

## Jesus and Liberal Judaism

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In our diverse communities with many blended families, I am often asked how Jesus fits into the Jewish picture. “If Jesus was Jewish then why don’t we believe in him or why aren’t Christians Jewish too?” The Orthodox Jewish response to this question is simple – although we believe that a personal Messiah will bring the end of days, we did not believe that Jesus was that messiah and Christians do.

For Liberal Jews, who are not waiting for a personal messiah and do not follow the intricate laws of Torah that Christianity discarded, the relationship between the two religions and the answer to that question is more. The historical Jesus was undoubtedly a Jewish man and probably a charismatic leader of a group of other Jewish men who wanted to reform their religion and return to its spiritual and ethical core. Sound familiar?

One could argue that Jesus’ Judaism was the earliest pre-cursor to ethical monotheism and therefore Liberal Judaism – but such a statement would spark further confrontation from evangelical Christians and from more traditional Jews. “Then progressive Jews really should be Christians?!” “So there is really isn’t much difference between progressive Judaism and Christianity?!”

It is Christian history not Jewish history that provides answers to these challenges; today’s Christianity is a later interpretation of Jesus’ initial Jewish sect. So we are being asked the wrong questions. We do not believe in Jesus because he was a revolutionary leader who wanted to be followed not worshipped. Christians are not Jewish because the religion they follow is not Jesus’ Judaism. The real question to ask ourselves is: “Can we find a place for historical Jesus, the proto-progressive Jew, in our Liberal Judaism without blurring the lines between Judaism and Christianity?”