

# Union of Messianic Believers

Restoring a Remnant for Messiah within the House of Israel

UMB

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## A Matter of Time

Many Christians are aware that the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus took place during Passover. As a result, they expect the Holy Day celebrations of Christianity and Judaism to overlap, or at least to coincide in some sense. But this year, Roman Catholics, Protestants and Evangelicals celebrate Holy Week a month before Passover. In fact, Easter coincides not with Passover, but with Purim this year. How did this happen?

The problem is the calendar. Over the last two millennia, the calendar has changed, and so has the process for setting the date of Easter in the Western Church. As a result, the various religious traditions have differing ways of calculating the times and the seasons. But even before these ways became fixed, the issue of celebrating the Passover and the Resurrection was a problem.

The early Jewish believers in Yeshua continued to follow the Torah requirements and celebrate the Passover according to the Jewish calendar. This meant observ-

ing the fifteenth of Nisan with a seder. Because Jewish identity was so much a part of the movement at that time, they simply added the celebration of the Resurrection to Passover so that the same day commemorated Passover and the crucifixion and resurrection.



Gentile believers, especially in the West, focused less on the Passover and more on the Resurrection of Messiah. They wanted to maintain a link to the Great Sunday of the Resurrection. This was reasonable, as they were less connected to the Passover celebration than their Jewish brothers, but the two approaches were not compatible. The Jewish calendar was lunar based, which meant that Passover would be on a Monday one year and a Friday on another. But

Sunday, according to Western calendars, always was a different day of the month, one time the 14<sup>th</sup>, another the 27<sup>th</sup>. So there seemed to be no way to bring the two together.

The believers met together to address this issue. They resolved that both approaches were good and necessary. Jewish believers would celebrate the Resurrection with the Passover on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month according to the Jewish calendar. The Gentiles would celebrate on the Sunday following Passover according to the Jewish calendar. All was well, until . . .

The Emperor Constantine, in an attempt to unify the liturgical structure, created a different way of calculating the Sunday known by then as Easter. As a result, he separated it from its Jewish moorings and left us with this separation in time, which is particularly obvious this year. The Eastern Church still connects the Resurrection with the Sunday after the Jewish Passover, but for Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelicals, the problem exists. So what can be done?

March 20-21  
Purim, festival of Esther

April 19-27  
Passover, festival of redemption

April 20-June 8  
Counting the 7 weeks until Shavuot

June 8-10  
Shavuot, festival of revelation

## Prayer Campaign Unites Messianic Jews and Supporters

When Spring approaches, most Jewish people think of Passover and its familiar customs—cleaning the house to get rid of leaven, preparing a big meal for family and friends, sitting down together to retell the Passover story, and eating matzah for eight days. Christians are becoming more aware of Passover as the time of Yeshua's death and resurrection. One aspect of this season, though found in the Bible, is not too familiar to Christians or to most Jews. This is the counting of seven weeks, beginning during Passover and concluding on the eve of Shavuot, the festival of Weeks, as in Leviticus 23:15-17.

Jewish tradition has kept this practice alive ever since the destruction of the temple, and in recent years, the UMJC family has made this tradition our own, as we have joined in 49 days of unified prayer during this period. This year, we invite all members of the Union of Messianic Believers to be part of it as well, as the countdown begins on Sunday evening, April 20 and concludes Saturday evening, June 7. The next day, Sunday, June 8, is the eve of Shavuot, or Pentecost, which celebrates God's gift of the Torah at Sinai, according to Jewish tradition, and the outpouring of the Spirit upon the followers of Yeshua centuries later. UMJC congregations and supporters will pray together throughout this period, which will culminate in a Shavuot offering that will be sent up to the land of Israel. Many participants set aside a dollar each evening after they pray to contribute to the offering.

The theme of the prayer campaign reflects the theme of this year's UMJC conference and tour in Israel: *Come Home Again: Honoring the Past; Embracing the Future*. Israel is the place of our biblical past, homeland of the Jewish people, and site of the life, death, and resurrection of Messiah. Israel is also the place of the future, where the Jewish story and the Yeshua story will be rejoined at the end of the age.

The first three weeks focus on honoring the past, by honoring God for his past deeds on behalf of Israel and all the nations. The second three weeks focus on embracing the future laid out in Scripture for Israel and the nations. The final week will bring everything together with prayers welcoming Yeshua as Lord and Messiah to return and fulfill the words of the prophets that we have repeated in our prayers.

Finally, on Shavuot, the 50<sup>th</sup> day (June 8-10), UMJC congregations and UMB allies will contribute to an offering based on the ancient sacrifice for Shavuot described in Leviticus 23:17-20. Like our prayers, our offering will honor the past and embrace the future, as we distribute it in Israel, the place of our origins and our future.

UMB members will receive a guide that provides more background on this biblical tradition, and a daily Scripture day as a basis for prayers. In addition, daily prayers and brief commentaries will be posted online and available

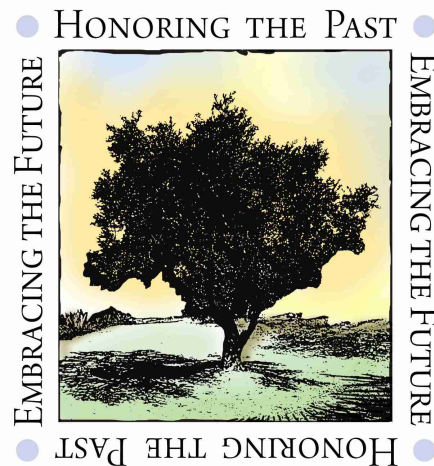
via email. Participants will be connected to others who are praying in the same way all around the world. Visit [www.umjc.org](http://www.umjc.org) to sign up for your daily online prayer commentary.

Counting the seven weeks honors the past, beginning during Passover when we celebrate God's mighty acts of deliverance long ago, and it embraces the future, counting off each day in eager anticipation of the gift of Torah, the outpouring of the Spirit, and the coming of God's Kingdom upon the earth. In the same way, as we pray and give together this year, we will honor what God has already accomplished for his people and embrace the future he has promised.

**Watch the mail for your prayer guide, which should arrive shortly before Passover, and for updates at [www.umjc.org](http://www.umjc.org). Your prayers and offerings are essential!**

**Rabbi Russ Resnik**

UMJC Executive Director



## Judeo-Christianity: a Mirror of Messianic Judaism

The Messianic Movement has several differing participants—Hebrew Christians, Messianic Jews, Messianic Gentiles, Jewish Roots Christians, and Christians engaged in Jewish evangelism. In addition, a large number of Christians in Churches support the movement through prayer and finances. In the last few decades the movement has moved toward a congregational structure. This changes its emphasis from identity and individual observance toward liturgy and congregational polity.

Many early congregations had a basic evangelical structure which was gradually transformed into a more “Jewish-flavored” one with messianic worship and folk dancing as well as aspects of synagogue, practice, such as the Ark and Torah Scroll. As time went on, many found that this approach simply did not work for them. What they needed was a greater Jewish structure.

These congregations created a new structure, a Messianic Synagogue. The liturgy and format are Jewish and the service includes traditional prayers in Hebrew. To this was added New Covenant texts, symbolism and content related to Yeshua that would fit most appropriately into a Jewish setting. The result was a dual model for Messianic congregations. On one end of the continuum is a Calvary Chapel with Messianic additions. On the other is a synagogue with New Covenant additions. And each congregation struggles with its own unique mix of these two emphases.

A similar struggle is beginning within churches that have a Messianic vision. Until now, many Christians simply added some Messianic stuff to their basic evangelical structure and that satisfied the need. If Christians wanted more, they simply attended a Messianic congregation. But as Messianic congregations become more positive toward Judaism and Hebrew worship, Christians are unable to keep up or unwilling to move that far from their own tradition.

Therefore, many Christians find themselves frustrated by the lack of liturgy and Biblically Jewish content within their churches, but also feel alien

when attending some messianic congregations because they have no background in Hebrew or the Siddur. So a new approach is emerging, the Judeo-Christian congregation. It is a complement to the Messianic Jewish synagogue and serves well for Gentiles with a messianic orientation.

Judeo-Christian congregations are founded on four basic principles. They are relational, liturgical, Messianic, and linked to both Judaism and Christianity.

**Judeo-Christian congregations are relational communities.** They function much like synagogues in providing four basic functions; prayer (worship), instruction (discipleship), fellowship (mutual ministry), and accountability (relational reconciliation).

**Judeo-Christian congregations are liturgical.** They develop a rich worship structure that encompasses the best and most Biblical aspects of Jewish and Christian tradition to celebrate the religious year, life cycle celebrations, and prayers. They bring worship architecture and ritual from both traditions into a new and unique mix.

**Judeo-Christian congregations are Messianic.** They recognize and support the Messianic movement as a genuine movement of God. They call assimilated Jews back to Jewish identity and affirm the Gospel of Yeshua as Messiah as instrumental in the ultimate salvation and restoration of Israel.

**Judeo-Christian congregations are linked to both Christianity and Judaism.** They have links in structure, doctrine, confession and identity, through Christian denominational affiliation and to Messianic Judaism through organizations like the Union of Messianic Believers.



*H Bruce Stokes, Ph.D.*  
UMB Vice President

For more information on being a UMB partner as an individual, a supporting church, or a Judeo-Christian congregation, go to [www.umjc.org](http://www.umjc.org).

(Cont. from pg. 1) First, we must seek understanding. The early believers found a way to be inclusive of each other rather than divisive. We must do the same.

Most Messianic congregations follow the older tradition of celebrating the Resurrection during Passover. This should continue and they should not be criticized for celebrating Purim on Easter Sunday. If your Church celebrates the Western date, you will have an opportunity this year to enjoy Holy Week and Passover at separate times. Just keep them together in your understanding. And for some Gentiles who follow a more eclectic calendar, the

Sunday following Passover will serve as the focal point for the Resurrection. It is the event that unites us, not the day that we celebrate it. Even the Torah gave a second Passover celebration to accommodate the unclean or traveler. Perhaps the Lord knows we have a problem with timing.

**H Bruce Stokes, Ph.D.**

For more information about this subject, see the article on Religious Calendars at [www.disciplecenter.com](http://www.disciplecenter.com)

## Purim—Festival of Esther

The book of Esther reflects the topsy-turvy world of exile. Israel is governed by an emperor who is more klutz than king, threatened by a villain who is equally laughable, and saved through the charms of an assimilated young Jewess who just happens to be queen. Such oddities lead the Jewish sages to ask, where is Esther mentioned in Torah? The answer: in the phrase, “I will surely hide My face (*haster astir panai*) on that day” (Dt. 31:18).

Esther’s story unfolds in a day when God seems hidden. When the king issues an irreversible decree that all the Jews in his empire are to be destroyed, there is no divine intervention, no prophet or sage to speak out, only cousin Mordecai who tells Esther that she must *do something*. And Esther does the right something, which saves her people.

Among the lessons of Purim, therefore, are those it gives for the times when God seems absent. As the old gospel song goes, “He may be late, but He’s always right on time.” Still, God hasn’t showed up yet, so what do we do in the meantime?

First, Esther does not give in to fear. She recognizes danger but is not intimidated. She avoids the extremes of freezing and panic. Instead, she organizes three days of prayer and fasting to undergird the step she must take. “And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!”

Second, Esther does what *she* can do. How many times do we miss our chance to respond effectively because we are busy wondering why God seems absent? Esther leaves that question to others and does what she can. When she does, God’s presence in the story becomes evident, even though He remains hidden.

In Messiah, we discover that when we do what we can, even though we feel powerless, His power is at work in us. We relearn the words of Rav Shaul, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). God seem hidden, but His presence becomes evident as we do what we are assigned to do.

Finally, Esther maintains a broad focus. Fear produces a tunnel vision that focuses only on the danger before us, and whatever immediate escape routes might open up. Esther, however, sees the big picture—God’s purposes for all Israel—and takes action.

We have a similar opportunity today. God has still to show up to accomplish all he has promised for Israel and the nations. This is not a time for discouragement, but for following Esther’s lead in mounting a prayer effort for the salvation of all Israel. This year we can respond not only during Purim, but also through the UMJC 49-day prayer campaign that begins a month later, on April 19, and continues through Shavuot, June 8-10. Our theme is “Honoring the Past; Embracing the Future,” as we thank God for past deliverance and pray for the culmination of his plan in Messiah Yeshua. Let’s follow Esther’s lead in renouncing fear and seeking God’s face, even though it may seem hidden, during these critical times.

For Prayer Campaign details, and to subscribe to your daily online prayer guide, go to [www.umjc.org](http://www.umjc.org).

## Preparing for Passover

*You shall eat no leavened bread with [the Passover lamb]; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life (Deut.16:3).*

Observance of Passover requires the removal of *chametz* or leaven, which includes yeast and all products made of the five grains of biblical times: wheat, barley, spelt, rye, and oats. In later times Ashkenazi Rabbis also prohibited rice and legumes (beans, lentils, peas, etc.), but Sephardic Jews still eat these during Passover. After these foods are removed, the house is thoroughly cleaned to eliminate every last particle. The final cleaning takes place the day before Passover, or two days before if Passover begins on Saturday night, as it does this year. Traditional Jews conclude the cleaning with a ceremonial search for leaven, in which the head of the house finds one last symbolic crumb, sweeps it up, and burns it, to fulfill the commandment: *And no leaven shall be seen among you in all of your territory for seven*

*days ... (Deut. 16:4).* This year the final search for leaven begins after sundown on Thursday, April 17 and concludes Friday morning, April 18, before Shabbat.

Preparation for Passover, however, not only responds to the negative command against *chametz*, but also to the positive command to eat matza. Both the Talmud and the New Testament refer to leaven as sin or the “evil inclination.” Cleaning out the leaven implies a spiritual preparation of renouncing sinful attitudes and deeds, especially pride, which is utterly incompatible with the spirit of Passover. We humbly remember that we were once slaves in bondage to sin and death, and God in his mercy redeemed us. We express our humility by eating matza, the bread of affliction or humility. Just as we are dependent on bread for our sustenance, we remain dependent on God’s grace for our redemption, and gladly affirm this dependency at Passover. *For indeed Messiah our Passover was sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old chametz, nor with the chametz of malice and wickedness, but with the matza of sincerity and truth (1 Cor. 5:7-8).*