

Notes: July 29, 2017

Start: 10 AM

Order of service:

1. Meet and Greet
2. Introduction (if new people)
3. Ma Tovv
4. Open in Prayer for service
5. Liturgy – Sh'ma +
6. Announcements
7. Praise and Worship Songs
8. Message
9. Aaronic Blessing
10. Kiddush
11. Oneg

Children's Blessing:

Transliteration: *Ye'simcha Elohim ke-Ephraim ve hee-Menashe*

English: *May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe*

Transliteration: *Ye'simech Elohim ke-Sarah, Rivka, Rachel ve-Leah.*

English: *May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.*

Introduction: Distinct and Authentic

Two weeks ago, I shared with you a sermon entitled “Our Borders” in which I conveyed the parameters of the congregation. What is authoritative to us. In that we identify ourselves as a Messianic Jewish Synagogue, with emphasis on Jewish, I wanted to convey to you what this actually means.

What is this congregation supposed to look like?

Earlier this week, I was part of a discussion on the Rabbi's Forum whereby a Messianic Rabbi made the following statement...

“The Jewishness of messianic Judaism, like anything else, is advanced first and foremost by Jewish people. Secondly, by Jewish culture. That culture includes Jewish values, education, art, entertainment, etc., and of course Jewish causes like Zionism. The idea that Jewish culture is all coming from the Torah, as if we must cling to the law given to us at Sinai by Moses in order to be Jewish simply is not true. Being Jewish is not a religious thing, it's a nationality. We are a culture that has developed over thousands of years, and you can't get it from reading or keeping the Torah, you get it from being around the people. The Jewish people. And from learning to see the world as we Jews do.”

During this exchange part of my response to Messianic Judaism being advanced by Jewish culture...

How is Messianic Judaism advanced by Jewish culture? If anything Jewish culture resists Messianic Judaism because we are not seen as being Jewish by their definition. Yet, we cannot be confined by how others define us. Are we Jewish enough?

If anything the culture that has developed over the years has actually moved us away from God because they have stopped reading Torah. Secular Jews and Reform Jews comprise 65% of the entire Jewish population. The very things that you had

conveyed as being Jewish identity, is in essence being defined by a majority of the Jewish population that has nothing to do with Torah. You are in essence allowing them to identify what being Jewish means.

Not only the 65% but the remaining 35% further define what it means to be Jewish. So much so that the JCA does not consider us to be Jewish, because we don't "fit" their definition of what Jewish is.

So, in order to define ourselves, we must first know what being Jewish means.

Disclaimer – I am not saying in any way that anyone here is to become Jewish, but rather as we have established ourselves as a Messianic Jewish Synagogue, what does Jewish mean.

Two weeks ago during Bible Study, I used material from a web site – Judaism 101 by Tracey Rich. I went back to this web site for more information on "What is Judaism?"

<http://www.jewfaq.org/judaism.htm>

Judaism is a rather unique concept.

Most people, both Jewish and gentile, would instinctively say that Judaism is a religion. And yet, there are militant atheists who insist that they are Jews!

So, just what is Judaism?

Is it a religion?

There is a religion called Judaism, a set of ideas about the world and the way we should live our lives that is called "Judaism." It is studied in Religious Studies courses and taught to Jewish children in [Hebrew](#) schools.

However, many people who call themselves Jews do not believe in that religion at all! More than half of all Jews in [Israel](#) today call themselves "secular," and don't believe in [G-d](#) or any of the religious beliefs of Judaism. Half of all Jews in the United States don't belong to any [synagogue](#). They may practice some of the rituals of Judaism and celebrate some of the [holidays](#), but they don't think of these actions as religious activities.

The most traditional Jews and the most liberal Jews and everyone in between would agree that these secular people are still Jews, regardless of their disbelief. Clearly, then, there is more to being Jewish than just a religion.

Is Judaism a race?

In the 1980s, the United States Supreme Court ruled that Jews are a race, at least for purposes of certain anti-discrimination laws.

But many Jews were deeply offended by that decision, offended by any hint that Jews could be considered a race. The idea of Jews as a race brings to mind nightmarish visions of Nazi Germany, where Jews were declared to be not just a race, but an inferior race that had to be rounded up into ghettos and exterminated like vermin.

But setting aside the emotional issues, Jews are clearly not a race.

Race is a genetic distinction, and refers to people with shared ancestry and shared genetic traits. You can't change your race; it's in your DNA.

Is Judaism a culture?

Most secular American Jews think of their Jewishness as a matter of culture or ethnicity. When they think of Jewish culture, they think of the [food](#), of the [Yiddish](#) language, of some limited [holiday](#) observances, and of cultural values like the emphasis on education.

Those secular American Jews would probably be surprised to learn that much of what they think of as Jewish culture is really just Ashkenazic Jewish culture, the culture of Jews whose ancestors come from one part of the world. Jews have lived in many parts of the world and have developed many different traditions.

There are certainly cultural traits and behaviors that are shared by many Jews, that make us feel more comfortable with other Jews. Jews in many parts of the world share many of those cultural aspects. However, that culture is not shared by all Jews all over the world, and people who do not share that culture are no less Jews because of it. Thus, Judaism must be something more than a culture or an ethnic group.

I want you to realize something here, based on the information conveyed by Tracey Rich...

- If you don't believe in the religion of Judaism, you are still considered Jewish.
- If you don't embrace the primary cultural aspects of Judaism, you are still Jewish.
- You can't change your DNA.

Yet, we are defined as not being Jewish because we come to accept the Jewish Messiah. Even though Judaism sees Yeshua as the head of Christianity and therefore a different religion, we are no longer Jewish because of this belief.

We could be atheists and still be Jewish.
We could deny the culture and still be Jewish.

Yet something so Jewish as accepting and embracing the promise of God makes us forfeit our identity.

Two of the challenges we experience as a congregation that I shared with you were:

- By identifying ourselves as Messianic Judaism, we may think that we are subordinate to a modern Orthodox, Ultra-Orthodox or Hasidic Judaism and that we should follow one of their models for faith, practice, theology, teaching, etc.
- As part of the Body of Messiah, we face the challenge of developing our own distinctive Messianic Jewish theological frameworks and self-understandings and should not limit ourselves to conform to inherited frameworks and understandings from the Gentile Church.

This past week, two words were constantly on my mind.

Authentic - of undisputed origin; genuine.

Distinct - recognizably different in nature from something else of a similar type.

So, when we look at ourselves as a Messianic Jewish Synagogue – Are we authentic?

We are a synagogue...as we provide in our bulletin...

We are a Beit Tefilah – house of prayer

We are a Beit Hallel – house of praise

We are a Beit Midrash – house of study

We are Messianic – in that we have accepted who we believe to be the fulfillment of the promises made to the Jewish people, sons of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov.

Now comes the Jewish part – are we Authentic – not by how others may define us but by how Adonai defines us.

Our Jewishness as a people may be defined by culture today, but that isn't how it is conveyed in Scripture.

Rom 9:4 the people of Isra'el! They were made God's children, the Sh'khinah has been with them, the covenants are theirs, likewise the giving of the Torah, the Temple service and the promises;

Rom 9:5 the Patriarchs are theirs; and from them, as far as his physical descent is concerned, came the Messiah, who is over all. Praised be Adonai for ever! Amen.

Are we a Messianic Jewish Synagogue?

Undisputed origin.

All aspects relating to Yeshua, convey that He is Jewish, even though some will question the validity of His birth. As I had convey previously, within the Jewish community, it doesn't matter what you do or believe, if you are Jewish, in the eyes of the community you are still Jewish.

Yeshua was born a Jew.

Yeshua lived as a Jew

Yeshua died as a Jew

Yeshua was resurrected as a Jew

Yeshua will return as a Jew

Now, let me take you a step further. Seeing as this Shabbat is Shabbat Chazon. Shabbat of Vision, the Shabbat prior to Tisha B'av, let me cast this vision for you.

What is our core message as a Messianic community?

I believe it is the same message conveyed by the Prophets. From Moshe (Deut 4:29 - 31; 30:1 - 4); Solomon (1 Kings 8:46 - 48); Isaiah (55:6 - 7); Jeremiah (3:12 - 15); Ezekiel (18:30 - 32); Hosea (14:1); Zechariah (1:3) and Malachi (3:7)

It is the same message conveyed by Yochanan the Immerser - Matthew 3:1 - 11.

It is the same message conveyed by Yeshua...Matthew 4:12 - 17

Mat 4:17 From that time on, Yeshua began proclaiming, "Turn from your sins to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near!"

To the Jew, our brothers and sisters it is "Return to Me and I will return to you"

To the nations, "Turn to me and I will turn to you"

The Haftarah portion for this week, Shabbat Chazon starts off with Isaiah 1:2:

Isa 1:2 "Hear, heaven! Listen, earth! For Adonai is speaking. "I raised and brought up children, but they rebelled against me.

Then we hear of Adonai's charges against the child He raised...

Isa 1:10 Hear what Adonai says, you rulers of S'dom! Listen to God's Torah, you people of `Amora!

Isa 1:11 "Why are all those sacrifices offered to me?" asks Adonai. "I'm fed up with burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened animals! I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls, lambs and goats!

Isa 1:12 Yes, you come to appear in my presence; but who asked you to do this, to trample through my courtyards?

Isa 1:13 Stop bringing worthless grain offerings! They are like disgusting incense to me! Rosh-Hodesh, Shabbat, calling convocations — **I can't stand evil together with your assemblies!**

To where the purpose of Isaiah and the other Prophets was to prompt Adonai's child to return to Him.

Deu 30:1 "When the time arrives that all these things have come upon you, both the blessing and the curse which I have presented to you; and you are there among the nations to which Adonai your God has driven you; then, at last, you will start thinking about what has happened to you;

Deu 30:2 and you will return to Adonai your God and pay attention to what he has said, which will be exactly what I am ordering you to do today - you and your children, with all your heart and all your being.

Deu 30:3 At that point, Adonai your God will reverse your exile and show you mercy; he will return and gather you from all the peoples to which Adonai your God scattered you.

Deu 30:4 If one of yours was scattered to the far end of the sky, Adonai your God will gather you even from there; he will go there and get you.

Isa 55:6 Seek Adonai while he is available, call on him while he is still nearby.

Isa 55:7 Let the wicked person abandon his way and the evil person his thoughts; let him return to Adonai, and he will have mercy on him; let him return to our God, for he will freely forgive.

Jer 3:12 Go and proclaim these words toward the north: "Return, backsliding Isra'el," says Adonai. "I will not frown on you, for I am merciful," says Adonai. "I will not bear a grudge forever.

Jer 3:13 Only acknowledge your guilt, that you have committed crimes against Adonai your God, that you were promiscuous with strangers under every green tree, and that you have not paid attention to my voice," says Adonai.

Jer 3:14 "Return, backsliding children," says Adonai; "for I am your master. I will take you, one from a city, two from a family, and bring you to Tziyon.

Jer 3:15 I will give you shepherds after my own heart, and they will feed you with knowledge and understanding."

To where we become acquainted with Yochanan the Immerser:

Mat 3:1 It was during those days that Yochanan the Immerser arrived in the desert of Y'hudah and began proclaiming the message,

Mat 3:2 "Turn from your sins to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near!"

and finally to Yeshua, whom I shared with you earlier...

Mat 4:17 From that time on, Yeshua began proclaiming, "Turn from your sins to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near!"

To where Adonai conveys through Isaiah...

Isa 49:3 He said to me, "You are my servant, Isra'el, through whom I will show my glory."

Isa 49:4 But I said, "I have toiled in vain, spent my strength for nothing, futility." Yet my cause is with Adonai, my reward is with my God.

Isa 49:5 So now Adonai says — he formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Ya`akov back to him, to have Isra'el gathered to him, so that I will be honored in the sight of Adonai, my God having become my strength —

Isa 49:6 he has said, "It is not enough that you are merely my servant to raise up the tribes of Ya`akov and restore the offspring of Isra'el. I will also make you a light to the nations, so my salvation can spread to the ends of the earth."

So, by definition and the corroborating testimony I have provided you earlier...would you say we are authentic?

Authentic - of undisputed origin; genuine.

Now, the question – Are we distinct?

Distinct - recognizably different in nature from something else of a similar type.

Would you agree that we are recognizably different, base on the information I provided you earlier, defining Judaism.

Yet, are we not similar to that which is recognizable?

So, by being authentic through the message we convey and the identity we have established, not through definitions established by man, but rather through Scripture, we have in essence made ourselves distinct.

The same is true, if we were to look at the other side of our connection, the Church.

- As part of the Body of Messiah, we face the challenge of developing our own distinctive Messianic Jewish theological frameworks and self-understandings and should not limit ourselves to conform to inherited frameworks and understandings from the Gentile Church.

We cannot allow ourselves to be defined by the Church. Further, we cannot allow ourselves to be deterred in our mission and this distinct Messianic Message of return / turn to me and I will return / turn to you.