

AMIDAH ANCIENT JEWISH PRAYER

To Catholics and Messianic Jews in Prayer

Messianic Jews and Catholics have much in common. We share our belief in the full humanity and divine nature of the Messiah. We share a belief that both the Old Testament (known as the Tanakh in Jewish circles) and the New Testament are of divine origin. And...we take prayer very seriously, both in its liturgical and spontaneous forms.

Both Catholics and Messianic Jews love both kinds of prayer. But liturgical prayer is sometimes undervalued among followers of the Messiah living in the United States. They imagine that praying someone else's words subtracts from the heartfelt purpose of prayer. But, we understand that this need not be the case. In fact, we Messianic Jews relish praying the ancient prayers of Israel found in the Siddur (prayer book) because they are so spiritually rich. Consider, for example, the Amidah or Standing Prayer. Its origins date back to the days of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and in its fully-developed expression captures some of the most beautiful and spiritually rich sentiments ever uttered by holy men and women.

Two examples:

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d and G-d of our fathers, G-d of Abraham, G-d of Isaac and G-d of Jacob, the great, mighty and awesome G-d, exalted G-d, who bestows bountiful kindness, who creates all things, who remembers the piety of the Patriarchs, and who, in love, brings a redeemer to their children's children, for the sake of His Name.

In this first of eighteen sections of the Amidah, we encounter the God of Israel who remembers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the basis for his ongoing commitment to the Jewish people. We also are reminded that a Redeemer is coming! His merit will be far greater than even the Patriarchs and Matriarchs! We Messianic Jews pray this beautiful section knowing full-well who that redeemer is -- Yeshua, Jesus Messiah. He came long ago and will come back again one day to rescue Israel and bless the entire world.

Here is the second section of the Amidah:

He sustains the living with loving kindness, resurrects the dead with great mercy, supports the falling, heals the sick, releases the bound, and fulfills His trust to those who sleep in the dust. Who is like You, mighty One! And who can be compared to You, King, who brings death and restores life, and causes deliverance to spring forth!

You are trustworthy to revive the dead. Blessed are you O Lord our G-d who revives the dead.

We pray this second portion of the Amidah in joyful anticipation of the resurrection of the dead. Faithful Jews, along with Catholics have always known that life does not end at the grave, but continues forever for the righteous. What a thrill! And who effects this resurrection? We Messianic Jews and Catholics know. It is Yeshua himself, the "first fruits of those who sleep in the dust." Because he rose from the dead, we will rise one day...in him.

Messianic Jews and Catholics each enjoy rich repositories of written prayer. Perhaps our liturgists can compose some written prayers which capture the wonder of both our unity and uniqueness as followers of the Messiah. This would be a worthy endeavor.

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