

The Local is Global- Tikvat Ami Messianic Synagogue

In July of 2011, Tikvat Ami, a Messianic synagogue, was established in Tallahassee, making it the first, and only Messianic synagogue in the city. Prior to the construction of Tikvat Ami, Messianic Jews in the area had to travel to Thomasville Georgia to attend services. Rabbi Joshua Lessard, the leader of Tikvat Ami, built this temple from the ground up along with his family and friends, and in only less than five years, Tikvat Ami has built an honorable reputation for itself in the Tallahassee area, where community members can come at any time for monthly dinners or discussion groups.

Messianic Judaism is a branch of Judaism that firmly believes that Jesus is the Messiah. This differs greatly from the conventional branches of Judaism who hold to the belief that the Messiah has yet to resurrect. Messianic Jew's belief in Yeshua (the Hebrew name for Jesus) as the Messiah means that they believe him to be the high priest that intercedes before the Father. Additionally, because of Yeshua's Davidic ancestry and resurrection from the dead, he is placed as the divine ruler for Messianic Jews, an international body of people who worship the God of Israel.

What makes Messianic Judaism different from Christianity and what distinguishes it from other forms of Judaism is the understanding that the Messianic idea of Yeshua as the Messiah, makes most sense in a Jewish context. In other words, Yeshua would not exist without his Jewish background. For example, the word Messiah would not even exist without the understanding of Yeshua as the Passover Lamb or the idea of a Davidic King would not exist without his Jewish background. Messianic Jews feel that to truly understand who Yeshua is and to understand the significance of his life one must maintain the Jewish feasts, Sabbath, and culture.

The Messianic movement in America had a modern resurrection in the 1960's and 70's. It was largely a revivalist movement among young Jews who felt a connection to Yeshua but also felt compelled to maintain an attachment to their Jewish heritage. This is also the beginning of how Rabbi Lessard began his journey with Messianic Judaism. Rabbi Lessard was always raised in a Messianic household that held a strong appreciation for his Jewish background as well as a deep love for Yeshua. Through attendance at a Messianic synagogue as well as personal study, Rabbi Lessard further strengthened his Messianic identity.

Rabbi Lessard previously attended a Messianic Jewish synagogue in Thomasville, Georgia, but he felt that that was too far to travel all the time for services. With the blessing from the congregation in Thomasville, Tikvat Ami was built, and is currently located on Tennessee Street, so that Messianic Jews in Tallahassee would have a more convenient place to worship.

Since its establishment, Tikvat Ami has been tenacious in developing a role for itself within the Tallahassee community. The synagogue regularly hosts Shabbat services every Friday evening at seven and every Saturday morning at 11. Additionally, Tikvat Ami hosts Men's and Women's groups, and holiday celebrations that are open to the public. Tikvat Ami is continuously striving to get out its message to Tallahassee locals in a relaxed and comfortable setting.

Tikvat Ami is run by a humble group of people, and therefore, its' creation was one that was spiritually as well as financially humble. Before settling at its' current location, congregants at Tikvat Ami would meet in a room at Ginger Bread Day School, a school owned by one of the congregation members. The Holy Ark that houses the Torah scroll used in services and for prayer was hand built and carved by Rabbi Lessard's daughter and her shop teacher. This mentality that is shared among members of the Tikvat Ami speaks to what they feel is truly important when it comes to religion and gathering.

Something unique that Tikvat Ami does is it teaches what Messianic Judaism is to anyone who may be curious. The synagogue offers disciple classes every Saturday to adults who have a desire to learn, and they educate on how to live a Messianic lifestyle at home. For example, Tikvat Ami not only hosts a Passover Seder for the congregation, but also holds a class on how to host a Messianic Seder.

Tikvat Ami has a strong open door policy for everyone, and recently has placed an increased interest in getting college aged students to become involved in the temple. In the past, there have been monthly dinners for the college students in Tallahassee, and Rabbi Lessard said there are plans to restart that. Overall, the main message that Tikvat Ami would like to send out to students in the Tallahassee area is that there is a complete open door policy and anyone from any background is welcome to join and take part in open and honest discussion.

The main message that Tikvat Ami wants to send out is one of servitude. Tikvat Ami says its primary role is to service the Tallahassee community and other communities abroad. The congregation of Tikvat Ami continuously prays for God's blessings on Israel, America, and those whom are persecuted around the world. Rabbi Lessard maintains the will to teach the word of God to anyone who is willing to listen, and says the congregation continuously gives financially to bless the poor in their midst as well as abroad.

Tikvat Ami has come a very long way in such a short period of time, and will most likely continue to grow a great amount within the Tallahassee community. With plans to increase events and gain membership from college-aged residents, there is no doubt that Tikvat Ami will not be successful. Messianic Judaism is a relatively small branch of Judaism and not much is even known about it throughout the country, so the fact that there is a synagogue right here in Tallahassee is very unique.

The overall message that Tikvat Ami would like to send out is clear and is branded directly on their website home page: “We are a congregation of people from many backgrounds who come together to study the Scriptures and thank God for Yeshua (Jesus), the Jewish Messiah for all the world. *Everyone* is welcome.”