

Christian Zionism

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Definition and Introduction

As a person committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, one thing I will always search for is the truth. Therefore my commitment to Christ must take priority over my feelings as a Palestinian, as one who has been oppressed, become a refugee and live among people who continue to suffer. The subject before us is Christian Zionism. Simply stated, *Zionism* is defined as a national movement for the return of the Jewish people to Palestine and the sovereignty of the Jews over the whole Land. The Zionist movement was officially organized in 1897 calling for the restoration of the Jewish national home in Palestine. The movement was secular in nature and the leaders brought foreign ideologies to Judaism such as socialism and nationalism. However, the Zionist movement eventually picked up support from most Jewish traditions and factions, particularly after the Holocaust. This support for the Zionist movement appealed also to many Christian traditions, especially those evangelicals who adhere to the theology of *dispensationalism*. Christians who strongly and actively support Jewish claims of return to Palestine, and continue to offer support for the Jewish State, are known as Christian Zionists.

Christian Zionism and Israel

Christian Zionists see themselves as defenders of the Jewish people and in particular the State of Israel. They support Israel's policies whether right or wrong. This support involves opposing those who are critical or hostile toward Israel. Consequently, most of them have little or no sympathy toward the Palestinians and are against any peaceful solution that may result in Palestinian statehood. From their perspective, God gave the Land to the Jews, *period*. The native Palestinians are dismissed as trespassers that have no rights in *the Land of the Promise*. Christian Zionists cite the Bible as justification for their positions. Dr. Rev. Stephen Sizer, in his thesis *Christian Zionism and its Impact on Justice*, itemizes several categories of behavior defined by Christian Zionism as being a true friend to Israel:

1. Encouragement of dialogue between Jews and Christians
2. Opposition to anti-Semitism
3. Education regarding Jewish origins of Christian faith
4. Humanitarian work among Jewish refugees
5. Opposition to moderate Jewish positions that are striving to negotiate Land for Peace
6. Misuse of Christian faith to justify denial of human rights
7. Apocalyptic Eschatology in danger of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy

Theology of Christian Zionism

- A. Restoration: The theology of Christian Zionism is based on the belief in the *restoration* - that the promise of the Land made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph was unconditional and eternal. Thus they encourage and pray for the Jews

to return and occupy what was given to them by God. God's promises cannot be made void. Therefore they believe:

- *God who scattered Israel will gather Israel back.* (Deuteronomy 30:1-6, Jeremiah 31:10, and Isaiah 11:11-12)

- The Church's responsibility is to provide comfort and blessing to Israel. If the Church fails, it will lose God's blessing in consequence. *"I will bless those that bless you and curse those that curse you".* Genesis 12:3

- According to the Christian Zionists, the role of the Church is to help restore, support, comfort, and commit to the survival of God's Chosen People.

- B. Chosen-ness: To the Christian Zionists, the Jews remain God's chosen people and have a unique and unbroken relationship to God. God thus has never rejected or replaced His Jewish People, overlooking the New Testament teaching concerning God's people.

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham...

Romans 9:6-7

- C. Apocalyptic View of the future: Basic to Christian Zionist theology is the concept of *dispensationalism*. According to this concept, God planned the world from beginning to end according to a timetable, and each period is referred to as a *dispensation*. Israel plays the main role at the end of the last period, when it is to be restored as a nation, rebuild the Temple, and reinstitute the priesthood and sacrificial system. The dispensationalists keep Israel and the Church apart, and God works separately with both until the great battle of Armageddon. Then Jesus Christ will return as King of the Jews, who will rule the nations from His throne in the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem. In the last battle, Israel will be brought to destruction and hundreds of thousands of Jews will die. For years the dispensationalists have been looking for the signs of times and fulfillment of prophecies. The declaration of the State of Israel in 1948 and the 1967 War have both been perceived as fulfillment of these prophecies, disregarding and overlooking the disposition of Palestinian Arabs and specifically Palestinian Arab Christians. All current world events are interpreted as "signposts" for the Second Coming of Christ. Prophecy charts are drawn up depicting these coming scenarios. Events—even the Holocaust, as evil as it was—were all considered as instruments of God's judgment. So Hitler, who did not believe in the Bible, did help to fulfill an outstanding prophecy by driving the preserved people back into the preserved land.

It is very obvious that, without Israel, Christian Zionists' entire prophetic plan, all dispensational theories and their fulfillment, would fall apart. This is why Christian Zionists have a special love for the State of Israel. To them, it is not a matter of two peoples fighting over a piece of land. It is a serious fulfillment of prophecies, the coming of Christ in glory and being in the perfect will of God. Christian Zionists are not willing to consider other interpretations of scripture and very clear teaching concerning peace and justice.

How do Christian Zionists support Israel?

For dispensationalists or, for that matter, Christian Zionists, *not* to support Israel is to align oneself against the purposes of God. Support for Israel comes in several forms:

- a. Financial
- b. Military
- c. Propaganda
- d. Service in the Israeli armed forces
- e. Sponsorship of mass return of Jewish immigrants
- f. Humanitarian
- g. Prayer for Israel
- h. Political
- i. Miscellaneous support

What does this mean to Palestinians?

Because there is no time to expand on all the above points, I will have to give one example. In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon. A Zionist Christian spokesman who was interviewed in the Jerusalem Post, made the following comments: "We (Christian Zionists) are better Zionists than you Israelis. You are too accommodating, too willing to compromise." He urged Israel to secure its "God-given rights to the Land" by a more aggressive drive to build Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

As you can see, the Palestinians are not only facing the very strong Zionist state of Israel, but they also have a hidden enemy in the Christian Zionists. These Christians, though often well meaning, see themselves as not only helping the Zionist state but as helping and hastening the coming of Jesus.

The Christian Zionists base their theology on assumptions and theories. What is the real Bible message? Is God not concerned about the rights and welfare of the Palestinian population in the Land? Are the Christian Zionists doing justice to the Bible with their very selective interpretations?

Do Christian Zionists have the only Biblical Interpretation?

Let's look at the Bible as a whole, both the Old and New Testaments. I believe that the Christian Zionists are in error in failing to appreciate the continuity and the relationship between the Old and New Covenants, and how the new annuls the old. We need to look at the scripture with Christian eyes. The book of Hebrews tells us very clearly "*the Law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.*" Hebrews 10:1

(Also look up Heb 8:1-6, Colossians 2:16-17)

In the Old Testament, revelation from God came in shadow, image, and prophecy. In the New Testament, we have reality, substance, and fulfillment. I want to hold on to what is real as revealed in the Son of God Jesus Christ: "*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at*

many times and in many various ways, but in these days He has spoken to us by His son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.” Heb 1:1-2

One also wonders how many times a promise should be fulfilled. The people of Israel, under the leadership of Joshua, *did* cross and they *did* possess the Promised Land. We read in Joshua 11:23, “So Joshua took **the entire Land**, just as the Lord had directed Moses and gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the Land had rest from war.”

Invasion of Canaan by Joshua.

Many Christians overlook the reason God allowed Joshua to destroy the Amorites, Hittites, Hivites (check this), etc. It was because of their idolatry and gross immorality. It is clear from the Book of Deuteronomy and later in the Book of Joshua, the nations are allowed to stay in order to test Israel’s relationship with God. God gave these nations 400 years to repent and He told Abraham, “for the sins of the Amorites have not yet reached full measure.” Gen 15:16

Finally this time of grace ran out and Joshua took the Land. However, later when the Kings of Israel were committing the same sins as the Amorites (I Kings 21:26) God’s judgment fell upon Israel as it had upon the Amorites and they were expelled from the Land. So God does not show favoritism.

Palestinians are not enemies of God

Let us remember that the Palestinian Arab people are not idolaters. They worship the God of Abraham. The moral standards of the Palestinians in general put most Americans to shame. What is happening to the Palestinians today certainly is not a judgment from God, but a result of political greed and man’s inhumanity to man.

Who are the descendants of Abraham

The Bible actually does not say “God gave the Land to the Jewish People.” What it does say is that God promised the Land to “*Abraham’s seed (descendants).*” Both Old and New Testaments affirm that Abraham’s promise is based on faith and obedience and not merely on fleshly descent.

Some Pharisees told Jesus, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus replied to them, “*If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the things Abraham did.*” John 8:39

Paul puts it in a beautiful way: “*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the Promise.*” Gal 3:29

Maybe at one time the Jews were the Chosen People of God, but after the coming of Christ “*all those who accepted Jesus became the Children of God.*” John 1”12

The New Testament and the Jewish People

The New Testament does not suggest at all that the Jewish People have an unconditional divine right to the Land. Romans 9-11 suggests that as soon as the hardening towards the Gospel by the

Jews is over they will be blessed, and their blessing can only be obtained through the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The future blessings are:

“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” Rom 11:25

In the above and throughout the New Testament, there is no suggestion that the future salvation of the Jews is conditional in any way on possession of the Land. So it is thus “...*through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and share together in the promise of Jesus Christ.*” Eph 3:4-6

The Love of God

The summation of all this is based on the love of God for the whole world. The Promise of the Land has become the Promise of the World. This sect of Christianity known as Christian Zionism needs to repent to God for their misinterpretation of the scriptures, for being the instrument of division and hate, for siding with an evil power, and for hindering the witness of Christ to the people of the Land. Wrong interpretation of scripture can destroy lives that Jesus died for. The Israeli government in the year 2000 deported several foreign fanatic Christians out of Israel. Intelligence information accused some of them of inflaming the start of a war. Their enthusiasm for the Second Coming of Christ is making them very anxious for the Last Battle. Jesus' words to all Christian Zionists and to us today is still: *“It is not for you to know times or seasons...but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and you shall be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the world.”* Acts 2:7-8

As Palestinian Christians, we do not see the theology of the Christian Zionists as being in harmony with the scriptures and the teachings of Our Lord Jesus. It has a negative impact on proclaiming the Gospel and could mislead the American Church in its understanding its role in the Middle East. Our message to the Jews and Arabs is a message of hope, life, love and good news. Jesus did not die to redeem a land. He died to redeem humanity, to *“rescue us from the domain of darkness and to bring us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves.”* Gal 1:13. Jesus loved the world and thus saved it.

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