

Bishop Eddie Long, Rabbi Messer Apologize for Offensive 'King' Ceremony

Bishop Eddie Long has apologized for a bizarre ceremony in late January in which a **Messianic rabbi** crowned him as "king."

"The ceremony was not my suggestion, nor was it my intent, to participate in any ritual that is offensive in any manner to the Jewish community," Long wrote in a letter sent Saturday to Bill Nigut, southeast regional director of the Anti-Defamation League, according to a report in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

The ritualistic service was posted on YouTube and went viral. More than 650,000 people have viewed the video, which sparked an outrage among Christians and Jews alike.

During the ceremony, Rabbi Ralph Messer dubbed the scandalized megachurch pastor a king, wrapped him in a scroll, and presented him with a "belt of justice and blessing" and "a constitution of God as king." Four men then lifted up the seated Long and carried him around the platform as Hebrew songs played in the background.

In his letter to the Anti-Defamation League Long denounced any action that depicts him as a king and said he was only a servant of the Lord. Nigut told the *Journal-Constitution* that he accepted Long's apology.

"For the ADL it's a real wake-up call that a lot of people do not understand our liturgies and practices," Nigut said. "Guys like Messer are troubling to us because they appropriate real ritual or, in this case, make one up."

The backlash against Messer, who heads Simchat Tora Beit

Midrash and was one of the speakers at Long's Economic Empowerment Summit, is coming from many sides.

"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," said a joint statement from the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations and the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America. "He is operating entirely outside the mainstream Messianic Jewish community."

But Messer is defending himself and the controversial ceremony. In a video response, he said he wasn't trying to offend anyone by using the Torah scroll. He apologized to the Jewish community for any offense. He also showed the ceremony in its entirety.

"I was invited [to New Birth] to teach the **Hebrew roots of the Christian faith** and the Torah to New Birth and their community at large," Messer says, noting that his goal was to encourage a community of believers that had been extremely discouraged, as well as to encourage Long who he said "has been through a major test in the last three years." He said their goal was "to restore and lift and encourage a man."