



MISSION

ISSUE 2 2013

CATALYST

Intelligent comment on faith and culture



A BRIEF HISTORY OF ZIONISM

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of the Holy Land is essential
if we are to understand
contemporary disputes over it.*

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ISRAEL-PALESTINE: IGNORANCE IS NOT AN OPTION



THIS ISSUE OF CATALYST FEATURES PIECES FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM, PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANITY, MESSIANIC JEWISH CHRISTIANITY, JUDAISM AND SECULAR HISTORY.

The last 110 years has seen a major migration of Jewish people to the land of Palestine. This came about following centuries of anti-Semitic hatred and persecution in Europe, culminating in one of the greatest sins in human history, the Holocaust, and the extermination of six million men, women and children with unbelievable barbarity.

This migration led to the creation of the State of Israel, and over the course of those years the Palestinian Arabs who lived in the land for centuries became increasingly marginalised, and many would say persecuted. Arabs are mainly Muslim, but most of the Christians in the region are also Arabs, and amongst them are many with whom we at BMS are privileged to partner.

Israel enjoys broad support from the West, born of post-Holocaust sympathy and justified guilt, and the desire for this never to happen again. But there are also geo-political realities. Israel is an indispensable ally to the West, and especially the US, in a region where most of the world's oil comes from.

Moreover, in the USA there is an influential pro-Israel Jewish lobby who will protest against any American government who adopts anything other than pro-Israel policies.

Finally, there is the theological system known as Christian Zionism, especially strong in the United States amongst right-wing Republican Christians, and the focus of this *Catalyst*.

Though there are many variations, Christian Zionism broadly sees the return of the Jewish people to the Holy Land and the re-creation of the State of Israel as the fulfilment of biblical prophecy and a necessary precursor to the return of Christ. Many see the State of Israel as coterminous with the Israel of the Bible, therefore anything that curtails Israel's occupation of the land is working against God's purposes.

Christian Zionism stems from the work of John Nelson Darby in the 19th century, and his dispensational theology, which argued that Christ would return when Israel was gathered in. On Christ's return the rapture would occur – believers would be taken and others would be left behind

to face the tribulation. This system was popularised through the extensive use of the Schofield Reference Bible and in the US in the 1970s in the influential but largely discredited *Left Behind* series of books written by Tim LaHaye.

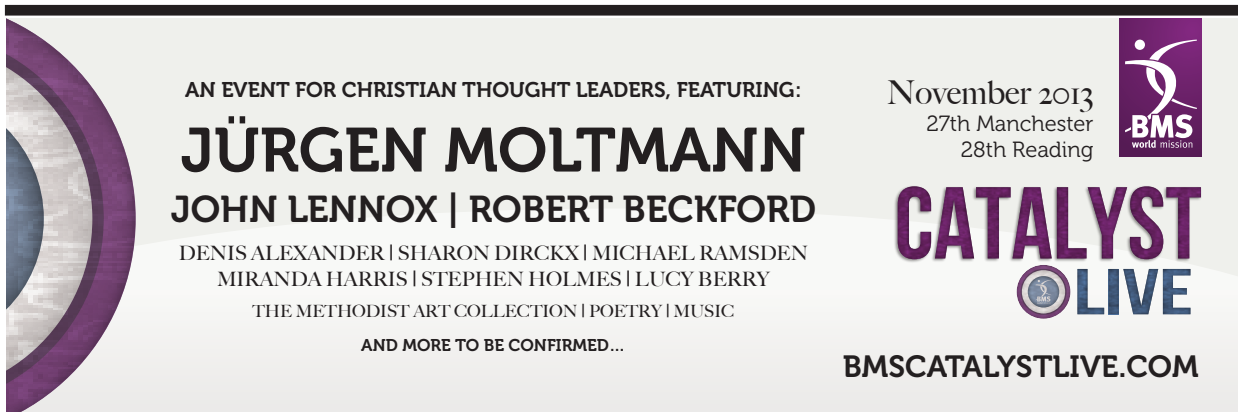
So, our questions. How are we to understand modern day Israel in the light of Scripture, not least passages such as Romans 9-11? Though the Jewish people have suffered monstrosity through the years, what is to be said about today's persecution of the Palestinian population? What would peace, justice and security look like both for the Palestinians and for Israel?

In these pages you'll find the voice of a Christian Zionist and another who opposes Christian Zionism. You'll hear a Palestinian Arab brother in Christ and a Jewish Messianic sister in Christ, a respected secular Israeli historian and the voice of a Jewish rabbi who loves his people, loves his homeland yet longs for justice for the Palestinians.

Read these and then, in the years to come, read some more. Ignorance is not an option.

David Kerrigan
General Director

There are several web-exclusive pieces relating to this issue at bmsworldmission.org/catalyst



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By Tanas Alqassis

Regional Manager for Europe, Middle East and Africa at the Anglican mission agency CMS,
Tanas has also worked for World Vision in his native Palestine and in Romania.

TO MY CHRISTIAN ZIONIST BROTHERS AND SISTERS

A PALESTINIAN CHRISTIAN REFLECTS ON CHRISTIAN ZIONISM AND HIS FAMILY HISTORY IN THE HOLY LAND.

“You are anti-Semitic,” the gentleman said when I told him that the reason for Christian emigration from Bethlehem was not due to Islamic pressure but also to the occupation and the economic situation.

In 1948 my grandparents lived in Jaffa. One day, my grandpa came home told my grandma to get all the children, leave everything and run, because the Israeli Hagana (an Underground terrorist movement) were on their way, killing people in villages.

My family became refugees, half of them settling in Beit Sahour (south of Bethlehem) and the rest in Amman. I am 44 years old, and the first time I got to meet some of my cousins was in 1993 after the Clinton peace talks. But, since those talks, more Palestinian land has been confiscated in order to build roads for Israeli settlers and to start new settlements in Palestinian areas.

I am an Evangelical Christian Palestinian, I love the Lord and have dedicated my life to serving him. I believe in reconciliation among the believers and the need to build bridges with my brothers and sisters on the Israeli side. I used to think this would be easy, being a command from the Lord to all his children, but then I met a Christian Zionist. He ignored my existence. He told me that I was a Gentile and therefore a second-class believer that I was not one of the Chosen.

I find it very hard that evangelical Christians are willing to justify what Israel is doing as part of God’s plan. That they do not only justify it, but that they support, encourage and fund the Israeli government

in building settlements and bringing more Israeli Jews onto our land. Do these Christians not understand that there *are* Palestinian Christians who have lived in the land for thousands of years, whose families and lives have deep roots in Palestine?

I wonder if Christians who support Israel in this way realise that I, because I am a Palestinian, am not allowed to travel to Jerusalem or any part of Israel. That my own brother, now living in the USA, is never allowed to return to live in his home because the Israeli authorities have denied him travel documents. That even when our father was having serious heart surgery, he had to beg, pray and plead to be allowed to cross into Palestine.

My question to my Christian Zionist brothers and sisters is this: “What would you have me and my family do? We live in this land. We have been here for hundreds of years and we have no place else to go. Has God abandoned us? Are we a stumbling block to God’s plan?”

Rabbi Arik Ascherman is co-founder and Director of Special Projects and External Relations for Rabbis for Human Rights, based in Israel. He is a co-recipient of the Gandhi Peace Award.

Photo © Trocaine.org



Q&A

RABBI ARIK ASCHERMAN

AN ISRAELI RABBI WHO HAS BEEN ARRESTED FOR DEFENDING PALESTINIANS TALKS ZIONISM AND JUSTICE.

Why is it necessary for an organisation like Rabbis for Human Rights to exist?

When I first came to this country, my first greatest shock was to find out that bagels were not readily available – I mean what kind of Jewish state is this, where you can't get bagels? But my most profound shock was to find out that the deeply held belief in the North American Jewish community – that a basic part of what it means to be a Jew is to be concerned with human rights and justice – is not the case in this country, in Israel.

Our organisation was founded during the First Intifada in 1988, and our founder, Rabbi David Forman put an open letter to the Chief Rabbinate saying: why is it that the religious establishment in this country seems only concerned with Sabbath observance or with our Jewish dietary laws? Where

are rabbis like Abraham Joshua Heschel, speaking about the burning moral issues in this country?

Rabbi Heschel was a descendent of a long line of patristic rabbis who was saved from the holocaust and who was very involved in issues of his time. He was very active against the Vietnam War and his picture hangs on our wall, marching with Martin Luther King. He is our role model.

The issue of human rights within the occupied Palestinian territories is one with which you have been very concerned. What has that involved?

Today, on principle, we are always involved in at least one issue dealing with human rights of Jewish Israelis and at least one issue dealing with human rights of non-

Jews who are part of our society or under our control. We really started in 1988, primarily because at the outbreak of the Second Intifada there was a real feeling that moral red lines had been crossed. Many Israeli human rights organisations were all founded about that time, and many rabbis felt that, being Jewish, we are partly responsible for what was happening.

Our biggest projects today are with the Bedouin, preventing them from being displaced, and our work against administrative home demolition. I myself have been on trial for standing in front of bulldozers coming to demolish homes. But today we're also working on a legal level too. We're attacking this discriminatory system of planning and building that denies people permits and ends up with their homes getting demolished.

We also have an olive tree campaign. Back in 2001/2002, we basically started acting as human shields to make sure that Palestinians could safely get to their olive groves. We started replanting trees where they had been uprooted. Those of us trying to protect them were being shot at, beaten, threatened, you name it, and the Israeli security forces were either not showing up, coming late or just standing by.

As a result of our work, today Palestinians are accessing lands that they haven't had access to for 15 years in some cases. We have a legal team that helps prevent takeovers of Palestinian land by Israeli settlers or by the government and helps return land to its rightful owners.

You sometimes describe yourself as a Zionist, but what does that mean to you specifically?

The best thing I can do to raise some eyebrows is to mention the fact that I am working for a Zionist organisation, that I am a Zionist and that we see what we're doing as the true Zionism today. Which I absolutely believe, because I believe that, in terms of our survival, it is in our self-interest not only to be physically strong but to be morally strong and to live up to our highest Jewish values.

There are many, many strands of Zionism – some I identify with; others I find racist and morally repugnant. The common denominator between all the different strands of Zionism is that it's the liberation movement of the Jewish people, starting with the proposition that the solution to 2,000 years of Jewish oppression (that took place because we had been expelled from our homeland and didn't have much control over our own destiny) is to return to our homeland.

Beyond that common denominator,

“ **REAL LOVE AND CONCERN IS SOMETIMES HOLDING UP A MIRROR TO HELP PEOPLE.** ”

you have Zionism like my Zionism, which says: I can't ask for myself anything that I am not prepared to give to others. And you have others which make Zionism into a movement for expelling and oppressing, and taking everything for ourselves. It really just depends which kind of Zionism you are talking about.

Has Christian Zionism been good for Israel?

I personally think it's incredible that people who call themselves Christian Zionists, who call themselves Christians, don't listen at all to their fellow Palestinian Christians. I think there's something very strange there.

I don't think that the support of the Christian Zionists for Israel is quite as innocuous as it's made out to be. Even if they're not involved in converting, and even if we don't really care about what they think this means for the end of days, the fact is that, for example, Ariel Sharon used to be the darling of the Christian Zionists, but when he started talking about territorial compromise they all turned against him. So it's not like they're just supporting the elect government of Israel, they are also opposed to even a somewhat right-wing government if it's not doing what they think is in the best interests of bringing about their scheme for the end of days.

I think that anyone who thinks we are getting some sort of unconditional love from the Christian Zionists should think again, because they are trying to induce Israel to do what they think is going to bring about their scheme of the end of days whether or not it's really in Israel's interests.

I think real love and concern is sometimes holding up a mirror to help people. I think that the Christian Zionists will support something whether or not it's in our interest if it fits their plan, and they will oppose something if it doesn't fit their plan.

If the Bible says that God has given Israel to the Jewish people forever, how can religious Jews support any compromise on the land claims of Palestinians?

Rabbis for Human Rights doesn't have a position on where the borders should be, but if one takes the Bible seriously, it says very clearly that God has made a promise of the land of Israel in perpetuity to the Jewish people as a sign of the covenant. And of course for us in the Jewish tradition, that covenant has never been abrogated, and so it is still valid.

However, that same biblical theology, you find it time and time again both in the Torah in the Prophets, teaches that if we behave improperly the land will spit us out. We see again and again that the land of Israel is pained, like a physical, living, breathing entity, when there's bloodshed, when there's oppression. These things pain the land and it will spit us out. The Bible doesn't say that God will expel us forever from the land, but God does say that the amount of the land of Israel that you will be holding on to at any point in history will expand or contract according to your moral behaviour.

From my point of view, the basic foundation of Judaism is honouring the image of God in every human being, which means honouring human rights and people's dignity and everything else.

And you don't just have to ask Rabbi Arik Ascherman. Rabbi Yosef, the founder and Sephardi Jewish leader of the ultra-orthodox Shaf Party, has said, in a ruling that many of his supporters would rather forget, that as holy as the land of Israel is, human life is more holy.

Ovadia Yosef said that, as painful as it would be to give up any part of our homeland, if by doing so one can prevent bloodshed then it's a no-brainer. Because what's more important is obvious. Now, today, he himself might get out of that conundrum that he put himself in, but from a Jewish point of view one can certainly argue that as holy as the land is, human life is more holy, and that if you can prevent bloodshed by compromise then, as painful as it is, that's what you do.

How is your work perceived in Israel?

In terms of how people see us – there are people who just don't know who we are at all. There are many, particularly in the religious world, that think we are like the devil incarnate because we throw a monkey wrench to that very comfortable symbiotic relationship between extreme right wing opinion and Judaism. And, on the other hand, there are people who stop us in the street and say, "I couldn't continue to be a religious Jew if you didn't exist, you are saving Judaism for me."

You can find out more about Rabbis for Human Rights at <http://rhr.org.il/eng/>



A BRIEF HISTORY OF ZIONISM

UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY OF THE HOLY
LAND IS ESSENTIAL IF WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND
CONTEMPORARY DISPUTES OVER IT.

The origins of Zionism

Against a backdrop of centuries of anti-semitism and frequent pogroms, by the end of the 19th century, Jews had nonetheless achieved a measure of emancipation in Europe. At a deep emotional level, the Passover liturgy spoken for centuries (“next year in Jerusalem!”) gave expression of their longing to have a land of their own.

In this respect, Zionism is to be seen as a political and religious movement centred on the desire for a homeland for the Jewish people, and is not to be confused with Christian Zionism which, with a number of variations, is the belief that the return of the Jewish people to the Holy Land and the establishment of the State of Israel is the fulfilment of prophecy and a necessary

precursor to the ingathering of the Jewish people and the second coming of Christ.

The Father of Zionism is often thought to be Theodore Herzl (1860-1904), a Hungarian Jew who studied law and

territories come under consideration, Palestine and Argentina. We could offer the present possessors of the land enormous advantages, take on part of the public debt, build new roads...”

Amazing as it may seem to us today, Argentina was a real option at that time. In 1897 Herzl called a Zionist Congress in Basel where 200 influential Jewish leaders attended. They adopted the Basel Programme: “Zionism strives for the

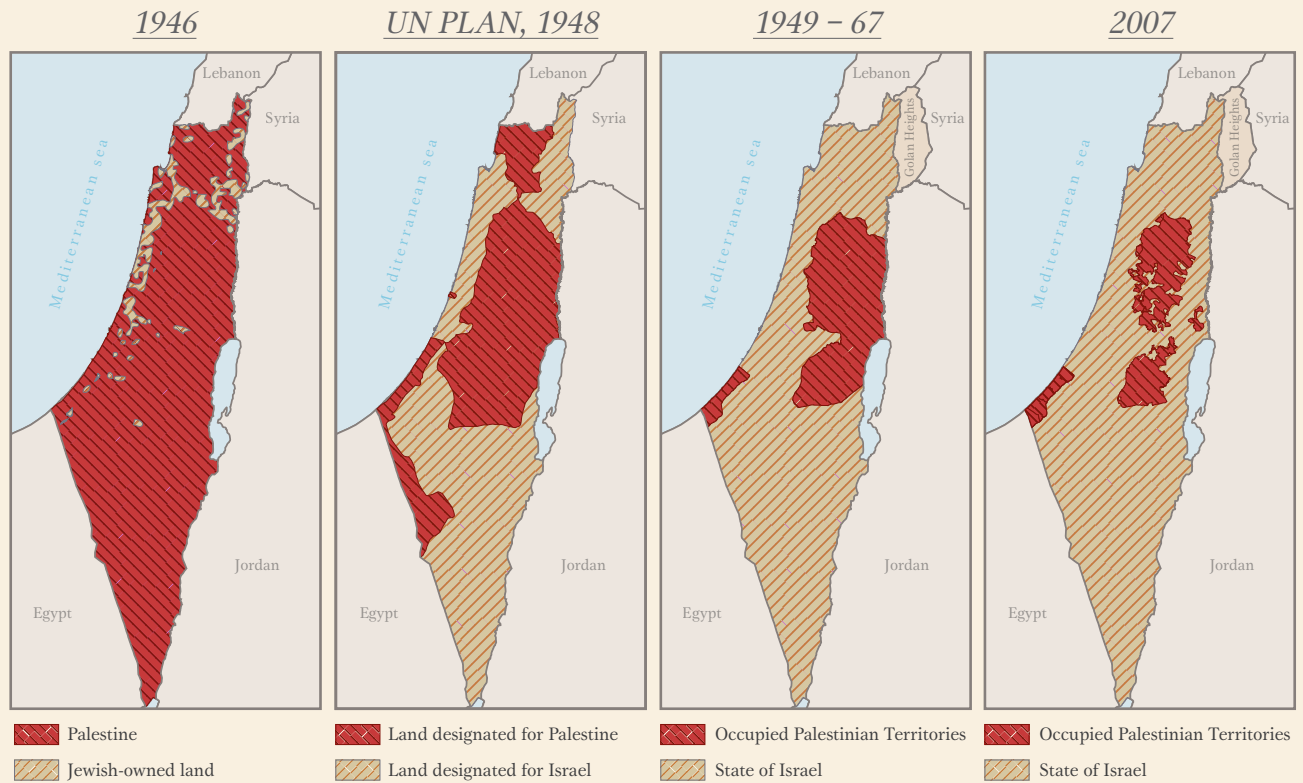
“ EUROPE’S CHRISTIANS KILLED SIX MILLION
JEWS, YET MOSTLY MUSLIM PALESTINIANS HAVE
BEEN MADE TO PAY THE PRICE. ”

moved to Paris. He wrote in 1896: “Let the sovereignty be granted us over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a nation; the rest we will manage ourselves... Here two

establishment of a publicly and legally secured home in Palestine for the Jewish people.”

Herzl knew that a dream was one thing. Bringing that into reality would be

PALESTINIAN LOSS OF LAND, 1946 – 2007*



quite another. In 1880, the population of Palestine was approximately 480,000, of which Arabs (mostly Muslims but also Christians) were 456,000 (95 per cent) and Jews only 24,000 (five per cent).

Years later, we read in Herzl's diary a most revealing insight: "We shall have to spirit the penniless population (the Arabs) across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, whilst denying it any employment in our own country... both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly."

How the land was obtained

Between 1891 and 1920 Zionists began to buy up large tracts of land from absentee Arab landowners, notable amongst whom were the Sursocks, a wealthy aristocratic family who spent most of their time in Western Europe. 90 per cent of all land acquired by Jewish people in Palestine up to 1929 was purchased from absentee Arab landowners. But, after this, the land was sold by small landowners, often to pay off crippling debts owed to Arab lenders at interest rates of up to 50 per cent. However, by 1948 only 6.6 per cent of the land was in Jewish hands, but that was a huge proportion of the cultivatable land, in effect the best that money could buy.

WHO LIVED ON THE LAND?

- 1800 BC** Abraham leaves Ur (Syria) for Canaan (Gen 12: 4 – dates are approximate)
- 1600 BC** Jacob and his sons go to Egypt (Gen 12: 10)
- 1280-1050 BC** Release from Egypt, Exodus and entry into the Promised Land
- 1050-931 BC** The Kingdom under Saul, David and Solomon
- 931-587 BC** Two Kingdoms – Israel (N) and Judah (S) – 'sovereign states'
- 722 BC** Northern Kingdom overrun by Assyria
- 597-539 BC** Southern Kingdom taken into exile under the Babylonians
- 539BC** Cyrus, King of Persia, defeats Babylon and allows Israelites to return to Jerusalem, but still under his rule. (2 Chron 36: 22, Ezra 1: 1ff)
- 597-63 BC** Palestine under the rule of Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks
- 63BC – AD330** Palestine under the Romans
- 330-634** Palestine under the Byzantine (Constantinople) Empire
- 634-1096** Palestine under the Arabs and Turks, largely ruled from Damascus (Syria)
- 1096-1187** Palestine under the Crusaders
- 1187-1517** Palestine under Arab rule
- 1517-1918** Palestine under the Ottoman Turks
- 1919-1948** Palestine under the British Mandate
- 1948** State of Israel declared

* Map Sources: NAD-PLO, as published in Occupation Magazine, PalMap - GSE/Good Shepard Engineering and Computing

British deception

To achieve victory in the First World War, Britain made conflicting promises to Arabs and Jews to win their support to end the war. In August and October 1915 they issued confidential letters promising to approve an Arab Caliphate across the region, including Palestine, if they emerged victorious. Their aim was to encourage the Arabs to rise up against the Turks who ruled Palestine, and who had sided with Germany.

Two years later, in November 1917,

in order to encourage prominent Jews in the USA and Russia to pressure their governments to side with the allies, Britain again issued

a confidential letter, the famous Balfour Declaration offering, should Germany and their Turkish allies be defeated, to “view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people...”

The war ended in 1918 with the defeat of the Turks by the British, French and Arabs and Britain was given a mandate by the League of Nations to rule Palestine. But the seeds of betrayal had been sown.

In 1923 Sir Edward Grey stated in the House of Lords, “I am sure that we cannot redeem our honour by covering up our engagements and pretending there is no inconsistency... we are placed in most considerable difficulty by the Balfour Declaration itself. It promised a Zionist home without prejudice to the rights of the population... and if 93 per cent of the population are Arabs I do not see how you can establish anything other than an Arab Government.”

Britain continued to rule Palestine until 1948, when the state of Israel was established. How this was achieved requires us to retrace our steps.

Life under the British

Mandate, 1922-1948

These years were characterised by frequent clashes between the Arab populace and the Jewish settlers. Though Jewish resistance had been defensive in the earlier years, from the early 1930s onwards, the Jewish paramilitary group, the Irgun, attempted to implement an overtly offensive strategy to break the spirit of the majority Arab population. In 1936 the Arabs rose in revolt against the British, who they blamed for the betrayal, but the revolt was crushed. In 1937 the Peel Commission concluded that the mandate was no longer workable and recommended a two-State solution and a

limit on Jewish Immigration for five years. The Jews protested this was a breach of the Balfour Declaration.

The Holocaust

There are no words to truly convey the evil that resulted in the murder of six million Jewish men, women and children at the hands of the Nazis in the years 1939-1945. It was extermination on an industrial scale. The emotional and political impact of the Holocaust cannot be overstated and in the

post-war years, it became evident that the creation of a homeland for the Jewish people was inevitable. Palestinian Arabs, most of whom are Muslims, are quick

to point out that it was Europe's Christians who killed the six million Jews, yet it is (mostly) Muslim Palestinians who have been made to pay the price.

The State of Israel

In 1947, Britain, in despair, announced it was giving up its Mandate and the matter was passed to the UN. There, a two-State solution was proposed. The division was to be: the Jewish people would get 55 per cent of the land, including the fertile coastal belt (then comprising 499,000 Jews and 509,000 Arabs) whilst the Arabs would have 45 per cent of the land, mostly the hills (comprising 9,500 Jews and 749,000 Arabs).

The UN General Assembly approved the plan, though many nations had misgivings. Huge pressure was brought to bear upon hesitant leaders by President Truman's government who were themselves under a constant barrage of pressure from Zionists in the US. The Jewish authorities accepted the plan, but the Arabs rejected it, believing it treated them unfairly.

When the British Mandate ended in May 1948, the Jewish authorities immediately proclaimed a new State of Israel. Within hours, war broke out, with Arabs from Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Iraq attacking. After seven months of fighting, Israel emerged as victor, having conquered large tracts of land that would have been Arab. 700-800,000 Arabs were forcibly evicted from their homes, thousands of whom are still alive today and can see the land that was theirs but was taken. This event is remembered by the Palestinians as the Nakba (the Catastrophe) and has resulted in several million Palestinian refugees to this day living in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank.

In the years since, there have been

CHRISTIAN CHURCH LEADERS AND ANTI-SEMITISM

Christian anti-Semitism historically played a significant role in the oppression of the Jewish people and the need for a Jewish liberation movement like Zionism. Any critique of Zionism must beware of falling into the sin of anti-Semitism.

John Chrysostom (344-407) wrote, “*The Jews are the most worthless of all men, they are lecherous, greedy, rapacious, murderers of Christians, worship the devil... odious assassins of Christ... it is incumbent on all Christians to hate the Jews.*”

Augustine (354-430) added, “*The true image of the Hebrew is Judas Iscariot – they will forever bear the guilt for the death of Jesus... their fathers killed the Saviour.*”

Martin Luther (1483-1546), hero of the Reformation, added for good measure: “*Set their synagogues on fire... their homes should likewise be broken down... they should be put under one roof, like gypsies in order that they realise they are not masters but miserable captives.*”

many wars and uprisings. Today, Israel holds almost all the land and what is left is relentlessly being encroached upon by further Jewish settlements which are deemed illegal under international law. Israel has erected a wall which has served to curtail attacks from radicalised Palestinians but which also imprisons the Palestinians, cuts many off from land and sources of employment and reinforces their status as second-class citizens.

Many Christians, and most of the international community, call for a just and lasting peace for Jews and Arabs, and a homeland for each. But the combination of powerful Jewish lobbies in the United States, and a strand of Christian Zionism that sees the creation of the State of Israel as the fulfilment of biblical prophecy, seem sometimes to combine together to overlook the injustices of what is happening on the ground today.

Some speak of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Certainly, the Arab population is being squeezed out, and along with them the small but vibrant Arab Christian population.

By Pastor John C Hagee

Founder and chairman of Christians United for Israel and one of the most influential voices in the Christian Zionist movement.

WHY CHRISTIAN ZIONISTS REALLY SUPPORT ISRAEL

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM'S MOST FAMOUS EXPONENT ADDRESSES CRITICISMS RELATING TO POLITICS, THEOLOGY AND ESCHATOLOGY.

As is the case for many Jews, our support for Israel starts with God's promises in the Hebrew Bible, but it does not end there. Christian Zionists recognise that we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the Jewish people. As I have

is tied to an effort to speed the second coming of Jesus. Both of these allegations are flat wrong. All we ask of our Jewish friends is that they get to know us before they judge us harshly on the basis of myths such as these.

“ WE STAND WITH THE JEWISH PEOPLE AS THEY FACE THREATS OF A SECOND HOLOCAUST FROM HITLER'S IDEOLOGICAL KIN. ”

stressed to my Christian audiences for years: if you take away the Jewish contribution to Christianity, there would be no Christianity. From the patriarchs to the prophets, from Jesus and his family to the men who wrote down the Bible, Jewish people have provided us with the fundamentals of our faith.

Christian Zionists also recognise that Israel is not the cause of militant Islam's hatred of America, but an ally in the fight against militant Islam. Until 9/11 and the ensuing events, Israel largely confronted this threat alone. And to this day the frontline of this conflict remains Israel's backyard. But Christian Zionists understand that Israel is merely militant Islam's first target. While American and Israeli soldiers do not fight on the same battlefield, they defend the same values.

Given the history of Christian anti-Semitism, I am not at all surprised that many in the Jewish community are sceptical of Christian support for Israel. Some worry that our efforts are motivated by a desire to convert Jews. Others posit that our Zionism

Like all people of faith, we Christians firmly believe that our religious beliefs are not subject to change. We believe in the Bible as the inspired word of God. We believe in the Second Coming of Jesus. Our theology is not subject to change. We believe in the Bible as the inspired word of God. We believe in the Second Coming of Jesus. Our theology is not subject to change.

Regarding the charge that we believe that the vast majority of Christian Zionists and evangelicals do not believe there is anything we can do to hasten the second coming of Jesus. Our theology is not subject to change. We believe in the Bible as the inspired word of God. We believe in the Second Coming of Jesus. Our theology is not subject to change. We believe in the Bible as the inspired word of God. We believe in the Second Coming of Jesus. Our theology is not subject to change.

Due to permissions issues, you can read the full version of this article here: <http://forward.com/articles/127965/why-christian-zionists-really-support-israel/>

Another common charge is that we believe that the vast majority of Christian Zionists and evangelicals do not believe there is anything we can do to hasten the second coming of Jesus. Our theology is not subject to change. We believe in the Bible as the inspired word of God. We believe in the Second Coming of Jesus. Our theology is not subject to change.

Christian support for Israel starts with the Bible, is grounded in our understanding of history and our love for the Jews. Christian Zionism is not a political ideology. Everything that flows from the Christian understanding of the Bible leads to the same conclusion: Christians should support Israel because it is simply the right thing to do.

A longer form of this article originally appeared in The Forward, 21 May 2010.

Further articles from British Christian Zionists can be found at bmsworldmission.org/catalyst



Q&A

Academic Dean at Bethlehem Bible College, Bethlehem, Dr Yohanna Katanacho is the author of *The land of Christ: a Palestinian cry* and is involved in church planting activities in Galilee.

DR YOHANNA KATANACHO

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM, PSALMS AS A SINGLE BOOK AND REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY DISCUSSED BY A PALESTINIAN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGIAN

Significant numbers of Western Christians are influenced by a theology that sees the current state of Israel as land that has been given back to the Jewish people by God. Do you agree?

If you believe that God gave the land to Israel I have three questions that I would like you to look for answers to from Scriptures.

First: what are the borders of this Promised Land? Is it from the Nile to the Euphrates, is it from Dan to Beersheba, does it include Jordan, Syria, Lebanon? What are the borders?

The second question: who is Israel? In Scripture, a lot of people confuse three labels: Hebrews, Israelites and Jews. These are not identical labels. Abraham, for example, was not a Jew, Abraham was a Hebrew, and he was not an Israelite. Samuel was not a Jew, Samuel was an Israelite. The term Jew is post-exilic. You can't find the term Jew in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible.

As I studied these texts I came to the conclusion that the label Israel in the Bible is not an exclusive label. Ruth for example joined the people of Israel, Rahab joined the people of Israel, 32,000 Midianites joined the people of Israel, all the women of Solomon joined the people of Israel, all their children joined the people of Israel. Not only that, in the last verse of Esther (chapter eight) it tells you the fear of the Jews fell upon

many nations and many nations became Jews. So now it's not even anything that is defined by DNA or biology, and you find many nations who became Jews. Do these nations inherit the promises? Because they have nothing to do biologically with Abraham.

The third question is: what do we mean by 'gave' (in terms of the land)? You give something to someone but what does that really mean?

“ PEOPLE WHO LOOK AT PROPHECIES MORE THAN THE HEART OF GOD ARE LIKE JONAH. ”

We cannot have any theology that is contradictory to the nature of God. God is merciful, God is loving, God is just. People who take prophecies without focusing on the heart of God, those who look at God's programme but not God's heart, are like Jonah. Jonah went with clear prophecies that Nineveh would be destroyed. He knew the prophetic messages but he forgot God's heart. And when he went there he was surprised, because his

prophetic predictions were not fulfilled. Nineveh was not destroyed, because God is a merciful God. And I think many times we see theologies which are merciless, especially towards Palestinians. So I challenge people to have a theology that is compatible to the nature of Jesus Christ, to love and to have mercy.

And I would answer your question by saying, “for God so loved the Palestinians that he gave his only begotten son to die on their behalf”. This is how I read John 3: 16. Not that, “for God so loved the Jews that he decided to get rid of the Palestinians”. This is what I fear so many theologies are doing, but I think God loves the Jews and the Palestinians equally.

What has Christian Zionism got right?

I think Christian Zionism is right in loving the Jewish people. I think we, as followers of Jesus Christ, should and must love the Jewish people, and I do. So I think that's great, they've got that right.

I think what they didn't get right is thinking that loving the Jewish people means hating the Palestinians. I think that we can love the Jewish people and love the Palestinians at the same time, because this is what God does, and we need to be his followers.

And I think, for my Zionist Christian brothers and sisters, I challenge them to include the Palestinian voice. Don't do your theology without reading our books, without coming to our churches and without visiting our conferences. Don't demonise, or stereotype, or marginalise or exclude us. I don't believe this is God's will, I think this is where my Zionist brothers and sisters have erred many times – they are embarrassed, not by Palestinian theology, but by the mere existence of Palestinian Christians. Often, they don't know what to do with us.

How do you feel about the term Replacement Theology?

Replacement Theology is a term that is loaded, that is dangerous and at many times used in political ways. In the West, Replacement Theology has its own history, it does not represent only a theological position, it represents a theo-political position that usually means excluding the Jewish people, oppressing them. So I don't feel comfortable with the label.

But if you want to ask me specifically, "do you believe that the Church fulfilled the role of Israel and that it is the light of the world?" then I would say yes. But I would qualify that Church is both Jews and Gentiles together in the body of the

“GOD DOES NOT GET RID OF THEIR ENEMIES, BUT MAKES THE NATIONS CITIZENS OF JERUSALEM.”

Messiah. I would say that Jesus Christ is the embodiment of Israel and in Jesus Christ I see the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises, and I see the Church as inclusive for both Jews and Gentiles. I see that the Church is at the core of the plan of God, and that the Church is actually the main plan of God. People can call this what they want, but I think that the term Replacement Theology is a little bit misleading.

What are you finding most theologically exciting at the moment?

I am very excited about reading the book of Psalms as a book. The book of Psalms, if we read it as a whole, contains a lot of theology that can really help in the Palestinian/Israeli context.

Psalms 72 ends with the phrase "the end of the prayers of David", but Psalm 86 starts with the title, "A Prayer of David", so you ask yourself, is this an editorial mistake or is it intentionally placed to raise new questions?

So what are the questions?

From Psalms 73-83, the Asaph Psalms, we have people crying out, "God, destroy the nations"; "God, what about our holy places"; "God, we are marginalised," and it is an ethnocentric reality in which Israel



Banksy is one of many street artists to demonstrate his objection to the separation wall with images of peace and freedom. This image is taken from 'Wall and Peace' by Banksy.

is basically wanting God to get rid of the nations which are their enemies. And, by the end of the Asaph Psalms, in Psalm 83, many nations come together to obliterate the name of Israel, so we see a very negative relationship between Israel and the nations.

But, in Psalm 84, the language changes. These are the Korah Psalms, and all of a sudden it is the language of all creation, not the language of just one particular group – and God, the living God, appears. Only twice in the book of Psalms does the living God appear, both of them in the beginning of the Korah Psalms, one at Psalm 42 and one at Psalm 84.

In this context David appears. He appears not as a militant king, as in Psalm 72, who wants to subdue the nations,

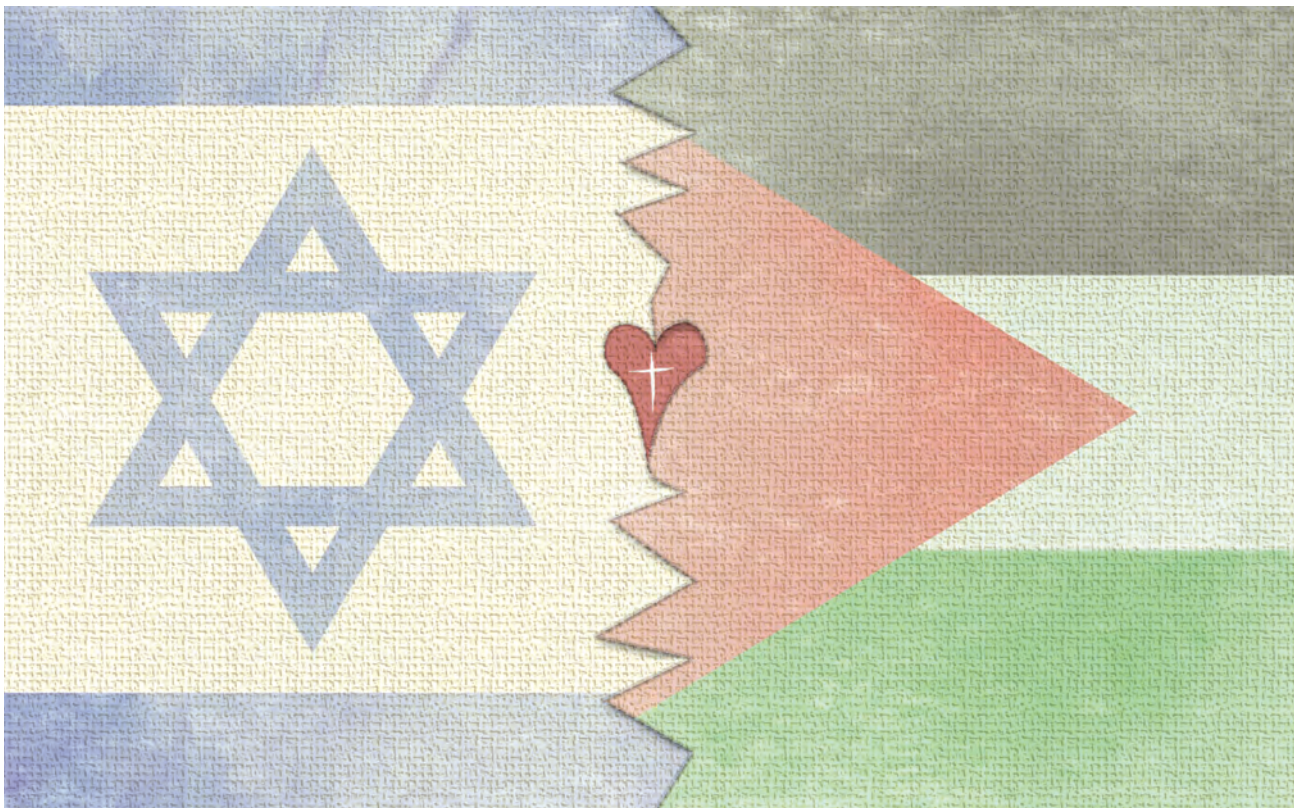
but as a suffering servant, a poor and needy person. And this suffering servant does not pray to destroy the nations, nor does he pray that Israel will restore its land and holy space. In fact, he prays a very shocking prayer that the nations will come to God in Jerusalem. And the answer of his prayer, in Psalm 87, is equally shocking. The nations are born again in Psalm 87, and as a result, they become citizens of Jerusalem, which becomes the city of God.

The Psalm presents a vision in which God does not get rid of their enemies, but gets rid of enmity and makes the nations citizens of Jerusalem. The most holy thing of Jewish history, Jerusalem, is shared with the nations. I want that reality to capture our imaginations.

By Lisa Loden

Head of Leadership Development Programme at Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary and Administration and Communication Co-ordinator at the Global Network for Reconciliation. Lisa is a Messianic Jewish follower of Christ

JOURNEYING TOWARDS RECONCILIATION: MESSIANIC JEWISH BELIEVERS & PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS



A COMMON FAITH IN YESHUA (JESUS) IS HELPING HEAL DIVISIONS BETWEEN PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS AND MESSIANIC JEWISH BELIEVERS, BUT THERE IS MUCH STILL TO BE DONE, ACCORDING TO THIS MESSIANIC ACADEMIC.

The essence of Yeshua's gospel is the proclamation and the embodiment of the Kingdom of God in the midst of a sin-filled world. Reconciliation springs from, moves toward, and finds its home in the new creation inaugurated by Yeshua's death and resurrection. It is a sign of the coming of the Kingdom in fullness. After more than 2,000 years, it is painfully incongruous that his body in

the land where he lived and taught is not yet either fully proclaiming or fully embodying the truth of his gospel.

A wounded family

In the context of relationship between Messianic Jewish believers and Palestinian Christians in Israel and the Palestinian territories, the family of God is wounded and broken. Relationships are damaged and distant.

The situation is much like the coming of the Kingdom of God. The word of this Kingdom is a word of reconciliation. It is simultaneously present, "already here," and "not yet" fully realised.

While the two faith communities in Israel/Palestine have much that should unite them, they remain deeply divided. There are many elements involved, including cultural, theological, political, geographical and sociological issues. The

“already here” aspect of reconciliation is based in the atoning work of Yeshua on the cross. With the last words of Yeshua – “It is finished” – reconciliation between the parties separated by sin was forever accomplished.

There is, however, a “not yet” part of the equation that remains an open wound in the body of Messiah. This presents a continuing challenge to authentically proclaim and embody the finished work of Yeshua – reconciled humanity – in everyday life and particularly in ongoing contexts of conflict.

Yeshua v ethnic identity

Communities and individuals in conflict tend to withdraw from each other, retreat and regroup into the safety of isolation. Followers of Yeshua, while united in their communal spiritual identity, are also members of their respective ethnic and national communities. In Israel/Palestine, these two existential realities frequently vie for the individual’s allegiance.

When Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians meet today, the basis of relationship is in their common

Relationship-building across conflict lines is a costly process requiring courage and a willingness to listen, engage, and identify with those on the other side. For many it is a seemingly more spiritual as well as an easier option to embrace the “already here” of reconciliation and deny or neglect the “not yet.”

Theology of the land

During reconciliation encounters between Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians, it is always difficult to speak about the painful past. There are many reasons for this. One is the way each community views their own historical narrative and that of the other side. Another issue is the fact that the conflicts between the two communities remain unresolved. Pain is not only past, it is present. Pain is intensely subjective and, if it is chronic and acute, it can distort perception.

For the Messianic Jew and the Palestinian Christian, how land and the theology of the land are viewed greatly influence the other issues. This is not merely a theoretical discussion. The consequences of the strongly held

the spiritual, theological dimension in the continuing quest for realised reconciliation in the Messianic Jewish and Palestinian Christian context.

Beatitudes of reconciliation

The Sermon on the Mount gives complete instruction for living as God’s reconciled family. The high, seemingly impossible demands of these chapters are not an unattainable ideal. Rather they are commands, intended to be acted upon. In a time of escalating cultural diversity, systemic complexity, information overload and seemingly infinite options, the simplicity of the gospel, whose heart is reconciliation, can easily be obscured.

Living together is the basis upon which Yeshua’s teachings are to be embodied. He is the pattern and the model. His own faithfulness to the way of life he taught took him to death on a cross. He died shamed, cursed and victimised in the eyes of the world; willingly giving his life for his enemies and his friends. His unconditional requirement for his disciples is to be willing to do the same in their lives and in their deaths. In this way the fullness of the Kingdom of God will be seen (light) and felt (salt) in the present world. This is both the “already here” and the “not yet” of reconciliation, accomplished and lived.

Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians have enormous challenges ahead of them. Many from both sides recognise and affirm the “already here” of reconciliation. Others, far fewer, have begun the often perilous but rewarding journey in the “not yet”.

The way forward will require renewed commitment to the radical simplicity of the gospel; willingness to engage with “the other side,” love the enemy and pray for oppressors and persecutors; courage to face the painful past and present; humility to repent of the sins of judgment and ethnic pride; readiness to work for just solutions; and together imagine a shared future on the earth and not only in heaven. Only then will reconciliation be realised and the kingdom come in the fullness of the “already here” and the “not yet.”

This paper is an abridgement and adaptation of a previously published chapter in Chosen to Follow: Jewish believers through history and today, eds Knut H Hoyland and Jacob W Neilsen.

“ FOLLOWERS OF YESHUA, REGARDLESS OF THEIR ETHNIC IDENTITY, LIVE SIMULTANEOUSLY IN THIS PRESENT WORLD AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD. ”

commitment to the lordship of Yeshua and the priority of the Scriptures as the source of life and truth. In faith-based reconciliation initiatives, Scripture is the foundation stone for any further building. Sadly, this commitment does not unequivocally resolve the “not yet” of reconciliation. How the Scriptures are understood and interpreted are often a deep source of division.

Reconciliation in the fullest sense can never be abstracted from the messy world of human interactions. A focus on the “already here” spiritual dimension is both foundational and essential. In the absence of active engagement with the “not yet,” the “already here” focus is insufficient. Through the body of Messiah in Israel/Palestine, the kingdom of God is struggling to break through into the physical realm of hostility, conflict, and mutually exclusive ideologies and theologies that have characterised relationships between the two people groups for decades.

views of the respective communities are central to the existence of each community living in the Land.

In the relationships between Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians there is no clear-cut distinction between the one who has suffered and the one who is responsible for the suffering, the victim and the perpetrator. Issues of power and its imbalance are integral elements in conflicted relationships. Embracing this kind of language is difficult for both sides when the “already here” situates all parties in a relationship of equality.

Followers of Yeshua, regardless of their ethnic identity, live simultaneously in two worlds, this present world and the Kingdom of God. How they live together bears witness to the truth of the gospel, to the love of God for humanity and to the presence of the kingdom of God breaking into the present world. The ethical, moral dimension is as important as

EXTRACT:

7 BIBLICAL CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

SOME QUESTIONS KEEP COMING UP WHEN CHRISTIANS DISCUSS ISRAEL. IN THIS EDITED EXTRACT FROM ZION'S CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS? STEPHEN SIZER EXAMINES THEIR BIBLICAL BASIS.

1 God blesses those who bless Israel and curses those who curse Israel

This popular assumption is based on Genesis 12: 3. First, note that the promise was made to Abram (that is, Abraham) and no one else. Second, there is nothing in the text to indicate God intended the promise to apply to Abraham's physical descendants unconditionally, or in perpetuity. Third, in the New Testament we are told explicitly that the promises were fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in those who acknowledge him as their Lord and Saviour. God's blessings come by grace through faith, not by works or race (Ephesians 2: 8-9).

2 The Jewish people are God's "chosen people"

Both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures insist membership of God's people is open to all races on the basis of grace through faith. In Isaiah 56, we see the Lord anticipate and repudiate the rise of an exclusive Israeli nationalism. In the New Testament the term "chosen" is used exclusively of the followers of Jesus, irrespective of race (See also Ephesians 2: 14-16 and Colossians 3: 11-12).

3 The "Promised Land" was given by God to the Jewish people as an everlasting inheritance

Contrary to popular assumption, the Scriptures repeatedly insist that the land belongs to God and that residence is always conditional. For example, God said to his people, "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers." (Leviticus 25: 23). In Ezekiel, it seems the Lord anticipated the reasoning of those who arrogantly claimed rights to the land because of the covenant originally made with Abraham.

"Son of man, the people living in those ruins in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one man,

yet he possessed the land. But we are many; surely the land has been given to us as our possession.' Therefore say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Since you eat meat with the blood still in it and look to your idols and shed blood, should you then possess the land? You rely on your sword, you do detestable things... Should you then possess the land?' ... I will make the land a desolate waste, and her proud strength will come to an end." (Ezekiel 33: 24-26, 28-29)

Residence was open to all God's people on the basis of faith, not race. Indeed, the writer to Hebrews explains that the land was never their ultimate desire or inheritance anyway but a temporary residence until the coming of Jesus Christ. Our shared eternal inheritance is heavenly, not earthly.

4 Jerusalem is the exclusive and undivided, eternal capital of the Jewish people

The Christian Zionist assertion that God intended Jerusalem to be the exclusive and undivided eternal capital of the Jewish people has no basis whatsoever in Scripture. God insists in Psalm 87 that Jerusalem must be a shared and inclusive city. Nations specifically mentioned include what are today Egypt, Iran and Lebanon. Even the hated Philistines are mentioned as "...born in Zion" on the basis of faith not race. Likewise, the vision of Isaiah 2 associates Jerusalem with the end of war, with peace and reconciliation, where "many nations" will come to the mountain of the Lord.

The focus of the New Testament instead moves away from the earthly Jerusalem toward the new, heavenly Jerusalem as the home of all who trust in Jesus (Hebrews 12: 22-23; Revelation 21: 2; 22-27).

5 The Jewish Temple must be rebuilt before Jesus returns

Prophecy pundits like to quote Daniel 9 and Matthew 24 to suggest a future temple will be built and desecrated by the anti-Christ, before Jesus returns to Jerusalem in order to set up his Kingdom. The only problem is, Christian Zionists require a 2,000 year gap between Daniel 9: 26 and 9: 27 and between Jesus' words in Matthew 24: 1-2 and 24: 15-16 in order to explain why, after the destruction of the temple in 70AD, another temple is needed. But there is absolutely nothing in either text, or anywhere else in Scripture, to suggest a gap of 2,000 years, or that a future temple is predicted, let alone needed. Just the reverse – the old temple was declared redundant the moment Jesus died on the cross when the curtain was torn in two from top to bottom (Hebrews 1: 3; 10: 1-3, 11). The true and lasting temple is revealed to be the Lord Jesus himself and his followers. The true temple, according to Ephesians 2: 19-21, is under construction. Quoting Old Testament temple imagery, the Apostle Peter writes, “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2: 5-7)

6 Believers will soon be ‘raptured’ to heaven before the ‘end-time’ battle of Armageddon

The rapture is a popular idea that Jesus will actually return twice: first of all secretly, to rescue true believers out of the world, then later visibly with his saints to judge the world. There is, again, no basis in Scripture for this novel idea. The Bible is emphatic: the return of Jesus will be personal, sudden, public, visible and glorious.

The idea of a secret rapture is actually based on a misreading of Matthew 24: 40-41 and Luke 17: 34-35 where Jesus warns that one person will be taken and the other left behind. Rapture proponents insist that it is the believers who will be taken and unbelievers left behind. However, in the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13, we see that it could well be unbelievers who are ‘taken’ first and believers who are ‘left behind’ to be with Christ.

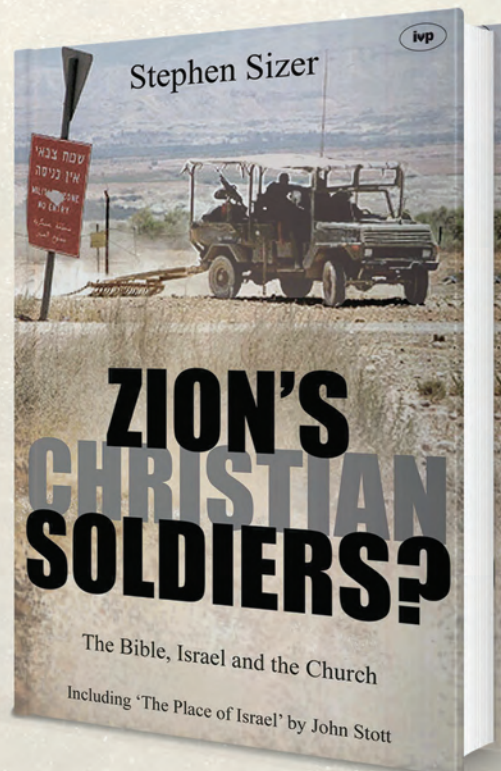
However we understand the vivid apocalyptic language of Daniel, Matthew and Revelation, we must hold on to the clear vision of the future of Paradise restored and the nations reconciled in Christ (Revelation 22: 1-2).

7 God has a separate plan for the Jewish people apart from the Church

The question that must be asked is this: “Does God have one people or two?” In the imagery of the vine and the branches (John 15) and the wild and natural branches of the olive tree (Romans 11), we see that God has only ever had one inclusive people, identified on the basis of faith not race.

If Gentiles “have been grafted in” (Romans 11: 17), it begs the question “into what or whom have they been grafted?” In the letter to the Philippians, Paul explicitly identifies the Church as the true ‘circumcision’ (Philippians 3: 3). This is entirely consistent with the Old Testament, where citizenship of Israel was open to all ‘those who acknowledge me’ (Psalm 87: 4).

Of course God has not rejected the Jewish people. His covenant purpose for them, as with every other race, has always been ‘that they may be saved’ (Romans 10: 1), to create one people for himself, made of both Jews and Gentiles (Romans 11: 26). As is explained in Ephesians 2, God’s covenant purposes are fulfilled only in and through Jesus Christ.



You can read more from Stephen Sizer at sizers.org
Zion's Christian Soldiers? is reviewed in this issue of Mission Catalyst.

By Professor Ilan Pappé

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6 MYTHS.

TRUTH & THE HOLY LAND



Photos © Robert Cronia

A RESPECTED ISRAELI HISTORIAN FINDS ERRORS IN WESTERN, OFFICIAL ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN VERSIONS OF MODERN HISTORY.

Any attempt to solve a conflict has to touch upon the very core of this conflict and the core more often than not lies in its history. A distorted or manipulated history can explain quite well a failure to end a conflict whereas a truthful and comprehensive look at the past can facilitate a lasting peace and solution. It can in fact do more harm, as the particular case study of Israel and Palestine shows: it can protect oppression, colonisation and occupation.

The wide acceptance in the world of the Zionist narrative is based on a cluster of mythologies that cast doubt on the Palestinian moral right, ethical behaviour and chances for any just peace

in the future. The reason for this is that these mythologies are accepted by the mainstream media in the West and by the political elites there as truth and, therefore, a justification, not so much of Israeli actions, but of the West's inclination to interfere.

Here are six fundamental and common myths that have provided an immunity shield for continued impunity and inhumanity in the holy land of Israel and Palestine:

The first is that Palestine was a land without people, waiting for the people without land. The first part was successfully proved to be false by a number of excellent

historians who showed that, before the arrival of the early Zionists, Palestine had a thriving society, mostly rural, but with a very vibrant urban centre. It was a society that, like all the other Arab societies around it, was under Ottoman rule and part of the Empire, but nonetheless one which witnessed the emergence of a nascent national movement that probably would have turned Palestine into a nation-state like Iraq or Syria had Zionism not arrived on the shores of Palestine.

The second part of this mythology is also doubtful, but no less significant. Several scholars, among them Israelis, doubted the genetic connection between the Zionist settlers and the Jews who lived in Palestine during Roman times or were exiled at the time. This is not unique to Zionism. Many national movements artificially create their story of birth and plant it in the distant past. This universal tendency becomes a problem when in the name of such a narrative, as is the case with Zionism, colonisation, expulsion and killing are justified in the name of that story. The validity of this second part is less crucial but what is done in its name is of grave concern to humanity as a whole when it lead to the dispossession of the indigenous and native people of Palestine.

The second foundational mythology was that the Palestinians from early on resorted to an anti-Semitic campaign of terror when the first settlers arrived and until the creation of the state of Israel. As the diaries of the early Zionists show, they were well received by the

Palestinians, who offered them abode and in many cases taught them how to cultivate the land. It was only when it was clear that these settlers had not come to live next to or with the native population, but instead of it, that the Palestinian resistance began. And, when that resistance started, it was no different from any other anti-colonialist struggle.

The third myth is a set of Israeli fables about the 1948 war. There were four foundational mythologies connected to this year. The first was that the Palestinians were to be blamed for what happened to them, since they rejected the UN partition plan of November 1947. This allegation ignores the colonialist nature of the Zionist movement. It would have been unlikely that the Algerians, for instance, would have accepted the partition of Algeria with the French settlers – and such a refusal

the Jewish forces and with less training and poorer equipment than the latter. Highly significant is the fact that these troops were sent into Palestine after 15 May 1948 when Israel was declared as a state, as a response to an ethnic cleansing operation that the Zionist forces had already begun in February 1948.

As to the myth of the extended hand of peace, the documents show clearly an intransigent Israeli leadership that refuses to open up negotiations over the future of post-Mandatory Palestine or consider the return of the people who were expelled or fled. While Arab governments and Palestinian leaders were willing to participate in a new and more reasonable UN peace initiative in 1948, the Israelis assassinated the UN peace mediator, Count Bernadotte, and rejected the plan suggested by the Palestine Conciliation Commission (PCC), a UN body, to reopen negotiations.

“ THERE IS AN ASSOCIATION IN THE MINDS OF MORE TWISTED PEOPLE BETWEEN THE ZIONIST COLONISATION AND JEWISH RELIGION. ”

would not be deemed unreasonable or irrational. What is absolutely clear is that such an objection, in the case of any other Arab country, would not have justified the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians as a ‘punishment’ for accepting or rejecting a UN peace plan that was devised without any consultation with them.

Similarly absurd is the myth that the Palestinians left their homes voluntarily, and as a result of a call by their leaders and those of the neighbouring Arab states to leave so as to make way for the invading Arab armies that would come to liberate Palestine. There was no such call – this myth was invented by an Israeli foreign minister in the early 1950s. Later on, Israeli historians changed the mythology and claimed that the Palestinians left or fled because of the war. But the truth of the matter is that half of those who became refugees in 1948 were expelled before the war commenced on 15 May 1948.

Two other mythologies associated with 1948 are that Israel was a David fighting an Arab Goliath and that Israel, after the war, extended its hand for peace to no avail as the Palestinians and the Arab powers rejected this gesture. Research on the first has proved that the Palestinians had no military power whatsoever and the Arab states sent only a relatively small contingent of troops that was smaller than

This intransigent view would continue and, as Avi Shlaim has shown in his *The Iron Wall*, contrary to the myth that the Palestinians never missed an opportunity to miss peace – it was Israel that constantly rejected the peace offers that were on the table.

The fourth mythology is that Israel was a benign democratic state, seeking peace with its neighbours and offering equality to all its citizens before the June 1967 war. This is a myth propagated alas by some notable Palestinian and pro-Palestinian scholars – but it has no historical foundation in fact. One fifth of the Israeli citizenship was subjected to a ruthless military rule based on draconian British mandatory emergency regulations that denied them any basic human and civil rights. Within this period, more than 50 Palestinian citizens were killed by the Israeli security forces. At the same time Israel pursued aggressive policies towards its Arab neighbours, attacking them for allowing refugees to attempt to return (or at least retrieve their lost property and husbandry) and, in collusion with Britain and France, tried to topple Gamal Abdul Nasser’s legitimate regime in Egypt.

The fifth myth is that the Palestinian struggle is that of terrorism and nothing more. The struggle led by the Palestine

Liberation Organisation was a liberation struggle against a colonialist project. Somehow the world finds it difficult to grant legitimacy to anti-colonialist struggle when most of the oppressed are Muslims and the oppressor is Jewish.

The sixth myth is that the 1967 war forced Israel to occupy the West Bank and the Gaza strip and keep it in custody until the Arab world, or the Palestinians, would be willing to make peace with the Jewish State. The Israeli political and military elite regarded the 1948 war as a missed opportunity: an historical moment in which Israelis could have occupied the whole of historical Palestine (from the river Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea). The only reason they did not do it was a tacit agreement with the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan that, in return for their limited participation in the general Arab war effort, Jordan could annex the West Bank. Ever since 1948, this elite has looked for an opportunity and planned carefully from the mid 1960s how to have it all.

There were several historical junctures at which the Israelis nearly did it – but did not in the last moment. The most famous are 1958 and 1960, when the leader of the state and its first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, aborted plans at the last minute due to fears of international reaction in the first instance and a demographic fear (that Israel could not incorporate such a large number of Palestinians) in the second. The best opportunity came in 1967. The Israeli mythology is one of not wishing to go to war against Jordan but having to react to Jordanian aggression, but there was no Israeli need to remain in the West Bank if this was just another round of tension between the two states. Incorporating the West Bank and the Gaza Strip within Israel was an Israeli plan since 1948 and was implemented in 1967.

Any criticism of this mythology (or others which I have not mentioned here) is branded as anti-Semitism. In fact, this policy and mythology is the main reason why anti-Semitism is still alive. Israel insists that what it does, it does in the name of Judaism – hence the association in the minds of more twisted people between the Zionist colonisation and Jewish religion.

This association should be rejected and in the name of Judaism (and indeed universal values) the right of everyone who lives there and was expelled from there to live as equals should be the main agenda for the peace and reconciliation efforts.

By Dr Stephen Finamore

Principal of Bristol Baptist College, Trustee of both Tearfund and the Baptist Union of Great Britain, whose doctoral work focuses on the Book of Revelation.

ROMANS 9-11:

THE APOSTLE PAUL, THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL AND THE PURPOSES OF GOD

AN EXAMINATION OF ROMANS 9-11 SUGGESTS THAT WHILE ISRAEL HOLDS A SPECIAL PLACE IN GOD'S HEART, ALL CHRISTIANS ARE HEIRS TO HIS PROMISES.

Lots of people claim that the Bible supports their views about the Middle East. They often point to passages in the Hebrew Bible, the book Christians call the Old Testament, and claim that these lie behind their political claims and even their property rights. One of the questions for those who follow Jesus is to ask how the New Testament writers understand the decisive texts. The apostle Paul cared passionately about his fellow Jews (Rom 9: 1-5) and reflects at some length on their place in the continuing purposes of God (Rom 9-11). The decisive promises in the Scriptures shape his understanding of God and his understanding of his own apostolic calling (Rom 15: 8-21).

One of Paul's great themes is that, through the Messiah Jesus, God has shown that he is faithful to all his ancient promises. As he insists at 2 Corinthians 1: 10, in Jesus, every one of God's promises is answered "Yes". Interestingly, Paul seems to interpret the promises in creative ways. For example, in Romans 4: 13, Paul is discussing the

promises that God made to Abraham, or to his seed, and he talks about them in terms not just of the land, but of the whole world. At Galatians 3: 16, Paul insists that the seed of Abraham is the heir to these promises and that the seed is the Messiah. His point is that it is Jesus who inherits all the promises made to Abraham and, taking Romans 4 seriously, this means that the whole world belongs to him. Interestingly, Paul goes on to argue in Galatians 3: 29 that those who belong to the Messiah, those whom he elsewhere refers to as being 'in Christ', are Abraham's seed and therefore also heirs of the promises.

When Paul sat down to write Romans he had a number of things in mind. He planned to take a collection to Jerusalem to be distributed to the poor (Rom 15: 25-26); from there he hoped to pay a visit to the Christians in Rome (Rom 1: 11-15) and then, perhaps with their help and support (15: 24), go on to continue his ministry of evangelism and church planting in Spain. One of his concerns seems to have been to offer

some pastoral advice to the believers in Rome to encourage the Jewish and Gentile Christians to be more accepting of one another. As a result he has to discuss the Jewish Law and the practice of circumcision. He also has to say something about the role of Israel in the continuing purposes of God.

In Romans 9-11 he sets out his position. He makes it clear that some of those who are physical descendants of Israel have stumbled and that this has always been a part of God's pattern of cutting back and restoring his people. So, their stumbling does not necessarily mean they have fallen away permanently. In some mysterious way, God has allowed them to stumble in order to provide an opening for some of the Gentiles to become part of the people of God. Perhaps this is to be understood as one of the ways in which the Messiah's inheritance of the world is to be understood. Then, at Romans 11: 12-15, Paul points towards the riches that everyone will experience when Israel is fully included within God's people. It will seem like life from the dead.

At this point Paul seems particularly concerned that the Gentile believers should stop pretending that they are in any way superior to their Jewish brothers and sisters. He drives his point home by means of an illustration; the people

Read more online: A Palestinian take on the text,
Palestinian Theologian Salim J Munayer analyses Romans 9-11 exclusively for Mission Catalyst.
bmsworldmission.org/catalyst



Valentin de Boulogne Saint Paul writing his epistles c 1618-20

of God can be pictured as an ancient cultivated olive tree. Some of its native branches have been cut off and branches from wild olives have been grafted on in their place. These new branches are nourished by the rich roots of the tree. This is a picture of the one people of God into which the Gentile believers have been joined. There is hope expressed in Romans 11: 23 that some of the cut off branches may be grafted back one day. Paul insists that when the full number of the Gentiles have joined God's people then the parts of Israel which are cut off will be restored (Rom 11: 26).

So, Paul is very interested in the promises to Abraham and in the destiny of Israel. However, he does not understand the promises in terms of one piece of land. Nor does he see the promises as belonging to all the physical descendants of Abraham, much less those of Israel. He has far wider concerns. The promises concern the whole world and the welcoming of the nations into the people of God. The heir of the promises is Jesus and, by extension, those who belong to him, whether Jews or Gentiles. However, it seems that at some point in the future,

“ PAUL IS NOT CONCERNED WITH THE POLITICAL OWNERSHIP OF THE LAND. ”

or perhaps beyond time, we may expect a move of God which will bring many of the physical descendants of Israel to salvation (Rom 11: 26-32).

Paul is not concerned with addressing questions about the political ownership of the land. Like everything else, it belongs to Christ. Nor does he suggest that we can expect the restoration of Israel to have consequences in terms of the land. Rather Israelites simply recover their place within the people of God and their place in the Messiah in whom they become co-heirs of the world.

This is the way the apostle understands the ancient promises and it may be that we would do well to be guided by him. This would suggest that the present state of Israel is simply to be understood as a political entity whose conduct is to be assessed in the same way as any other's. It may be that the Jewish people who live in every part of the world, not just within the state of Israel, are to be constantly in our prayers and care because of the place they had in the apostle's heart and, much more significantly, for the place they have in God's heart and God's continuing purposes.

In one sense we are all equal before God. Every type of humanity has sinned and falls short of God's intended purposes for us. But in another sense, God's gift and call cannot be revoked (Rom 11: 29) and so the Israelites still hold a special place with God (see, for example, Romans 3: 1-4). As Paul puts it when he runs out of words in his exploration of these mysteries, "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways...To him be the glory forever! Amen." (Rom 11: 33-36)

RELEVANT READS FOR CHRISTIAN LEADERS

THE LAND OF CHRIST:
a Palestinian cry

By *Yohanna Katanacho*
Katanacho.com
Price: £14.20 (*bethbc.org/giftshop*)
ISBN 978-965-7582-00-8

Don't judge a book by its cover. This is not about doves or charismatic gifts. It's for the theological mind, wrestling with the biblical issues surrounding the land of Israel-Palestine.

The author's charismatic conversion introduces a theology of praxis based on love before exposing the failings of dispensationalism, Zionism and restorationism.

He expounds the identity of Israel, exposes the shallowness of fixed borders and refutes claims that the land belongs to Israel. Drawing on well-known theologians from Von Rad to Moltmann, Katanacho focuses on Christ's ownership of all lands, with a message of hope based on God's justice and the resurrection of the Messiah. He concludes with a vision of a new Jerusalem described in the Palestinian Kairos document (*kairospalestine.ps*).

Gareth Wilde is pastor of Broadmead Baptist Church, Woodford Green, London/Essex

PALESTINIANS IN ISRAEL:

Segregation, Discrimination and Democracy

By *Ben White*
Pluto Press, 2011
Price: £13.04 (*amazon.co.uk*)
ISBN 978-0-74533-228-4

A key issue, often masked by the attention-grabbing violence that regularly characterises Israel-Palestine, is that of the growing Palestinian minority within Israel itself. It's what the Israeli government calls 'the demographic problem' and Ben White calls 'the democratic problem'. Israel defines itself not as a state of its citizens, but as a Jewish state. Paradoxically, it is also keen to project an image of being the only liberal democracy in the Middle East. White argues convincingly that privileging one ethno-religious group over another cannot be seen as compatible with democratic values at all.

Many will find this a tough read, both in terms of density and content, but this fairly short book challenges Christians to examine Israel-Palestine more in terms of justice than eschatology or geopolitics.

Steve Sanderson is BMS Manager for Mission Projects

ZION'S CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS?

The Bible, Israel and the Church

By *Stephen Sizer*
Inter-Varsity Press, 2007
Price: £6.74 (*amazon.co.uk*)
ISBN 978-1-84474-214-1

Endorsed by an impressive group of academics from the worlds of theology and history, former clerics in Israel and more familiar names like John Rackley and Garth Hewitt, *Zion's Christian soldiers?* also has its share of detractors, as does its author. That said, what speaks more than any blurb or green-inked web polemic is the thoroughness of scholarship and obvious respect for the authority of Scripture evident in this book.

History and politics are touched on, but one question is central to this book: what does the Bible say? The answers Sizer provides are both illuminating and, perhaps surprisingly, moving and inspiring. Good reading for understanding Israel-Palestine, as well as God's love for all sinners.

Jonathan Langley is Editor of Mission Catalyst

WHOSE PROMISED LAND?

By *Colin Chapman*
Lion Books, 1983
Price: £14.47 (*bookdepository.co.uk*)
ISBN 978-0-85648-956-3

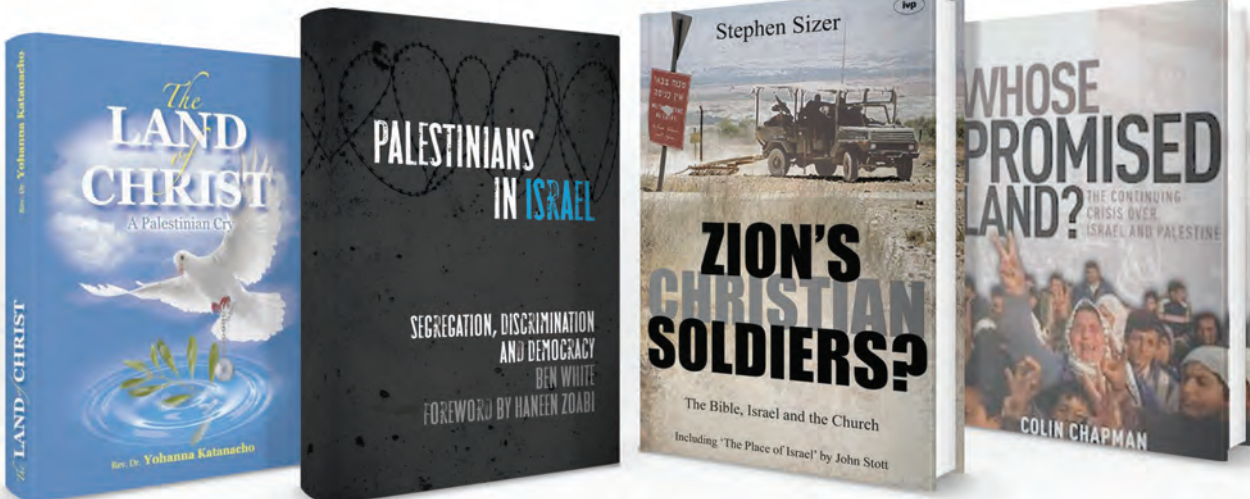
This book is a 'must read' for a panoramic survey of this complex subject. Chapman carefully unpicks historical, political and theological strands that together make Israel-Palestine a unique problem.

Chapman's historical overview begins with Abraham and extends through the post biblical period to the present day. With 130 pages on the Bible and the land, he is not light on theological and biblical analysis.

Politically, the origins of the Zionist cause are treated sympathetically. Less so the duplicity of the British Government in the early 20th century. Chapman charts the birth of the State of Israel and the many wars, uprisings and peace initiatives of the last 50 years.

This book is out of print but available in second-hand shops and online. Beg, borrow or steal – but read this.

David Kerrigan is General Director of BMS World Mission



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