

The Proper Protocol

by J.K. McKee posted 01 March, 2005 www.tnnonline.net

What would you do if you were invited to a White House state dinner? If you were a man, you would likely make sure that you had a tuxedo, a haircut and were groomed properly, and that you knew the proper procedure. If you were a woman, you would make sure that you had a lovely gown, your hair styled and make-up on, and that you knew the proper procedure. You would be in the presence of the president of the United States, and you would want to know exactly what was expected of you.

Those who are privileged enough to be invited to the White House have to know these sorts of things. Mostly they are limited to world leaders, government officials, diplomats, celebrities, and other notables. The protocol of going to an official state dinner is extremely complicated, and if you are the leader of a country wanting to gain favor with the American president, you follow it. One of the only notable exceptions to a head of state not wearing a tuxedo to a state dinner was whenever a Soviet official would come to Washington, as it was official Soviet policy to always wear a business suit as tuxedos and fancy gowns were believed to be symbols of capitalist opulence.

But what does this mean for us as Messianic Believers?

We might not be invited to the White House, Buckingham Palace, or any kind of function that requires us to look our best and follow a strict procedure. On the contrary, every week as Messianic Believers we are invited into the presence of the King of Kings in our Messianic congregations. We fellowship with other Believers as we worship the King of the Universe. The Lord is by far much more important than any Earthly king, president, prime minister, or governor. The procedure for formally going before Him is by far much more important, and much more serious than going to a state dinner.

The Messianic community today is very broad and very diverse, so when we contemplate the subject of “the proper protocol,” what are we exactly talking about here? Certainly, as each one of us surveys the Messianic community, we recognize that each congregation and fellowship is different, that each has different needs based on the type of people who attend, and that those needs are determined both by the spiritual maturity of congregational members and where they are located geographically.¹ But even so, we should not be functioning as totally independent, autonomous entities with no formal structure or ability to understand proper procedure. Our God is a God of order and not of confusion.

As a Messianic teacher, I have had the opportunity to interact with Messianic groups all over the United States and North America, and even Israel and the United Kingdom. I have also corresponded with many people all over the world who are looking for direction regarding Torah observance and the Messianic walk. While there is always going to be variance in any religious community, as we consider where we are today as the Messianic movement, it is time for us—both in a theological and congregational sense—to become a little more uniform.

What is “protocol”?

The subject of what “protocol” actually is, is something that each one of us needs to have a proper handle on. *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines “protocol” as “the code of ceremonial forms accepted as correct in official dealings, as between heads of state or diplomatic officials.”² Protocol is what enables rivals such as Ronald Regan and Mikhail Gorbachev to shake hands and agree on important issues of state that are beneficial for the people of the United States and Soviet Union. It enables sports rivals to realize that they need to play fairly for spectators in the stands. And, it enables those in congregational settings to understand that they have a responsibility to the Body of Messiah and that we need to demonstrate some uniformity to others—especially outsiders.

¹ Consult the editor's article “Congregations Among Us.”

² *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus* (Cleveland: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2002), 510.

The Lack of Uniformity in the Independent Messianic Movement

“In that day the LORD of hosts will become a beautiful crown and a glorious diadem to the remnant of His people; a spirit of justice for him who sits in judgment, a strength to those who repel the onslaught at the gate. And these also reel with wine and stagger from strong drink: The priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are confused by wine, they stagger from strong drink; they reel while having visions, they totter *when rendering* judgment. For all the tables are full of filthy vomit, without a *single clean* place” (Isaiah 28:5-8).

These words from the Prophet Isaiah describe the majesty and power of God. They describe the judgment of false priests and prophets who “are muddled in their visions...they stumble in judgment” (NJPS). This confusion is caused by liquor, and these people vomit in the House of the Lord. Suffice it to say, even though these people might think they are servants of the God of Israel, they clearly are not because they are intoxicated and are capable of creating nothing but a mess.

Sadly, in some ways, these verses describe the state of certain sectors of the Messianic movement, or perhaps better termed, **the independent Messianic movement**. What is the independent Messianic movement? For the most part, the independent Messianic movement is composed of those ministries, congregations, and fellowships that have arisen in the past decade or so—many of which advocate a belief in the reunification of the Two Houses of Israel. Many of these groups are truly helping and ministering to others; they are Biblically sound and theologically stable. But then again, some of these groups are not Biblically sound or theologically stable, and any form of “organization,” i.e., order, is looked down upon if not completely rejected.

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges that faces us is the fact that as many people have come out of mainstream Christianity, some individuals view anything of “organization” to be problematic. This causes people to view things like having a set statement of faith or belief, theological absolutes, or congregational governance with suspicion. Some view these things as “Christian errors” and do not want to have a statement of faith, clear positions on important theological issues, or any set of congregational by-laws relating to what is expected in an assembly of Messianic Believers.

Thankfully, this is not the case with everyone, but it is an issue that has to be addressed. Many people in the Messianic community today have said things along the lines of: “We’re not looking for uniformity, only unity.” While our Heavenly Father certainly desires unity among His children, unity among the brethren cannot come without some uniformity. Unfortunately, because uniformity is viewed as something that comes out of a so-called “errant Church system,” it is something that many do not want. However, having some uniformity is necessary in the Body of Messiah. Yeshua prayed in John 17:20-21,

“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

Yeshua prayed to His Father that just as the two of Them had unity—both in substance and *in theology*—that His followers who would believe in Him in the future would also have unity. Our Lord prayed that we would one day have the unity that the Father and the Son had, so to say that we should not have some uniformity in the Messianic community is an absurd statement to make. Not having some uniformity, especially on key doctrinal issues, will only cause instability. The Apostle Paul wrote, “for God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the [assemblies] of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33). We do not need confusion in the Messianic community because some are unwilling to take definitive stands. Peace naturally comes as a by-product of some uniformity.

A Movement in Transition

The fact that the independent Messianic community today (which by-and-large advocates some belief in the Two Houses of Israel) lacks some key theological uniformity, is to be expected at present. As a movement, we have only really existed since the mid-to-late 1990s, and it is only

now that this is beginning to grow in substantial numbers. Because maturity, among both the leaders and congregants, in any move of God is something that takes time, by necessity we are going through some growing pains as a movement. There have been people who have stirred the Messianic community and led others astray, and then there are men and women of principle who are truly trying to minister to others and have solid Biblical doctrine. We are a movement in transition.

One of the principal challenges, of course, is the fact that there are people in the independent Messianic movement today that come from all sorts of religious backgrounds. Most of the people that we have come from diverse Christian backgrounds. These include the mainline Protestant denominations, various charismatic groups, and non-denominational churches. There are people in the Messianic movement who were raised Roman Catholic. There are people in the Messianic movement who come from cults. In addition to this, there are Jews who were raised in the Synagogue, many of whom spent time in Messianic Judaism. And, many of those from Christian backgrounds who believe in the restoration of all Israel have spent some time in Messianic Judaism.

As you can imagine, we are diverse group of people, and we are trying to get a hold on our bearings. There are some people who are used to one sort of religious experience, there are others who are used to something else, and then there are those who are looking for something completely different from Christianity or Judaism. This relates to our theology and to how a basic congregational service is conducted. In this article, we will primarily be focusing on the protocol that needs to be evidencing itself in Messianic congregations, as the local assembly of Believers is an outreach to those who are interested in their Hebraic Roots, and testifies to outsiders to what the Messianic movement is all about.

The Example of Messianic Judaism

One of the problems with some in the independent Messianic movement, specifically relates to the fact that not enough of those in teaching or leadership positions in congregations have been exposed to Messianic Judaism. Sadly, because of Messianic Judaism's widescale skepticism, if not rejection of non-Jewish Believers as their equals (as well as unwarranted vehemence displayed toward the Two-House teaching), what Messianic Judaism represents can be viewed with some suspicion by people in the independent Messianic community. The problem with this is that Messianic Judaism has been the primary representative of the Messianic movement since the late 1960s. They have established themselves as a credible expression of "the Christian faith," and Messianic Jewish congregations have been planted all over the United States and the world. Messianic Judaism is theologically sound when it comes to the absolute essentials of the faith, and many of its leaders come out of the Jewish Synagogue.

This is not to say that from a congregational perspective Messianic Judaism does not have its flaws, but it is much more established than the independent Messianic movement today is. Messianic Judaism primarily started out as an evangelistic outreach of Jewish Believers to their fellow Jews. Jewish non-Believers who would attend Messianic congregations would see some of the same familiar elements of the Jewish Synagogue. They would see an ark with a Torah scroll, Hebrew liturgy, preaching from the Torah—but all with an emphasis on Messiah Yeshua. There would be new things, but with some old things as well.

As an unforeseen consequence of Messianic Jewish congregations being planted all over the world, many non-Jewish Believers began to be exposed to the Hebraic Roots of their faith. The majority of people in Messianic Jewish congregations today are not Jewish. Sadly, in many of these same congregations, non-Jewish Believers are not ministered to in the same degree as the Jewish Believers, and Jewish Believers are sometimes given preferential treatment. Even more disturbing, non-Jewish Believers who have been spiritually convicted that they are to keep and follow the Torah are often told that it is "just for the Jews to keep," and that they should not concern themselves with it. When Scriptures such as Numbers 15:16, "There is to be one law and

one ordinance for you and for the alien who sojourns with you,” are quoted to the leadership—they are oftentimes ignored.

Where does this leave non-Jewish Believers in a Messianic Jewish congregation? For many, it leaves a bad taste in their mouths. While it may not necessarily turn all non-Jewish Believers off to the Hebraic Roots of our faith, it can turn many non-Jewish Believers off to *the Jewish Roots of our faith* and those things which specifically come from Judaism that enrich our understanding of the Bible. When non-Jewish Believers who are Torah observant do not feel welcome in Messianic Jewish congregations, things that may have bothered them—more likely Jewish customs and traditions that were not understood—can then be summarily rejected in their minds. In other words, the so-called rigid, boring, liturgical Jewish service that may be practiced, or elements of it that may be followed in a Messianic Jewish congregation, can now be dispensed.

This includes many people who have now entered into the Two-House Messianic community. They have been in Messianic Judaism for a time period, and while they realize that they are to follow the Torah, they did not feel welcome in it for some reason or another, and could not forgive and/or forget. The Two-House teaching of Judah and Ephraim does advocate that all Believers in Yeshua are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel, which is composed of the House of Judah or the Jewish people, the scattered House of Israel/Ephraim, and those of the nations. It does advocate equality among all Believers who are somehow involved in the restoration of all Israel. However, it is also relatively new in regard to more established theology, and because of this there are some practical differences emerging that are creating a gap between Messianic Judaism and the Two-House movement. We need to ask ourselves if we want these differences to exist, and if we want to be devoid of any Jewish flavor in our congregations and how we practice the Torah.³

Who has the oracles?

One of the critical issues when understanding the proper protocol that is to exist in both Messianic congregations, and in the Messianic movement in general, is to understand who has the authority and who takes the lead. Obviously, we know that Messiah Yeshua is the King of all Israel, and we are to follow His example. This is not in dispute. But what is debated is the fact that Yeshua was a Jew who lived in the First Century, that He taught as a Jewish Rabbi, and that His theology was closest to that of the Pharisees than any other of the sects of First Century Judaism.

When prophesying over his sons' future, the Patriarch Jacob prophesied over Judah that “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples” (Genesis 49:10). Jacob said that the scepter of authority is not going to pass from Judah. Some have tried to say that his words “until Shiloh comes,” obviously a Messianic reference, means that once the Messiah comes the scepter will no longer be in the hands of Judah. However, Yeshua Himself was a Jew, and Yeshua Himself said that those who treat His Jewish brethren maliciously will be told quite candidly by Him: “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Whether certain people in the independent Two-House community like it or not, Judah is still to be recognized as having been given the principal place among the people of Israel.

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 3:1-2, “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.” He is writing to non-Jewish Believers and their proper place in the Kingdom of God. From a Two-House perspective, we know that the Jewish people have been the primary representatives of Israel since the dispersion of the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim since 721 B.C.E. The Jewish people, being the primary representatives of Israel, *notably when Paul wrote*

³ Consult the editor's article “Anti-Semitism in the Two-House Movement,” for a discussion of specific areas where clashes occur.

these words, circumcised their infants from the time of birth, and were “entrusted with the very words of God” (NIV).

What does Paul actually mean by saying that the Jewish people have the oracles of God? Many people in the Messianic movement interpret this as meaning that the Jewish people have been given the job to maintain the Torah, which forms the foundation of the rest of Scripture. Certainly, this is a valid understanding. But the oracles of God *cannot be limited* to the written Scriptures themselves. The oracles of God *also include the understanding* of how the commandments of the Torah are to be kept, lest we invent our own independent interpretations without any Jewish input whatsoever—which is *exactly* what is happening in various parts of the Messianic community today. This has caused unbelievable division and factionalism.

The thrust of Paul’s comments is made clear in Romans 9:4, where he writes concerning his Jewish brethren that they “are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises.” He attests that they have been given the Torah to preserve, but also that they have been given “the worship” (RSV). *Latreia* (λατρεία) specifically refers to “*service to the gods, divine worship*” (LS) in a classical sense.⁴ This is why the NASU renders it as “*temple service*.” Very few people realize this, because the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 C.E., but the Temple service—in a manner of speaking—does continue on today with the order of service that is present in many Jewish synagogues. The liturgical prayers that are used today which have been compiled into the various *siddurs* or prayer books, if not adapted from Scripture directly, are derived from hymns and psalms of adoration that were sung to the Lord in the Temple.

Now what do all these things mean? When we survey the independent Two-House Messianic community today, there is a substantial number of non-Jewish Believers who practice the Torah without any Jewish elements present. If anything among some, Jewish interpretations of the Torah are looked upon with some disgust or dismay, in favor of new “Ephraimite interpretations.” In other words, among many people there is just no respect for the proper protocol, and respect for Judah as having the principal place among the people of Israel.

The oracles of God and the Temple service have been specifically given to the Jewish people and they involve many things relating to the protocol that are to be practiced in Messianic congregations. They involve how we are to follow the Torah’s commandments, and do include some things that are Spirit-inspired that are detailed in Rabbinical writings such as the Mishnah and Talmud. Of course, whenever we consider something extra-Biblical in our walk of faith, it is to be tested against Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” In my opinion, it is greatly unfortunate that there are Two-House Messianics who have ignored Jewish custom and tradition entirely, and as a result have caused a stench to be present in the nostrils of many Jewish Believers. **They are doing more to keep Israel divided than they realize.**

What kinds of issues has made the Two-House community odious?

Whether you realize it or not, there are issues that have made the Two-House community odious in the minds of many Messianic Jews. Most of these issues do not relate to what the Two-House reunification of Judah and Ephraim is about, but instead to some of the common beliefs and practices espoused in areas of the Two-House community—most of which directly relate to our assemblies and how we “observe” the Torah.

If you have been to a typical Messianic Jewish congregation, you know that there is a strong respect for the order of the service, the liturgy involved, the music played, both men and women know their proper place, and there is respect for the congregational leader. While there may be some variance from congregation to congregation with the amount of Jewish custom and

⁴ H.G. Lidell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 466.

tradition present, there are on the whole “no surprises” and everyone knows what to expect. There is often some relative congregational order as people know what protocol there is to follow.

This is not the same for the Two-House related assemblies that have arisen in the past five to six years (2000-2005). You often do not know what to expect when you attend a congregation that adheres to a belief in the Two Houses of Israel. You often do not know the theological background of the leadership and if they come from a mainline Protestant, Jewish, or other background. You do not know what kind of service to expect, and whether or not it will be all liturgical, all music, formal, charismatic, etc. You do not know if the men wear *tallits* and *kippahs*, or just *tallits*. You do not know if any Jewish custom or tradition is at the very least respected. And, there are many Two-House groups that use the Divine Name of God to an extent that makes many Messianic Jews, and even more so Jewish non-Believers, **very, very uncomfortable**.

When Messianic Jews who believe that both Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are one in Messiah, and that all of God’s people are called to keep the Torah, see some of the discrepancies apparent in some of the Two-House congregations that exist—and the fact that many of the leadership in these congregations are asserting themselves as “Ephraim,” and being “Ephraim” means not considering Jewish positions on how things are to be done—then the Two-House teaching can become odious. Israel all of a sudden becomes “Ephraimite only” as opposed to “Jewish only.”

What can we do to amend these misunderstandings? A substantial amount of misunderstanding has existed between Christianity and Judaism for centuries because we do not understand why we do what we do, why we believe what we believe, and we have not respected one another to the extent to allow protocol its proper place so we can get along. Too many have reinforced the negative stereotypes of the other.

Are we truly provoking Judah to jealousy?

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that the Jewish people are the only recognizable remnant of Israel in the world. Because the Jewish people retained their Israelite heritage from the time after the dispersion of the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim, in many cases in the Apostolic Scriptures when Israel is referred to, **Jewish Israel is being spoken of**. This is something that non-Jewish Believers in the Messianic Two-House community need to keep in mind, especially when our job is to provoke the Jewish people to jealousy for faith in Messiah Yeshua!

Paul writes in this regard, “What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; just as it is written, ‘GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY.’ And David says, ‘LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER.’ I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous” (Romans 11:7-11).

What Paul says in these verses is that Jewish-Israel has stumbled so that salvation may go out to the nations (Grk. sing. *ethnos*, ἔθνος). It is in the nations where those of the scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim are. However, because scattered Ephraim has been so assimilated into the nations he is not distinguishable from those who are true “Gentiles.” In salvation going out to the nations to gather all of dispersed Israel, salvation as a consequence will be available to the whole world. But the key about salvation going out to the whole world is that **the nations are to provoke the Jewish people to jealousy**.

How Judah is provoked to jealousy for faith in Messiah Yeshua is an extreme challenge for some in the Two-House community today. Sadly, there are some who believe that they must assert an independent identity as “Ephraimites,” devoid of anything Jewish in their Torah observance, and whether they realize it or not *they are not only not provoking Judah to jealousy*, but they are also turning many Christians off to examining the Hebraic Roots of our faith. We

need to do better. We have to consider the fact that Judah is the leader of Israel, and keep this in mind as we establish Messianic congregations and seek to obey the commandments of the Torah. Some may believe that they are provoking Judah to jealousy, but when you see some of the “independent” Torah interpretations that exist in the Two-House community, some of us wonder.

Is the Two-House community in proper order?

As Believers in the Messiah of Israel, how many of us consciously realize that there are outsiders looking at us, looking at how we live our lives, conduct ourselves, and what our spirituality is like? Hopefully, those in the world see living testimonies of people who have been spiritually transformed, who know Yeshua as their personal Lord and Savior, and who have true peace when the cares of the world come upon us.

Even more so as Messianic Believers, there are Jews and Christians who are looking at us to see what kind of a testimony we have toward them. Jews are very skeptical of anyone who believes in Yeshua, and so as Messianic Believers who live in obedience to the Torah we should be doing it with the intent of provoking our Jewish brothers and sisters to jealousy—and not do it in such a way that will turn them off to faith in Him. Similarly, when our Christian brethren see us, they need to see that we are living more and more like Messiah Yeshua—and not less.

Is the Two-House community today in proper order? Are we helping the Body of Messiah, as opposed to hindering it? What are some of the things that we have to consider as the Messianic movement grows?

Messianic congregations and fellowships that are presently being established obviously are not going to all be the same. There is going to be some practical and doctrinal variance on non-essential issues, and we should expect it to be this way. However, as we survey Judaism, Messianic Judaism, and also Christianity, Messianic congregations need to be Messianic congregations. We need to have an order of service that while meeting the needs of the local congregants, does lend itself to being more like the Synagogue than the Church in our worship. We need to have Hebraic liturgy and songs, and need to respect things like the *tallit*, *kippah*, and Torah scroll. We need to engage congregational members so the Holy Spirit can have His way and each individual can function in his or her spiritual calling.

Perhaps because in comparison to Messianic Judaism, the Two-House movement is just so new, that right now we are experiencing some growing pains and people are trying to figure out just who we are and how we are to do things. This can be both good and bad. On the one hand, it is good that theological stability and credibility are being made a priority, but on the other, we cannot define ourselves as being totally separate from those who have preceded us in the Messianic movement. Sadly, the divisions that exist between Messianic Judaism and those in it who believe in the equality of all Believers, and the Two-House community, are often not over subjects related to the Two Houses of Israel, but often over issues related to the Torah and congregational protocol. Many Messianic Jews reject the Two-House teaching not because they do not believe in the end-time restoration of all Israel, but because they see some Torah practices in the Two-House community that are devoid of anything Jewish, and that fail to take into consideration any Jewish views or interpretations.

Having traveled to the Land of Israel, I understand the position of many Jewish Believers, who view the independent Messianic community that is emerging, with some severe skepticism. I have seen and personally encountered Messianic Believers across North America and the world that would not fit in well with the mainstream Jewish element in Israel that is open to dialogue with “Christians.” This is because these Messianic Believers do not understand the Jewish protocol of doing things, and how careful non-Jewish Believers in Messiah need to be when testifying to them of Yeshua. The examples of how *not* to deal with Jews are too numerous to list, but if you just try to go down to the Western Wall in Jerusalem as a man without a *kippah* on and start speaking the name “Yahweh,” **you will find out very quickly how much the Two-House community turns many Jews off to Yeshua**, and to the restoration message of all Israel.

Misunderstandings between Christians and Jews have taken place during the centuries because neither group has been able to sit down with the other and just say what they do and how we can get along. This is compounded today by people in the Two-House community who are independent thinkers and doers—and while this can be good to a certain extent—they fail to understand that there is a chain of command within the people of Israel, and that post is headed by Judah. As Messianic Believers, we have the serious responsibility to respect our Jewish brethren, present them with the good news of Messiah Yeshua, and while doing this not offending them unnecessarily. This is also true of our Jewish brethren who already believe in Him, too.

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.

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