Next week, former President George W. Bush is scheduled to keynote a fundraiser in Irving, Texas, for the Messianic Jewish Bible Institute, a group that trains people in the United States, Israel, and around the world to convince Jews to accept Jesus as the Messiah. The organization's goal: to "restore" Israel and the Jews and bring about about the second coming of Christ.

Messianic Jews have long been controversial for Jews of all major denominations, who object to their proselytizing efforts and their message that salvation by Jesus is consistent with Jewish theology. Last year, Abraham Foxman, president of the Anti-Defamation League, told Politico that former Sen. Rick Santorum's appearance at an event hosted by another Messianic Jewish organization, the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, was "insensitive and offensive."

And Commentary magazine, which bills itself as a "conservative American journal of politics, Judaism, social and cultural issues," noted, "it must be understood that the visceral distaste that the overwhelming majority of Jews have for the Messianics is not to be taken lightly." Many Messianic Jews are Christians who have adopted aspects of Jewish ritual observance; others are Jews who share the Christian belief that Jesus is the Messiah.

Asked about Bush's upcoming appearance at the Messianic Jewish Bible Institute (MJBI) event, Rabbi David Saperstein, the director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, said, "It's disappointing that he would give his stamp of approval to a group whose program is an express effort to convert Jews and not to accept the validity of the Jewish covenant." Foxman was traveling overseas and unavailable to comment.

Note: *After this story published, the Messianic Jewish Bible Institute removed references to George W. Bush's scheduled appearance from its website. But Freddy Ford, a spokesman for the former president, told   Mother Jones on Friday afternoon that Bush's plans "haven't changed," and he will appear at the event.*

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