

A History of Messianic Jewish Music

Singing and dancing are a central part of Jewish culture and religious life, and how much more exciting for those who can rejoice in their relationship with the Messiah! Music as joyful worship is an essential part of biblical life. Psalm 95:1 encourages us to sing before the Lord: "O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord, let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation." Songs in the Bible express a variety of emotions, including gratitude (1 Samuel 2:1–10; Luke 1:46–55), adoration (Revelation 4:8), exultation (Exodus 15:1–21), and also mourning: "Therefore my harp is turned to mourning, and my flute to the sound of those who weep" (Job 30:31).

The Birth of Modern Messianic Jewish Music

Messianic Jewish music draws inspiration from the vast tradition of scriptural songs and liturgical expression. Messianic music employs the sounds of the Jewish Diaspora and the rhythms of Israel. Today in the Messianic Jewish world, countless artists have emerged, and more are coming.

Modern Messianic Jewish music originates in the Jesus movement of the late 1960s and early 70s. In 1972, a group of young Jewish hippies who came to faith in Messiah formed a singing group, the Liberated Wailing Wall. Stuart Dauermann, a Messianic rabbi and musician, wrote much of the group's repertoire in a "Jewish gospel" style.¹ This musical group toured all fifty states and six continents and engaged 150 members during its thirty-eight-year history.²

Later, in 1979, the Messianic group Kol Simcha recorded its first vinyl, *The Sound of Joy*. Based out of Philadelphia, this group also toured extensively in the United States and played at several music festivals in the former Soviet Union. The Liberated Wailing Wall and Kol Simcha weaved eastern European *niggunim* (wordless melodies) and choral arrangements into their songs, and, of course, lots of tambourines and dancing. As Messianic Jewish congregations grew in the 1970s and 80s, new Jewish believers began incorporating this music into their Sabbath worship services.

Joel Chernoff, one of the pioneers of Messianic Jewish music, formed the group Lamb in 1972 with Rick "Levi" Coghill, a studio guitarist. Lamb wrote and played folk-rock Messianic songs for twenty years. The band produced fourteen albums, some of which made it to the top ten of the contemporary religious charts. Some of Lamb's most notable hits are: "The Sacrifice Lamb," "Clap Your Hands," and "I Will Talk to My Brothers." Chernoff went on to release two solo albums after the group dispersed.

The Next Generation

In the 1980s, other singing groups formed, including Israel's Hope with Paul Wilbur, Marc Chopinsky, and Rene Bloch, an acoustic trio with musical excellence. Although the band only recorded two albums, they composed several songs Messianic believers still sing today, like "Come Let Us Go Up" and "He Shall Reign."

Paul Wilbur went on to develop his own projects, including the 1996 release of *Shalom Jerusalem*. A live recording of a concert in the Holy City, this album revolutionized how the Jewish and Gentile world looked at Messianic Jewish music. This album includes classics like "Roni, Roni, Bat Zion" ("Rejoice, Rejoice, Daughter of Zion"), "Baruch Haba" ("Blessed Is He Who Comes"), and "Mah Tov" ("How Good"). At this concert, musicians sang in Hebrew and English and used various instruments, while Messianic Jewish pioneer David Loden conducted a choir. From there, Wilbur recorded two other live concerts, "Lion of Judah" and "Jerusalem Arise." His work is integral to worship in many congregations today.

Another notable Messianic Jewish musician is Marty Goetz. He has been recording music since 1985, including his beautiful album *The Love of God*, which combines the sounds of Broadway with contemporary worship music. He currently leads "House of Worship," a time of weekly praise music live on social media. His daughter, Misha, is also a worship leader and recording artist.

As you can see, Messianic Jewish music offers a vast array of musical styles. Each of these artists' sounds varies greatly, yet all compose songs based on inspiration from biblical narratives and themes.

Growth of Messianic Jewish Music in Israel

With the Israeli release of an album called *Praise to Our God*, 2004 was a crucial year for Messianic Jewish music. The Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel sponsored this live recording of a concert, and Jamie



MESSIANIC RESOURCES



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Miqedem debut album is a genre-melding collection of songs taken from the Hebrew Scriptures. "Miqedem" in Hebrew means "from the east" or in poetic significance, "from eternity." This young band, mentioned in this newsletter, is based out of Tel Aviv and their music reflects the culture of a city caught between worlds.

Band Members: Jamie Hilsden, Shai Sol, Yaron Cherniak, Vadym Sokolyk, Gabriel Elbaz.

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This year be blessed by the photography, which includes scenes of Jerusalem, with its people and varied scenes of the land. Use the calendar as a personal prayer guide, and learn more about our ministry among God's chosen people. This calendar is special as it marks the seventy-fifth birthday of Israel as a modern nation! Israel has come far since 1948 and stands as an amazing testimony to God's faithfulness and the fulfilment of biblical prophecy. 18-month calendar features September 2023 to December 2024.

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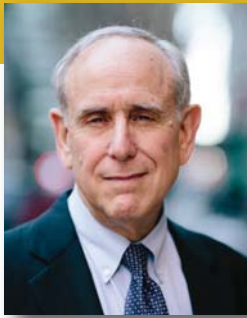
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The Chosen People
SERVING THE JEWISH PEOPLE SINCE 1894

Sing to the
Lord
a
New Song

Dr. Mitch Glaser
International
Director
Chosen People
Ministries



A Testament to God's Faithfulness

Shalom, dear friends,

We see the dramatic rise of new Messianic music today and musicians, especially in Israel, including Joshua Aaron, SOLU, MIQEDEM, and others who are writing Israeli-style Messianic music, unlike the older, more eastern European tunes. The older style gave powerful testimony to a generation of post-Holocaust Jewish people, confirming you can be Jewish *and* believe in Jesus. At the same time, these new Israeli sounds make it clear Israelis who believe in Jesus are not only still Jewish but, by culture and nationality, proudly Israeli.

Many Messianic congregations worldwide have embraced this new form of music, and it is an authentic part of our worship life and witness to how you can be Jewish and believe in Jesus. What a joyful Jewish testimony for the Lord!

Messianic Jewish Music for All

Rabbi Stuart Dauermann¹ is one of the early fathers of Messianic music who continues to lead worship and write today. I asked my dear friend Stuart about his pilgrimage in Messianic music and wanted to tell you some of his thoughts.

I am so grateful to Stuart for his treasure trove of musical contributions to the corporate life and testimony of today's growing Messianic Jewish community. Singing songs expressing our love for the Lord is always a sign of a vital and growing movement of the Spirit.

Our Messianic Jewish music is so essential to our identity as Messianic Jewish people and for our witness. If the number one objection Jewish people have about believing in Jesus is they would no longer be Jewish, then our music might be the loudest and sweetest testimony to proving we keep our Jewish identity. At our core, we are always who God made us (1 Corinthians 7:18), even more so when we recognize He created a covenant people whom He called for His specific purposes.

Every Jewish believer in Jesus we meet is a testament to God's covenant faithfulness. When we lift our voices and sing Messianic songs within our hearts, we not only affirm we are Jewish followers of Jesus but also identify with and love our people.

Enjoy the rest of the newsletter, and please continue praying the Lord will put a new song in the hearts of Jewish people worldwide. You can help make this happen by praying and standing with Your Mission to the Jewish People.

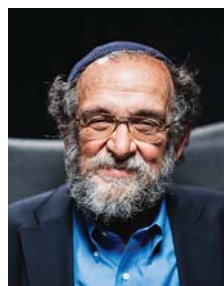
Blessings,
Mitch
Mitch

¹ Dauermann earned music theory and music education degrees from the Manhattan School of Music. He later completed a PhD in Intercultural Studies at Fuller Seminary.

An Interview with Stuart Dauermann

How do you define Messianic music?

I used to define Messianic music as Jewish in flavour and apostolic in doctrine. I no longer define it that way because it left out the element of communal location. I now favour this definition: "Messianic music is music that is Jewish in flavour, apostolic in doctrine, and expressive of the covenantal and social location of Messianic Jews as part of the remnant within Israel and not outside of it."



How did you begin writing Messianic music?

I attended an American Board of Missions to the Jews (Chosen People Ministries' older name) meeting in New York City, where the leaders sought

to communicate in Jewish ways to Jewish people. However, as I told the director there, the music in the meetings sounded very un-Jewish. The music actually implied that Jewish people who believe in Jesus lose their identity as Jews. Since I was going to music school then, he challenged me to write some better music. So I did!

What might the future of Messianic music look like?

Messianic music will lose its power and lose its way if those responsible for it themselves lose clarity on their identity as Jewish believers in Jesus. The music must not only be biblically and theologically sound but must also be an authentic expression of Jewish faith in Jesus the Messiah. To achieve this, over the past thirty-five years, I have increasingly written music based on Jewish liturgy, which itself expresses the voice and soul of the Jewish people. Only by hitting the right biblical, theological, communal, and cultural notes will it be possible for Messianic music to be spiritually enriching and something not only lively but alive. ★

The Story of Messianic Music in Israel

Worshipping the Messiah through music has been a crucial part of life for followers of Jesus (Yeshua) since the first century. Paul exhorts believers in Messiah to be filled with the Spirit and speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual music (Ephesians 5:18–19). Honouring God with our voices through song is still essential to worshipping Him.⁵

When Jewish people began to return to Israel in the 1800s, new music also flourished in the land. Today, Israeli music is hard to describe because it is so diverse and continually changing due to ongoing waves of new immigrants who bring their own distinctive styles. Music in Israel thus draws on influences from various places, including the Middle East, Central and eastern Europe, North and South America, and North Africa. Israeli musicians and composers' creativity and inventiveness indeed stem from around the world.⁶

Messianic Jewish people from around the globe also immigrated to Israel, and it was only natural this small group wanted to express its faith in Jesus as Messiah by singing in the revived Hebrew language. The emergence of Messianic worship songs began in the land even before Israel became a nation. The development of modern Israeli Messianic worship is like flowers blooming in a newly planted botanical garden.⁷

Ann Hilsden is not only a historian of modern Israeli Messianic worship, but she has also contributed to its nurture and growth. She and her husband, Wayne, moved to Israel in 1983 and established King of Kings Community in Jerusalem, from which much Messianic music has arisen. Ann has carefully documented Messianic music in Israel. In one of her articles, she describes the development of a unique Hebrew hymnal Moshe Ben Meir created as early as 1950.⁸ Ben Meir also wrote the first modern Messianic Hebrew worship song, "He Comes with the Paratroopers."

The next crucial stage for the body of barely 500 Messianic Jewish believers came in the 1960s with the publishing of the *Blue Hymnal*, which included 212 songs. The translation and

editing of hundreds of worship songs was a daunting task. Soon after, Arie Bar David, a young Messianic believer and competent musician, put together a new compilation of more than 268 worship songs. He carefully worked through the musicality of the melodies while others assisted with translating lyrics into Hebrew. Victor Smadja, an elder at the Jerusalem Messianic Assembly and founder of Yanetz Press, published this new hymnal, which became the standard for the growing Messianic community in Israel. It was well-used and became known as the *Brown Book*.⁹

The next significant development came in the 1970s and 80s when Bar David began writing a new generation of worship songs with many new immigrants to Israel. Most notable were David and Lisa Loden, Batya Segal, and Elisheva Shomron. With abundant talent and love for the Messiah, a series of recordings, worship music, concerts, and symposiums emerged. Ann Hilsden describes this Spirit-led development in the following way:

One cannot explain this kind of musical renaissance simply in human terms. Surely it was more than imparting musical and lyrical skills and encouraging words. I see this as a divine "kiss" on a newly regathered body of believers, in their own land, and for their own expression.¹⁰

During the following years, the Messianic body in Israel produced a flood of original songs, many of which became part of regular worship in their congregations. In the 1990s, the Peniel congregation in Tiberias collected many new pieces and prepared each in a new format with an interlinear translation. These songs were published in a collection called *Zimrat Haaretz L'Yeshua*.¹¹

Today, the number of believers has soared to greater than 25,000, with more than 200 congregations spread throughout the Holy Land. The Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel sponsors regular concerts every two years featuring new musical artists and



their songs. There are also several professional recording studios for Messianic Jewish musicians. In addition, the Yuval Ministry in Jerusalem, now led by Yoel and Liel Davis, provides music lessons to children and guidance for new musicians who need assistance in composing and recording music.

Some Israeli Messianic groups and artists like MIQEDEM, SOLU, Joshua Aaron, Sarah Liberman, and Emanuel Roro are known internationally for producing and performing innovative and inspirational worship songs. Those who have led the way mentor and assist these emerging musicians. The unity and cooperation among Israeli Messianic worship leaders and performers are also encouraging.

The vibrant and dynamic nature of Israeli Messianic worship music reflects the healthy growth of the body of Messiah in Israel. The artists are writing songs reflecting the language and culture of their country, and both young and older believers in Messiah sing along. Israelis are praising the name of the Lord in the Promised Land. We long for the day when *"all Israel will be saved,"* and we will praise the name of the Lord together (Romans 11:26). ★

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Hilsden produced all the music. Israeli believers from across the Jewish nation submitted songs to compile a songbook, and this album was the fruit of their endeavour. This album ushered in a new generation of Messianic artists, like Sarah Liberman, Keren Silver, Yaron Cherniak, and, most recently, Emanuel Roro. Five more concerts have occurred because of the success of the first one.

Hilsden also formed his own music group, MIQEDEM, with other Jewish believers from Israel. While at Messiah Conference, one of the largest Messianic gatherings in the United States, Hilsden would lead and collaborate annually with a group called "The Band from the Land." In 2015, he asked some of the members if they wanted to become an official group—and sure enough, they formed MIQEDEM! They released their first album in 2016 and then released two more.

The Hebrew word *miqedem* means "from the east" or "from eternity."³ This music group's songs blend contemporary Eastern sounds with words from the Hebrew Scriptures. One of the members of MIQEDEM, Shai Sol, released her solo album and is also working on new musical endeavours.

Another artist of note in Israel is Shilo Ben Hod. He put together a group called SOLU, who have a "vision to prepare the way for revival and Yeshua's return."⁴ This band features young Israelis and releases live YouTube worship sessions. Ben Hod has two albums of his own featuring members of the group. They have toured the United States twice and have more music coming out soon!

One of the most popular Messianic artists in Israel is Joshua Aaron. After releasing "Gadol Elohai" ("How Great is Our God" in Hebrew), he acquired millions of hits on his YouTube channel. Now, he owns a music house in the Galilee region of Israel and records a plethora of music. Notably, he recorded two live albums, one at the Tower of David and the other at the Garden Tomb. Joshua Aaron most recently collaborated with Aaron Shust, a Christian artist. Shust released a groundbreaking song called "Zion," which quotes extensive amounts of Scripture. During the song, he even sings the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4), a traditional Jewish prayer, in Hebrew.

Messianic Jewish music will continue to grow and flourish as it is based on an ancient biblical foundation of song, combined with much innovation. There will be more to come and new talent to discover. Of course, much has changed since the music from the 1970s. Yet, each musical contribution is valued and necessary and plays a part in the history of Messianic Jewish worship. May we continue to honor this legacy and look forward to what God has in the near and distant future. ★

Endnotes

- ¹ Tuvya Zaretsky, "They're Playing Our Song: the Liberated Wailing Wall," First Fruits of Zion, January 10, 2022, <https://ffoz.org/discover/messiah-magazine/theyre-playing-our-song-the-liberated-wailing-wall.html>.
- ² "Liberated Wailing Wall," Jews for Jesus, accessed June 20, 2023, <https://v2-live.jewsforjesus.org/about/liberated-wailing-wall/>.
- ³ William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Based upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner*, 12th Revised ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 313. By way of example, the root word זָרַח has the sense of "east" in Genesis 2:8 and Isaiah 2:6. It has the sense of "eternal" in Deuteronomy 33:27.
- ⁴ "Who We Are," SOLU, accessed June 14, 2023, <https://soluisrael.org/who-we-are/>.
- ⁵ Paul Mokuolu and Tom Drion, "The Importance of Song as Part of Worship," GraceLife London, January 8, 2021, <https://www.gracelifelondon.org/articles/the-importance-of-song-as-part-of-worship/>.
- ⁶ Michèle Tauber, "Music in Israel," Institut Européen des Musiques Juives, March 2007, <https://www.iemj.org/en/les-musiques-en-israel/>.
- ⁷ The development of Messianic music in Israel is documented in the following article: Ann Hilsden, "Shir Chadash: The Rebirth of Hebrew Worship in the Land of Israel," ed. Jim R. Sibley, *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People*, no. 68 (2011): 5–10, <https://www.caspari.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/mishkan68.pdf>.
- ⁸ Hilsden, "Shir Chadash: The Rebirth of Hebrew Worship in the Land of Israel," 5.
- ⁹ Ibid., 7.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 8.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 9.

