

Who's Drinking Netanyahu's Genocidal Amalek Kool-Aid?

Religious nationalism may be soaring in Israel, but that's not the trend in America.

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"You must 'remember what Amalek has done to you,'" Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu admonished on October 28, announcing the "second phase," a ground invasion, of Israel's war in Gaza.

Amalek, in the *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible), is a nation that ambushed the Israelites making their way to the Promised Land. Following the attack, which the Israelites were able to beat back, God instructed that they must never forget and must wage an eternal war until no trace of Amalek's existence remains. Generations later, King Saul killed all but the Amalekite king, whose descendent, Haman, generations after that, in the story of Purim, plotted to kill all the Jews in Persia.

Netanyahu is notoriously secular in his private life. But, ever the shrewd politician, scripture is his language of choice to sell his war to Jewish supremacists in Israel and right-wing Evangelicals in the United States.

The victims of Hamas' vile October 7 attack come from what is referred to as the "Gaza envelope." Heavy with kibbutzim (intentional collectives, traditionally based around agriculture), its [residents](#) are known for being secular and left-leaning.

Asked if losing his parents in Hamas's terror attack had affected his political views, Maoz Inon, [pleaded](#) not for revenge but a reassessment of basing security "on military might."

Likewise, Yotam Kipnis, in [eulogizing for his father](#), said "We will not stay silent while the cannons roar, and we won't forget that Dad loved peace. He wasn't willing to serve in the territories. Do not write my father's name on a missile, he wouldn't have wanted that."

Tom Godo, whose son lived and died in Kibbutz Kissufim, [blamed the Netanyahu administration](#): “The fingers that pulled the trigger and murdered, the hands that held the knives that stabbed and beheaded and slashed were the loyal and determined emissaries of the accursed, messianic and corrupt government [of Israel].”

Even after spending 16 days as a hostage in Gaza, eighty-five-year-old peace activist [Yocheved Lifshitz](#) retained her belief in reconciliation. Upon being transferred to the Red Cross, she took the hand of her Hamas handler and bade him “Shalom,” (peace).

It’s not the families of those murdered on October 7, nor the families of the hostages who have been sleeping in tents outside the military headquarters in Tel Aviv [demanding](#) all Palestinian political prisoners be released in exchange for their loved ones Netanyahu is invoking Amalek to, but the ideological descendants of Kach.

The religious-nationalist [Kach party](#) was founded in 1971 by Brooklyn-born Rabbi Meir Kahane who argued for “the immediate transfer of the Arabs,” whom he referred to as “dogs.” In 1984, the one time his party secured a single seat in the Knesset, Kahane introduced legislation to ban all Jewish-Gentile marriages and sexual relations and revoke the Israeli citizenship of non-Jews.

The Kach party was so violently racist that it was [prohibited](#) from running in Israel’s next election, banned entirely in 1994, and defined as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department.

In what could be perceived as another iteration of Amalek, in 2019, Kahane follower Itamar Ben Gvir formed the Jewish Power party, an ideological offshoot of Kach. Merging with other far-right fundamentalist parties to form [Religious Zionism](#) in 2022, they won the third-largest share of Israel’s parliament seats. This is the audience Netanyahu is addressing, but not only them.

On October 8, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ), which [claims](#) to represent millions, sent out an email stating that Hamas’ attack, “was not launched due to grievances over the Israeli ‘occupation’ or any real dangers to the al-Aqsa mosque.” Rather, it was driven by the ancient “Spirit of Amalek.”

On October 24, Christians United for Israel, which boasts a membership of over 10 million, raised \$25 million in [a single night](#) in support of Israel (they raised and donated \$100 million over the week). Standing beside CUFI’s Pastor John Hagee, who in 2008 [referred](#) to Hitler as a “hunter” sent by God “to help Jews reach the promised land,” was Israeli Ambassador to Israel Gilan Erdad.

Given their [belief](#) that when enough Jews have populated their modern state, the apocalypse will come, and “[a sea of \[Jewish and Muslim\] human blood](#)” will fill the land, it’s hard to think of Evangelical Zionist support for Israel as a heartfelt commitment to the protection of the Jewish people. Despite that, amid [declining](#) Jewish-American support for Israel, especially among young Jews, Israel has for years been [courting](#) Evangelical support. However, [polls](#) are finding the support of young Evangelicals is also rapidly declining, dropping from 75% to 34% between 2018 and 2021.

Religious nationalism may be soaring in Israel, but that’s not the trend in America. Some people of faith, like [Adam Strater](#), the senior Jewish educator for Georgia Hillels, are even

reclaiming the story of Amalek as a model for Jews to reject “the evil impulse,” described in the Zohar (3:160a) and “make the moral choice to reorient the tradition towards a shared sense of solidarity, and ultimately, liberation.” Given the rapidly climbing toll of death in Gaza—over 10,000 people killed already—these changes could not be more welcome or come soon enough.

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