

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE



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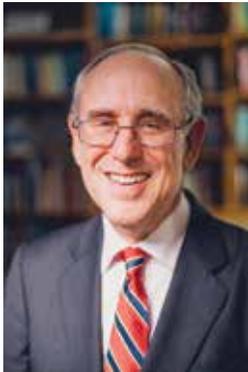
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UNDERSTANDING MESSIANIC CONGREGATIONS

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FROM THE PRESIDENT



MESSIANIC CONGREGATIONS EXPLAINED

Chosen People
Ministries Establishes
Congregations Where
Non-Believing Jewish
People Feel at Home

Dear friend in the Messiah,

Shalom from our headquarters in New York City!

Did you know that on any given weekend more than 1,500 Jewish people connect with a community of worship associated with Chosen People Ministries? Your Mission to the Jewish People has planted Messianic congregations across the United States, Canada, Israel, and around the globe in various cities with a high concentration of Jewish people.

It is our hope to help Jewish people worship the Lord in a more comfortable Jewish-sensitive environment. This enables Jewish believers in Jesus to grow in their faith and also provides a place where they can bring their family and friends to hear the Gospel in a Jewish way.

Messianic congregations are not new as there were hundreds of these congregations in Europe prior to the Holocaust! But sadly, they were destroyed along with the Jewish communities they served. Most of the missions to the Jewish people operating in Europe at that time created congregations for the Jewish people who came to faith in the Messiah Jesus. In fact, we have been planting Messianic congregations for all of our 123 years of ministry!

May I share a little bit of Chosen People Ministries' history?

CHOSEN PEOPLE MINISTRIES AND MESSIANIC CONGREGATIONS

Chosen People Ministries was founded by Rabbi Leopold Cohn, who came to faith on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1892. He established our ministry in Brooklyn in 1894. Rabbi Cohn reached out to the Jewish people at that time in a variety of ways, as most of those he reached were new Jewish immigrants to the United States, like himself. He started food distribution centers, citizenship training, English-as-a-second-language instruction, a free medical clinic, and of course, began preaching the Gospel in parks, public areas, and through weekly and holiday services.

Rabbi Cohn understood that it would be best for Jewish believers to worship on Friday night and Saturday as this would cause the least degree of cultural disruption for Jewish seekers and for new Jewish believers in Jesus.

Many Messianic Jews continue to worship on Friday night and Saturday at this present time. The 150-plus Messianic congregations in Israel, where there has been tremendous growth of new congregations over the last two decades, all worship on Saturday! Sunday is a work day in Israel. The congregations that worship on Sunday are primarily established for non-Jews who live in the Holy Land.

Your Mission to the Jewish People has always believed it is important for Messianic Jews to be part of a local church or Messianic congregation. We also believe it is important for Jewish believers to maintain their Jewish identities in the Messiah as God made us who we are and has planned and promised a future for the Jewish people. This means there needs to be an identifiable Jewish presence.

The Apostle Paul recognized this when he wrote to the Roman believers in Romans 11:1,

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

JEWISH IDENTITY AND MESSIANIC CONGREGATIONS

In fact, perhaps the number one reason Jewish people do not want to follow the Messiah Jesus is because it is assumed that by believing in Jesus a Jewish person is rejecting their Jewishness and committing ethnic suicide! The Apostle Paul, of course, argues that this is not true and we want to remove this very obstacle from Jewish people as they consider the claims of the Messiah. We also believe it



is healthy for Jewish people to understand that based upon the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3) the Jewish people continue to have a unique role in this world. When you read through the Epistles, the Apostle speaks about the unity of Jews and Gentiles and so it is important for Jewish people to maintain their identity, as this is part of our witness of unity in the Messiah. Unity is not a miracle when everyone is the same (Galatians 3:28).

Whereas it might not be the case for every Messianic Jew, worshiping at a Messianic congregation can be good for the soul and for the corporate testimony to our Jewish people.

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT A MESSIANIC CONGREGATION?

Some people have asked, “What is the difference between a local evangelical church and a Messianic congregation?” This is a good question!

Let me say from the start that Messianic Jews believe the same core doctrines as evangelical Christians. The difference is not doctrinal and, of course, Messianic Jews all believe that the only way to receive salvation is through accepting Jesus as our atonement for sin. His incarnation, resurrection and soon return are doctrines cherished by all the Messianic Jews I know and especially those associated with Chosen People Ministries.

So what makes a Messianic congregation unique? Simply, we express our faith in Jesus the Messiah in a more “Jewish” way. We have already established that these congregations most often meet on Friday night or Saturday morning. This is a testimony in itself.

I have been asked by Jewish people, “So what days do you worship?” If I answer, on Sunday, then I know they are going to say that we “converted” and are no longer Jews. But when I say, we start congregations that meet on Friday and/or Saturday morning, they often say, “Oh! But, I thought you were a Christian now?”

I usually respond with, “Well, if by Christian you mean a follower of the Jewish Messiah, then absolutely yes...you can call me a Christian. But, if by naming me a Christian you mean that I am no longer Jewish, then you are wrong...I am still Jewish, but believe that Jesus is my promised Messiah.”

However, the day of worship is only one of the distinctives of a Messianic congregation. Additionally, most Messianic congregations celebrate the Jewish holidays as fulfilled in the Messiah Jesus. This would include Passover (and Feast of Unleavened Bread), First Fruits, Pentecost (*Shavuot*), New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*), the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) and Tabernacles (*Sukkot*). The festivals are road maps to redemption leading us to the person of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.

You only need to attend a Messianic congregation on a



Jewish holiday, wedding, or even a funeral service to see how Jewish non-believers respond to what occurs in the service. The testimony is profound. Messianic congregations can provide these special ministries as they schedule congregational life around the Jewish calendar, which provides many opportunities for the Jewish family and friends of Messianic Jews to come and see the Jewishness of Jesus rather than simply hear about it!

The music has a more “Jewish style.” Aspects of the service are in Hebrew and the order of service is more like a combination of a church and a synagogue service. There is a heavy emphasis on reading the Bible, just as there is in a synagogue, and a sermon is preached—usually longer than the brief 15-minute sermon preached by the average rabbi. The fellowship afterwards is similar, but expect more bagels!

THE WITNESS OF A MESSIANIC CONGREGATION

Just imagine what it would be like to bring your friend or relative to a Chosen People Ministries’ Messianic congregation to enjoy a Jewish holiday event! We believe that hearing the message of the Gospel in a Jewish setting adds to the clarity and power of our witness.

Chosen People Ministries serves many Jewish believers through our congregations who regularly attend local churches but need the additional Messianic Jewish fellowship and training. This is also one of the reasons we provide camping programs, retreats, and trips to Israel for young adults, and more. We want to help strengthen the identity and testimony of Jewish believers in Messianic congregations and also those who are part of local churches.

I hope that one day you will visit a Messianic congregation, if you have not already. I also want to encourage you to view the videos we have prepared so you can see how Messianic Jewish congregations worship, and watch the testimonies of both congregational leaders and of those who have been touched by our congregations. You can watch these videos by visiting chosenpeople.com/messianiccongregations.

Thank you so much for your understanding, love and support.

Blessings in our Messiah!

Mitch

P.S. You do not need to go to a Messianic congregation to learn more about Passover. For your gift of \$200 or more we will send you a copy of our brand new book to be released in March, *Messiah in the Passover*, edited by myself and Dr. Darrell Bock, who teaches at Dallas Theological Seminary. I think you will love it...recipes included!

WE ARE MESSIANIC JEWS — JEWISH PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH OF ISRAEL. IN FACT, WE COMMONLY REFER TO JESUS AS **YESHUA**, WHICH IS A HEBREW NAME THAT MEANS, “GOD IS THE SAVIOR.” WE BELIEVE THAT PEACE IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF HIM.

AUSTIN KOUSTIK

I was raised within the Messianic movement. My parents, both my mom and my dad, became believers in Yeshua soon after they got married, about ten years before they had me. I didn't come to faith immediately, but the one defining aspect that made me come to faith and accept Yeshua as my Messiah was thinking about what is going to happen to me after I die? That just got me to investigate the Scriptures and investigate the story of Yeshua and the Gospel. I made the decision when I was about 10 or 11 years old, and the rest is history.

The main aspect that has made me stay in a Messianic congregation is identifying with my Jewish roots and how that ties in to the Jewish faith and what I believe in. Personally, I regard my Jewish heritage as a very important part of me. This has been the main thing that has kept me in the Messianic movement, as a believer in Yeshua, for most of my life.

The diversity of the Messianic community is one of the main things that make it unique. It is both Jewish people and Gentile people identifying as one body, believing in Yeshua the Messiah as their Savior. Messianic congregations preach a unified message that brings people together. I think the whole Messianic movement and congregations emphasize communal togetherness and a unified sense of community that most systems in this world cannot achieve.

Austin was raised in a Messianic Jewish home in Southern California.



DENISE CHUNG

I came to faith in my late 20s. At the time, I was working hard and started to think about life. Some friends came to me and challenged me to think about the universe, how it was created, and if there is a God. I gradually started reading the Bible and after attending church for two months, I realized that there is a God who created this world, and He created me and I have a purpose in my life. He is the truth, and so in that way I came to faith in Jesus. I realized that He is my Savior, and I need Him.

When I first walked into the Messianic congregation I didn't expect anything because I had no idea of what it would be. I know the Chinese way to worship, and the American way, and the church way to worship, but Jewish people—I had no idea! Since then, I have been looking at the Bible in a more Jewish context. It is more vivid in the culture and the language itself, because we use some Hebrew liturgy, and some Yiddish. We also have a lot of Jewish stories and humor, which fill in the context when we are teaching the Bible.

I also feel that I have become an ambassador for telling the Church, especially the Chinese Church, where I came from, that Jewish people have their own way to worship, and it's biblical and has Jesus at the center! When I talk to my Jewish friends about my congregation, they are so surprised! They say things like, "I expect you to go to a Chinese congregation? But you tell me about all these Jewish things in your church!" Because of their Jewish background, they want to understand more. This attracts them to want to know what I believe. There have been a couple of occasions when I invited Jewish friends to come to my congregation, which has been a very good tool for me in introducing my Jewish friends and contacts to Jesus. It has also become a way for me to link the Gentile believer and the Jewish believer together.

Denise is from Hong Kong and grew up in a traditional Chinese home. She came to faith as a young businesswoman.

OKSANA

My name is Oksana. I attend Beth Sar Shalom Congregation in Brooklyn, New York. Ever since I came to the Lord five years ago, I have had the desire to serve Jewish people. I remember I had a moment when I was a young believer—I was praying and I said to the Lord, "Lord, I want to know your heart." I remember at that moment, it just came, something like a burden, like a deep pain and I realized it was for Jewish people.

I remember when I first walked into the congregation. My friend invited me, and I had just moved to Brooklyn from Queens. My new apartment was two blocks away. The next week I came to congregation when it was opening, and I felt that I was home. It was something new, it was peace. When I went to regular church, I remember there was a feeling of expectation, like there is going to be loud music and it is going to be great—there will be something that is going to lift my emotions and I'm going to feel this happiness. When I came here it was different. It was quiet, it was peaceful—it was really shalom.

Oksana is a Ukrainian believer who works in the fashion industry.

GENE POMERANTS

My name is Gennadi Pomerants, but most people call me Gene. When I was in my mid-to-late twenties, someone gave me a Jehovah's Witness Bible. I didn't know one Bible from another and so I started reading Genesis. It didn't make sense to me that I was reading the same thing I grew up reading in the Tanakh! One day, driving through the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel, I saw a billboard that said, "Be more Jewish, believe in Jesus!" I contacted them, started studying the Bible with them and accepted Jesus as my Messiah in the late 1990s.

However, I stepped away from my faith for a very long time. My wife, who is Jewish too, thought I was going to become an anti-Semite because she experienced antisemitism by Christians in the former Soviet Union. In the summer of 2015 I decided to start following Jesus again and I told my wife, "I'm going to start going to church again."

And to my surprise she said, "I'm going to go with you," and that was a miracle! We started going to a Pentecostal congregation, and I loved it but my wife felt a little uncomfortable to be there because it was so weird to her to be in a Christian setting, even though she accepted Messiah there. Then I found out about Beth Sar Shalom and decided to give it a try. The second my wife and I walked through the door we felt at home!

Since then, we have had a couple of celebrations here. My wife and I renewed our vows this past August, and our daughter also had her Bat Mitzvah here. For both occasions our family came and they were confused. They were like, "Okay, wait a second, everything seems Jewish here...where is the Christian part? We thought you were Christians now. But it seems very Jewish." It was kind of fun seeing the reaction of our friends and family to that. Coming to Beth Sar Shalom Brooklyn has brought our family closer together.

Gene is a Jewish believer in Jesus from a Russian background.

Hebrews 6:1-3 A Call for Spiritual Maturity



Dr. Rich Freeman, D. Min. serves as the Vice President for Church Ministries and Conferences with Chosen People Ministries and lives in South Florida with his wife, Julia. Dr. Freeman works with churches throughout the country and abroad, helping to equip God's people to share the Gospel with their Jewish neighbors, friends and co-workers and grow in their understanding of the Scriptures.

In our last study, the writer of Hebrews spoke about how these Jewish believers were not spiritually mature enough to receive deep, meaty teaching regarding the Melchizedekian priesthood of Yeshua the Messiah. He then moves on, in Hebrews 6:1, to the thought that it was clearly now time for them to mature. He says they should be “leaving the elementary teaching about the Messiah and press on to maturity.” The elementary teaching about the Messiah, in this context refers to Jesus’ earthly ministry, His birth, life, teaching, death, burial, and resurrection as understood through the Old Testament. The understanding of His ministry as our Great High Priest is what these Jewish believers needed to mature into.

There is some finality in the Greek word, *aphiemi*, translated “leaving.” It refers to total detachment, to depart, to put off. In the *Expositors Greek Testament*, in Hebrews 6:1, the clause is translated, “let us abandon (give up) the elementary teaching about Christ.” As the writer of Hebrews is dealing with the issue of these Jewish believers desiring to go back to the sacrificial system, he describes, in verse 2, what it is they are supposed to be leaving. He says, “not laying again a foundation,” which would be going back to the basics of Old Testament teaching regarding the Messiah. They are called to go beyond these basics and press on to maturity. He then describes this foundation with the following details:

“Repentance from dead works and of faith toward God” – The dead works the writer of Hebrews is referring to is the system of sacrifices designed to point people to the Messiah. The Old Testament practices presented a faith in God by coming to Him through the sacrifices. Rather, we ought to approach Him through Messiah as our High Priest. What is most important about this basic truth is that when we repent we need to leave one thing and turn to another, which the writer says is the Messiah.

“Of instruction about washings and the laying on of hands” – Every Jewish believer understood the importance of the *mikvah* bath. Virtually every Jewish home would have a basin by the entrance to use for ceremonial washings. There were ritual washings for many different purposes, and these Jewish believers were apparently desirous of these things which were again only shadows pointing to Messiah. They had the reality of Messiah and needed to move on from the pictures. The laying on of hands was another description of the sacrifices where the man making the sacrifice would lay hands on the animal, confess his sin, and identify with the animal being sacrificed as it was, in effect, taking his place on the altar.

“And the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment” – The Old Testament doctrine of resurrection and eternal judgment is not clear and is incomplete without the New Testament teaching of what Jesus accomplished. One of my favorite verses regarding this subject is John 11:25-26, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”

Hebrews 6:3 is a transition to the next section (6:4-8), which we’ll cover next month—the question of what happens to these believers if they don’t listen. This upcoming study is a very controversial and divisive section of Scripture. Ray Stedman, a great pastor and Bible commentator of the 20th century, said this about it: “The knottiest problem passage in Hebrews, if not the whole Bible; a passage which has been a battleground...for ages.”

Ultimately I believe the key to understanding it is looking at the context. Jewish believers were wavering in their faith because of persecution from secular society, and pressure from their own families and traditional Jewish teaching. The writer of Hebrews was trying to intervene on their behalf. Some things seem never to change.

Read Hebrews 6:1-3 NASB

¹ Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ² of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. ³ And this we will do, if God permits.

MESSIANIC CONGREGATIONS— A POWERFUL WITNESS

One way that Chosen People Ministries preaches the Gospel to Jewish people is through its centers and congregations. One of our congregations has had a Jewish visitor for the last eight years. His wife, who is a believer, kept bringing him and he kept coming. In the last few months people have noticed a change in his behavior and speech and finally, in the midst of the Jewish holidays, he prayed with his wife to accept Yeshua as his Messiah and Savior. Pray for this dear soul to grow in the knowledge of the Word and his Saviour.

ANOTHER ISRAELI ADDED TO THE KINGDOM

Some years ago our staff was praying for Shmuel* who first heard about Jesus being the Messiah at a Hanukkah celebration in Wanaka, New Zealand. Over the years, he has grown more open and serious about finding out if Jesus is the true Messiah. Shmuel has told our Israel staff that as soon as he begins to think it's true he pulls back out of fear that his parents would get upset. Recently he said, "I can't avoid it anymore. It is clearly there. If you read the Bible, there is no question. So what now?" Please pray for Shmuel as he begins the journey of walking with Jesus. Please pray for more young Israelis to read the Bible and see that it clearly speaks of Jesus.

GOD IS DRAWING HIS PEOPLE TO HIMSELF

During the Passover/Spring/Easter Season, Chosen People Ministries staff travel far and wide equipping the Church and preaching the Gospel. Often times, a church member or even the pastor will invite a Jewish friend to hear one of our presentations. This is what happened to Peter, a member of our staff. As he was teaching Messiah in the Passover in a church, Drew,* a Jewish man



who was raised Orthodox, was in attendance. After the teaching, the pastor asked Drew what he thought. Drew was quick to point out that he did not like what went on. Yet as he struggled with his own faith, he said the message did challenge him. So, he began to seek more information about Jesus. The pastor recently shared with us that since Peter's visit, Drew actually came to the Lord and has been leading Passover Seders at the church each year. He is growing and is involved in the work of the church.

ISRAELIS OPEN TO THE GOSPEL

Our efforts in Israel are being blessed by God. Israelis are searching for meaning and spiritual fulfillment. That is why we are always thrilled to hear of another Israeli coming to know the Lord. We are humbled that God is using our missionaries as His ambassadors back to where the Gospel was first preached. Recently we held one of our trips to the tourist sites in northern Israel; as usual, we had a good mix of believers and non-believers. We had excellent discussions; the most amazing one was with an

elderly Jewish woman who was an atheist at the beginning of the day, but at the end, she prayed to accept her Messiah. Now she is studying the Bible and preparing for baptism!

PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

In our November 2016 newsletter we wrote about the contributions of various American presidents to the well-being of Israel. One of our faithful supporters mentioned that we should include Richard Nixon. We thought that was a great idea. Read the following quote to see what Nixon said about Israel and the Jewish people.

"Americans admire a people who can scratch a desert and produce a garden. The Israelis have shown qualities that Americans identify with: guts, patriotism, idealism, a passion for freedom. I have seen it. I know. I believe that."¹

Please pray that our new president will have the same ongoing attitude towards the nation of Israel.

¹ http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/Nixon_Israel9.html

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Unless . . . you take one simple step.

Through simple estate planning you can 1) minimize fees and taxes, 2) provide for your loved ones, and 3) leave a legacy that includes reaching and discipling the lost Jewish people through Chosen People Ministries! Do not let the government take your hard earned dollars and turn them into tax dollars. Your passion for reaching Jewish people around the world with the Gospel can continue, even after you go home to be with the Lord.

Please do not wait! Determine your legacy now by making sure you have an up-to-date will or estate plan in place that provides for your family and Chosen People Ministries. You can set a specific amount—or a specific percentage of the remainder of your estate.

Your bequest helps to ensure that your wishes for the future of Jewish evangelism will be honored. With your support, we will continue to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to Jewish people around the world. What a meaningful legacy!

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