

New House Speaker Mike Johnson, an Evangelical Christian, Holds Ties to Israel's Far Right

Louisiana Rep. Mike Johnson described his 2020 visit to Jerusalem's Temple Mount as 'the fulfillment of a biblical prophecy'; his election is the most significant victory to date for evangelicals in D.C.

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House Speaker Mike Johnson, confirmed Wednesday after three failed previous Republican choices and weeks of inner party turmoil, is an evangelical Christian whose connections to Israel reflect the movement's deep ties to the Israeli right, which has become increasingly mainstream over the years.

Johnson's confirmation brought to an end weeks of [Republican Party](#) turmoil after three previous choices failed to win enough votes to replace Kevin McCarthy.

But it is also the most significant victory to date for [evangelical Christians'](#) pro-Israel movement.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his allies – including former Israel ambassador to the U.S. Ron Dermer – have publicly and privately stressed [the importance of evangelical support](#) as U.S. Jews have grown increasingly critical of Israel's rightward shift.

This dynamic has largely fueled Israel becoming an increasingly partisan issue where Republicans have adopted increasingly pro-Israel sentiments – both within international geopolitics and local domestic politics.

Since the [October 7 Hamas attack](#) and Israel's [subsequent response](#) in Gaza, pro-Israel evangelicals have only become more vocally pro-Israel, while the rest of the GOP adopts increasingly anti-Palestinian rhetoric.

Louisiana Rep. Johnson traveled to Israel in February 2020 with an under-the-radar group called the 12Tribe Films Foundation. The organization's CEO is a social media activist named Avi Abelow, who emigrated from New York more than 30 years ago at age 18 and lives in the West Bank settlement of Efrat.

Abelow switched his vote from right-wing Likud to far-right Religious Zionism in last November's general election, helping elevate [Bezalel Smotrich](#) to a position where he could demand a key role in Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition. He told Haaretz following the election that his decision was motivated by his deep distrust of the Arabs serving in the Israeli parliament and genuine fears for his own safety living in the occupied territories.

Johnson's first stop on his Abelow-organized visit was to the Kohelet Policy Forum – the conservative think tank that has been an essential partner to the government's efforts to weaken the judiciary.

The fourth-term congressman also visited the Temple Mount compound alongside Yehudah Glick, a former Likud lawmaker who has led the fight to change the status quo and permit Jewish prayer at the flash point Jerusalem holy site – in opposition to both official Israeli government policy as well as that of the international community, particularly the Biden administration and Jordan.

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