

Teaching *from* Zion

Netivyah Bible Instruction Ministry
Jerusalem, Israel

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"...for out of Zion shall come forth Torah
and the word of the Lord from
Jerusalem." —Isaiah 2:3



The Synagogue

INSIDE THE SYNAGOGUE AND MESSIANIC JUDAISM | RABBI DANIEL ZION | SYNAGOGA VS. EKKLESIA



The Synagogue

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About Netivyah

Netivyah in Hebrew means “the Way of the Lord.” “The Way” was one of the names by which the early community of believers was known in the Brit Chadashah (New Testament). Paul says: “... According to the Way which they call ‘sectarian,’ I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is accordance with the Torah, and that is written in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14). As followers of “the Way,” we believe in the God of Israel, the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov. We try to be faithful to God’s law (the Torah) and to the rest of Scripture—the Prophets and the Writings. We believe that the Messiah promised in God’s word is Yeshua (Jesus), the one who “saves His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

Cover Artwork: Erin Zofef

News from Netivyah



We may say that the building project is finished. Although there are still more little things that must be done and many new things that already need fixing, the frustration level is high but the final approval from the municipality is in our hands. We so

deeply appreciate everyone who has prayed and contributed financially to make this a reality. Some gave much and others prayed more. All of you dear brothers and sisters are measured equally by the Lord and He who gives life to all will bless you according to His everlasting mercy and truth. Thank you all for your goodness and generosity standing with us and with Israel.

The building is however in full use. We have celebrated the Biblical Holidays this Fall and it was such a pleasure to worship here. Altogether we had more than 200 people attending, and many of them had to be sent downstairs to the fellowship hall, where there is a large screen that enables us to extend the services from the sanctuary. This is how we can accommodate large groups of people. But there were also many people standing upstairs because all the chairs were being used even downstairs. May God be praised!

There are two new congregations connected to Netivyah, born in the last couple of months. One is just outside Helsinki in Finland, the name of which is “Shepherd of Israel,” just like us in Jerusalem. The second is in Vitoria, in the state of Espirito Santo, Brazil. Both count more or less 50 adults, a great number for starting a new congregation. Please keep them in your prayers. The congregation in Finland was actually started by children of believers who have been committed to the restoration of the New Testament Church for some 30 years. Miika, a teacher and founding member in this congregation is the son of one of my teachers at Lipscomb University, Dr. Tim Tucker!

This is a real fulfillment of the blessing in Psalm 127:5-6, “The LORD bless you out of Zion, and may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Yes, may you see your children’s children. Peace be upon Israel!”

Please pray for all of Israel and for the Christian Arabs in Israel, in the West Bank, in Syria, Iraq, and in Gaza. We must show both physical and spiritual solidarity with our brothers and sisters and also with the State of Israel as it is honestly seeking peace with our Arab neighbors. We want peace but we are not naive or suicidal. We won’t allow the jihadist organizations like Hamas, Hezbollah, and ISIS to succeed. Pray for real and lasting peace, based on mutual recognition. Pray that the Palestinian Authority would recognize the Israel as the national homeland of the Jewish people. The only “wrong” that we are doing is defending ourselves and our God given right to live in the Land that God gave to Abraham.

One of the things we need you to pray about is the overall growth spiritually and numerically in all our congregations. Also, pray for inspiration and zeal for our young leadership. It is hard to inherit a position in leadership after one like me. The qualifications needed are hard to find, but Netivyah is fortunate enough to have wonderful young families who were raised in the congregation and who are not only capable, but better equipped than me and my generation. The future of the Jewish people in relationship to Yeshua and to Christianity is rapidly changing for the better. The younger leaders will be faced with new challenges and opportunities that will enhance the importance of the GOOD NEWS and of YESHUA in the Jewish World and therefore influence greatly general Christianity as well. Finally, pray for the children in our congregations. They are our most precious cargo.

I prefer not to share about new financial needs of Netivyah in this issue of Teaching from Zion, I just give thanks to God for you who have given so lovingly and liberally for the building project. I ask you to continue praying for us and for Israel. Our Father in Heaven bless each and every one of you with His bounty and goodness, and with grace and truth!

Joseph Shulam

NETIVYAH BIBLE INSTRUCTION MINISTRY

The Institution of the Synagogue and Its Impact on Early Messianic Judaism

During the era of the Second Temple period, the synagogue was an established institution in the Jewish community in both the land of Israel and in the diaspora. It was the place where the people assembled for the divine service. The synagogue also served as the center for all the community's cultural and religious activities. As Jews returned from the Babylonian and Persian exiles, they brought a new approach to the religion of their ancient forefathers. The diaspora was instrumental in developing a religion that centered on the community experience. During the First Temple Period, the levitical priesthood and the Temple were the exclusive centers of religious activity.

After the destruction of the Temple and the subsequent diaspora, the Word of God—the text of the Torah—became the most significant instrument for discerning the will of the Almighty. The priesthood and the *urim* and *tumim* were replaced by the text of the Torah and the Prophets, which became the means by which a man could know what God required of him. We can see the signs of these changes in the book of Nehemiah 8. In this book, Ezra and the Priests read the Torah with the intent to obey upon their return from the Babylonian exile. This knowledge and understanding of the Word of God became central in the Jewish community experience during the Second Temple Period. We see here the birthplace of the synagogue as the place of gathering for the main purpose of the public reading and hearing of the Word of God.

We must note that in what is commonly called the “Old Testament” there is no mention or hint of such an institution as the synagogue. The synagogue is strictly a Second Temple Period institution. By the time of Yeshua, however, it was

already fully grown and developed. It is interesting to note that the Apostles recommend that even gentiles who believe in Yeshua attend the synagogue on the Sabbath day in order to hear “Moses” being read publicly.¹

We should also note that there is a basic difference between the worship in the Temple and in the synagogue. The Temple is an innately holy institution that receives its holiness by virtue of the fact that God dwells therein and it houses the holy implements of God. The synagogue has no such holiness attributed to it. It is a place to conduct “public business.” The significance of the synagogue was that it was regarded as the assembly of the local Jewish community, giving expression to the civic and communal spirit of the people of that community. The word “synagogue” itself means “a gathering place.” It served as the rallying-point of the community in the land of Israel and in the diaspora.

By the beginning of the first century CE, synagogues existed in most of the cities and villages of the land of Israel. The Gospels witness that there were synagogues in Nazareth, Capernaum, elsewhere in the Galilee, and in Jerusalem. Josephus mentions synagogues in



Ancient synagogue at Capernaum, Israel

Tiberias, Dor, and Caesarea Maritima, while Philo of Alexandria says that there were many synagogues in Alexandria and in Rome. The book of Acts speaks of synagogues in Damascus, Antioch, Salamis in Cyprus, Iconium, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Beroea, Athens, and Corinth. Archaeologists have found inscriptions in Greek from Mount Ophel in Jerusalem, Corinth, Korazin, and Capernaum. The Jerusalem Talmud speaks of a multitude of synagogues in Jerusalem.²

Origins

The origin of the synagogue is sometimes attributed to the Babylonian Exile and texts are brought from Ezekiel³ and Jeremiah⁴ to substantiate this position.⁵ According to Prof. S. Safrai, these texts do not have any connection with the institution of the synagogue. The synagogue was rather instituted during the third century BCE for the main purpose of reading the Torah and teaching it to the people. It was as much an institution in the land of Israel as it was in the diaspora. The evidence is that synagogues existed in Jerusalem side-by-side with the Temple and were not a replacement of the Temple following its destruction.

The New Testament evidence supports this position. Thus we read in 15:21 that “from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogue.” Josephus and Philo further support the evidence from archaeology and from the *tanaaitic* sources that the main purpose for which people gathered in the synagogue was to read and study the Torah.

We see in Luke 4 that Yeshua read from the Prophets in the synagogue in Nazareth and then sat down to expound on the text and explain its meaning. The New Testament is consistent with the evidence that other Jewish sources present as to the activities that took place in the synagogues of the first century.⁶ In the Theodotus inscription we read: “Theodotus the son of Vettenus, priest and *archisynagogus*, son of the *archisynagogus* and grandson of the *archisynagogus* built the synagogue for the reading of the Torah and the study of the commandments ...”⁷ This inscription stands as unprejudiced evidence of the fact that synagogues were built for the purpose of the “reading of the Torah and the study of the commandments.”

When one seeks to see what Yeshua and the Apostles did in the synagogues the overwhelming evidence is that they read from the Torah and teaching or expounded its meaning to the crowd:

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. (Matthew 4:23)

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. (Matthew 9:35)

Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—that they might accuse Him. (Matthew 10:9–10)

And when He had come to His own country, He taught them in their

synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, “Where did this *Man* get this wisdom and *these* mighty works? “Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary And His brothers James, Josés, Simon, and Judas? “And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this *Man* get all these things?” (Matthew 13:54–56)

Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God! (Mark 1:21–24)⁸

And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. (Mark 3:1)

And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing *Him* were astonished, saying, “Where *did* this *Man* get these things? And what wisdom *is* this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! (Mark 6:2)⁹

The New Testament is full of texts which speak of the synagogue as the community meeting place. In fact, the letter to the Hebrews gives a warning to the readers “not to neglect to meet together.” The Greek word used here is, επισυστώμεν. In the New Testament the word “church” or ἐκκλησία is not used as a “place” but as a people or a community. The word συναγωγή is often used as

a place of meeting. It is my opinion that looking into the New Testament more closely will reveal to the student the distinction today between the “church” and the “synagogue.” It is also my opinion that this difference is the key to understanding the relationship between the ἐκκλησία and the συναγωγή.¹⁰ These two institutions were not mutually exclusive; they had a symbiotic relationship because the ἐκκλησία was “people” and in most common usage the συναγωγή was the place of worship. The ἐκκλησία could worship anywhere and there were times when it worshiped in the συναγωγή together with members of the Jewish community, who were not followers of Yeshua. To demonstrate this point let us look at the letter to Jacob (James). We read in Jacob 2:1–8:

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well.”

An analysis of this text from the letter to Jacob (James) reveals some in-

teresting facts. The people who are addressed are followers of the Lord Yeshua our Messiah. They have an “assembly”—the Greek word is συναγωγή υμῶν—“your synagogue.” The word συναγωγή is used here in its first century Jewish context.¹¹ In the same “gathering”/“synagogue” there are believers and also unbelievers: “Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called.”

The most common use of the word “church” today is for a building—not for a people or for a gathering of the community. In the New Testament, the word church never means a “building,” nor “an institution,” nor “an organization”—it always means “a people.” The normal word for the gathering of the saints in the New Testament is “synagogue.”¹² Note that there is no such a terminology as “going to church” or “worshiping in church” in the New Testament. When the writer of the letter to the Hebrews wants to encourage the readers not to forsake their assembly he uses the word “*epi-synagogen*”¹³

Various texts in the New Testament describe what believers did when they gathered together in the context of the synagogue:

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. (Acts 2:43–46)

What most evangelicals do in their congregations today is very close to the things that happen in the synagogue.

So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel." Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. (Acts 12:12-16)

Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. (Acts 14:27)

Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, "Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him." Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. (Acts 20:7-11)

How is it then, brethren?

Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

Let us examine what the believers of the first century did when they gathered together.

- They prayed
- They broke bread together
- They reported the miracles that God had done for them
- They sang songs and psalms
- They gathered money for the poor saints of Judaea

We know that the Jewish believers in Jerusalem also went to the Temple to pray. Paul was purified in the Jerusalem Temple from a vow he had taken, and he also offered sacrifices. The picture that the New Testament gives of what the believers did when they gathered together and how they worshiped is not so different from what Jews who did not believe in Yeshua. In fact, what most evangelicals do in their congregations today is very close to the things that happen in the synagogue. In the synagogue people pray, study the Word of God, give of their means, and sing. Are these not the very same things that people do in the Protestant and Evangelical churches today?

In the Second Temple Period there were two main models for worship and service to God. The standard model of the Torah was the "temple" and "priestly" model. In this model, the individual worshiper is dependent on the "temple" and the "priest" who links the worshiper to God. In this model there is a "holy precinct" which has innate holiness attributed to it. In order to have a "temple" you must have something that

gives it "physical holiness." The buildings are holy, as are the tools and instruments of worship and service, and the priests who serve are also holy. The worshiper who goes to the temple has very little to do himself. The priest does the major part of the "work"/"service."

The synagogue, on the other hand, is the "assembly of the people." Each person can worship for himself. Each person can know the will of God by studying the Torah. Each person is equal to the person standing or sitting next to him. Each person can be a leader of the congregation and serve before the Lord. The centerpiece of holiness is the Torah itself and there is no need for a "relic" or a mystical presence to provide a cover of "holiness." The occasion and the people are holy in the synagogue and not the buildings or the precinct. The synagogue is a place—it has no ecclesiology. The people who gather there and make up the community are the "people of God" and the community! In the synagogue the community is the main thing and the structure of the community is designed to function in every aspect of life, not only in "worshiping God." Because in Judaism there is no division between the common/mundane and the "spiritual," everything from the education of the children to the burial of the dead becomes a part of the community concern, i.e., the synagogue.

Eight pillars have kept the Jewish community alive even during the darkest of dark periods of Jewish history:

- Mikveh (for family purity laws)
- Torah schooling for children (Heder)
- Torah adult education (Beit Midrash)
- The soup kitchen (Beit Tamchui)

Outwardly, the public gatherings and the functioning of the early church was no different than the synagogue, but inwardly these two differences brought about a great difference—as well as some problems.

- The burial society (*Hevra Kaddisha*)
- Alms giving to the poor (*Tzadaka*)
- Slaughter house (for slaughtering kosher meat)
- Beit din (a court for settling grievances in the community)

When we talk about New Testament ecclesiology, we should look at the community of the followers of Yeshua in light of the synagogue. The *ekklesia* did the following things—things that churches today are just beginning to understand and do, praise the Lord.

- They studied: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.”
- They ate together and worshiped God: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
- They took care of their poor by sharing their wealth: “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common.”
- They gave of their money for the poor.¹⁴

We do not know much about the burial practices of the early church, but we do know that they had some organization for burial of their members. We can learn this from the story of Ananias (Acts 5). After he died the Word says: “And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.”

The early church’s function was nothing less than a synagogue. But it was also much more than a synagogue

because it had additional dimensions provided by the Holy Spirit. These were related to the differences provided by faith in Yeshua and by the inclusion of the gentiles into the family of God’s children. These two areas of difference make the church of the New Testament much more than a man-made institution like the pharisaic synagogue. We should not forget that the synagogue is not a Torah. The Torah knows of no such institute as a synagogue; the synagogue was established by the Jewish community without a direct command from God. If the synagogue has any divine sanction it was received *a posteriori*. When God poured out on the early church His Holy Spirit and opened His gates to the nations, the community of followers of Yeshua changed. Outwardly, the public gatherings and the functioning of the early church was no different than the synagogue, but inwardly these two differences brought about a great difference—as well as some problems.

If we look at the ecclesiology of the early church in the categories of sociology and theology, we should see that on both of these grounds a great similarity and also a great difference both exist. The similarity of the early church and the synagogue is in “form” and “style.” The difference between the two is in theology and gifts of the Holy Spirit which have enabled the church to communicate with God and serve the community with God’s power delivered by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

I have demonstrated up to now that the synagogue was an important insti-

tution in the life of Yeshua the Messiah and in the life of the early church. But the question must now be asked: Do the Torah and the Pharisees who put themselves as the guardians of the Torah have any authority for us as followers of Yeshua the Messiah? This question could have some interesting answers if we ignore one very important passage from the words of Yeshua: “Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. “Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do” (Mt. 23:1-3). Do these words of Yeshua have any meaning for us today? And if they do, how do they apply after both Judaism and Christianity have developed almost beyond compare or recognition from the reality of the first century? These questions are not easily dismissed without a major compromise of the respect which the Word of God deserves.

The seat of Moses was a physical seat stationed in synagogue—it would be something like a pulpit in the average church. The seat of Moses was the place where the Rabbi would sit when he explained the Torah and made halachic rules. Whatever these words of Yeshua mean, it is clear that they do give the Pharisees of the first century, at least, the authority to interpret the Scriptures in some binding way. Yeshua was a Pharisee. In his doctrine Yeshua was a Pharisee. He believed that angels exist, and in the resurrection from the dead. The strong words that Yeshua had for the Pharisees in Matthew 23 and in other discussions were not words for the enemy. Yeshua’s criticism of the Pharisees was of someone who cares for the “company.” It is the criticism of someone who cares that things should go right in every situation. Yeshua criticized the Pharisees because he wanted to see them doing the right things for the right reasons and with the right motives. According to this text, Yeshua believed that the Phar-

isees were teaching the true interpretation of the Torah—but they were not doing it for the right reasons.

Modern Context

The implications of the understanding of this text for the Messianic Jewish Movement are far-reaching. If Yeshua is giving the Pharisees the right to interpret Scripture with authority, it means that when they, or their descendants, interpret the Torah their interpretation of *halacha* (because Yeshua said that his followers should *do* what they are told by them) has some meaning for us today. In today's Jewish context today the group which is setting the tone for faith, morality, and Jewishness are the descendants of the Pharisees—the Orthodox Jewish community. The members of the Messianic Movement in America have attached themselves to the more “Reform” type of Jewish expression because most of the Jews in the movement have come from a “Reform” type of Judaism. It is my opinion that the “Reform” movement today is much more equivalent to the Sadducees than to the Pharisees of the first century CE. If the Messianic Movement wants to remain a Jewish movement, the model for worship and for expression of our faith in Jewish terms ought to come from the more traditional and more authentic Jewish community. This, of course, goes without question in Israel, where the majority of God believing Jews are Orthodox. The “Reform” and “Conservative” Jews in Israel are a minority and they are almost in the same situation as the Messianic Movement far as civil rights are concerned. So, when we are talking about having Messianic synagogues and discuss the question of tradition, style, and interpretation of Scripture, should we not hear what Yeshua was teaching his followers in Matthew 23?

We should further note that there is no record in the Word of God that the Apostles, the Elders, or the members of the church in Jerusalem or Corinth,

Ephesus, Smyrna, or Rome, attended the local Baptist, Pentecostal, or Presbyterian churches. We do have record that the believers, Jews and Gentiles, attended the synagogue of their choice even after they were cast out of a few such places of worship. It was the custom of the Apostle to the Gentiles, Saul of Tarsus, to attend the synagogue every Sabbath. The Book of Acts gives us ample evidence that this is what he did, even when he was away from home, and when he came into a new city.¹⁵ I often times wonder how those Jews would have allowed the Apostle Paul to come into their synagogue, particularly if he was dressed in a brown habit with a hood hanging on his back and a large olive wood cross on his chest, looking real Christian. Can you imagine such a thing?

The Jews invited him to read from the Torah and “reason with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Messiah had to suffer and rise again from the dead.” The only way I can imagine this happening is if the Apostle Paul looked like a Jew, acted like a Jew, and spoke Torah like a Jew. The “early church” was, in their meetings and fellowships, a synagogue. In fact, there is ample evidence both in the New Testament and in the Talmudic sources that Jewish believers and Jews who did not believe in Yeshua continued to worship together until well into the second century CE. It is a well-established fact that what is called “Birkat haMinim” in the Amida prayer was composed after the Bar Kochba rebellion precisely for this reason. This prayer was composed to separate and expose those who believe in Yeshua as the Messiah and the Son of God from the crowd in the synagogue. There would be no need to compose such a prayer if the Jewish followers of Yeshua did not attend the synagogue with their “unfaithful” Jewish brothers. The relationship between the church and the synagogue became complicated mainly because the syna-

gogue rejected the Jewish followers of Yeshua—not because these Jewish believers wanted to leave. Most of the contacts, and in fact converts, of the Apostle Paul were made through the synagogues where these believers were invited to preach and reason with the Jews about the Scriptures and what they teach about the Messiah. This was the case in Pisidian Antioch, as well as in Ephesus, Corinth, Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, Berea, Thessalonica, etc.¹⁶

The church has repaid the synagogue for this behavior a thousand times over, and with such animosity and hate that our fathers and mothers were sent into the gas chambers which smoked next to the church steeples during the beautiful fall, and summer, and springs of Europe. Yet although the synagogue did expel the followers of Yeshua from the Jewish community the question which now needs to be asked is: How should we make our way back to the synagogue and bring Yeshua home with us? An even more basic question should be if we should return back to the synagogue, or just join the “church” of our choice. In so doing, we continue to propagate the myth that when a Jew believes in Jesus he stops being a Jew and his seed is lost from the commonwealth of Israel. It is this writer's opinion that with the restoration of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, we have a sign that God does not want the Jewish nation to be deleted from the face of His earth. If God's purpose is truly to restore His people we must ask ourselves: What should the role of the church be in promoting and helping restore the Jewishness of the Good News that Yeshua is the Messiah of Israel and the world? How can we—as Jewish believers—help bring unity and biblical faith to our Gentile brothers and sisters who are at least as much captive to their traditions as we are of ours?

In the first century CE the synagogue was the place where Jews and god-fearing Gentiles gathered to discover the

The church without the synagogue is only a shadow of itself.

will of God, through the reading of the Torah.¹⁷ The synagogue was where Paul met the Jews and the Gentiles who were interested in God and in His Word. Today, after traveling in more than forty countries and teaching about the Jewishness of the New Testament, I am convinced that what is going on around the world is the work of the Holy Spirit and that Gentile brothers and sisters all over the world are looking again towards the synagogue and towards the Jewish followers of the Messiah. They want to re-discover their own connection and faith in the God of Israel and in the historical Jesus whose name in Hebrew is Yeshua. In the first century the synagogue provided the stage and meeting place for the early church in the diaspora. It was the only place where both Jews and non-Jews could go every Sabbath to hear the Word of God the Torah being read. It was the only place where followers of Yeshua could have fellowship with other people who are not “pagan” and believe in the One and only God of Israel who created the world and everything that is in it.

The Bridge

In today’s situation I believe that the Messianic synagogue, if it is authentically a synagogue and authentically Messianic, can again become a bridging place and conduit for both Jews and Christians to find a common ground and a path to return to our true faith and common heritage. God has preserved both the church and the synagogue for a reason. I believe that this is the restoration of both peoples into His will and goal for all mankind. The church without the synagogue is only a shadow of itself. It can be only an empty shell that is more easily swayed into idolatry than into turning to the knowledge of God

and Yeshua His Son. The synagogue without Yeshua is also a form without the true substance of God’s Spirit and without any biblical means for atonement. These two great historical institutions need each other desperately—and the Messianic Jews ought to be the bridge between them.

The challenge of the messianic community and movement today is not in the use of “semantics” and outward forms. The challenge is in building biblical communities in which the expression of Jewishness is authentic, true, and traditional, so that both the Jewish community and the church can identify us as Jews who believe and follow Yeshua as our Messiah. This is a big challenge and, frankly, I do not see much hope in my generation that it will be met. My generation of Messianic Jewish leaders is like the generation wandering in the wilderness. While we were educated and raised in Egypt we can build the infrastructure for those that follow us so that they will not be a part of the Christian denominational world or need to accommodate the divisions and creeds of those who have traditionally hated us. We can do this by building congregations which are authentic and independent, together with educational institutions which will train the next generations of leaders to be 100 percent Jews and 100 percent followers of Yeshua.

I must say in closing that already many gentile Christians have realized these ideas and are giving of themselves to see them realized. If the Messiah Yeshua does not come back soon, the next generation of leaders in the Messianic Movement will hopefully be different, better, more authentic, and better educated in Judaism and in Bible than my own present generation of leaders. Let us all pray that God’s plan will be known

and accomplished for both the church and the synagogue. Because ultimately, we are one in the Messiah as He and the Father are One. ■

Endnotes

- 1 See Acts 15:19–21.
- 2 Palestinian Talmud Megillah 3I, 73d
- 3 Ezekiel 11:16: “Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.”
- 4 Jeremiah 39:8: “the house of the people.”
- 5 S. Safrai, *The Jewish People in the First Century* (Van Gorcum / Fortress Press 1987), 909–911.
- 6 Talmud Bavli Megillah 29a; P.T. Megillah 4, 75a, Philo, *De Vita Moses* II, 215–6; *De Opificio Mundi* 128; Josephus, *Contra Apion* 2.175.
- 7 R. Weill, *La cité de David* I (1920), 1ff; T. Reinach, “L’inscription de Theodotos,” in *REJ* 71 (1920), 46–56; CII no. 1404.
- 8 The word “synagogue” appears several times in this chapter (cf. verses 21, 23, 29, 39).
- 9 We see the same context also in Luke 4:15 as well as other texts which reflect the fact that Yeshua visited the synagogues in the Galilee to “teach” from the Word of God.
- 10 The word synagogue appears 61 times in the Nestle Aland edition of the Greek New Testament.
- 11 Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida (eds.), *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic domains*: “Synagogue.”
- 12 See the previous footnote and the list of references there for the use of the word “synagogue.”
- 13 See Hebrews 10:25: μή ἐγκαταλείποντες τὴν ἐπισυναγωγὴν ἑαυτῶν, καθὼς ἔθος τισίν, ἀλλὰ παρακαλοῦντες, καὶ τοσοῦτῳ μᾶλλον ὅσῳ βλέπετε ἐγγίζουσιν τὴν ἡμέραν.
- 14 See 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9; Romans 15:27.
- 15 See Acts 17:1–2.
- 16 Acts 13:14ff, “But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.” Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: “The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it.”
- 17 See Acts 15:19–21.

From Church Liturgy To Synagogue Liturgy

When I first started to visit the Netivyah Congregation, as it was called in those days, the service was just about like any Bible Church service. There were some songs, a reading from the Bible and the sermon, which was the major part of the service. There was talk of being Jewish and the implementation of Synagogue worship but for years nothing was done.

One year I came to visit the congregation on a Shabbat morning to find that things had changed. Asher Intrater, who had become one of the elders of the congregation, had introduced a new format of worship that was based on Synagogue liturgy. To help the worshipers find their way in the new service, a duplicated sheet was handed out with the page numbers and the Messianic songs that were to be sung.

The Torah scroll, which until then had not been used, was taken out and several of the *aliyot* (calls for reading) were done with the traditional prayers before and after each reading. In those days only a few were capable of reading the text in the Torah scroll without the punctuation marks, and only one was able to do so even according to the cantillation marks; his name was Joseph Vactor. Most of those who were called up would read the blessings before and after, while the designated reader would do the actual reading.

Martha Stern, with several women in the congregation, made a *parochet* (the veil that is on the front of the Ark where the Torah Scrolls are kept), which is still in use today. The words in Hebrew “He is our mercy seat” are embroidered along the top. In the center is a large seven branched menorah, and on either side appear two pillars reminding us of those that were in front of the Temple. Along the bottom, the words “I have set the Lord before me always” are embroidered in gold.

Today the service is similar, though some things have developed. We now have full sets of prayer books and the Cantor has a much more prominent role in

the service. A great deal of the service is sung directly from the Siddur (traditional prayer book). Classic Messianic songs are sung only seldomly. More often than not it is young men of the congregation who are called up to read from the Torah. Somewhere along the line a reading from the New Testament was introduced, which is read after the Haftorah. We have three men who assist the Cantor in singing. They lead from the front facing the Ark, making a big difference in the congregational singing.

Once there was a break-in to our auditorium and the one Torah Scroll was stolen. The burglars apparently intended to set the building on fire as they left behind six bottles filled with gasoline. Amazingly, the Lord provided two Torah Scrolls and a scroll containing the Haftorah readings after this incident. In one case, an anonymous lady who visited the congregation only a few times heard about the theft of our Torah Scroll and left in her will ten thousand dollars to purchase a new one. Because of the theft, the insurance company requires us to keep the scrolls in a fire-proof safe. This safe is very heavy and the veil had to be broadened to fit the new “Ark.” ■

Synagogue Worship by Jewish Disciples

Why pray from the *siddur* in exactly the same manner as do other Jews in their synagogues? The simplest response is to answer that question with another question: Why would anyone think they should pray in any other manner? After all, Jewish messianists are, first and foremost, Jews who are devoted to an Israeli rabbi as their master teacher.

Further, we find in the apostolic writings, in Acts 2:42—“*They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*” A detail that rarely, if ever, appears in English translations is that the final phrase in the Greek text includes a definite article, as a reference to “*the prayer*”, which was a commonly recognized reference to the *Amidah*.

Thus, Rav Yeshua’s disciples were devoted to praying in accordance with the traditional Jewish prayer formulation. Indeed, the prayer taught to them per their explicit request, often called “The Lord’s Prayer,” represents a brief summary of the *Amidah* and associated traditional prayer phrases which also have been incorporated into the traditional liturgy that has been passed down to Jews throughout our generations.

The essential defining point of the modern paradigm of Messianic Judaism is that its adherents are Jews who behave Jewishly, who embrace their perception of a Jewish Messiah in that manner and who embrace their participation within the Jewish enterprise along with all of their fellow Jews. Any difficulties that may exist currently in explaining and demonstrating how Rav Yeshua’s teachings are actually supportive of that approach to spirituality, in the face of common misperceptions of him and of his teachings, do not detract from that fundamental definition and religious model.

Much of this article will describe the benefits we may derive from following the traditional liturgy and worship as we do. Those benefits include, among

others, the joy of knowing that we are obediently following a spiritual path developed by people of wisdom who have been exceptionally devoted to the instructions given to the Jewish people by G-d Himself. In addition, we have the joy of touching history, of connecting with the culture and practices of our people, reaching across literally thousands of years and many generations.

The shape of contemporary Jewish worship is rooted in Second Temple Judaism. Three of the core sections of the Shabbat morning liturgy, the *Shmà* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), the *Amidah* or *Sh'moneh 'Esreh* (18 Blessings), and the Torah reading service, may be dated as far back as the return from exile in some nascent form.

The *Shmà*, a declaration of G-d’s singularity, is foundational to the life of the Jewish community in the face of competing religious and political ideologies in the ancient world. The *Sh'moneh 'Esreh* is the substitution of prayer for Temple sacrifice, when Jews outside of Jerusalem would gather for prayer at the same time as the Temple sacrifices. The *Sh'moneh 'Esreh* would continue, even after the destruction of the Temple, as a reminder of this center of the Jewish

community. The public reading of Torah with interpretation dates back to at least the time of Ezra (see Ezra 7:20), and it was a central component of synagogue worship on Shabbat and market days (Monday and Thursday) by the time of Rav Yeshua (see Luke 4:16ff; m. *Megillah* 3:4).

These three components gradually became united with the morning blessings (*Birkot HaShachar*), the liturgical poems, songs and Psalms (*P'sukei D'Zimra*) and a series of concluding prayers (*Musaf*). In contemporary Messianic Jewish worship these sections constitute the bulk of Shabbat morning worship.

The Dramatic Structure of the Prayer Service

The service serves metaphorically as a weekly re-enactment of G-d's revelation to Israel of the Torah at Sinai. We announce to whom we are coming to worship and prepare ourselves for worship. We sing songs along the way to the mountain of revelation. We declare who we are worshiping and offer our sacrifice of prayer as we ascend the mountain. In the Torah Service, we hear from God through the Torah, and the Haftarah (and also the apostolic writings) as G-d meets us on top of the mountain. Finally, in the *Musaf* we are sent back down the mountain to live out that word in G-d's creation working in expectation of the day when G-d's kingdom will be fully realized on earth.

A second metaphor for understanding the service is thinking about worship as the drama of entering the Temple or the throne room of the King. The synagogue remotely mimics the Temple service for those who could not attend services at the Temple in person. In Ancient Israel, the Temple was seen as G-d's palace, the place from which G-d ruled all of creation. Outside the gates of the Temple we orient ourselves towards the One we are coming to meet in that space and what is going to happen

The synagogue remotely mimics the Temple service for those who could not attend services at the Temple in person.

there through praying. The hymns, poems and Psalms are recited as we move towards the throne room of the King. On the edge of the throne room, we declare who is our ruler by reciting G-d's gifts of creation, revelation, and redemption in the *Shma* and its blessings. Before entering, we offer our sacrifice of prayer in the *Sh'moneh 'Esreh*. After hearing His word to us, finally in the *Aleinu* prayer of the *Musaf*, we accept the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven in expectation of that kingdom's realization and as a mantle of service in the world.

Meaning of Prayer

The text serves as a springboard that propels the worshiper toward higher purposes. Practically speaking, the collected prayers with which we become familiar in the siddur also form a compendium of Jewish thinking, outlook, and doctrine. They remind us of a variety of Jewish interests and concerns derived from our historical experience as well as from the spiritual instructions that we have received from *HaShem* in the form of Torah and prophetic writings.

Jewish prayer expresses its effects in three dimensions, vertical, horizontal, and reflexive. The vertical represents the "I/Thou" relationship between the individual and *HaShem*. The horizontal represents the expanding circles of people around us, from our own friends and family members, to our local community and to the larger society including governmental or business entities and others. The reflexive represents the ways we influence ourselves, our own soul, by the thoughts we think, the feelings we feel, and the actions we perform.

The definition of prayer is multi-fac-

eted, ranging from simple communications directed toward the heavens to request help or express gratitude, to more complex expressions of praise or thanksgiving, and to deeper interactive spiritual expressions of meditation, self-examination, intercession, and even prophecy. Traditional Jewish prayer services in its structure particularly supports the pursuit of awe and honor toward *HaShem* and His purposes, including the establishment and preservation of a community known as the Jewish people.

Commonality and Kavanah

While there exist a number of *siddurim* (traditional prayer books), which vary in the exact content of the standard prayers, all of them may be traced back to the siddurim that were compiled in the ninth century CE by Amram Gaon (~850 CE) and Saadya Gaon (~900 CE), both of Sura, Babylon. These siddurim, in their turn, reflect elements recorded in earlier Jewish literature, demonstrating that they were not a new invention so much as they were an attempt to capture and codify longstanding common prayer practice that previously was passed along only by the continuing experience of synagogue worship throughout generations. Of course, there has been some growth and development along the way, including the addition of a variety of inspirational poems along with the Psalms that were already part of its recitation.

In modern Israel, some attempts have been made to integrate previously diverse versions into a more common liturgy, though subcultural distinctions can still be found between Ashkenazic



Men praying in Rachel's Tomb Synagogue in Jerusalem.

and Sephardic compilations. The selection of a siddur is one of the elements that will characterize the cultural flavor of the synagogue community that prays with it. Traditionally observant congregations are more likely to exhibit commonality than those which feel compelled to innovate or to accommodate the unfamiliarity of their audience with the common procedures. It is my hope, as Jewish messianists continue their religious development, that their prayer services also may come into greater conformity with other traditional congregations.

The fixed order of prayers and phrasings in the siddur provides structure and commonality and coordination of prayer by a community that prays together in one accord. Such a community is in agreement in prayer. Rav Yeshua noted the inherent benefit of this when he said, “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 18:19) The formulations of the siddur permit a praying community to function together, better than either silent or unstructured extemporaneous prayers can support. However, for all its benefits, order and commonality alone are not sufficient. How can a written prayer become transformed into a real one? The answer is found in the concept of *kavanah* (i.e., intentness, directedness, focus, sense of purpose, intensity of feeling) that an individual worshiper applies to that text.

Maimonides himself ruled, though this was not instituted by later codifiers, that “*since prayer without kavanah is no prayer at all, if one has prayed without kavanah he has to pray again with kavanah. Should one feel preoccupied or overburdened, or should one have just returned from a voyage, one must delay one’s prayer until one can once again pray with kavanah ... True kavanah implies freedom from all strange thoughts, and complete awareness of the fact that one stands before the Divine Presence*” (*Yad Tefillah* 4:15, 16). One who prays must enter into it personally, contributing to it a sense of self, which can only be done via conscious participation. We seek to live out this commitment by having many different people involved each week in worship, from children to adults, from congregational leaders to community members.

In a standard synagogue structure, we are seated around the worship platform, which allows us to connect with one another in worship. People leading our worship come out from the midst of our community and go up to the *bimah* to lead prayers, to sing, to read scripture, or to address the congregation. The leadership of our community’s worship emanates from the center of our community. All of us, congregation, leaders, assistants (and even possibly a choir) are directed towards the Holy Ark in which resides the Torah. In our worship, we seek to create a responsive interaction. Sometimes the cantor will lead us into worship through his or her voice,

at other times the congregation will join together in singing praise.

Queries for Future Consideration

There is one more, somewhat delicate, matter yet to discuss in the context of the content of traditional synagogue services. Even if a given synagogue community of Jewish messianists were to employ all elements of the traditional services in their entirety, there remain some questions for this or any Messianic Jewish community to address. These include questions about whether to interpolate additional material not found in the traditional format, and if so; how and where to do so.

For example, is there specific material relating to the notion of the “new” (or *renewed* under the auspices of the Messiah) covenant that might be beneficial? Should we add quasi-Hasidic practices such as dancing, and perhaps even some version of the modern charismatic practice of prophecy or other spiritually-gifted ministry? Or are some of these elements already present, latent in the existing structure, awaiting only our emphasis and interpretation to make them apparent? Are any specific capabilities that should more properly be administered in a different congregational or private venue? Some forms of dancing or congregational singing can successfully supplement and enhance the worship context. Some teaching, springing from the Torah or Haftarah context, borders already on the edges of prophecy. There are already a few places in the traditional context that are open to healing emphases and could be elaborated further (not just in the middle of the weekday *Amidah*).

In sum, each thing that is done has implications and consequences and these must be evaluated in consideration of how specific congregational practices are developed or discouraged to formulate a comprehensive presentational and functional package. ■

From Chappati to Challah

BY JAI RUBIN



Growing up in apartheid South Africa as a Hindu, I did not initially come in contact with people of other religions. Years later, while in a very dark time I came to believe in Jesus through a newspaper advertisement. I attended Church services every week and read the Bible for the first time. When I came across the word “synagogue” in the New Testament I was fascinated. When I asked one of the elders about the Synagogue, I was told to keep reading and one day I would understand.

Now I live in Israel and attend the Synagogue of Roeh Israel. My journey from Hindu temple to church to synagogue has led me to understand that I am still a Gentile but have been grafted in. A Gentile cannot become a Jew and a Jew cannot become a Gentile. But if some of the branches were broken off and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. Remember that it is not you that support the root but the root that supports you. ■

Easy Challah

- 1½ cup boiled water
- ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar
- 4 teaspoons active dry yeast
- 5 cups wheat flour
- 1¾ teaspoons salt
- 2 large eggs
- ½ cup oil

Directions

In a large dish mix 1 tablespoon sugar with ½ cup boiled water. As soon as sugar is dissolved, sprinkle 4 teaspoons of active dry yeast and let it rest for 10 minutes. It will froth and rise.

Add the sifted flour, salt, sugar, 1 egg, and the oil. Mix and add 1 cup water to make dough. Turn onto floured surface,

knead until you have a good soft dough, not sticky. Oil the dish, put the ball of dough into it, cover with plastic wrap and leave in the refrigerator overnight.

Next day, take the dough out of the refrigerator and punch it down and shape into either 3 small, 2 medium or 1 large challahs. Cover with plastic and leave it back in the refrigerator to rise. For each challah divide into 3, 4 or 6 strands and then braid it to form a loaf. Remove from refrigerator and let it stand out for 30 minutes to get to room temperature.

Heat oven to 375° F or 190° C. When oven is ready brush the top of the loaves with a beaten egg and sprinkle with your choice (sesame seeds, poppy seeds, raisins, honey, cinnamon). Bake the small loaves 25 minutes, medium loaves 30 minutes or the big loaf 40 minutes.

**You can omit the ½ cup sugar, and you can use a different flour, but adjust the amount of water.*

The Chosen People

“For the LORD will not reject his people; he will never forsake his inheritance.” (Psalm 94:14)



KOBBY_DAGAN/BIGSTOCK

Not the tall, beautiful, blond and blue-eyed Aryan race of bold goose-stepping conformists in perfect ranks, nor the descendants of Olympus, in the image of Greek gods and goddesses adorned with wreaths in the aesthetic supremacy of Apollo and Athena in their columned temples built to perfection on the principle of the Golden Section.

The Chosen People are a somewhat battered and afflicted race of oft scorned and rejected Semites, historically outcast and nationless, despised, persecuted by their hosts in a diaspora of nearly two millennia, and cursed before being expelled or killed. They have been inquisitioned and stretched on racks into submission, and burned alive at the stakes by the devout who would thus save their souls. Sifted like

wheat through the sieve of centuries, they survived and remained a thorn in the side, perennially creating discomfort in the conscience and consciousness of humanity. They are Don Quixote chasing the impossible dream that humanity would rather forget.

After a long absence culminating in an unprecedented hellish burning called the Shoah, in Hebrew (Holocaust in English), they straggled back to their ancient former estates in the Holy Land, largely unwelcome there as well. Again they were obliged to fight for their existence, this time for their very lives against attacking armies of enraged Arabs and, mercy, they prevailed more than once. And all that opposition has by necessity recreated them into a nation of poet-warriors and statesmen on the order of David, the king of Jerusalem before them. They are now called Israelis.

The Chosen are not a pretty people of great physical stature or beauty like the children of Japheth, who have produced the most panted-after bathing beauties, but are rather plain and even gruff-looking. Aside from a rare dazzling beauty of note, the women are not as a rule terribly attractive, nor the men especially handsome. They can even be a bit harsh, in-your-face, but usually straight-forward and honest people who rarely kill each other. Many if not most of the Chosen would prefer not to be, but rather, as Tevye put it, “Maybe you could choose somebody else for a change?” They carry the responsibility and affliction with some reserve, but also with flair.

Yet from within that fraction-of-a-fraction of humanity has arisen the solution of the great mysteries of the universe, the unleashing of the powers within the microcosm, the cures for many of humankind’s ills in medicine and economics, major advances in cutting-edge technologies, timeless music and poetry and, in the Bible, the greatest literature of the ages having the

From this tiny people came forth Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Joshua, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Kings David and Solomon, Esther, Saint Peter ... and that quintessential Jew himself, Yeshua of Nazareth—Jesus.

most profound effect upon much of the world, its art and literature and music and political philosophies, giving hope in the knowledge and revelation of one single Creator.

From this tiny people came forth Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Joshua, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Kings David and Solomon, Esther, Shimon Caipha (Saint Peter), Miriam (Mary the mother of Jesus), Saul of Tarsus (Saint Paul), and that quintessential Jew himself, Yeshua of Nazareth—Jesus.

And descended from that line of notorieties came forth Einstein, Freud, Marx (Karl and Groucho), Pasternak, Mendelsohn, Chagall, Spielberg, and Dylan. From that aggrieved and resentful Chosen race came those whose works and discoveries have earned above one hundred and seventy Nobel Prizes in every category (above twenty percent of all Nobel Prizes given) to the benefit of the entire world.

Many have attempted to replace the Chosen People, either by declaring that they are no longer chosen, as proven by arrogant theologies and impossible contorting of biblical passages, or attempting to physically exterminate them from existence, both which have thus far failed in their efforts. Many have declared themselves now the Chosen in the place of the Hebrews, notably Islam and large tracts of Christianity, who though worshiping a Jew as their God, and a Jewess as his mother, and Jews as his apostles, see not the blind dissonance of their scorn for the Jewish people as the Chosen. But the Jews nev-

ertheless continue as the Chosen (Jeremiah 31:35–37), and continue to prosper in their Promised Land, despite unending opposition.

Today all the above is again being put to the test in the Jewish nation-state called Israel, which has again drawn the ire of much of the world, which insists that Israel live by a standard of idealism that they themselves do not adhere to, and which is so detached from reality as would precipitate the final end of “the Jewish Problem.” The land in question is so tiny as to have its width be crossed by a fighter jet in mere three minutes, and its length in some twenty. And yet it is blamed as the cause of all the woes of its warring neighbors who are slaughtering each other in self-inflicted miseries. Iran, the culprit behind the Islamic revolution, declares annually its desire to wipe Israel off the map. Many insist that the world’s problems would magically dissolve if only the already tiny land in question could just be divided in two, like the baby in King Solomon’s court. It is an unlikely dream, considering even the maelstrom of warring factions in the Muslim world.

Be that as it may, facts on the ground are hard things to deny, although many do succeed in doing just that. Concrete doctrines and dogmas are held so dearly by their adherents as to their bending of reality impossibly in order to force it into their invented doctrines. But somehow reality manages to elude the doctrinaires, and persists on its own under Heaven to the delight of some, and to the dismay of others. ■

Rabbi Daniel Zion

Chief Rabbi of Bulgarian Jews during World War II

In 1918, the head of the Yeshiva in Thessalonica sent his young son, Daniel to serve the Jewish community in Sofia, with the many new immigrants following the wars. Rabbi Daniel Zion served loyally and was elected to be the chief Rabbi of Bulgaria.

His notable accomplishment was his activity during World War II years, saving thousands of Jewish lives from Nazi destruction. This act of salvation was in part due to his special relationship with the Metropolitane Stephan of the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria, whom he befriended after experiencing Yeshua in a vision. Stephan, who was well versed in the delicate relationship between Jews and Christians only encouraged the Rabbi to forget about Christianity and concentrate on Yeshua himself.

Rabbi Daniel never converted to “Christianity” he started to believe in Yeshua and remained faithful to the Torah keeping life style of Orthodox Judaism. A song that he wrote about his faith can probably best express his attitude toward Yeshua the Messiah:

No not I, No not I, only you are
Yeshua in me!

Only you bring me before the God
of my fathers,
Only you can heal me from every
evil illness,
No not I, No not I, only you are
Yeshua in me!

Only you teach me to love all
creation,
Only you teach me to love even the
enemy,
No not I, No not I, only you are
Yeshua in me!

For this reason I will stay in your
love,
For ever will I be within your will,
No not I, No not I, only you are
Yeshua in me!

Rabbi Daniel started to collect a very select small group of Jewish people to study the New Testament each Saturday

afternoon in his house. Among these Jews were some of the leading members of the Jewish community in Sofia. His faith became a well known secret in the Jewish community of Bulgaria. However his position was so honored and his services so highly esteemed that none of the Jewish functionaries in Sofia could openly criticize the Rabbi. And because he remained well within the framework of the Jewish community in Bulgaria and did not stop living as an Orthodox Jew in all the rigor of the strictest observance of the Torah there was little that his opponents could point as heresy. In the background of things the leadership of the Jewish community started to isolate him slowly.

In 1944, the Communists' *coup d'état* brought down the fascist Government of Bulgaria. Rabbi Daniel Zion remained the leader and the chief Rabbi of Bulgaria until 1949 when he, with most of the Bulgarian Jewish community immigrated to Israel.

In Israel Rabbi Daniel was immediately accepted as the Rabbi of the Bulgarian Jews. When in 1954 Rabbi Samuel Toledano became the chief Rabbi of Israel, he invited Rabbi Daniel Zion

to be a judge in the rabbinical court of Jerusalem. When the rumors started to fly that Rabbi Daniel Zion believes in Yeshua, Rabbi Toledano invited Rabbi Zion to his office and asked him personally about these rumors. Rabbi Daniel explained to Toledano his position. He explained that he accepts Yeshua as the Messiah and he does not accept Christianity as the true expression of the teaching and person of Yeshua the Messiah. Rabbi Toledano said to him that he can live with this position as long as Rabbi Daniel will keep it to himself.

When Rabbi Daniel said that he did not think that such a message can be kept a secret, Toledano was forced to take Rabbi Daniel to the rabbinical court, and allow the other Rabbis to decide what should be done. In the court, after evidence of Rabbi Daniel's faith in Yeshua the Messiah was presented in the form of four books that Rabbi Daniel had written in Bulgarian about Yeshua. The right to speak was given to Rabbi Daniel. Here are the words which Rabbi Daniel Zion spoke in his own defense:

"I am poor and feeble, persecuted and vulnerable,
Yeshua conquered me, and with the New Man he honored me,
He delivered me from the poverty-stricken self with his great love, he loved me.

Every day the cunning devil aspires to grab my faith,
I hold on to my encourager, and chase the devil away.
I stand here alone in my faith, the whole world is against me.
I give up all the earthly honor for the sake of the Messiah my friend."

The Rabbinical Court stripped Rabbi Daniel from his Rabbinical Title, but the Bulgarian Jews in Israel continued to honor Rabbi Daniel as their Rabbi. A Russian Jew who was one of the early

Zionist settlers in Rishon LeZion, and had become a "believer", had given Rabbi Daniel Zion a building on Yeffet St. in the heart of Jaffa for a Synagogue. In that Synagogue Rabbi Daniel officiated until the 6th of October 1973. In this Synagogue Rabbi Daniel Zion did not often speak of Yeshua openly, but many times he brought stories and parables from the New Testament. However, each Sabbath after the Synagogue Rabbi Daniel would bring home a group of his followers to study from the New Testament.

Many missions, missionaries, and Christian Societies, visited Rabbi Daniel Zion in his Jaffa home. They wrote many articles about him, and at rare occasions would even offer him large amounts of money for the use of his name in their ministries. In every case Rabbi Daniel rejected their offers. He did not want to destroy his witness with the people of Israel for a handful of dollars. If anyone would give him some free-will offering without any strings attached the Rabbi would accept it and pass it on to Jewish charitable organizations of the blind, or to orphans and widows. He himself lived in abject poverty. There was nothing in his own house that was of value and he would never lock his home.

Rabbi Daniel Zion wrote hundreds of songs about Yeshua the Messiah, Sabbath, and the healthy living. He also wrote books on the subject of vegetarianism, health food, and natural living. Rabbi Daniel's major contribution to Messianic Judaism is his personal example.

He lived 100% a Jewish lifestyle, and was 100% follower of the Messiah Yeshua. He did not compromise faith for neither money from the Christian missions, nor did he succumb to the pressures of the chief rabbinate. Yeshua was his savior and friend and until the last days of his life Rabbi Daniel Zion lived up to the poem that he wrote with the acrostic of his name, Daniel Zion the Servant of God.



Rabbi Daniel Zion z"l

The (*Daver*) Word of God is my path,
The (*Ner*) Lamp of God is my guide,
The (*Iraat*) Fear of God is the beginning of Wisdom,
The (*Ahavat*) Love of God is my Life,
The (*Laasoth*) Doing the will of God is my aspiration,
Righteousness (*Zedek*) and Justice are my goals,
His (*Isurim*) Suffering is my atonement,
He will (*Veyagen*) protect you in all your ways,
The (*Nezah*) Eternal one of Israel is my comfort.

In 1979 Rabbi Daniel Zion departed to be with the Lord in a ripe old age of 96 years. The Bulgarian Jewish community of Israel gave him full military, and state honors. His bier stood in the center of Jaffa with a military guard and at noon was carried by men all the way to the Holon cemetery on foot. He was buried as the Chief Rabbi of Bulgarian Jews who saved them from the Nazi holocaust. ■

Rooted in the House of the Lord

Children light up a room! They are our joy and our future. They are not only important to their parents who love them but we know on a spiritual level that they play a great role. They held a special place in the heart of Yeshua who opened his arms to them and took the time to teach them with gentleness, and they have the faith that we ourselves should pattern ourselves after (Matthew 18:3). This brings children to a prominent role in our Synagogue life.

At Roeh Israel, we have chosen a style of worship that brings us alongside the house of Israel. Our children are caught up in the flow of Synagogue life as they observe the holidays, life events (such as Bar Mitzvahs) and following the weekly Torah portion. These acts in and of themselves tie us to the greater Jewish family in Israel and around the world. This all influences our children, as they join us in worship, prayer and learning together. Our goal is that they grow up into a spiritual family, where they may find their place as followers of Yeshua and as fellow Jews in Israel. Biblically, spiritual education begins in the home, from the God-fearing parents (Deuteronomy 6:1-3). Any education

the children receive outside of the home should come secondary and as a supplement to their upbringing. This is why we join the children to the rhythm of congregational life, to echo that of the Jewish home. We emphasize the Sabbath, as family and community, which is central to biblical living and growing in His ways. Daily prayers at the home blend with the Sabbath prayers in the Synagogue so that spiritual life is painted in a cohesive picture, providing the children with foundations they need.

Additionally, in Israel the public school education is special in that the children learn the Torah there as well! Each week, following along with the weekly Torah portion, children come

home with a general understanding of biblical stories. The home, the Synagogue and even the school position our children firmly in the Bible and greater Jewish life surrounding them. We weave their experience together by gathering their sources of spiritual input and directing them to the knowledge of Yeshua. This is education in its most natural form.

It is a true privilege to see these children come each week to the Synagogue, bringing all their understanding gained from prayers, holiday and school, and watch them connect the dots to Yeshua! The roots in the Jewish biblical tradition lead to Yeshua, of whom the Torah and the Prophets speak (Luke 24:27). These little lives are the fulfillment of God's word. They are here, living in a promised land and learning His ways for their life. As they grow in their understanding of the Biblical texts, the holidays, the traditions, their home and Synagogue life they gain confidence in their understanding of the true God and in their belief in the promised Redeemer in the land of Israel. They are securely rooted in the foundations of Jewish heritage, in the Synagogue, to stand among the people of Israel and draw them towards the knowledge and love of Messiah. ■

Synagoga vs. Ekklesia



ALEFET/BIGSTOCK

I wish to deal with the terms *synagoga* and *ekklesia* theoretically, in discussion pertaining to Messianic Jewish religious identity and historical consciousness. Alas, in the traditional sense, the *synagoga* is כנסת ישראל, the Assembly of Israel, more specifically *the body* of Israel, or Judaism as Israel, Israel as Judaism. The Ekklesia then is the Church, as in the body of Christians, Christendom, or, perhaps, the *true* Church, the body of Messianic believers and that tradition of faith and practice.

In Christianity, the Church or *Ekklesia* is the abstract body that various Christians associate themselves with in their mind, in their self-awareness, identity and religious consciousness. Evangelicals, for example, view their heritage, albeit critically, as the Apostles through the Church Fathers to the Catholic Church, and then from the Protestant Movement through the various denominations and classic revivals to interdenominational Western Evangelical Christianity, literature and culture.

In Messianic Judaism, nomenclature is at the heart of what it is and is not. Terminology very easily gets murky, confused and confusing, when anyone can redefine anything.

The Ekklesia is the Church, the Church is their heritage, with all its history and baggage, positive and negative. No one can draw the vivid lines between those who belong or do not belong, but the important factor is rather the thought, the value of the Church as historical-religious consciousness.

In Judaism, traditional religious Jews would view themselves in a similar parallel manner to the Church, as the Assembly of Israel, the Synagogue. The Jewish people, practicing Judaism, are Israel, which is embodied in and as the Synagogue. Some Jews are loosely connected to this historical-religious consciousness, and over history they would typically assimilate and leave this concept, community and identity. In modern history, many Jews, though still identifying with Judaism as synagogue, established alternative streams to Orthodox Judaism, namely “Reform” or “Liberal,” “Reconstructionist” and “Conservative.” Even many secular and semi-observant Jews still identify with Jews and Judaism as synagogue.

Typical Consistent Forms

In Messianic Judaism, *nomenclature* is at the heart of what it is and is not. Christian? Judaism? Messianic? Terminology very easily gets murky, confused and confusing, when anyone can redefine anything. So while the descriptive names are very significant, it would make good use to look through and beyond, in order to understand. Perhaps, this historical-religious consciousness, this self-awareness or identity, of Church or Ekklesia and Synagogue will help to bring clarity.

In effect, we can assume three typical approaches, as I purposely leave out the term “Messianic Judaism.” The first is *Jewish-Christianity*, simply ethnic and cultural Jews joining Christianity, identifying with the Church and against the Synagogue. [They would typically carry a “post-Torah” worldview.] The second is the opposite on the spectrum, which I will call *Jesus-Judaism* (sometimes referred to as Crypto-Messianic Judaism), of Jews practicing traditional Judaism while identifying with and among the Synagogue (whether inconspicuous or not) against the Church. [Needless to say, they would embrace a covenantal worldview of the New Testament and traditional Torah observance.]

Finally, is a *third approach*, which is more complex. It is not quite Judaism, a term owned by traditional Orthodox Judaism. It is Jewish in the sense that the *Karaites* are Jewish. So it does not associate with the synagogue but rather skips two thousand years back to late antiquity. The difficulty is, however, that the Karaites really do trace back directly to antiquity, while the very large majority of this third approach have gone through Evangelical Christianity, before striving to establish themselves as an original unaffiliated community of faith.

The attitude towards religious consciousness is independent, at least in theory, denying both church and synagogue, or semi-inclusive, admitting shallow influence from church and synagogue. Though refusing to identify with the Synagogue religiously, association with culture, Jewishness and Israel is acceptable. While refusing to identify with the Church, the term *ekklesia* is accept-

able. This approach is protestant in its nature, and may be described also as modernist, revisionist and ambitiously independent. [Regarding Torah worldview and practice, the approach would not be traditional Judaism observance, but, again similar to Karaites, supposedly biblical according to independent interpretation and application.]

Summary

In reality, these theoretical approaches are all often deemed Messianic Judaism. No one is strictly in one group, most are loosely and fluidly between these three approaches, which is probably normal in social-religious camps. And I would argue that the third approach, the independent protestant idea of Messianic Judaism is nearly non-existent in a pure form, though it is exactly what many strive for and talk about. Messianic Jews are a mix of all these ideas and inclinations. This “mixing” or crossover, is not necessarily negative or even peculiar.

I suppose many Christians and Jews move between institutions, practices, ideas and camps. Of course, I have mentioned three theoretical categories of grouping, in other words on a corporate or collective level. Must individuals identify with a body? Though some claim that being part of a body is fundamental to the Christian faith and the Jewish faith, so that in a sense you cannot just be a disconnected individual, maybe in a postmodern society this is possible, in which case believers presume to defy all borders of identity and corporate belonging, historic consciousness and all, while at the same time maintain the borders and religious camps when they fancy.

This article was meant to bring clarity to the slight confusion of ideas and rhetoric floating around the Messianic Christian world. As such, my intention is additionally to present critique, for people to sharpen their own identity and affiliation, for the sake of transparency and authenticity. ■

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