

Liturgy, Holy Spirit, & Time

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We have a problem. We want our services to be Jewish and, at the same time, to be responsive to the *Ruach HaKodesh*. That's a problem because Jewish Services are liturgical and were developed over the last 2000 years by a Judaism that did not (and still does not) embrace the reality of a living Holy Spirit in Jewish lives and in our synagogue prayers. Jewish liturgy is biblical and spiritual but, like the Temple liturgy, is precise and not conducive to being interrupted by a move of the Spirit.

Messianic Judaism, being a New Covenant Judaism, must make place for the Holy Spirit and, in our *Shabbat* service here at Ohev, we open ourselves to receive Him through our praise and worship and during our call for prophetic Words. That is not to say that the Spirit does not minister to us through our liturgical prayers as well and through our messages. He most certainly does, but the *Ruach HaKodesh* is a living Spirit, and His nature is to want to transcend the structural limitations we tend to place on Him.

Spirit-filled Christian services do not have the problem because they tend to have little or no structure, and are therefore able to change direction at a moment's notice in response to the Holy Spirit. Does that mean that our Jewish liturgical way of praying is out of God's will? Not at all! Messianic Jewish congregations have a different purpose and role to play than Christian churches – a role that employs ancient prayers and worship forms reminiscent of our covenantal priestly responsibilities, and of our connection to the wider Jewish world. The problem is not our liturgy; I believe it is rather that we impose an unreasonable time expectation on our *Shabbat* service and have become so time-conscious, wanting to end our service no later than 12:30 that, too often, we end our praise and worship and response to the Holy Spirit prematurely in order to go on to the next thing on our agenda.

This is not something that is unique to Ohev. All Spirit-led Messianic Jewish congregations in the country wrestle with the time it takes to pray traditional prayers in Hebrew, repeat them in English, read Scripture, incorporate New Covenant content that includes contemporary praise and worship, call for prophetic words, lay hands on the sick, give a message, and manage to end their service before *Havdalah*.

We can be proud of our Ohev *Shabbat* service as being one of the most liturgically Jewish and yet diverse and spiritual services among Tikkun congregations and possibly in the entire movement. During the recent Tikkun Conference, the praise and worship led by Bruce, and the Torah Service led by Scott, brought accolades from many who were inspired to bring what they experienced back to their home congregations. Still, the service was not Spirit-led in that it was almost completely planned in advance and limited by constraints on time.

Scripture is replete with examples of prayer and our need to spend uninterrupted time in it. Consider, for example, [Luke 6:12](#):

"It was around that time that Yeshua went out to the hill country to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God."

Now to be fair about it, Luke 6:12 is an example of private prayer – not synagogue prayer, and we know that the prayers and sacrifices in the Holy Temple were conducted at specific times and with timed efficiency. The fact is, the closest we have in Scripture to the Holy Spirit breaking through and redirecting public worship is what is described in Acts 2, where the Holy Spirit captured the attention of the crowd that had gathered in Jerusalem for *Shavuot*; but it was a one-time miracle and did not occur during a service or in a synagogue.

The sparse information we have about official proceedings in the synagogue and Temple in the First century is that they were formal and liturgical, with no mention of body ministry or the expectation of being led by the Holy Spirit. There is, however, a biblical reference to believers gathering in the Temple Court and in homes to break bread, praise God, and enjoy each other's fellowship. These appear to be informal gatherings and not services, for we read in Acts 2:44-47:

"All those trusting in Yeshua stayed together and had everything in common; in fact, they sold their property and possessions and distributed the proceeds to all who were in need. Continuing faithfully and with singleness of purpose to meet in the Temple courts daily, and breaking bread in their several homes, they shared their food in joy and simplicity of heart, praising God and having the respect of all the people. And day after day the Lord kept adding to them those who were being saved."

What this means is that we are not going to get a lot of Bible help to enhance our understanding of how to invite and incorporate the Holy Spirit in our Jewish services; we will have to find out how to do it from the Holy Spirit Himself. One thing is intuitively clear to me though. To some extent, we will have to change our expectation that our service must end at a certain time because, when the Holy Spirit moves on us, we must be willing to follow where he leads regardless of the time it takes. Yes, within reason we can truncate other parts of the service to accommodate, but not to the extent of cancelling its major components the *Sh'ma*, the *Amidah*, and reading from the *Torah*; I believe it is God's will that they remain a core part of every *Shabbat* morning service because they enable us to identify with our Jewish People who pray similarly in synagogues everywhere in the world. Nevertheless, changes in our attitudes about time are necessary if we really want the Holy Spirit to have a place of free reign in our services.

Now, talking about inviting the Holy Spirit is not the same as actually inviting Him, so we will proceed a little differently today. I will close the service now with the Aaronic benediction, and *Shamash* Steve will come forward to lead us in a season of unstructured prayer and seeking the Holy Spirit. *Kiddush* today will be led by Eric in the *Oneg* room upstairs. By closing in this unusual way, I am not signaling that we will be ending our *Shabbat* service this way in the weeks to come, or that our services will become routinely longer. I am, however, asking that we pray to be delivered from the time-consciousness that has heretofore been pervasive in our service, and also that God reveal to us how we can provide opportunity for the Holy Spirit to function in our midst with greater frequency and power.

Now:

"May the Lord Bless you and keep you,
May He make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you,
May He lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."