

How Does the Church of God Differ from the Messianic Religion?

By Art Braidic and Terry Moore

© 2010 the Eternal Church of God

All Scriptures are from the New King James translation unless otherwise noted.

Today there are many different doctrines within the Messianic groups. As we understand it, the movement originated in the 1880s in Britain based on the concept that Jesus was Jewish. Began by protestants, this was an attempt to entice Jewish individuals into their brand of Christianity by emphasizing Judaism. As the movement grew, some saw the need to eliminate the secular/pagan holidays and trinitarian beliefs of professing Christianity. They began to keep the Ten Commandments and God's annual holy days which they realized were always kept by God's people. However there is some dispute among them over which calendar to use.

Without going through a vast list of minor issues, in our modern age, there are some major differences between the Messianic belief system and that of the Churches of God. First, the Messianic groups place a great deal of emphasis on traditions of the Jews. While God's Church respects the Jewish people, the Scriptures teach that all true believers are spiritual Israelites (Rom. 9:6). It is a spiritual organism that is not limited to race or genealogy. We feel that their practice violates the conclusion of the Apostle Paul who wrote:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

In this context, a number of the Messianic groups require that members speak the Hebrew name Yeshua when referring to the Savior and Yahweh when referring to the Father. The Church of God does not agree with this as being a necessity. To add to their confusion, there is a significant disagreement among the various Messianic groups regarding the proper pronunciation of YHWH. Therefore, many have their own preferred interpretation. Further, the first sentence in the Bible introduces us to God by the Hebrew name—Elohim. In hundreds of other Scriptural references there are instances when YHWH in the actually refers to the Word who became the Messiah—not the Father. For example, we are told that all things were created by Christ (Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16; Rev. 4:11). However in Genesis 2 and Exodus 20 we read:

This *is* the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens (Genesis 2:4).

For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it (Exodus 20:11).

The term LORD when presented in all capitals is YHWH in Hebrew, and in too many instances to list, this term also applies to our Savior. Ironically, even Christ used a different name

when calling on God when He taught us to pray “Father” and He also cried out “Eli Eli” (Mat. 6:9; 27:46). At the burning bush, when Moses enquired of God’s name, the Eternal replied “I AM” which is the Hebrew *Hayah* meaning to exist.

Throughout the New Testament, the apostles considered it proper to call God by the Greek Theos and Jesus by Iesous. John 1:38 is proof that the apostle whom Christ loved did not write in Hebrew. Although the Church of God does not feel that we may call God by any name we wish, we do not believe that it must only be by YHWH or Yeshua.

The Church of God also differs in that we do not advocate or emphasize the religion of Judaism. While many of these groups accept Judaism and the oral law of the Talmud and the Mishna, these books were not inspired by God. Much of these writings were developed centuries after the Diaspora as well as long after Christ’s death. In addition, the authors of these documents are people who rejected the Messiah. In another example, the Babylonian Talmud was not written by those who followed Ezra and Nehemiah back to Jerusalem. In fact, the document bears the name of those who chose to stay in Babylon.

Christ repeatedly accused the Pharisees of being in error by not knowing the Scriptures, and yet it was these hypocrites who gained influence and prominence within Judaism as time marched on. The Church of God has always believed that the Scriptures are to be understood and applied in their spirit and intent and not by any corrupt religions devised by men. Just because the Jews were once God’s people does not validate their extra biblical writings.

Christ’s constant confrontation with the Pharisaic and Sadduceean religious leaders, His ultimate destruction of the Temple, and the scattering of the priesthood is an indicator of God’s displeasure with the religion they had created. Our Savior warned His followers to beware of the leaven of these individuals, and then explained the meaning of His statement:

Then they understood that He did not tell *them* to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:12).

It is interesting to note that when Christianity first developed, the Roman Empire thought it was simply another sect of Judaism and therefore left them alone. However, the Jews knew that this was not the case. Therefore, they were the first to persecute the true religion. Remarkably, Paul was a zealous Jew who persecuted Christians. However, when he became converted, he said that everything he had learned and done as a leader of the Pharisees was now considered dung. This obvious division during the establishment of the New Testament Church clearly shows us that the Christianity of Christ and Paul were not related to Judaism and therefore we should also not align ourselves with the same.

In addition, many of the Messianic groups observe unbiblical Jewish and/or secular holidays. Some believe in the trinity. Others use symbols of crosses, stars, and fish in their worship. Many wear yamikas, tassles, or prayer shawls which are little different than Catholic apparel. To consider these congregations to be a part of God’s true Church would be a mistake.