

Book Claiming Messianic Judaism Is Not Christianity Stirs Controversy

Critics say Stan Telchin's recent book is unbiblical and may cause unfounded distrust of Messianic congregations

An author's claim that Messianic Judaism is unbiblical and causing division in the body of Christ has sparked controversy in the Messianic community and led some of its leaders to protest his book.

Stan Telchin, a Messianic Jew and author of *Messianic Judaism Is Not Christianity* (Chosen Books), says those within the movement think Messianic Judaism is superior to Christianity, which he says impedes the Bible's call to unity.

The 80-year-old Jews for Jesus missionary adds that Messianic congregations appeal largely to Gentile Christians who enjoy traditional Jewish customs such as wearing yarmulkes and prayer shawls. Telchin says this offends and angers the Jewish community, which holds such practices in high regard and reserves them only for observant Jews. He says the Messianic movement may, in effect, alienate the very people it is trying to win to Christ.

"The Bible calls us to provoke Israel to jealousy," Telchin told *Charisma*. "What Messianic Judaism is doing is provoking the Jewish community to outrage." Telchin said this is because Messianic congregations make "a caricature, a charade" of what happens in synagogues.

Author of the best-selling book *Betrayed*, in which he shares

his testimony, Telchin says his intent is to “reveal and to help heal the division that is occurring among brothers and sisters in the Messiah—a division being fostered by those who insist that Messianic Judaism is not Christianity.”

Barry Rubin, president of Messianic Jewish Publications and rabbi of a Messianic congregation in Columbia, Md., says the book, subtitled *A Loving Call to Unity*, does anything but promote unity. “In his interest toward unity, he has actually done the antithesis,” Rubin told *Charisma*. “He has not really come to Messianic Jews with his concerns. Instead he published a book that, for the most part, is going to Christians.”

The book has been surrounded by controversy since it released in August. The confusing title drew a negative reaction, prompting its publisher—Chosen Books, a division of Baker Book House—to issue a press release explaining that people needed to read the book’s lead-in line, title and subtitle: *Some Messianic Jews Say, “Messianic Judaism Is Not Christianity”: A Loving Call to Unity*.

Rubin says Telchin’s book focuses on minute issues that are in no way normative in Messianic Judaism. “Stan Telchin is not a theologian, he is not a leader of any Messianic congregation, and he is [in] no way a spokesman for Messianic Judaism, and yet he has chosen to act as if he were,” Rubin said.

Rubin joined Joel Chernoff, president of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America; Jamie Cowen, president of the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, and other leaders in writing an open “letter to the editor” to trade publications that advertised Telchin’s book, including *Charisma*’s sister publication *Christian Retailing*.

“Telchin presents a skewed picture of the Messianic Jewish movement,” the letter stated. “By not presenting a balanced picture of today’s Messianic congregations, in effect Telchin portrays exceptions as the rule, characterizing them as standard fare.”

The letter went on to say the book might cause Christians to “shy away from standing with Messianic Jews in Israel at a time of their greatest need, and avoid connecting with us here in the States.”

Telchin, who was pastor of a nondenominational charismatic church in the Washington, D.C., area for 14 years, says he knew the book would draw criticism. “I want Jewish people to get saved,” he said, “but you’re not going to reach the Jewish people through Messianic Judaism—it’s not working.”

Moishe Rosen, founder of Jews for Jesus, writes in the book’s foreword that through the years Telchin has grown uneasy and troubled “by such terms as ‘Gentile Church’ when he knew that the Messiah established only one Church.” Rosen added that “questions should arise [from the book] and much discussion should be the result.”

Rubin estimates there are about 300 Messianic congregations in the United States. Telchin said the claims in his book do not apply to all Messianic congregations. Originally intended to be a vehicle to attract Jewish people, Messianic congregations appeal mostly to Gentiles, Telchin said. “About 80 percent, of those who attend Messianic synagogues are not Jewish,” he said.

In his ministry’s November newsletter, Rubin admitted that

most Messianic congregations “consist of at least 50 percent non-Jews,” but added that most of these ministries have an excellent relationship with local Christian churches. He said the problems Telchin refers to in his book “barely exist, if at all” and that “by being so visible to the Jewish community, Messianic congregations are a strong witness of the faith.”

Nancy Justice