

Jesus Was Not a Palestinian

Let's set the record straight. Jesus was a Galilean Jew, not a Palestinian Muslim. He celebrated Passover, not Ramadan, and he was called "Rabbi," not "Imam." His followers were named Yaakov and Yochanan and Yehudah, not Muhammad and Abdullah and Khalid. And He Himself had one of the most common Jewish names of the day: Yeshua.

As for the name "Palestine," it was not used in any widespread way to describe the land of Israel until A.D. 135—in other words, more than 100 years after Yeshua's death and resurrection. And it was renamed Palestine by the Romans to mock the Jewish people, thereby calling their ancient (and sacred) homeland the land of the Philistines.

But it is not only anachronistic to label Jesus a Palestinian. It is also misleading.

That's because the word "Palestinian" today speaks of non-Israelites, of non-Jews. It speaks of a people who claim that the land of Israel belongs to them, not to the Jewish people. And it speaks primarily of Muslims.

That's what comes to mind when someone says, "Jesus was a Palestinian." And that's why Palestinian activists have tried to recast Jesus in their own image.

Leading up to Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem last year, Fatah officials called Jesus "the first Palestinian."

Five years earlier, in 2013, the PLO declared, "Every Christmas, Palestine celebrates the birth of one of its own, Jesus Christ."

Back in 2005, the Palestinian Authority stated that, "We must not forget that Messiah [Jesus] is a Palestinian, the son of Mary the Palestinian."

And Fatah even declared Jesus to be “the first Palestinian martyr (shahid)” in 2015.

Anything but declaring that Jesus, who is revered in Islam as a prophet (but not as the crucified Son of God), was a first-century Jewish rabbi.

Instead, Jesus is recast as a Palestinian freedom fighter, born of a Palestinian mother, at war with the evil Jews and (through Islamic eyes) a prophet of Islam. God forbid that he is recognized as Rabbi Yeshua, the Messiah of Israel.

But it’s one thing when Palestinian activists and Muslim propagandists recreate Jesus in their own image, calling him a Palestinian.

It’s another thing when a member of the House of Representatives does this same thing. Yet it was none other than Rep. Ilhan Omar who retweeted a tweet from Omar Suleiman that included the statement, “Jesus was a Palestinian.” In fact, the tweet highlighted the suffering of Palestinian Christians at the hands of evil Israel, further separating Jesus from his Jewish ancestry.

It was for good reason that Rabbi Abraham Cooper took umbrage to Omar’s retweet, noting that “Palestine was a name made up by Romans after they crucified thousands, destroyed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and exiled the People of Israel from their homeland.”

But Omar is not the only one to perpetuate this fraud.

In an op-ed in *The New York Times*, published one day before the misleading tweet, Eric V. Copage claimed that “Jesus, born in Bethlehem, was most likely a Palestinian man with dark skin.”

Jesus the Palestinian!

And note carefully that, in an op-ed of roughly 700 words, the

word "Jew" does not occur a single time. The same with the word "Israel." Not one single mention.

Ironically, Copage was explaining why he, as a black Christian, was mystified as a child at the "fair-skinned, blue-eyed depiction of Jesus."

And for good reason. Jesus was not a European Caucasian.

But he was also not an African Black. Or a Palestinian.

He was a first-century, Middle Eastern Jew. And he would have been recognized for his Jewish religious garb, including the fringes at the corners of his garments (see Num. 15:37-41 and compare Matt. 9:20, 14:36 in RSV, NRSV, ESV, NASB, NLT and TLV).

That doesn't mean that Jesus is indifferent to the challenges faced by the Palestinians. Or that he doesn't identify with Palestinian Christians. Or that American Christians who support Israel should be anti-Palestinian.

Not at all.

True friends of Israel—especially true Christian friends of Israel—should want justice and fairness for both the Israelis and the Palestinians. As for Jesus, he is both the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the world, giving his life for Jew and Gentile alike.

But let's call out this hijacking of Jesus' identity by Palestinian activists, Muslim leaders, a U.S. congresswoman and *The New York Times*.

Let's stop the lie in its tracks.