

Messianic Leaders Weigh Call for Jewish Repentance for Past Sins

The move has stirred controversy among Messianics, but leaders say it could release God's blessing in a new way

Some leaders in the Messianic Jewish community are cautiously welcoming a controversial move that is challenging Jews to repent for their historic sins.

Although they recognize some might find the idea of a people who have suffered so much persecution asking forgiveness for their own wrongs hard to swallow, they say such an initiative could release God's blessing in a new way.

The move centers on a public appeal by David Dreiling, a Messianic believer with a prophetic ministry who says God has told him to "call for repentance by the Jewish people for their sins against the church." Dreiling's message was published late last year by The Elijah List, an Internet-based network for those in the prophetic movement.

Dreiling wrote that he repented to "my non-Jewish brethren in Messiah, on behalf of my people, for sins committed by my ancestors against those who first kept and shared the words of the gospel. ... We are truly sorry for the pain and hurt that was caused as families were torn apart and lives destroyed because of Jewish prejudice.

"I ask you to forgive our people, even as G-d has required that we freely and with an open heart accept your repentance."

Dreiling told Charisma that although the appeal was controversial, he has received an overwhelmingly positive response from Messianic and Gentile believers. His effort, he said, was “getting Gamaliel-ed”—after the name of the Pharisee referred to in the book of Acts, who warned the Sanhedrin against persecuting the early believers.

“People are saying, ‘If this is God, don’t touch it; and if it isn’t, it will go away.’”

Dreiling’s appeal—which he wants to spread to the non-Messianic Jewish community, too—has sparked strong debate among Messianic leaders, said Curt Landry, who leads a Messianic congregation and is treasurer of the International Messianic Jewish Alliance (IMJA).

Since Landry himself shared a similar message—“repenting of the fact that we had been called by the Lord to bring the light into the world, we had not been good stewards”—with a church in Mounds, Okla., both congregations have experienced “an increase in the presence of God,” he added.

Joel Chernoff, president of the IMJA and general secretary of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, said he believes most people would agree with the idea of “taking ownership of things that we need to” and that repentance is “an important, foundational issue for the restoration of the Jewish people.”

But, he added: “Because of 2,000 years of Christian persecution of Jewish people, there are concerns within the Jewish community of anything that would be seen as giving more fuel to the anti-Semites. ... There are issues that need to be

well-considered if there is going to be a community response to it.”

Chernoff has incorporated Jewish repentance in his music ministry appearances in the last year or so. “We have not been a light to the nations, and fallen short in our calling, and for that I want to apologize and repent,” he said.

Negiel Bigpond, pastor of Morning Star Evangelistic Center, where Landry offered his apology for the failings of the Jewish people, said the initiative deepened the connection between his predominantly Native American congregation and the Jewish people.

“We are both covenant people, who understand the land issues,” he said. The service with members of Landry’s congregation was “a special moment for us all,” and since then his church has experienced “a freshness and a joy,” he added.

At the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, General Secretary Russ Resnick agreed with the “broad picture” of Jewish repentance but said it would be “a really controversial thing” to suggest taking it to the larger Jewish community.

Jews for Jesus Associate Executive Director Susan Perlman said she did not think Jews or Christians could “take responsibility on a corporate level for sins that those individual Jews and Christians haven’t committed. I don’t see a biblical basis for that.”

Michael Brown, a Messianic Jew who leads one of the training schools born out of the Brownsville Revival in Pensacola,

Fla., said he was “somewhat surprised” at Dreiling’s initiative, as Jewish persecution of the early church had primarily been of fellow Jews who had embraced Jesus as the Messiah.

“It was not an instance of Jewish persecution of the church, implying Jewish persecution of Gentiles,” Brown said. His burden is “to call my people to repent of their sins against God and the Messiah—the sin of rejecting the Son of God.”

In his written appeal, Dreiling said he recognized it would be “very hard to hear for my Jewish brethren.” He added: “Even for believing Jews the idea that our people need to repent to the believing world seems ridiculous. They are very clear about anti-Semitism, but are prone to doubt that Jews ever persecuted believers when they were the dominant religious group in the early days of the Church.”

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