

## Our Praise & Worship

by

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What is Messianic Jewish Praise and Worship? Those of us who have enough years in the Messianic Jewish Movement remember when our praise and worship music was a combination of Christian hymns, Christian-neutral choruses, and Jewish and Israeli folk songs to add a bit of Jewish sound. It was an era when dancing to “Havah Nagilah” (the only dance anyone knew) passed for Messianic praise.

But Messianic Jewish praise and worship caught on, and, in the late 60s, several Messianic Jewish composers (e.g. Stuart Dauermann) began to publish Messianic music, and the Liberated Wailing Wall of Jews for Jesus burst onto the scene. Then, in the early 70s, another Messianic Jewish music group from Beth Yeshua called “Lamb” began to perform, and a style of music composed by John Wimber and Eddie Espinosa of the Vinyard Movement became extremely popular. This latter music was adopted by so many Messianic Jewish congregations, that the line of distinction between Messianic Jewish Music and Vinyard music blurred considerably. Other groups that followed were Kol Simcha, also from Beth Yeshua, and Israel’s Hope from Beth Messiah. More recently, Messianic Jewish composers have introduced other sounds including the sounds of rock and soul, but the early sound, often called “Davidic praise and worship,” is still the one most associated with Messianic Judaism.

In the early days and even up to today, praise and worship in Messianic Jewish congregations was thought of as an entirely separate entity from liturgy; this led to the practice of putting Jewish liturgy and praise and worship in separate places in the service with little or no effort to integrate the two. After all, “Davidic praise and worship” was new! Alive in the Spirit! Free-flowing! Exciting! Why mix it with the structured deadness of Jewish liturgy that did not know of the Spirit, and that was developed centuries ago by Jews who had rejected Yeshua? Yet Jewish liturgy was so associated with the identity of a Jewish service, that not to include it would seem to belie Messianic Judaism’s claim of Jewish authenticity. Thus began an uneasy struggle between those who favored Jewish liturgy as their form of worship and those who resisted it as a vehicle that could potentially quench the Spirit.

Now I only have a limited space in this Newsletter, so I had better get to the point of what I want to say. In my opinion, both Jewish liturgy and the songs used in Davidic praise and worship are valid for our worship because they both contain Scripture and words of praise for God. And they are both “liturgy” because, in both their cases, their words and music have been composed by men, and they are both repeatedly used in specified parts of our services. Another characteristic of their both being liturgy is that both of them often encourage certain physical gestures to accompany them; for example, we stand for the *Amidah*, and clap to “Hiney Ma Tov.”

In my opinion, whether or not a worship form invites or quenches the Spirit has more to do with how it is used than how it sounds. What is needed, whatever liturgy is used, is the willingness of the leader and the worshiper to pause and redirect the worship at any place and at any time that the *Ruach haKodesh* directs. This is often resisted by us because we become comfortable in our repetitive ways; but this is where we have to put most of our efforts.

I have noticed a new trend in Messianic Jewish worship that I think is very good. It integrates the ancient Jewish liturgies with the more contemporary ones to produce a single more unified period of praise and worship that is overall authentically Jewish. But even here, the goal of it being “Spirit led” will not be achieved unless the worship leader makes way for the Holy Spirit to lead, and to interrupt with an agenda of His own. I am reminded of 1 Chronicles 25:1 where King David ordered that some of the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun be separated to prophesy along with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals. We don’t often think of our praise and worship times as regularly accompanied by prophecy, but we ought to start thinking that way, and begin to expect that God will speak to us both personally and publicly in the midst of our worship.

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