

## A Biblical Response to Israeli Apartheid

What does the Bible say about apartheid? How has the Bible been used to justify apartheid? How can we challenge and refute apartheid from the Bible? This is a work in process, but is offered to help equip answer these questions and give confidence to challenge Israeli apartheid in your church/small group.<sup>1</sup>

### Contents

1. A brief history of apartheid tracing its roots from European colonialism, white supremacy and black slavery, through to segregation in the US, Fascism in Germany to Apartheid in South Africa and Israel.
2. A summary of how the Bible has been used to justify white supremacy, segregation and apartheid.
3. A biblical refutation of apartheid.
4. A Bible study to encourage personal reflection as well as group discussion.

This paper will examine how biblical texts have been used by proponents of segregation in the USA and apartheid in South Africa. It does not elaborate specifically on how Christian Zionists use the Bible to justify Israeli supremacy, the subjugation of Palestinians or the colonisation of their land.<sup>2</sup> These are addressed more fully in my book *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon?*<sup>3</sup>. *Zion's Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel and the Church*<sup>4</sup>, provides a more detailed study of the biblical texts concerning the two key elements of apartheid theology – supremacy “Chosen People”<sup>5</sup> and colonisation “Promised Land”<sup>6</sup>

### 1. Introduction

On 28 August 1963 Martin Luther King, co-led a civil-rights march of 250,000 people in Washington DC against racism and segregation. King was deeply committed to non-discrimination as well as non-violence. In what has become probably the most well-known and widely quoted speech in history, King shared his dream of a diverse but united multi-ethnic nation:

*“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.*

*I have a dream that one day out in the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state*

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<sup>1</sup> This study draws heavily, and with deep gratitude, on the writings of John Stott and in particular, his book, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> A summary of this paper was delivered at the annual Sabeel-Kairos UK conference on 25 September 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon?* (Eugene, Wipf & Stock, 2021), <https://www.stephensizer.com/books/christian-zionism/>

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Sizer, *Zion's Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel and the Church* (Eugene, Wipf & Stock, 2021), <https://www.stephensizer.com/books/zions-christian-soldiers/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.stephensizer.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/zcs2.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.stephensizer.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/zcs3.pdf>

*sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.*

*I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by their character.*

*I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; that one day right down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.*

*I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day every valley shall be engulfed, every hill shall be exalted and every mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains and the crooked places will be made straight and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together...*

*With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to climb up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day...*

*When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every tenement and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old spiritual, "Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last."<sup>7</sup>*

As John Stott points out,

*"We are still waiting for the fulfilment of his dream. Yet it is a Christian dream. God has given us in Scripture a vision of the redeemed as "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne" (Revelation 7:9). That dream we know, will come true. Meanwhile inspired by it, we should seek at least an approximation to it on earth, namely a society characterized by justice (no discrimination) and harmony (no conflict) for all ethnic groups. We are looking for a fully integrated society which continues to celebrate diversity."<sup>8</sup>*

Clearly we still have a long way to go.

Let us define what we mean by racism and institutional racism. Following the death of Stephen Lawrence as a result of a racist attack, the UK government enquiry defined racism in the following way:

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther King, "I have a dream" <https://www.npr.org/2010/01/18/122701268/i-have-a-dream-speech-in-its-entirety?t=1631530554402>

<sup>8</sup> John Stott, 'Celebrating Ethnic Diversity', *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2006), p. 291.

*“Racism in general terms consists of conduct or words or practices which disadvantage or advantage people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. In its more subtle form, it is as damaging as in its overt form.”<sup>9</sup>*

The report further defined “institutional racism” as:

*“The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.”<sup>10</sup>*

The origins of institutional racism can be traced back to the European colonization of the Americas and Africa and to the slave trade. Even the Church of England was complicit in exploiting slaves.

*“The Church of England generally accepted the idea of slavery. It had links to the slave trade through the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and plantations in Barbados. Its slaves were branded on their chest with the word ‘society’. The Church of England supported laws not to educate slaves. In addition, the Church was very much part of the state and therefore followed the political doctrine of those in power.”<sup>11</sup>*

With the abolition of slavery, institutional racism evolved into American segregation, German Antisemitism and South African Apartheid.

The word “Apartheid” is a South African word derived from the root ‘*apart*’ meaning ‘separate’ and ‘*heid*’ meaning ‘hood’ and translated as “aparthood”. It describes a system of institutionalised racial segregation that existed in South Africa and South West Africa (now Namibia) from 1948 until the early 1990s, although it was practiced much earlier.

The 1998 Rome Statute to the International Criminal Court and 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid define apartheid as a crime against humanity consisting of three elements:

1. An intent to maintain domination by one racial group over another.
2. A context of systematic oppression by one racial group over another.
3. Inhumane acts.<sup>12</sup>

In 1973 the UN defined apartheid as,

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<sup>9</sup> The Stephen Lawrence Enquiry Report, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/277111/4262.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277111/4262.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>11</sup> BBC, “Reasons for the Development of the Slave Trade” <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z22nfg8/revision/7>

<sup>12</sup> Visualising Palestine “The Crime of Apartheid” [www.visualizingpalestine.org](http://www.visualizingpalestine.org)

*“inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over another racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them.”<sup>13</sup>*

Although later revoked under pressure from the United States and Israel, in 1975, the UN specifically applied this definition to Israel, describing the ethnic exclusivism intrinsic to Zionism as, ‘*a form of racism and racial discrimination.*’<sup>14</sup>

## **1.1 Segregation in the United States**

The end of slavery in the USA following the Civil War did little to improve the conditions of African Americans or ameliorate the endemic racism inherent in white communities. Segregation was an inevitable consequence to protect and maintain white supremacy.

Kevin Giles observes,

*“Today, virtually all evangelicals... believe that the Bible in no way approves of or endorses slavery. It is an evil and Christians should oppose slavery. They find it hard to believe that, for eighteen centuries, Christians accepted slavery like they did other cultural realities. In fact, most Christians find it unfathomable that the best theologians in America in the nineteenth century argued that God instituted slavery and approved of it.”<sup>15</sup>*

In 1954, however, G.T. Gillespie, President Emeritus of Belhaven College, Jackson, Mississippi, in an address before the Synod of Mississippi insisted,

*“The Anglo-Saxon and English-speaking people have steadfastly opposed and resisted the mixture of their racial stock with that of other peoples, especially where the physical and cultural characteristics were widely dissimilar, and wherever they have gone, around the world, they have consistently instituted and maintained a pattern of segregation which uniformly provided an effective check against the process of amalgamation, and which has preserved the racial integrity of the English-speaking peoples of the world.”<sup>16</sup>*

Gillespie insisted that “Segregation is one of nature’s universal laws”, and that “The principle of segregation may be defended on Biblical grounds and is not “Unchristian”.

*“While the Bible contains no clear mandate for or against segregation as between the white and negro races, it does furnish considerable data from which valid inferences*

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<sup>13</sup>The UN International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (1973) <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/intlinst.htm>

<sup>14</sup>Resolution of the UN General Assembly on the report of the Third Committee (A/10320) 3379 (XXX). Elimination of all forms of racial discrimination. <http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf>

<sup>15</sup> Kevin Giles, “Justifying Injustice with the Bible: Apartheid” Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) International (20 April 2016) <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/mutuality-blog-magazine/justifying-injustice-bible-apartheid>

<sup>16</sup> G.T. Gillespie, *A Christian View of Segregation* (Winona, Mississippi, Association of Citizens’ Councils, 1954), p. 8. [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/citizens\\_pamph/1/](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/citizens_pamph/1/)

*may be drawn in support of the general principle of segregation as an important feature of the Divine purpose and Providence throughout the Ages.*"<sup>17</sup>

In 1967, following a series of violent clashes between police and civil right demonstrators in the US, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, published a report. In the introductory summary they stated,

*"Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal... Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans... White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it."*<sup>18</sup>

Racism remains endemic in much of the United States, witnessed by the frequent deaths of African Americans in police custody and the popularity of the Black Lives Matter movement.

## **1.2 Antisemitism in Germany**

Policies enacted in the USA during the Jim Crow era, which limited the rights of African Americans, were the inspiration for the way Fascists in Nazi Germany treated Jews. Yale law professor James Q. Whitman explores this link in "*Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*,"<sup>19</sup>

In particular, Whitman presents a detailed investigation of the American impact on the notorious Nuremberg Laws, the centerpiece anti-Jewish legislation of the Nazi regime. Both American citizenship and antimiscegenation laws proved directly relevant to the two principal Nuremberg Laws—the Citizenship Law and the Blood Law.

Whitman shows that the Nazis took a real, sustained, significant, and revealing interest in American race policies. He looks at the ultimate, ugly irony that when Nazis rejected American practices, it was sometimes not because they found them too enlightened but too harsh.<sup>20</sup>

*"Nazi lawyers closely studied Jim Crow laws and used them as a model for their Nuremberg Laws, passed to legally degrade Jews both as citizens and as a race. The Nazis kept close tabs on American race policies and used them to come up with ways of disenfranchising groups they wished to keep marginalized, although even they sometimes found American methods to be too brutal."*<sup>21</sup>

*Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle* or *My Fight*) is the infamous autobiographical manifesto of Adolf Hitler published in 1925, eight years before he came to power. The book describes his political ideology and plans for Germany. Hitler eulogised what he termed, "the Aryan race".

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/national-advisory-commission-civil-disorders-report>

<sup>19</sup> James Q Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (New Jersey, Princeton University press, 2018)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., rear cover.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Rozsa, "Fascism makes a comeback but nothing about its methods is especially new" *Salon* (September 19, 2021), <https://www.salon.com/2021/09/19/fascism-makes-a-comeback--but-nothing-about-its-methods-is-especially-new/>

*"Every manifestation of human culture, every product of art, science and technical skill, which we see before our eyes today, is almost exclusively the product of Aryan creative power... it was the Aryan alone who founded a superior type of humanity... He is the Prometheus of mankind, from whose shing brow the divine spark of genius has at all times flashed forth..."*<sup>22</sup>

John Stott points out that Hitler even tried to justify racial purity from the Bible.

*"In Mein Kampf, Hitler wrote that sexual relationships between different racial groups were to be opposed with the utmost vigour, in order to preserve the purity of the Aryan stock. Intermarriage, he declared, invariably causes physical and mental degeneration. It is "a sin against the will of the Eternal Creator"."*<sup>23</sup>

Besides the influence of Henry Ford, Richard Wagner, Frederick Nietzsche and Charles Darwin, Hitler's racist ideology was also shaped by German Christian scholars who were developing a "creation theology" to justify racist supremacism.<sup>24</sup>

One of these was the leading Lutheran scholar, Paul Althaus, a professor of theology at the University of Erlangen. He welcomed the emergence to power of Hitler. He wrote, *"Our Protestant churches have greeted the turning point of 1933 as a gift and miracle of God"*.<sup>25</sup> Althaus insisted marriage, family, race and people (volk) were God's order of creation. *"We champion the cause of the preservation of the purity of the Volk and of our Race."*<sup>26</sup>

### **1.3 Apartheid in South Africa**

John Stott observes,

*"Anti-Semitism in Germany and apartheid in South Africa seem at first sight so different from one another as to be entirely unsuitable for comparison. In particular, the unspeakable outrage of the Holocaust has had no parallel in South Africa. Nevertheless... the theory of "race" on which both systems were built is almost identical. So is the sense which many Germans and South Africans have expressed that they are "destined to rule" and mist at all costs preserve their racial purity."*<sup>27</sup>

The Dutch Afrikaners who colonised South Africa saw themselves as the heirs and bearers of European Christian civilisation.

*"They saw a parallel between themselves and the exodus of the Old Testament people of God, destined for a new promised land. The Africans were their equivalent to the Amalekites and the Philistines. After the defeated the Zulus at the Battle of Blood River, they entered into a solemn covenant with God, and henceforth thought of the Transvaal and the Orange free State as the promised land to which God had brought them. "Afrikanerdom is not the work of men." Said Dr D.F. Malan, the Nationalist*

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<sup>22</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (London, Hutchinson, 1925), p. 150, cited in John Stott, *ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>24</sup> John Stott, *ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012) p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Gutteridge, *Open Thy Mouth for the Dumb: German Evangelical Church and the Jews* (Hoboken, Wiley-Blackwell, 1976), cited in John Stott, *ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>27</sup> John Stott, *ibid.*, p. 273

*leader who became prime minister in 1948, “but the creation of God.” Thus Afrikaners believed that they had a messianic vocation, that they were born to rule, and that God had called them to preserve Christian civilisation in Africa.”<sup>28</sup>*

Elizabeth Corrado describes how apartheid emerged in South Africa.

*Up until the mid-nineteenth century, congregations of the Dutch Reformed Church were “integrated”; all races occupied the same physical and temporal space for church services, despite the existence of a racial hierarchy within the church. For example, while all congregants received Communion during the same church service, whites were the first to receive it, and blacks were likely to be relegated to the back of the church (De Gruchy, 2004). Despite the solidification of racial and ethnic stratification, baptism was meant to serve as the foundation upon which all people received Communion. This practice was strongly affirmed by the church in 1829, when the NGK Synod wrote that Holy Communion should be given “simultaneously to all members without distinction of color or origin” as a result of the “unshakable principle based on the infallible Word of God” (De Gruchy, 2004, p. 7).*

*This changed in 1857 when the South African Synod gave in to white lobbying and shifted to permitting separate spaces of worship along racial lines. De Gruchy hints at the magnitude of this change when he writes “South African social history... might have been very different if the sacraments had been ‘rightly administered’ and truly represented the reconciling power of the gospel” (De Gruchy, 2002, p. 97).<sup>29</sup>*

Stott explains how the theological justification of apartheid emerged within the dominant Dutch Reformed Church.

*“Added to their history (which gave them this sense of destiny) was their theology (which gave them their theory of race). It was this combination which undergirded their determination to ensure their distinct survival by means of apartheid.... But keeping South Africa white could only be achieved through white domination.”<sup>30</sup>*

Paul Kruger was President of South Africa from 1881-1902. He drew parallels between the ancient Israelites and Afrikaners in their journey from slavery to freedom in the Promised Land. Michael Prior, in his book, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique*, points out,

*“According to Kruger, God chose his Volk in the Cape Colony and brought them out into the wilderness, and having chastened them, made a covenant with them, and ‘the enemies were defeated and the trekkers inhabited the land which God had given them in this rightful manner... For Kruger, black Africans were not among God’s people, and were destined to be kept in perpetual subjugation to their white masters.”<sup>31</sup>*

Alexander Wilmot, an author and member of the Legislative Council of the Cape Colony wrote in 1889,

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<sup>28</sup> Stott, *ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>29</sup> Corrado, “The Godliness of Apartheid Planning” *South African History Online*, (5 October 2013) <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/godliness-apartheid-planning-elizabeth-corrado-university-illinois-5-october-2013>

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>31</sup> Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 89-90.

*“The existence of the coloured races is an immense benefit, as by means of them, cheap labour is obtainable, and large agricultural supplies can be constantly procured; but Southern Africa, although its population chiefly comprises the descendants of stalwart nomadic races who have migrated from the northern part of the continent, is eminently, a White man’s country, where homes can be found for millions of the overflowing population of Europe.”*<sup>32</sup>

The Natives Act (1923) became the basis for segregation in South Africa determining that indigenous urban African ‘locations’ should be separated from white towns.

*“Segregation enabled the cities to function with black workers, but without their presence in sufficient numbers to disturb white domination, and was formally institutionalised in the apartheid laws. Under the terms of the Act, the Africans, although 67 per cent of the population, kept only 7.3 per cent of the land. For. While they were restricted to reserves, but since they were needed for cheap labour, the segregation spread into the white areas.”*<sup>33</sup>

The Dutch Reformed Church Mission Policy of 1935 insisted,

*“The Afrikaner’s traditional fear of equalisation (“gelykstelling”) between black and white was born from his aversion to the idea of racial mixing. The Church declares itself straightforwardly opposed to this mixing and to everything that promotes ... While the church does declare itself opposed to social equalisation (“gelykstelling”) in the sense of the disregard for the racial and colour differences between blacks and whites in daily life, it wishes to encourage and promote social differentiation and cultural segregation to the benefit of both sections.”*<sup>34</sup>

In 1944, Prof J D du Toit (better known as Totius), the Afrikaans poet and Bible translator gave an address on “*Die Godsdienstige Grondslag van ons Rassebeleid*” [The Religious Foundation of our Race Policy] at the National People’s Congress (“Volkskongres”) on Race Policy, held in Bloemfontein. According to Robert Vosloo, he began by saying,

*“‘Give me a Bible text,’ says the opponent of our colour policy, ‘a text that proves that segregation is in agreement with the utterances of Holy Scripture.’ ‘I have no text,’ is my answer. ‘Then I have won the case, says the advocate for equality’ ... I answer: ... ‘I don’t have a text, but I have the Bible, the whole.’”*<sup>35</sup>

Totius then proceeded to present a defence of racial segregation on biblical grounds.

*“In Genesis 1, Totius argues, we read that God creates a beautiful unity. But how does God do this? God acts as the Hammabdil, i.e. the Separator or Divider (“Skeidingmaker”). As the “great Divider”, God separates light and darkness, the dry land from the waters, the living creatures according to their kind. God created things*

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<sup>32</sup> Leonard Thompson, *The Political Mythology of Apartheid* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985), p. 93.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>34</sup> Cited in Vosloo, *ibid.*,

<sup>35</sup> Apartheid as Kerklike Beleid I." Die Kerkbode, 22 September 1948, 664-665, cited in Robert Vosloo, “The Bible and the justification of apartheid in Reformed circles in the 1940’s in South Africa. Some historical, hermeneutical and theological remarks”. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* (2015)



*not as a mixed mass, but as separated and segregated. Drawing on Acts 17:26, Totius admits that God created the nations out of one blood, but notes that this verse further states that God determined the boundaries of their territory. However, in Genesis 11 we read how the tower builders, drawing on their own wisdom and in resistance to God's command ("in hulle eiewysheid en verset"), did not want to trek any further, and wanted to remain one nation with one language. But, according to Totius, God again acts as the "Divider" ("Skeidingmaker") by creating a confusion of languages and dispersing the nations over the whole earth (Genesis 11:9). Therefore the nations should stand their ground ("hulleself handhaaf") against this Babylonian spirit of unification ("die Babiloniese gees van eenmaking"). For Totius, God willed the coming into being of the nations, but not the formation of empires (cf. Dan 7: Rev 17:13)*

*Given this emphasis on the idea that God (as Divider) created the nations, Totius then goes on to challenge the idea of "gelykstelling" (equalisation) between the races as defended by what he calls "die humaniteitsmense" ("the humanist people"), with their references to texts such as Colossians 3:11 and Galatians 3:28. The point for Totius here is that the unity depicted in these texts refers to a spiritual unity in Christ in which distinctions and separations remain intact.*

*Readers of Totius's text today will probably be struck by his reference to Africa as a "dark swamp" ("donker moeras") that is set over against "civilisation," as well as his depiction of the Afrikaner nation ("Boerenasie") as a "new type" that came into being out of a remarkable and miraculous convergence of bloodlines.*

*The heart of Totius's argument for racial separation lies in his emphasis on the idea that what God has separated we should not put together. God wills pluriformity, and unity is to be viewed as a spiritual unity in Christ. Hence he wants no equalising of races ("geen gelykstelling"), because this reflects the Babylonian agenda of imposing equalisation where there is in fact no equality."<sup>36</sup>*

Vosloo points out that in his address to the People's Congress in 1944, Totius speaks of "Christian guardianship".

*"Fellow South Africans, here is the calling from God on high, namely to nurture the native in his coming of age ... The wonderful God who guided our fathers as torch bearers for black Africa will also lead and inspire us under possibly even more difficult conditions to be bearers of light where the darkness still prevails."<sup>37</sup>*

Vosloo also points out that although this was clearly not the first time the Bible was used to justify apartheid,

*"What was important about the 1944 congress, though, was that it brought discussions that were found in a small circle of academics and pastors to a wider public. The decisions taken at the "Volkskongres" draw together several of the motifs already highlighted from Totius's address. The congress decided*

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<sup>36</sup> Vosloo, *ibid.*,

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*,

*“That it is to the benefit of whites as well as blacks that a policy of apartheid be followed ... And that it is the duty of the whites to act as guardians over the black races ... And that in the best interest of all races there shall be no further mixing of blood.”*<sup>38</sup>

Totius summarises his arguments thus,

*“Firstly, what God united, no one may divide. This is the basis of our plea for unity among Afrikaners... Secondly, we may not unite what God has divided. The council of God is realised in pluriformity... Consequently, we do not want any equalization or bastardization.”*<sup>39</sup>

P.J. Loots, another Dutch Reformed Church theologian, claimed apartheid was self-evident.

*“From this reformed principle of separate, independent groups within the kingdom of God flows our policy of apartheid in church and state. This is a universal principle which was, according to scripture and Nature, instituted by the Great Creator and which the Afrikaner people and the Church of the Boers have to defend to the utmost, especially against modern liberalism’s policy of equalization.”*<sup>40</sup>

In 1949, the *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act* was passed which banned the marriage of “Europeans and non-Europeans”. This was intended to protect the racial purity of the minority Afrikaners. Professor Dr A. B. Dupreez, attempted to give the legislation a biblical justification, asking rhetorically,

*“Is it God’s will, that all nations he has created in such rich diversity should now be equalized and assimilated, through intermarriage, to a uniform and mixed race?”*<sup>41</sup>

In 1974, the Dutch Reformed Church published a report entitled, *“Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scriptures.”* Once again they insisted that segregation of different ethnic groups was based on Scripture.

*“The Scriptures... teach and uphold the ethnic diversity of the human race... a political system based on the autogenous or separate development of various population groups can be justified from the Bible.”*<sup>42</sup>

Kevin Giles observes,

*“This [apartheid] theology was backed by virtually every Reformed theologian in South Africa. The unambiguous and overwhelming support of Apartheid by the Reformed*

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Michael Prior, *ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>41</sup> Professor Dr A.B. Dupreez, *Inside the South African Crucible* (Kapstaad-Pretoria, HAUM, 1959), p. 63. cited in Stott, *ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>42</sup> Stott, *ibid.*, p. 275. See also Johan M van der Merwe, *The Dutch Reformed Church from Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture to Church and Society: the struggle goes on.* <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/she/v39n1/10.pdf>

churches justified and legitimated the system. One of their most respected theologians, F. Potgeiter, summed up what was believed:

*"It is quite clear that no one can ever be a proponent of integration on the basis of the scriptures. It would be in a direct contradiction of the revealed will of God to plead for a commonality between whites, coloured, and Blacks."*<sup>43</sup>

Michael Prior, in *The Bible and Colonialism*, points out,

*"Deuteronomy's prohibition of mixing with the indigenous people (7:3-4) provided the scriptural basis for the South African immorality act prohibiting mixed marriages, so that Afrikaners would be kept pure. Just as the Israelites were a minority, who, through the help of God, acquired possession of the land, so too the South African Calvinists regarded their possession of the land as divinely ordained... the South African Calvinists were insensitive to the fact that the land had already been inhabited. The occupation of the land was to be celebrated..."*<sup>44</sup>

Resistance to apartheid on theological grounds began to surface in the 1960's.

*"In 1960, ten leading Reformed Afrikaner theologians published a series of essays condemning Apartheid and the claim that the Bible endorsed racial separation. They were put on trial for heresy, found guilty, and denounced by the prime minister, Dr. H. Verwoerd, himself a theologian."*

*"In 1963, Beyers Naudé, another Afrikaner theologian, spoke out and wrote in opposition to the claim that the Bible supported Apartheid. Naudé and his family were completely ostracized by their fellow Afrikaners. He was forced to resign as minister and put out of his home without a salary."*<sup>45</sup>

A seismic shift occurred in South Africa in the 1980's following mounting political as well as theological international pressure. In 1982, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches passed a motion declaring apartheid to be a "heresy" and ejected the South African Dutch Reformed Churches from the Alliance. The *Washington Post* reported,

*"The two all-white Dutch Reformed churches that claim the loyalties of more than half of South Africa's ruling white Afrikaners were voted out of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches last night for the "heresy" of racial segregation... Last night's action by the Alliance, which has nearly a dozen U.S. denominations in its membership, climaxed years of warnings and resolutions condemning apartheid..."*

*Last night's vote leaves South Africa's white churches virtually isolated from the rest of the Christian world. They withdrew from the World Council of Churches more than a decade ago because of the council's stand against racism and its financial support of organizations fighting racism and white domination.*

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<sup>43</sup> Giles, *ibid.*,

<sup>44</sup> Prior, *ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>45</sup> Giles, *ibid.*,

*The Afrikaner churches broke off from the Netherlands mother church and the South African Council of Churches for the same reasons. Dropping out of the South African council also has isolated the Afrikaans churches from the rest of South Africa's churches--Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Congregational -- all of which have condemned apartheid.*"<sup>46</sup>

In 1986, the US Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act added economic pressure on South Africa, as did protests at the continued imprisonment of Nelson Mandela. The growth of a global grassroots campaign of boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) left South Africa increasingly isolated economically, apart from a few sympathetic nations such as Israel who engaged in sanction busting.

A series of statements by South African theologians followed, the most significant being the *Kairos Document* (1985)<sup>47</sup> written by 150 Black theologians predominantly from the townships of Soweto. The document challenged the churches' response to what the authors saw as the vicious policies of the apartheid regime under the state of emergency declared on 21 July 1985. In the first Chapter, entitled "The Moment of Truth" they insisted,

*"The time has come. The moment of truth has arrived. South Africa has been plunged into a crisis that is shaking the foundations and there is every indication that the crisis has only just begun and that it will deepen and become even more threatening in the months to come. It is the KAIROS or moment of truth not only for apartheid but also for the Church."*<sup>48</sup>

In Chapter 2, entitled, "Critique of State Theology" the authors insist,

*"The South African Apartheid State has a theology of its own and we have chosen to call it 'State Theology.' 'State Theology' is simply the theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism. It blesses injustice, canonizes the will of the powerful and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy.*

*How does 'State Theology' do this? It does it by misusing theological concepts and biblical texts for its own political purposes. In this document we would like to draw your attention to four key examples of how this is done in South Africa. The first would be the use of Romans 13:1-7 to give an absolute and 'divine' authority to the State. The second would be the use of the idea of 'Law and Order' to determine and control what the people may be permitted to regard as just and unjust. The third would be the use of the word 'communist' to brand anyone who rejects 'State Theology.' And finally, there is the use that is made of the name of God."*<sup>49</sup>

In particular, they criticised the way:

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<sup>46</sup> "Two S. African All-White Churches Suspended from World Body" *Washington Post*, (26 August 1982) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/08/26/two-s-african-all-white-churches-suspended-from-world-body/41d45740-7aec-4937-b62d-91cf0215dfc7/>

<sup>47</sup> Kairos Document (25 September 1985) <https://kairossouthernafrika.wordpress.com/2011/05/08/the-south-africa-kairos-document-1985/>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.,

*"State security becomes a more important concern than justice ... The State often admonishes church leaders ... not to 'meddle in politics' while at the same time it indulges in its own political theology which claims God's approval for its use of violence in maintaining an unjust system of 'law and order'"*<sup>50</sup>

Describing attempts to justify apartheid theologically as “*not only heretical, it is blasphemous*” the *Kairos Document*, called for action, civil disobedience, and, above all, moral leadership because God sides with the oppressed. The authors conclude:

*“To say that the Church must now take sides unequivocally and consistently with the poor and the oppressed is to overlook the fact that the majority of Christians in South Africa have already done so. By far the greater part of the Church in South Africa is poor and oppressed. Of course, it cannot be taken for granted that everyone who is oppressed has taken up their own cause and is struggling for their own liberation. Nor can it be assumed that all oppressed Christians are fully aware of the fact that their cause is God’s cause. Nevertheless, it remains true that the Church is already on the side of the oppressed because that is where the majority of its members are to be found. This fact needs to be appropriated and confirmed by the Church as a whole. At the beginning of this document, it was pointed out that the present crisis has highlighted the divisions in the Church. We are a divided Church precisely because not all the members of our Churches have taken sides against oppression. In other words not all Christians have united themselves with God “who is always on the side of the oppressed” (Ps 103:6). As far as the present crisis is concerned, there is only one way forward to Church unity and that is for those Christians who find themselves on the side of the oppressor or sitting on the fence, to cross over to the other side to be united in faith and action with those who are oppressed. Unity and reconciliation within the Church itself is only possible around God and Jesus Christ who are to be found on the side of the poor and the oppressed.”*<sup>51</sup>

A year later, in July 1986, 130 black evangelicals published *Evangelical Witness in South Africa*<sup>52</sup> which similarly called for a radical repentance among white Christians for the way they had justified apartheid and had acquiesced at its brutalities.

*“As with the first Kairos Document, the Concerned Evangelicals wished to draw Christian attention to the moral and spiritual necessity of a decisive political commitment to opposing Apartheid, and the profound spiritual and denominational perils involved in attempting to remain neutral by-standers in the unfolding horror.”*<sup>53</sup>

Increasingly isolated, in October 1986, the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa published *Church and Society*.<sup>54</sup> This marked a complete reversal of its defence of apartheid.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>52</sup> *Evangelical Witness in South Africa: A Critique of Evangelical Theology and Practice* by South African Evangelicals (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1986)

<sup>53</sup> Patrick Holt, Amazon Review (24 April 2010) <https://www.amazon.com/Evangelical-Witness-South-Africa-Evangelicals/dp/0802802915>

<sup>54</sup> “Church and society: a testimony approved by the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church October 1986” (Bloemfontein : General Synodical Commission in collaboration with Pro Christo Publishers, 1987) <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/2242576>

*“Racism is a grievous sin which no person or church may defend or practise... As a moral aberration, it deprives a human being of his dignity, his obligations and his rights. It must be rejected and opposed in all its manifestations” (para. 112).*

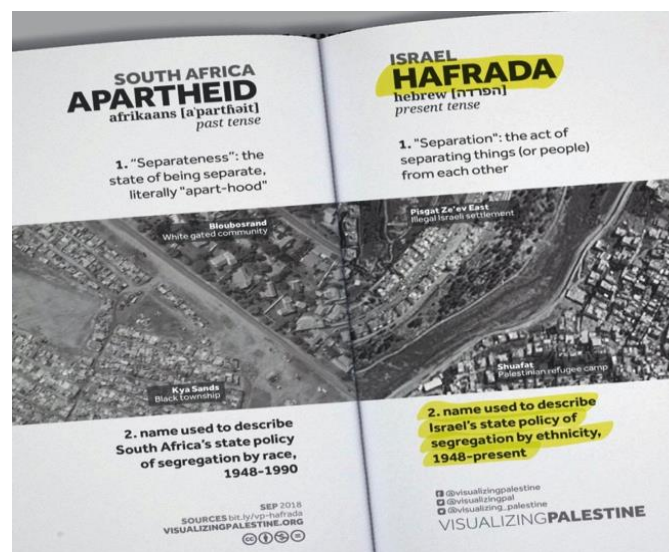
*“Apartheid... a forced separation and division of peoples, cannot be considered a biblical imperative. The attempt to justify such a prescription as derived from the Bible must be recognized as an error and be denounced.” (para. 305)<sup>55</sup>*

In October 1998, the Dutch Reformed Church re-joined the World Alliance of Reformed Churches after its General Synod had renounced apartheid.

*“In 1986 the DRC admitted that it erred by using the bible as a foundation of racial segregation. In 1990, the church also declared its personal guilt and responsibility for the political, social, economic and structural injustices in South Africa. Despite admitting its role in racial segregation, the DRC continued to be racially segregated with White churches and White congregations still controlling huge amounts of land and wealth in contrast with churches of their Non-White congregations. As a consequence, the WARC held back admitting the DRC back into the alliance. A meeting was held in 1997 by the DRC and the WARC which resulted in a statement by the DRC in 1998 where the church denounced apartheid as wrong and sinful in its fundamental nature, effects and operations. As a consequence, the WARC lifted the suspension of the DRC and readmitted the church in 1998.”<sup>56</sup>*

## 1.4 Israeli Apartheid

The Afrikaans word “Apartheid” meaning “apartness” is translated “Hafrada” in Hebrew. Ironically, while denying that it is an apartheid state, the Israeli government uses the word to describe the Separation Wall which weaves its way through the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the route of which is purposely designed to maximise the amount of land to be annexed while minimising the number of Palestinians still living on it.



<sup>55</sup> Cited in Stott, Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>56</sup> “The Dutch Reformed Church rejoins the World Alliance of Reformed Churches” *South African History Online* (13 October 1998), <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/dutch-reformed-church-rejoins-world-alliance-reformed-churches>

The Wall epitomises the two policies at the heart of the Israeli version of apartheid, - the subjugation of Palestinians and the sequestration of Palestinian land. This policy is achieved in numerous ways described by Jeff Halper, the Israeli anthropologist, as a “Matrix of Control”.<sup>57</sup>

*“It is a system of control designed*

- 1. to allow Israel to control every aspect of Palestinian life in the Occupied Territories, while*
- 2. lowering Israel's military profile in order to give the impression to the outside that what Palestinians refer to as "occupation" is merely proper administration, and that Israel has a "duty" to defend itself and the status quo, yet*
- 3. creating enough space for a dependent Palestinian mini-state that will relieve Israel of the Palestinian population while*
- 4. deflecting, through the use of "administrative" image and bureaucratic mechanisms, international opposition and thus to maintain control indefinitely and, in the final analysis,*
- 5. to force the Palestinians to despair of ever achieving a viable and truly sovereign state and to accept any settlement offered by Israeli. ("Time is on our side" is, as Sharon has often said, a cornerstone of Israeli policy.)*

*A second set of controls derives from Israel's policy of "creating facts on the ground" virtually all of them in violation of international law (including the Fourth Geneva Convention signed by Israel itself). These include:*

- Massive expropriation of Palestinian land;*
- Construction of more than 200 settlements and the transfer of 400,000 Israelis across the 1967 boundaries: about 200,000 in the West Bank, 200,000 in East Jerusalem and 6000 in Gaza (the latter occupying a fourth of the land, including most of the coastline);*
- Carving the Occupied Territories into areas -- Areas "A," "B," "C," "D" in the West Bank; "H-1" and "H-2" in Hebron; Yellow, Green, Blue and White Areas in Gaza; nature reserves; closed military areas, security zones, and "open green spaces" of restricted housing over more than half of Palestinian East Jerusalem - which confine the Palestinians to some 190 islands all surrounded by Israeli settlements, roads and checkpoints;*
- Carving the Occupied Territories into areas -- Areas "A," "B," "C," "D" in the West Bank; "H-1" and "H-2" in Hebron; Yellow, Green, Blue and White Areas in Gaza; nature reserves; closed military areas, security zones, and "open green spaces" of restricted housing over more than half of Palestinian East Jerusalem - which confine the Palestinians to some 190 islands all surrounded by Israeli settlements, roads and checkpoints;*
- A massive system of highways and by-pass roads designed to link settlements, to create barriers between Palestinian areas and to incorporate the West Bank into Israel proper;*
- Imposing severe controls on Palestinian movement;*
- Construction of seven industrial parks that give new life to isolated settlements, exploit cheap Palestinian labor while denying it access to Israel,*

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<sup>57</sup> Jeff Halper, *Decolonizing Israel, Liberating Palestine: Zionism, Settler Colonialism, and the Case for One Democratic State* (London, Pluto, 2021)

*rob Palestinian cities of their economic vitality, control key locations and ensure Israel's ability to continue dumping its industrial wastes onto the West Bank;*

- *Maintaining control over aquifers and other vital natural resources;*
- *Exploiting holy places (Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem, the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron and others in and around Jerusalem) as pretexts for maintaining a "security presence," and hence military control.*<sup>58</sup>

Halper concludes,

*"The Matrix of Control represents Israel's success in establishing a system of control over the Occupied Territories that has lasted decades. Its usefulness does not end there. Because it renders the Occupation invisible, it is capable of deflecting opposition at home and abroad. Although it was Israel who prejudiced the outcome of the Oslo negotiations by measurably strengthening its grip over the Occupied Territories and offering concessions that left its control intact, it is the Palestinians who have been almost universally blamed for the breakdown of the "peace process." An understanding of the Matrix of Control is essential for comprehending the sources of the present conflict and the obstacles to its resolution. Only dismantling it will lead to a just and lasting peace. This is the only way that Israel's long-standing and ongoing campaign of "creating facts on the ground" can be effectively neutralized."*<sup>59</sup>

John Reynolds is Associate Professor of International Law at Maynooth University. In an article published in the *Irish Times* in April 2021, he summarised the emerging political and academic recognition that Israel was, like South Africa, practising apartheid in its policies toward the Palestinian people.

*"In 1961, Hendrik Verwoerd declared that 'Israel, like South Africa, is an apartheid state'. As an architect of apartheid, and South African Prime Minister at the time, he spoke from a position of some authority. In the sixty years since, the suggestion of Israeli apartheid has never gone away. In 1965, Fayez Sayegh wrote about the 'practitioners of apartheid in Palestine'. In the 1970s, Edward Said characterised the Israeli-Palestinian relationship as 'a specific, continuing process of dispossession, displacement, and colonial de facto apartheid'. Since the 1980s, Palestinian and Israeli scholars like Elia Zureik, Uri Davis, Leila Farsakh, Raef Zreik, Ilan Pappé and many others have produced ever-deeper analysis of Israeli apartheid. Prominent South Africans from Desmond Tutu to Ronnie Kasrils say the conditions they witnessed in Palestine remind them so viscerally of their own experiences of apartheid."*<sup>60</sup>

Sir Yehudi Menuhin, the world-renowned Jewish violinist, was awarded the prestigious Wolf Prize in 1991 by the Israeli Government. In response, he gave a speech in the Israeli Knesset expressing the views of many Jews concerning Israel's occupation of the West Bank.

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<sup>58</sup> Jeff Halper, "The Key to Peace: Dismantling the Matrix of Control", <https://icahd.org/get-the-facts/matrix-control/>

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>60</sup> John Reynolds, "Discrimination against Palestinians constitutes apartheid", *The Irish Times* (27 April 2021), <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/discrimination-against-palestinians-constitutes-apartheid-1.4549053>



*“This wasteful governing by fear, by contempt for the basic dignities of life, this steady asphyxiation of a dependent people, should be the very last means to be adopted by those who themselves know too well the awful significance, the unforgettable suffering of such an existence. It is unworthy of my great people, the Jews, who have striven to abide by a code of moral rectitude for some 5,000 years, who can create and achieve a society for themselves such as we see around us but can yet deny the sharing of its great qualities and benefits to those dwelling amongst them.”<sup>61</sup>*

Uri Davis, the Israeli author and anti-Zionist, was the first to critique Israel as an apartheid state in his ground breaking book, *Israel: An Apartheid State*, in 1987.<sup>62</sup> Davis was also the first Jew to be elected to the Revolutionary Council of the Palestinian Fatah movement. He was also involved in the first UN World Conference Against Racism held in Durban in 2001.

*“He distinguishes between racism and apartheid, which, he argues, requires not simply an official value system that distinguishes on a racial basis but a legal reality. Indeed, Davis has written that it is wrong to single out Israel on the grounds that it is more racist than other states in the UN. Rather he believes it should be singled out because, as he wrote in a letter to Al-Ahram newspaper in 2003, “it applies the force of law to compel its citizens to make racial choices, first and foremost in all matters pertaining to access to land, housing and freedom of residence”.*<sup>63</sup>

Davis wrote a sequel, *“Apartheid Israel: Possibilities for the struggle within”* in 2003.<sup>64</sup> It has been described as the most thorough critique to date of Israel’s legal and political structure from a human rights perspective.<sup>65</sup>

In 2001, the African National Congress observed the similarities between the policies of the former white South African government and that of Israel.

*“Until its defeat, South Africa’s apartheid regime found much in common with their Israeli counterparts. Both Afrikaner nationalism, as manifest in the apartheid state, and Zionism, as manifest in the Israeli state, propagated the ideology of an exclusive ‘chosen people’. In Israel today, the government classifies its citizens as either Jew or non-Jew. These classifications are stamped into official identity documents. Political, social and economic rights and goods are allocated on the basis of this classification. Such an approach is familiar to black South Africans. It is racist.”*<sup>66</sup>

Archbishop Desmond Tutu summarises this assessment of the Israeli government’s policy toward Palestinians. *“Apartheid is back, complete with the ‘Separation Wall’ and Bantustans. History, it seems, repeats itself.”*<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Wolf Prize winner raps government’ *Jerusalem Post* (May 6, 1991).

<sup>62</sup> Uri Davis, *Israel: An Apartheid State* (London, Zed, 1987)

<sup>63</sup> Peter Beaumont, “Why Israeli Jew Uri Davis joined Fatah to save Palestine” *The Guardian* (23 August 2009) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/aug/23/uri-davis-interview-israel-fatah-palestine>

<sup>64</sup> Uri Davis, *Apartheid Israel: Possibilities for the struggle within* (London, Zed, 2003)

<sup>65</sup> Nils Butenschon, Director, Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo, cited on back cover, Davis, *Ibid.*,

<sup>66</sup>ANC Statement: World cannot ignore the plight of the Palestinian people, 25 August 2001.

[http://www.badil.org/Resources/WCAR/ANC\\_Statement.htm](http://www.badil.org/Resources/WCAR/ANC_Statement.htm)

<sup>67</sup> Desmond Tutu, foreword to *Speaking the Truth About Zionism and Israel*, ed. Michael Prior, (London, Melisende, 2004).

In 2004, I was commissioned by World Vision UK to write a position paper entitled “*The Faithful Remnant: The Uncertain Future of the Church in the Holy Land*” to help promote World Vision projects in Palestine. It was however, never published, in part because I insisted on using the term ‘Apartheid’ to describe Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories. Reynold’s observes,

*“Israel’s primary defence against long-standing allegations of apartheid is that Palestinians who have Israeli citizenship can vote. But only 1.6 million of the 6.8 million Palestinians living under Israeli jurisdiction have that status, in contrast to all 6.8 million Jewish Israelis under the same regime. The imposition of a military rather than civil regime over the majority of Palestinians is coupled with what Human Rights Watch calls a ‘two tiered-citizenship structure and bifurcation of nationality and citizenship’ under Israeli law.*

*Israel’s Nation-State Law reiterates this as a constitutional reality in elevating the Jewish character of the state above its democratic character. Prime Minister Netanyahu has made clear that ‘Israel is not a state of all its citizens’ but rather ‘the nation-state of the Jewish people and only them’. Many people might support this as a political project, but cannot at the same time deny that it is an apartheid reality that subjugates Palestinians. Human Rights Watch also makes clear that Israel has used ‘security as a pretext to advance demographic objectives’, and that legitimate security concerns do not permit or mitigate the crime of apartheid.”<sup>68</sup>*

In 2021, two major human rights reports were published by Human Rights Watch<sup>69</sup> and B’Tselem.<sup>70</sup> Both defined Israel as an apartheid state.

*“B’Tselem (literally: in the image of), the name chosen for the organization by the late Member of Knesset Yossi Sarid is an allusion to Genesis 1:27: “And God created humankind in His image. In the image of God did He create them.” The name expresses the Jewish and universal moral edict to respect and uphold the human rights of all people.”<sup>71</sup>*

B’Tselem’s report “*This is Apartheid*” is subtitled, “*A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid*” and explains how Israel divides, separates and rules over the lives of Palestinians.

*“In the entire area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, the Israeli regime implements laws, practices and state violence designed to cement the supremacy of one group – Jews – over another – Palestinians. A key method in pursuing this goal is engineering space differently for each group.*

*Jewish citizens live as though the entire area were a single space (excluding the Gaza Strip). The Green Line means next to nothing for them: whether they live west of it,*

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<sup>68</sup> Reynolds, *ibid.*,

<sup>69</sup> Human Rights Watch, “A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution, (27 April 2021), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>

<sup>70</sup> B’Tselem, “This is Apartheid” (12 January 2021) [https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101\\_this\\_is\\_apartheid](https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid)

<sup>71</sup> B’Tselem, [https://www.btselem.org/about\\_btselem](https://www.btselem.org/about_btselem)

*within Israel's sovereign territory, or east of it, in settlements not formally annexed to Israel, is irrelevant to their rights or status.*

*Where Palestinians live, on the other hand, is crucial. The Israeli regime has divided the area into several units that it defines and governs differently, according to different rights in each. This division is relevant to Palestinians only. The geographic space, which is contiguous for Jews, is a fragmented mosaic for Palestinians.”<sup>72</sup>*

The B'Tselem report concludes,

*“The Israeli regime does not have to declare itself an apartheid regime to be defined as such, nor is it relevant that representatives of the state broadly proclaim it a democracy. What defines apartheid is not statements but practice. While South Africa declared itself an apartheid regime in 1948, it is unreasonable to expect other states to follow suit given the historical repercussions. The response of most countries to South Africa's apartheid is likelier to deter countries from admitting to implementing a similar regime. It is also clear that what was possible in 1948 is no longer possible today, both legally and in terms of public opinion.*

*As painful as it may be to look reality in the eye, it is more painful to live under a boot. The harsh reality described here may deteriorate further if new practices are introduced – with or without accompanying legislation. Nevertheless, people created this regime and people can make it worse – or work to replace it. That hope is the driving force behind this position paper. How can people fight injustice if it is unnamed? Apartheid is the organizing principle, yet recognizing this does not mean giving up. On the contrary: it is a call for change.*

*Fighting for a future based on human rights, liberty and justice is especially crucial now. There are various political paths to a just future here, between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, but all of us must first choose to say no to apartheid.”<sup>73</sup>*

Reynolds summarises the significance of the Human Rights Watch report, “*A Threshold Crossed*”.

*“A 220-page report published by Human Rights Watch is titled *A Threshold Crossed*, and concludes that, from an international law perspective, Israel has indeed crossed the line into apartheid.*

*This follows a stream of similar findings by Palestinian and Israel human rights organisations, international lawyers, and UN bodies. It is clear that another threshold has also been crossed in recent years: the allegation of Israeli apartheid itself has decisively crossed into the mainstream.*

*Human Rights Watch is one of the largest human rights organisations in the world, and is as moderate and mainstream as they come...*

*It has now determined itself that Israel has ‘demonstrated an intent to maintain the domination of Jewish Israelis ... with systematic oppression of Palestinians and inhumane acts committed against them’. This is, Human Rights Watch makes clear,*

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.,

*the crime of apartheid, and it is being perpetrated across Israel-Palestine in its entirety. (The organisation similarly found previously that Myanmar has imposed apartheid on the Rohingya people).*

*According to the report, a systemic array of 'laws, policies, and statements by leading Israeli officials make plain that the objective of maintaining Jewish-Israeli control over demographics, political power and land has long guided government policy'. A chapter on systematic oppression and institutional discrimination totals almost 100 pages and painstakingly details the extent of this discrimination between the two groups across virtually every aspect of life: legal status, land, housing, planning, mobility, roads, tax, education, healthcare, water, sewage."*<sup>74</sup>

In the same way that South African theologians justified apartheid from selective biblical texts, so too many Christian Zionists are apologists for apartheid in Israel.

*"evangelical and Reformed theologians can, with Bible in hand, find arguments from Scripture to justify and legitimate their rule over others. Furthermore, no matter what awful consequences follow from their theology, they remain adamant that God has set them over others."*<sup>75</sup>

## **2. The Biblical Justification of Apartheid**

In *"The Godliness of Apartheid Planning"*, Elizabeth Corrado summarises how influential Dutch Reformed theologians found biblical justification for apartheid to legitimize their supremacism and rule over others.

*"It is important to explore the ideas of key apartheid theologians like Totius, J.W. Coetzee, Abraham Kuyper, and E.P. Groenewald to garner insight into the specifics of theological justification. Totius designed some of the earliest biblical proofs; for example, he used the story of the Tower of Babel to illustrate that God had willed the separation of distinct nations... J.W. Coetzee used "experiential proofs," relying on the idea that racial integration had disastrous consequences so God must not have willed it. Kuyper was a Dutch Calvinist whose work was adapted and adopted by the NGK in South Africa. The theological concept of "Pluriformity"- the idea of diversity in church practice- became part of the religious justification for maintaining a separation of races via apartheid in the South African context, and takes center stage when examining Kuyper's role in apartheid theologizing. Groenewald synthesized many earlier ideas into influential reports like "Racial and National Apartheid in the Bible." He was considered the first theologian to work out a biblical base for apartheid."*<sup>76</sup>

In this regard, South African theologians merely followed the precedent set by American theologians who had earlier justified segregation from the scriptures. Both used the same passages, relying especially on the Book of Genesis.

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<sup>74</sup> Reynolds, *Ibid.*,

<sup>75</sup> Giles, *ibid.*,

<sup>76</sup> Corrado, *ibid.*,

Essentially, they argued that God had willed the creation and separation of the different ethnic groups or nations in their own lands, insisting therefore that apartheid was “*pleasing to God because it was endorsed by Scripture.*”<sup>77</sup>

*“The “biblical” case for Apartheid is as follows:*

- 1. The world is predicated on a number of unchanging creation “orders” (i.e. God-given hierarchies, institutions, structures, and relationships), namely, the family, male leadership, the state, work, and race.*
- 2. The Bible teaches that God has created different races. The story of Babel tells us that the separation of people into different races with different languages is God's will. In Acts 2:5-11, Rev. 5:9, 7:9, 14:6, and other passages, the Bible clearly states that God recognizes that people are divided and identified by race. For the Apartheid theologians, difference between races trumped any similarities.*
- 3. Acts 17:26 was possibly the most important text for Apartheid theologians. “From our one ancestor God made all nations (Greek ethnoi) to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the time of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live.” This text was interpreted to mean that God had divided all the people of the world into different nations or races and allocated a region for each. They saw this as unambiguous endorsement of the policy of separating the different races of South Africa and allotting an area to each... This one text settled the matter. Those who accepted what it said were obeying God, and those who did not, were opposing God.*
- 4. The government has the right to create laws and citizens must obey them (Rom. 13:1-7).*
- 5. No possible rational or moral objection can be made to the idea of different races each having their own geographical area to develop separately at their own pace. (... You would never guess from these words that Apartheid theology gave precedence to whites.)”<sup>78</sup>*

Likewise, during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century a theological movement emerged called ‘Dispensationalism’ which emphasized that God has a separate plan for the Jews apart from the Church. John Nelson Darby, one of the founders of the Brethren, along with Cyrus Scofield, through his *Scofield Reference Bible*, popularised the novel idea that God has two chosen peoples and two separate plans, one being fulfilled through the Church, the other through Israel. According to Scofield,

*“Comparing then, what is said in Scripture concerning Israel and the Church, we find that in origin, calling, promise, worship, principles of conduct and future destiny all is contrast.”<sup>79</sup>*

Lewis Sperry Chafer, one of Scofield’s students, elaborates on this dichotomy between Israel and the Church,

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<sup>77</sup> Giles, *Ibid.*,

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>79</sup> C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course*, 19th edn. (Chicago, Moody Bible Institute), p. 23. For an elaboration on the biblical hermeneutic of Christian Zionism see <http://www.stephensizer.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/Christian-Zionism-Master-Theology-part-2.pdf>

*“The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity... Israel is an eternal nation, heir to an eternal land, with an eternal kingdom, on which David rules from an eternal throne’ so that in eternity ...never the twain, Israel and church, shall meet.”<sup>80</sup>*

G.T. Gillespie’s 1954 pamphlet *A Christian View of Segregation*<sup>81</sup> is one of the clearest expositions of the biblical justification for segregation. For convenience many of the comments below, including headings, are derived from his pamphlet.

### **2.1 The Separation of Cain and Seth (Genesis 4:11-26)**

*“A mark is placed upon Cain, and he is separated from the other branch of the human family, represented by Seth and his descendants. From Cain were descended men of great vigor and inventive genius, from Seth were descended men who began to call upon the name of the Lord, and were evidently those elsewhere referred to as "The Sons of God.”<sup>82</sup>*

### **2.2 Demoralization Resulting from Intermarriage (Genesis 6:1-7)**

*“The promiscuous intermarriage of the Sons of God, that is, the descendants of Seth, with the "Daughters of Men," who were apparently the descendants of Cain, resulted in the complete break-down of family life and such widespread immorality and wickedness as to provoke the Lord to destroy the earth with the flood. A possible though not necessary. inference from this tragic story is that the intermarriage of dissimilar groups, whether the differences be moral, cultural or physical, is not conducive to the preservation of wholesome family life or to morality, and therefore is contrary to the purpose and will of God.”<sup>83</sup>*

### **2.3 The Origin of Racial Boundaries (Genesis 9:18-29)**

Segregationists turned to the story of the flood as proof of the divine origin for the separation of people.

*“After the flood the three sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth, became the progenitors of three distinct racial groups, which were to repeople and overspread the earth. The descendants of Shem migrated eastward and occupied most of Asia; the descendants of Japheth migrated westward and ultimately occupied the continent of Europe, while the children of Ham moved generally southward toward the tropics and occupied the continent of Africa, and possibly southern Asia and the islands of the Pacific. This brief record, the accuracy of which has not been successfully disputed by the anthropologists and ethnologists, while affirming the unity of the race, also implies that an all-wise Providence has "determined the times before appointed, and*

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<sup>80</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Dispensationalism* (Dallas, Seminary Press, 1936), p. 107.

<sup>81</sup> Gillespie, *ibid.*,

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

*the bounds of their habitation." Which same Providence by determining the climatic and other physical conditions under which many successive generations of the several racial groups should live, is thereby equally responsible for the distinct racial characteristics which seem to have become fixed in prehistoric times, and which are chiefly responsible for the segregation of racial groups across the centuries and in our time.*"<sup>84</sup>

Gillespie makes at least two inconsistent assumptions in using this passage to defend segregation. He assumes that Japheth, Ham and Shem were the progenitors of three distinct racial groups and that logically, subsequent migrations by their descendants were without divine sanction. This is ironic since it would presumably deny any justification for Europeans colonising North America or South Africa.

Further, the curse of Canaan in verse 25 has been used to justify the enslavement of Africans. Everett Tilson, in *Segregation and the Bible*, points out five assumptions made by those using this verse to justify segregation and slavery.

*(1) That God pronounced the curse, (2) That the curse be biologically transferable, (3) That Ham be the original victim of the curse, (4) That the children of the original victim of the curse be slaves, (5) That the original victim of the curse be a member of the Negroid race.*"<sup>85</sup>

None of these assumptions may be proven from the text or subsequent passages. The curse was uttered by Noah upon Canaan and no one else. Canaan's descendants dominated the territory of Palestine and Jerusalem, which took its name from Canaan's son Jebus, remained in Canaanite hands at least until the time of David. The use of verse as a justification of slavery thousands of years later is rather tenuous.<sup>86</sup>

David M. Goldenberg, in his book, *"The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam"*<sup>87</sup> points out the misreading of Hebrew and other Semitic languages led to the mistaken belief that the word "Ham" meant "dark, black or heat."<sup>88</sup>

Benjamin Braude, a professor of history at Boston College and co-director of its program in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies, argues,

*"In 18th- and 19th-century Euro-America, Genesis 9:18-27 became the curse of Ham, a foundation myth for collective degradation, conventionally trotted out as God's reason for condemning generations of dark-skinned peoples from Africa to slavery,... in prior centuries, Jews, Christians and Muslims had exploited this story for other purposes, often tangential to the later peculiar preoccupation."*<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>85</sup> Everett Tilson, in *Segregation and the Bible* (New York, Abingdon Press, 1958), pp. 23-25.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 25

<sup>87</sup> David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New Jersey, Princeton, 2005)

<sup>88</sup> Felicia R. Lee "From Noah's Curse to Slavery's Rationale" New York Times (November 1, 2003)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/01/arts/from-noah-s-curse-to-slavery-s-rationale.html>

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.,

Stephen R. Haynes, the author of *“Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery”*<sup>90</sup> notes,

*“Slavery was necessary in the white Southern mind to control the ungovernable black. Slavery is the response to Ham's rebellious behavior... “The reason the text was so valued by 19th-century people was that it was about honor. Ham acted dishonorably, and slavery was life without honor... Scholars of history and religion alike have failed to comprehend that pro-slavery Southerners were drawn to Genesis 9:20-27 because it resonated with their deepest cultural values.”*<sup>91</sup>

#### **2.4 The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)**

The story of the Tower of Babel was frequently used by segregationists to justify the belief that God had willed the separation of distinct nations with different languages which must therefore be perpetuated. Under the heading “Origin of Linguistic Differences”, Gillespie argues,

*“This indicates that the Confusion of Tongues, which took place at Babel, with the consequent scattering of the peoples was an act of special Divine Providence to frustrate the mistaken efforts of godless men to assure the permanent integration of the peoples of the earth. Incidentally it indicates that the development of different languages was not merely natural or accidental, but served a Divine purpose, in becoming one of the most effective means of preserving the separate existence of the several racial groups.”*<sup>92</sup>

Here, Gillespie makes three false assumptions. He assumes first, that God caused the confusion of tongues because of their attempt at racial integration; second, that linguistic and racial differences were coextensive; and third, that the division of people after the Fall were along racial lines. First, the text indicates the confusion of languages was a response to their ambition of building a tower to heaven. Second, experience clearly shows that racial and linguistic differences are unrelated. Europeans, for example, while sharing similar DNA, are divided by multiple languages, whereas cities like London, for example, are made up of multiple ethnic groups who share a common language. And third, those who were scattered after Babel were all the descendants of Ham.<sup>93</sup>

#### **2.5 Abraham Called to a Separate Life (Genesis 12-25)**

*“Abram, later changed to Abraham, was called to separate himself from his home and his kindred in Ur of the Chaldees and to live as a “stranger in a strange land.” Under Divine guidance and blessing he and his household lived peaceably with the inhabitants without mingling with them socially or inter- marrying with them. The Covenant of Circumcision instituted by God provided a sign or seal which was to distinguish and set apart in a most significant way the “Seed of Abraham,” or the Hebrew people from all the other peoples of the earth throughout all generations. Many incidental circumstances, such as the refusal of God to allow the son of Hagar,*

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<sup>90</sup> Stephen Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford, Oxford University press, 2002)

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>92</sup> Gillespie, *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>93</sup> Tilson, *ibid.*, p. 27.



*the Egyptian bondwoman, to become the heir of the covenant promise, the great care exercised by Abraham to secure a wife for his son Isaac from among his own kindred rather than from among the Canaanites, and a similar concern manifested by Isaac and Rebekah concerning wives for their sons, all emphasize the importance which is attached to' the principle of segregation, and doubtless paved the way for the emphasis given to it in the Mosaic economy and in the subsequent history of Israel.”<sup>94</sup>*

Gillespie here ignores the way the New Testament explains and interpretes the term “seed”. As if anticipating how the passage would be misinterpreted and exploited to justify supremacism or segregation, the Apostle Paul explicitly insists the term does not refer to the Israelites but to Jesus and those who trust in Him.

*“The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ.... There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:16, 28-29)*

The story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 and Abraham’s Call in Genesis 12 are therefore examples of how unique events in scripture have been used to justify an abiding principle, or contemporary application devoid of any contextual interpretation, while ignoring the flow of biblical history and progressive revelation.

## **2.6 The Demands for Racial Purity and Ban on Mixed Marriages (Deuteronomy 7:3)**

*“Moses strictly warned the Israelites against allowing their sons and daughters to intermarry with the pagan peoples with whom they came in contact, under the penalty of bringing upon themselves the Divine wrath and judgment. This warning was emphasized repeatedly, and was specially burned into the consciousness of the nation by the terrible penalties which were inflicted upon those who committed whoredom with the daughters of Moab at Baal-Peor (Numbers 25:1-8).”<sup>95</sup>*

## **2.7 Ezra’s Condemnation of Mixed Marriages (Ezra 9-10)**

*“After the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, it was discovered that great numbers of the prominent Jews had taken wives from among the heathen people of the land. This caused Ezra to rend his clothes and tear his hair, and cry unto God for mercy upon the sinning nation. The drastic steps which were taken to purge out this evil practice emphasized anew the vital importance which was attached to the preservation of the purity and integrity the racial stock by the leaders of the nation and by their Divine ruler.”<sup>96</sup>*

In both passages, Gillespie ignores the explicit reference to paganism and cultic worship as the reason for the ban on intermarriage. Ezra’s demands were rooted in the need for religious purity not racial purity. Neither passage justifies a ban on the grounds of colour or ethnicity. On the contrary, Deuteronomy makes legal provision for mixed marriages.

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<sup>94</sup> Gillespie, *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

*“if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife.” (Deuteronomy 21:11)*

There are also numerous examples of mixed marriages in the Bible. These include Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David and Solomon. And as has been noted, the genealogy of Jesus recorded in Matthew 1 includes Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabite. As Tilson points out,

*“These genealogies reveal just how little respect early Christian writers had for Ezra’s demand for a pure stock. Since we could employ these texts as proof of Jesus’ inability to meet Ezra’s requirements for consideration as a member of the chosen people, how can we justify the imposition of such requirements on Jesus’ followers?”<sup>97</sup>*

## **2.8 National and Natural Boundaries Fixed by God (Acts 17:26)**

*“From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.” (Acts 17:26)*

The obvious problem with using the passage to justify segregation is that it is not referred to. Furthermore, the question arises as to which boundaries or borders were or are set by God? If it is interpreted to refer to all, then it makes God responsible for the rise of atheistic Communism and Nazi Fascism. John Stott concedes,

*“Thus, although God cannot be held responsible for the tyranny or aggression of individual nations, yet both the history and geography of each nation are ultimately under his control.”<sup>98</sup>*

It is ironic that those using this verse to justify their borders to preserve their ethnic purity were 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> Century colonialist projects imposed on very different ethnic groups around the world.

The emphasis of the verse is upon the unity of humankind “*from one man*” denying any sense of racial superiority - (in this context, the Athenian Greeks), and on the temporary nature of their existence and extent “*their appointed times*” meaning their rise as well as fall.

What segregationists ignore is the context. What was God’s purpose in arranging the time and place of nations? Paul tells us in the next verse,

*“God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.” (Acts 17:27).*

So, the verse emphasizes our unity not diversity and the transitory nature of nations rather than their permanence or independence. His purpose in their creation was that people might seek, find and know him.

## **2.9 Submission to the Governing Authorities (Romans 13)**

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<sup>97</sup> Tilson, *ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>98</sup> Stott, *ibid.*, p. 286.

The other passage frequently used by segregationists is Romans 13.

*“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”* (Romans 13:1-4)

Winsome Munro observes,

*“the white Dutch Reformed church, in common with the state, and certain fundamentalist missionary groups, often connected with the American religious right, have pointed to this passage and its parallels as the ultimate sanction for enforced submission to present power relations.”*<sup>99</sup>

Elelwani B Farisani, likewise points out,

*“Romans 13 urges citizens to be subject to the government of the day as instituted by God, and was invoked during the days of apartheid to coerce black people into accepting the apartheid government's policy of racial oppression and segregation as being ordained and sanctioned by God. It was argued that opposing the South African government was tantamount to opposing God, who had given the government authority to rule over all South Africans. All those who opposed the government were branded Communists and terrorists who wanted to wage a total onslaught on the Christian government and replace it with a Communist dictatorship. This view led to torture, detention without trial and the loss of many innocent lives. The text was used not only by politicians to silence those who opposed racial segregation, but also by certain church leaders and theologians who urged Christians not to be involved in politics that went counter to the government's policies.”*<sup>100</sup>

The abuse of Romans 13 by segregationists is not hard to expose. The passage is explicit in defining the God-given role of governments in terms of protecting those who do good and punishing those who do evil. When a government ceases to do so, it may be inferred that they have ceased to fulfil their God-given role and citizens have a moral responsibility to disobey in order to obey God. When forced to choose, Jesus is clear, *“Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”* (Mark 12:17)

John Stott observes,

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<sup>99</sup> Winsome Munro, “Romans 13:1-7 Apartheid's Last Biblical Refuge” *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture* (November 1, 1990)

<sup>100</sup> Elelwani B Farisani, “Interpreting the Bible in the context of apartheid and beyond: An African perspective” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae, The Church History Society of Southern Africa*, vol.40 n.2 Pretoria (December 2014)

*“We need to be cautious, however, in our interpretation of Paul’s statements. He cannot be taken to mean that all Caligulas, Herods, Neros and Domitians of New Testament times, and all the Hitlers, Stalins, Amins and Saddams of our times, were personally appointed by God, that God is responsible for their behaviour, or that their authority is in no circumstances to be resisted. Paul means rather that all human authority is derived from God’s authority, so that we can say to rulers what Jesus said to Pilate, “You would have no power [exousia, authority] over me if it were not given to you from above.”<sup>101</sup>*

In the context of South African apartheid, Stott mentions the encounter between Michael Cassidy, founder of African Enterprise and President P.W. Botha in 1985.

*“It was the time of the National Initiative for Reconciliation, and Michael had hoped for signs of repentance and for the assurance that apartheid would be dismantled. He was to be bitterly disappointed. This is his account of what happened. ‘I was immediately aware on entry to the room that this was not to be the sort of encounter for which I had prayed. The president began by standing to read me part of Romans 13!’ He evidently imagined that this passage was enough to justify unequivocal support of the Nationalist Government’s apartheid policy.”<sup>102</sup>*

In conclusion, it is clear that even a cursory examination of the verses used to justify segregation, the necessity of maintaining racial purity or political boundaries, which are at the core of apartheid theology, actually do nothing of the kind – indeed many prove the very opposite.

### **3. A Biblical Refutation of Apartheid**

Refuting the theological basis for apartheid (and Christian Zionism) is actually very easy. One does not need a long list of scripture passages to counter those used to defend apartheid or segregation by ethnicity. Just one verse is sufficient.

Let me explain by use of an analogy. Imagine the theology of apartheid is like a can of clear lemonade or Sprite. It represents the demand for racial purity, a ban on mixed marriages, and divinely ordained national boundaries based on ethnicity. What happens when you add some Coke to a glass of Sprite? It changes colour. How much Coke do you need to change the colour of Sprite? Very little. Once you have added even a small amount of Coke you cannot ever go back to pure clear Sprite. In the same way, just one mixed marriage is enough to confound any notion of racial purity. And in like manner, just one bible verse that challenges apartheid will adulterate its theology. Let me give you a few examples:

#### **3.1 The Ethnic Diversity of God’s People**

Against the claim that the Old Testament mandates segregation based on ethnicity, there are numerous examples of Gentiles who became Jews, indeed even of pagans who came to believe in the one true God and who were accepted within the people of God, namely, Israel.

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<sup>101</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Romans*, (Leicester, IVP, 2004) p. 340.

<sup>102</sup> Stott, *ibid.*, pp. 341-342.

These included Abraham the Aramean “whose father worshipped other gods” (Joshua 24:2); Rahab who sheltered the Israeli spies and was rescued along with her family (Joshua 6:25); Ruth who married Boaz (Ruth 1:16-17); both of whom feature in the genealogy of the Jesus (Matthew 1:5); and the bi-racial parentage of Timothy (Acts 16).

*“But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho—and she lives among the Israelites to this day.” (Joshua 6:25)*

*“But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” (Ruth 1:16)*

### 3.2 An Inclusive Israel

The ambiguous nature of Israel’s claims to be a democracy as well as a Jewish state was dispelled with the passing of the controversial “Nation-state” law in 2018 which defined Israel as the state exclusively for the Jewish people. Miriam Berger quotes the then Prime Minister Netanyahu as saying this was a “defining moment”.

*“The [Nation state] law does three big things:*

- 1. It states that “the right to exercise national self-determination” in Israel is “unique to the Jewish people.”*
- 2. It establishes Hebrew as Israel’s official language, and downgrades Arabic — a language widely spoken by Arab Israelis — to a “special status.”*
- 3. It establishes “Jewish settlement as a national value” and mandates that the state “will labor to encourage and promote its establishment and development.”*

*Each of these statements would be contentious on its own, but taken together, they’re a clear, unequivocal statement of how the Jewish state’s current leaders see both the country and the diverse people who call it home... or Arab Israelis, then, the new nation-state law is merely the culmination of years of institutional discrimination. Only now the discrimination is officially enshrined in Israel’s basic law — the country’s constitutional equivalent.”*

*“Netanyahu was ecstatic. “Today we made it law: This is our nation, language, and flag,” he said in a statement. “In recent years there have been some who have attempted to put this in doubt, to undercut the core of our being.”*

*In an age of hyperpopulism, where identity politics has made a resurgence as the liberal democracies of the post-World War II order face fundamental challenges from within, the nation-state law is a perfect power play for Netanyahu’s kind of nationalism — even if its actual application remains unclear.”<sup>103</sup>*

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<sup>103</sup> Miriam Berger, “Israel’s hugely controversial “nation-state” law, explained” *Vox* (31 July 2018).

Surprisingly perhaps, the Old Testament knows nothing of this contemporary form of nationalism. Instead, Israel as a nation was never narrowly restricted to those who were the physical descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. Israel as a nation always incorporated people of other races and this extended not just to their identity and right of residence but also to their inheritance of the land and even their right to worship the one true God in the Temple.

Moses, for example, warned the Jewish people against a racial exclusivity:

*“Do not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you lived as an alien in his country. The third generation of children born to them may enter the assembly of the LORD.”* (Deuteronomy 23:7-8)

The Edomites, descended from Esau, lived in what is today the Negev and Southern Jordan.

Similarly, David looked forward to the day when other races - Egyptian (Rahab) Persian (Babylon), Palestinian (Philistia), Lebanese (Tyre) and African (Cush) would have the same identity and privileges as the Israelites:

*“I will record Rahab and Babylon  
among those who acknowledge me—  
Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush[c]—  
and will say, ‘This one was born in Zion.’”*  
5 *Indeed, of Zion it will be said,  
“This one and that one were born in her,  
and the Most High himself will establish her.”*  
6 *The Lord will write in the register of the peoples:  
“This one was born in Zion.”* (Psalm 87:4-6)

Note the phrase “This one was born in Zion.” What do you normally get when you are born somewhere? Citizen rights. Now why would the Lord God have to repeat himself three times in three verses? Perhaps because the Lord’s people did not want to share Zion. And observe the only criterion for citizenship God lays down is faith. God welcomes all ‘those who acknowledge me’.

And in the story of Esther, after God rescues his people from the hands of their enemies, we are told,

*“In every province and in every city to which the edict of the king came, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.”* (Esther 8:17)

### **3.3 An Inclusive Inheritance (Land)**

As if to emphasize that ‘citizenship’ means much more than a new passport, God instructs the Israelites to share the land and give an inheritance to all who trust in him.

*“You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born*

*Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe the alien settles, there you are to give him his inheritance,” declares the Sovereign LORD.” (Ezekiel 47:22-23)*

Notice again, the Lord has to say the same thing “share the land” three times in two consecutive sentences. Why? Presumably because the returning exiles did not want to. And so, God makes it clear, in no uncertain terms that those of other races have the same rights as ‘native born Israelites’ and have a share in the inheritance of the land.

### **3.4 An Inclusive Temple**

Through his prophet Isaiah, the Lord God is also quite explicit in insisting that people of other ethnic origins may become members of his people Israel.

*“Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say, “The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.... And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” (Isaiah 56:3, 6-7)*

Now if the Lord insists that foreigners should not say “*The Lord will surely exclude me from his people*”, why on earth would foreigners think it? Simple. Because the Lord’s people must have been doing the excluding – presumably on the same supremacist grounds advocated by Zionists and other segregationists today. The people of God in scripture were always defined on the basis of faith not race and we must resist any attempt to make exclusive what God has made inclusive.

### **3.5 Unity and Diversity (Acts 17)**

In an essay entitled, “Preserving the Richness of Racial Diversity”, John Stott draws out four basic principles from the Apostle Paul’s Areopagus speech in Acts 17. They are the unity of the human race in creation; the diversity of ethnic cultures in history; the finality of Jesus Christ (in repudiating ethnic idolatry); and the unique diversity with equality that should be intrinsic to the Christian community.

*“First, Paul affirmed the unity of the human race, or the God of creation. For God had “made from one every nation of men” (v. 26), and all human beings are therefore his “offspring” (28–29)... All men and women, having been created in God’s image, are equal before him in worth, and therefore have an equal right to respect.”*

*Second, Paul affirmed the diversity of ethnic cultures, or the God of history. For the “periods and the boundaries” of the nations are in God’s hand (v. 26). The apostle was probably alluding to the primeval command to multiply and fill the earth. It was certainly this human dispersal that inevitably resulted in the development of distinctive cultures. Now culture is the complement of nature. What is “natural” is God-given and inherited; what is “cultural” is man-made and learned.*

*Culture is an amalgam of the beliefs, values, customs, and institutions every society develops and transmits to the following generation. Scripture celebrates the colourful mosaic of human cultures and even declares that their “glory” will be brought into the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:24)...*

*Third, Paul affirmed the finality of Jesus Christ, or the God of revelation. For “now he commands all men everywhere to repent,” having raised Jesus from the dead and appointed him the universal Judge (30–31). The apostle refuses to acquiesce in the multireligious condition of Athens. He does not hail the city as a living museum of religions. No, it’s idolatry was abhorrent to him. We learn, therefore, that to welcome the diversity of cultures does not imply an acquiescence in the diversity of religions. On the contrary, Christians who appreciate cultural achievement must at the same time resist the idolatry [that] lies at the heart of many cultures.*

*We cannot tolerate any rivals to Jesus Christ. They “provoke” us, as they did Paul (16). We must therefore proclaim to all mankind that the God they may “worship as unknown” (23) has actually made himself known, uniquely and decisively, in Jesus Christ.*

*Fourth, Paul affirmed the glory of the Christian community, or the God of redemption. For God acted through Jesus Christ to abolish the barriers [that] divide human beings from one another and to create a single new humanity... Here was the nucleus of the new society of Jesus, in which men and women of all social, racial, and cultural origins are reconciled to each other through him. Whatever policies a country may develop for racial integration, they must reflect and not compromise these four theological truths.*

*“Because of the unity of the human race, we must demand equal rights for racial minorities. Because of the diversity of ethnic cultures, we must renounce cultural imperialism and seek to preserve the riches of every culture. Because of the finality of Jesus Christ, we must insist that religious freedom includes the right of Christians to propagate their faith, and we must not deny this right to others. Because of the glory of the new community in Christ, we must rid it of all lingering racism and strive to make it a model of multiracial harmony. Jesus calls all his followers to be peacemakers. We must pray, witness, and work to the end that the multiracial dream may come true.”<sup>104</sup>*

By contrast, Apartheid theology essentially holds to a dualistic hermeneutic, separating the spatial from the spiritual – so justifying separate churches for black and white Christians while emphasizing their unity in the faith. The New Testament does not tolerate such a dualistic theology. Far from it, the Kingdom of God breaks in and transforms the kingdoms of this world. Faith in Jesus Christ is the determinant of our identity, not our colour, ethnicity, place of birth, language or passport.

### **3.6 Segregation within the Church Rebuked**

The Apostle Paul develops this theme in his letter to the Galatians. In chapter 2, he shares a painful example of segregation and its destructive impact.

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<sup>104</sup> John Stott, *Christ the Cornerstone: Collected Essays of John Stott* (Bellingham, Lexham Press, 2019)



*“When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? “We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ... I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (Galatians 2:11-15, 21)*

While not explicitly referring to ethnic segregation, the Apostle James rebukes those who showed favouritism within the church treating rich and poor differently.

*“My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong? If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbour as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.” (James 2:1-9)*

And to those holding a dualistic faith – for example, those within the Dutch Reformed Church who believed black and white Christians were brothers but nevertheless insisted on segregated churches, James warns,

*“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James 2:14-17)*

### **3.7 Ethnic Barriers Removed by the Gospel**

In Galatians chapter 3 and 4 Paul shows how ethnic identities are transformed by the gospel.

*“The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if*

*the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise... There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:15-18, 29)*

Here Paul explicitly denies the claim that the ‘seed’ of Abraham are the Jewish people by ethnicity or physical descent. There are no grounds for supremacism among Christians. Abraham’s inheritance is for all who trust in Jesus irrespective of ethnicity. In chapter 4 Paul goes further and equates unbelieving Jerusalem with Hagar and Ishmael and Gentile believers with Sarah and Isaac.

*“Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise. These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother... Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise... Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.” (Galatians 4:21-26, 28, 31)*

A more personal example of the transformational effect of the gospel on relationships may be found in Paul’s letter to Philemon. Here Paul insists that because Onesimus has become a Christian, Philemon must treat him as a brother and no longer as a slave. In all probability, Philemon was a Roman citizen and Onesimus was of another ethnic group conquered by Rome.

*“Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.” (Philemon 15-17)*

While legislation brought an end to slavery in the Americas and apartheid in South Africa, nevertheless, supremacism and racism sadly remain endemic. Only a radical and personal encounter with Jesus Christ can confront our pride, dispel our fears, renew the heart and transform the way we view those who are different from ourselves. Ethnic divisions are indeed transformed by the gospel because of God’s ultimate purpose to create one new humanity.

### **3.8 One New Humanity**

In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, we are given a glorious insight into how Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ have been brought into a new ‘citizenship’ that transcends former ethnic barriers and religious divisions.

*“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)— remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.” (Ephesians 2:11-16).*

The ‘dividing wall of hostility’ typified by the barrier that separated Jews and Gentiles in the Temple, has been broken down by Jesus Christ. It is ironic that despite his willingness to comply with all the petty Temple regulations concerning ritual purity, Paul would eventually be arrested for allegedly bringing Greeks into the Temple and defiling God’s house. (Acts 21:28-29). Today, their successors in the government of Israel have erected a much higher and longer ‘Separation Barrier’ to preserve their racial identity and exclusive claim to the land even though they have, perhaps intentionally, never defined or accepted its actual international borders.

Paul goes on to show how, having broken down the wall of partition, Jesus has created a new living Temple made up of people of all ethnic groups.

*“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:19-22)*

The New Testament does not teach that the Gentiles have superseded the Jews. But neither does it teach that the Jewish people retain a position of superiority over the Gentiles or indeed over the Church. There is continuity between the believers under the Old Covenant who looked forward to the coming of Christ and believers under the New Covenant who look forward to his return. When Jesus died on the cross, he broke down the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles.

The Bible does not warrant a racial exclusivity giving any race preferential or elevated status within God’s kingdom. God’s intention has always been to create for himself one new people, drawn from every race and nation, under one head – the Lord Jesus Christ.

John Stott therefore insists, somewhat provocatively,

*“Now who, according to the New Testament perspective, is Israel today? And the answer we are going to see from the Bible is this extraordinary event – that true Israel today is neither Jews nor Israelis, but believers in the Messiah, even if they are gentiles.”*

*“The paradox of our position in this: True Jews today are Christians. May I say it again? The true Jews today are Christians. Or if you don’t like that expression, try this one: “The followers of the Messiah are more truly the people of Israel than those people of Israel who reject Him.”<sup>105</sup>*

Segregation, and by implication supremacy, based on ethnicity is repudiated and superseded by the New Testament insistence of our equality as sisters and brothers, in Jesus Christ, as the united but incredibly diverse family of God.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Robert Vosloo asks some helpful questions in the conclusion to his paper on the Bible and the justification of apartheid in South Africa.

*“Rereading the texts from the 1940s leaves on with the question about how our reading of the Bible is determined by beleaguered, fixed, isolationist and polarised identity constructions. And what difference does it make when we employ a hermeneutic marked by hospitality, hybridity, ecumenicity and reconciliation?”*

*I have mixed feelings when reading these texts from the 1940s. It seems to me too easy to challenge the proponents of the biblical justification of apartheid as simply immoral or evil, or bad exegetes, or people who were merely pawns in the hand of politicians. The more haunting questions for me became: Why were these ideas received so favourably in the church? And: Why were the dissenting voices not heard more widely and, when they were, often scapegoated? And: Are we aware of our own ideological distortions as we appropriate the Bible for our seemingly good causes today? The need remains to grapple with these questions as we reflect on the uses and abuses of the Bible in public discourse today.”<sup>106</sup>*

I feel very much the same about the acquiescence of many church leaders within the mainstream denominations who appear reluctant to express criticism of Israeli apartheid or the complicity of Christian Zionists who support Israel’s racist policies.

As has been shown, however, it does not take much to burst the apartheid balloon. John Stott, for example, points out the folly of justifying segregation as a means of preserving racial purity. It is simply a biological fact that,

*“...humanity as a race is fundamentally hybrid... “Pure British blood”, for example, is a figment of the imagination. At the very least we are a mixture of Jute, Celt, Goth, Saxon, Roman and Norman. We have to ask, therefore, where are these “pure” ethnic groups which fear hybridity?”<sup>107</sup>*

The use of the Bible to normalise segregation was never undertaken in isolation, but was invariably attempted retrospectively by colonialists to justify their subjugation of dependent

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<sup>105</sup> John Stott, “The Place of Israel” an unpublished sermon included with permission in Stephen Sizer, *Zion’s Christian Soldiers* (Eugene, Wipf & Stock, 2021), p. 169. <https://www.stephensizer.com/2018/04/john-stott-the-place-of-israel/>

<sup>106</sup> Vosloo, *ibid.*,

<sup>107</sup> Stott, *Issues*, *ibid.*, p. 275.

people and the sequestration of foreign lands. In this regard, apartheid was and remains not about maintaining racial purity as about maintaining racial supremacy.

Slavery had been central to the European colonisation of the Americas, Africa and Australasia. With the demise of slavery, segregation was the means of maintaining the subjugation of indigenous people and the colonization of their land by force.

It is sobering to realise that the segregationist policies designed to preserve European ‘racial purity’ in the USA, also inspired fascism in Germany and apartheid in South Africa to do the same.

Largely with the complicity of the institutional churches, supremacism has led to the blasphemous justification of slavery, to segregation, fascism, apartheid and genocide. If we really care about justice, peace and reconciliation, it is time to challenge, refute and help bring an end to apartheid in Israel, peacefully and non-violently. As apartheid in South Africa was brought to an end as a result of concerted religious and political opposition, so can, God willing, apartheid in Israel/Palestine be ended.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu is not alone in comparing the two forms of apartheid. In 2002 he wrote,

*“The end of apartheid stands as one of the crowning accomplishments of the last century, but we would not have succeeded without the help of international pressure... If apartheid ended, so can the occupation, but the moral force and international pressure will have to be just as determined. The current divestment effort is the first, though certainly not the only, necessary move in that direction.”*<sup>108</sup>

This is why, John Stott asserted,

*“I myself believe that Zionism, both political and Christian, is incompatible with biblical faith.”*<sup>109</sup>

*“Only a true theology, the biblical doctrine of God, can deliver us from racism. Because he is the God of creation, we affirm the unity of the human race. Because he is the God of history, we affirm the diversity of ethnic cultures. Because he is the God of revelation, we affirm the finality of Jesus Christ. Because he is the God of redemption, we affirm the glory of the Christian church... Because of the unity of humankind, we demand equal rights and equal respect for ethnic minorities. Because of the diversity of ethnic groups, we renounce cultural imperialism and seek to preserve all those riches of culture which are compatible with Christ’s lordship. Because of the finality of Christ, we affirm that religious freedom includes the right to propagate the gospel. Because of the glory of the church, we must seek to rid*

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<sup>108</sup> Desmond Tutu, “An international campaign : Build moral pressure to end the occupation” *International Herald Tribune* (June 14, 2002) <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/14/opinion/IHT-an-international-campaign-build-moral-pressure-to-end-the.html>

<sup>109</sup> John Stott, cited on back cover of Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon?* (Eugene, Wipf & Stock, 2021)

*ourselves of any lingering racism and strive to make it a model of harmony in which the multi-ethnic dream comes true.*"<sup>110</sup>

We began with the dream of Martin Luther King. What is your dream? Your vision of the future? What kind of world do you want for your children and grandchildren?

In the Book of Revelation, there is a glorious heavenly vision of a restored humanity ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse yet standing together not segregated, but one in heart, soul and mind.

*"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:*

*"Salvation belongs to our God,  
who sits on the throne,  
and to the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9-10)*

Did you notice that tiny little word "from" in verse 9? The multitude which no one can count is *from* every nation, *from* every tribe, *from* every people and *from* every language. They are not segregated; they are not separated. They are not distinguished by these things. They are all standing together, all wearing the same white clothes, all singing the same song, united in joyful adoration. If that is what we will, God willing, be one day, surely, the Church of Jesus Christ should be a foretaste of heaven.

*"God has given us in Scripture a vision of the redeemed as "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne" (Revelation 7:9). That dream we know, will come true. Meanwhile inspired by it, we should seek at least an approximation to it on earth, namely a society characterized by justice (no discrimination) and harmony (no conflict) for all ethnic groups. We are looking for a fully integrated society which continues to celebrate diversity."*<sup>111</sup>

Only a biblical vision of God and His purposes for our world, revealed fully and finally in the supremacy of Jesus Christ can deliver us from the idolatry of racist supremacism and the illusion of racial purity.

Jesus said, "*Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*" (John 13:17)

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<sup>110</sup> John Stott, *Issues*, op. cit., p. 291.

<sup>111</sup> John Stott, 'Celebrating Ethnic Diversity', *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2006), p. 291.

**Sabeel-Kairos UK**  
**A Christian Response to Israeli Apartheid**

The following statement was endorsed by the Trustees of Sabeel-Kairos UK with the support of Sabeel Jerusalem and Kairos Palestine and was published at the annual Sabeel-Kairos UK conference on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

*‘Having considered a Christian response to Israeli apartheid, we affirm that all people are created equally in the image of God; we commend the B’TSelem and Human Rights Watch documents designating Israel as an apartheid state; we repudiate all forms of racism and discrimination; and we recommit ourselves to working for justice, peace and reconciliation in Israel/Palestine.’*

## **A Biblical Response to Israeli Apartheid: Some Bible Study Questions**

The Bible has been used in the past to justify colonisation, slavery, white supremacism, segregation and apartheid. The Bible has also been used to defend Zionism and justify Israeli apartheid. This study is intended to help you to challenge the misuse of the scriptures and bring an end to apartheid in the furtherance of justice, peace and reconciliation.

1. Many Christians believe that God blesses people and nations who bless Israel and curses those who do not.

*“The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ‘I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’” (Genesis 12:1-3).*

2. To whom was the promise made? Is this personal blessing extended to anyone else?
3. Read Matthew 25:31-46. Some claim that Jesus promises a reward to Christians (sheep) who bless the Jewish people (these brothers of mine). In the following two passages that precede this parable, who does Jesus say are his brothers and sisters?

*“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is known to be my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly be rewarded.” (Matthew 10:42)*

*““Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12:48-50)*

4. Some argue that God’s people were identified by physical descent from Abraham. What do these passages teach?

*“Do not despise an Edomite, for the Edomites are related to you. Do not despise an Egyptian, because you resided as foreigners in their country. The third generation of children born to them may enter the assembly of the LORD.” (Deuteronomy 23:7-8)*

*“I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me— Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush — and will say, ‘This one was born in Zion.’ “Indeed, of Zion it will be said, “This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her.” The LORD will write in the register of the peoples: “This one was born in Zion.” (Psalm 87:4-6)*

5. What was the status of Gentiles?
6. From the following verses, to whom does the “Promised Land” belong?

*“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)*



*“I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable.” (Jeremiah 2:7)*

*“I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin, because they have defiled my land with the lifeless forms of their vile images and have filled my inheritance with their detestable idols.” (Jeremiah 16:18)*

7. What was the status of God’s people in the land? What is the difference between “freehold” and “leasehold”?

8. After the Exile who was entitled to an inheritance of land?

*“You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the foreigners residing among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe foreigners reside, there you are to give them their inheritance,” declares the Sovereign LORD.” (Ezekiel 47:22-23)*

9. In Isaiah 56, the Lord seems to anticipate the rise of supremacism and racism among his people, and the fear among those living further away from Jerusalem that they may be excluded. What were the criteria for admittance into the Temple?

*“Let no foreigners who have bound themselves to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely exclude me from his people.” ... And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” (Isaiah 56:3, 6-7)*

10. If God insisted that foreigners should not say “The Lord will surely exclude me from his people”, why would they say it?

11. Why does Jesus quote this passage in Matthew 21:12-13?

12. The image of the vine and branches appears frequently in the Bible. Who is the ‘vine’ in Psalm 80:14-17 and Hosea 10:1-2?

13. When Jesus said “I am the true vine” (John 15:1) what is he declaring?

14. How does Paul analogy of the olive tree in Romans 11:17-21 complement John 15?

*“If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.” (Romans 11:17-21)*

15. How do these passages answer those who claim the Church has ‘replaced’ Israel?

16. Into what, or whom, have Gentile believers in Jesus been grafted?

17. How does Paul define a Jew in Romans 2?

*“A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God.”* (Romans 2:28-29)

18. How does Paul define “Israel” and identify the children of Abraham in Romans 9?

*“It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.”* (Romans 9:6-8)

19. Read Galatians 4:21-31. How does Paul use the analogy of Sarah and Hagar to identify the inheritors of the promises God made to Abraham?

20. From the following passages, who are God’s ‘chosen people’?

*“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”* (1 Peter 2:9-10)

*“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”* (Colossians 3:12)

21. How does Hebrews 11 explain the relationship between the Old and New Testament saints?

*“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”* (Hebrews 11:39-40)

22. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. Does God have two ‘chosen’ peoples or one?

23. What has Jesus broken down through his death? Why is it important therefore that we do not recreate racial barriers among God’s people?

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