

# Jesus was Jewish, but should Jews be Christians?



## Highland Views

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Columnist

For several years back in my youthful evangelical and Pentecostal days, I regularly joined in Bible study, worship and fellowship with a "house church" led by my friend Stillman who called himself a "messianic Jew." We all understood this meant he was a Christian with a Jewish heritage.

Stillman led us in Hebrew prayers, read to us from his Hebrew Bible and we sang in Hebrew to Adonai (Lord) and Yeshua (Jesus).

Stillman and I would take long walks now and then, smoking our pipes and discussing Yahweh's (the Holy One's) will for our lives. These were deeply meaningful moments for me, especially as I was studying biblical and Christian history in college.

After a few years, my walks with Stillman became less frequent and more uncomfortable. I was now reading more philosophy and enjoying my study of all the world's religious traditions. Stillman listened, though it must have pained him to hear me speak so respectfully of non-Christians while questioning the exclusive claims of any one faith.

This year, more than 6,000 Christians from 100 countries gathered in Jerusalem "to show their love for Israel." They traveled from far and wide to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot).

As I was reading a story in *The Atlantic* ("White Evangelicals Used to Dominate Christian Zionism, but Not Anymore," Oct. 20, 2017), I saw that several representatives were from North Carolina. One woman explained: "It's like a pre-celebration before Moshiah [Messiah] comes."

Her husband added, "[We're] focused on the restoration of Israel, but we're also interested in the Jewishness of Jesus." One man from Brazil said he "hopes Jews might learn about Jesus."



**When his daughter was young, Chris Highland's family celebrated both Christmas and Hanukkah.** COURTESY OF CHRIS HIGHLAND

Though the Israeli government seems to give its blessing to the Christian Zionist movement and some Jewish people are happy to have the support, we could wonder how many truly understand what is actually at work here, behind each "shalom" (peace) and "I'chaim" (to life).

Reading the *Atlantic* article brought me right back to those joyful days in the house church with Stillman. We "loved Jews" too, especially because our Lord and Savior was Jewish. We knew the Jewish people were the "chosen" and had a special place in the sight of God — and it was up to us, the true People of God, to bring all Jews to a "saving knowledge" of Jesus.

It's not easy to make sense of that, but it's how we thought and believed.

Christian scriptures say that "At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:10-11). Not much room for discussion with that. The message is as clear as the sun in the sky: the ultimate goal for all humanity, Jews included, is to bend the knee before King Jesus.

Many folks probably don't know, but there is an underlying "end time" belief operating with all this. Large numbers of believers have been taught, as I was by Stillman and others, that once the Jewish state appears, Jesus will soon appear in the sky, returning to take his true believers home to heaven. That's the heart of the apocalyptic vision.

There's no getting around it. Someone says they love you, that you have a special place in God's heart, but what they don't tell you is that you are lost unless you accept Jesus as Messiah, Adonai and Yahweh.

Most of my Jewish friends and colleagues can see right through the smokescreen. They are put off by "Christian Zionists," "Jews for Jesus" and other Christians who "love Israel, in the Name of Jesus."

It seems to me that honesty and truth are basic to the practice of any respectable, ethical religious belief. Wouldn't we be much better off if people would just say what they really think and believe?

It would be more honest to hear, "God loves you. I love you. I love some of your scripture, language, tradition and your nation. But unless you bow to Jesus and confess Him as Yahweh, it pains me to say, you'll spend eternity suffering in hell."

You have to wonder if Israel would be so welcoming if those 6,000 Christians celebrating a Jewish holiday in Jerusalem came right out and said that to all the Jews they met on the street.

Personally I think it's wonderful when people, secular or spiritual, are invited to share in holidays and celebrations of different faiths and traditions. When we are open to listen and learn, maybe we will grow to love people who believe differently and even enjoy blending some of their celebrations with ours. Then it's not about getting others to bow to our beliefs but to find ways to stand together.

*Chris Highland served as a Protestant minister and interfaith chaplain for nearly 30 years. He is a teacher, writer, free-thinker and humanist celebrant. Chris and his wife, Carol, a Presbyterian minister, live in Asheville. Learn more at [chighland.com](http://chighland.com).*