

Difference Between Churches And Messianic Congregations

Edited and adapted from Rabbi Michael Wolf's paper titled
"Is There A Difference Between A Church And A Messianic Synagogue?"

Messianic Rabbis have a common call and gifting to that of many Church Pastors. We have much in common, because both are helping to bring a body of believers into spiritual maturity. However, just as we are part of one body, and there are similarities between our ministries and congregations, so there are differences as well. What are some of these differences?

Whereas Churches only identify with the worldwide community of believers, Messianic congregations identify with both the worldwide community of believers and the worldwide Jewish community.

In addition, our congregations are **called** to worship God through the Jewish Shabbat, festivals, and holy days. Messianic congregations are called to be a beacon of light and spiritual oasis for Jews to live out their faith in Messiah, without having to forgo their Jewish identity. But we are also a place for Gentiles who are **called** to worship God in the same way as our congregation. We strive to reach many people of all backgrounds of like mind and vision, who are called to identify with Israel.

Just as there are different callings between churches and Messianic congregations, there are also different opinions about the purpose of a Messianic congregation. As we present the Messianic vision, we often find that individuals may come into a Messianic congregation with a vision that is not compatible with the vision God has given us. By listing some of these perspectives below, a clearer understanding of the Messianic congregation and its distinctions emerge.

First, some falsely see the Messianic congregation as the "true church." They feel that the local church should be modeled after the Messianic congregation and that the whole body worldwide should be keeping the Jewish Shabbat, festivals, and kosher laws, among other things. In short, for them, the Messianic congregation is living a "more authentic Christianity" that all churches should follow. We at The Olive Tree do not agree with this. Ours is a positive message, not a negative message about Churches. Unlike those who see us as the "true church", we do not see our congregation as superior. We are a part of the body, not above it.

Second, there are those who falsely see our congregations as two-tiered, placing Jews above Gentile, especially when it comes to leadership roles. In this view, there are some roles that only Jewish members can fill. At The Olive Tree, all active, regular attendees (whether Jewish or Gentile), who are fully committed to our congregation and to its vision, and are maturing to their **call**, qualify for the various congregational positions.

Third, some come with a false perspective that places Rabbinic Judaism and Talmudic thought on an equal status, and perhaps a status above the Apostolic writings of the New Covenant. At our congregation, we view only the Old Testament (Tanakh) and the New Testament as divinely inspired. We do not view ourselves as being under the authority of Rabbinic Judaism, but instead under the authority of Rabbi Yeshua, through the leading of the Holy Spirit. We value traditions, but not as though they are divinely imposed.

Whoever you are, be who God created you to be, and enjoy your rich inheritance as both Jew or Gentile, in whatever manner he has called you. In all things, praise, glorify and honor Yeshua, God of Israel.