

February 3, 2012

On behalf of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC) and the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA), we join our voices with the wider Jewish community in condemning the ritual orchestrated last Sunday by Ralph Messer at New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta. Messer is not recognized by any major branch of Messianic Judaism and, under the standards of the UMJC and the MJAA, is not even considered part of our community, let alone a rabbi. He is operating entirely outside the mainstream Messianic Jewish community. Furthermore, his claim to be acting on behalf of the Jewish people is outrageous and without merit.

We condemn Messer's flagrant disrespect of the Sefer Torah in this ritual and his misrepresentation of Jewish tradition, an abuse which must stem either from ignorance or great presumption. It is inappropriate and offensive to wrap a person with the sacred scroll, to describe the Torah mantle as "a foreskin," to pronounce a man to be "king" in a ritual context, to employ a tallit in ways completely out of touch with the tradition to which it belongs, and above all, to do all these things, and more, claiming to represent the Jewish community.

Respect for the Torah is a central value within authentic Messianic Judaism. We assure the rest of the Jewish community that this ceremony would seem as bizarre and offensive within our congregations as it would within yours. An article at AJC.com (the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* website), quotes David P. Gushee, a professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University: "One problem with Messianic Judaism, in which leaders attempt to fuse Jewish and Christian traditions and symbols, is that it can easily stray into profound insensitivity." While Professor Gushee's characterization of our "attempt to fuse Jewish and Christian traditions and symbols" is simplistic, his description of the "one problem" is accurate. Responsible leaders within the Messianic Jewish community share his concern that our traditions be handled with sensitivity and deep respect. By his actions at New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, Messer demonstrates that he is unworthy of any sort of leadership within our community and cannot claim to represent us in any way.

Howard Silverman, President

Russell Resnik, Executive Director

Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations

Paul Liberman, President

Joel Chernoff, General Secretary

Messianic Jewish Alliance of America