
FAQ

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Liturgy, Hebrew

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What do you think about the use of Hebrew liturgy in Messianic congregations?

There are generally two extremes that one encounters among Messianic congregations as it relates to Hebrew liturgy: (1) those who rely on liturgy exclusively, and (2) those who see no value in liturgy at all. Those who rely on liturgy exclusively for prayers and worship are those that often embrace a strictly Orthodox Jewish style of *halachah*, whereas those who often see no value in liturgy are largely influenced by charismatic and/or Pentecostal Christianity.

Any cursory examination of Second Temple Judaism will reveal that liturgical prayer and worship were important parts of the religious expression of Jewish life. For the most part, the type of liturgy from this period that was used included singing Scripture to music, employing Psalms in daily and corporate prayer, and various other praises issued to God in the Temple service. While varied traditions existed from community to community, and between Judean and Diaspora Judaism, liturgy was nevertheless an important part of the Jewish world Yeshua and the Apostles were a part of.

The use of liturgy was not only limited to ancient Jewish worship, because the early Christian movement of the Second Century modeled its worship style after the Synagogue, employing many of the same prayers or praises, as well as new prayers or praises based on the Gospels and Apostolic texts. Certainly, spontaneous prayers were also a major part of early Christian worship, probably more so than what we see in the Synagogue. Also significantly different was the First Century *ekklēsia's* integration of Yeshua into a Jewish monotheistic worship of HaShem (YHWH) as demonstrated by hymns such as the *Carmen Christi* of Philippians 2:5-11. Throughout most of Christian history, liturgical worship has given structure to corporate services, notably being seen today in the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican traditions. There are also strands of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches that can be considered "high Church Protestant."

Today's emerging Messianic movement sits between the two major liturgical traditions seen in Judaism and Christianity. Not surprisingly, many Messianic congregations use Jewish liturgy to structure their worship services. Most Messianic congregations do not use the amount of liturgy that an Orthodox synagogue would employ, and so the amount is usually somewhere in between what is seen in Conservative and/or Reform synagogues—not that much unlike various Protestant traditions that use a moderate amount of liturgy. There are some Messianic congregations that use no liturgy at all, or for that matter have a structured worship service, often modeling themselves off of a style of charismatic Christian worship unique to the Twentieth, and now Twenty-First Century.

We would encourage Messianic congregations to use a moderate amount of liturgy, be it in the form of traditional prayers and praises, as a way to not only give structure and organization to worship—but also to invite a reverent attitude to the assembly. It can be easily said that with all of the vibrant song and dance seen at many Messianic congregations, there does need to be a moment when the music stops, there is no dancing, and the people join in one accord and one voice in proclaiming who God is. Of course, the amount of liturgy to be used is an issue that must be determined by the local needs of an assembly. Likewise, not all of the liturgy need be in Hebrew, as a significant amount of it can be done in English (or whatever other native language is spoken).