

# Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?

## Part 2: The Bible and Christian Zionism

Christian Zionism may be distinguished by seven basic theological tenets and each of these will now be evaluated in the light of scripture. Not all who identify with Christian Zionism necessarily holds to all seven tenets, or with equal conviction. Nevertheless, these seven provide a summary of what distinguishes Christian Zionism from other movements.

### 1. An Ultra-Literalist Biblical Hermeneutic

Through his Reference Bible, Scofield popularised an ultra-literal way of reading the Bible in this way:

*'Not one instance exists of a 'spiritual' or figurative fulfilment of prophecy ... Jerusalem is always Jerusalem, Israel is always Israel, Zion is always Zion ... Prophecies may never be spiritualised, but are always literal.'*<sup>1</sup>

Patrick Goodenough of the International Christian Embassy offers a contemporary example of this position.

*We simply believe the Bible. And that Bible, which we understand has not been revoked, makes it quite clear that God has given this land as an eternal inheritance to the Jewish people.*<sup>2</sup>

#### 1.1 Changing Literalism

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1 <sup>1</sup> C.I. Scofield, Scofield Bible Correspondence Course, (Chicago, Moody Bible Institute, n.d.), pp45-46.

2 <sup>2</sup>Kathy Kern, '*Blessing Israel? Christian Embassy Responds*' Christian Peacemakers Team, Internet:menno.org.cpt.news@MennoLink.org 2 November 1997.Y

Such literalism is problematic when futurists attempt to keep pace with the dramatic geo-political changes as seen in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the last two decades. Lindsey had insisted in 1981 and again in 1994 that his, by then, apparently contradictory assessments of Russia were, nevertheless, both predicted in the Bible.

<b>1980's Countdown to Armageddon</b>	<b>Planet Earth 2000 AD</b>
'Today, the Soviets are without question the strongest power on the face of the earth. Let's look at recent history to see how the Russians rose to the might predicted for them thousands of years ago.' <sup>3</sup>	'We see Russia as no longer a world threat, but a regional power with a world-class military - exactly what Ezekiel 38 and 39 predicted it would be.' <sup>4</sup>

With the gradual demise of Russia as a world power and the disintegration of the Communist bloc, Lindsey began to switch his emphasis from Russian Communism in 1970 to Islam Fundamentalism by 1994.<sup>5</sup> In The Late Great Planet Earth (1970) the threat comes from 'The Russian force'.<sup>6</sup> By 1997 this had become, 'The Russian-Muslim force'.<sup>7</sup> In keeping pace with the

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3      <sup>3</sup> Lindsey, 1980's, op.cit., p68.

4      <sup>4</sup> Lindsey, Planet, p216.

5      <sup>5</sup> Lindsey, Chapter 1 of The Final Battle, (Palos Verdes, California, Western Front, 1995), is entitled 'The New Islamic Global Threat', p1.

6      <sup>6</sup> Lindsey, Late, op.cit., p160.

7      <sup>7</sup> Lindsey, Apocalypse, op.cit., p153.

changing Middle East scene, by 1999 Lindsey was claiming this axis of evil was now led by a ‘Muslim-Russian alliance.’<sup>8</sup>

## 1.2 Contradictory Literalism

While dispensationalists claim to use a consistent plain literal interpretation of scripture, at times they nevertheless reach very different, and sometimes contradictory, conclusions. For example, in their interpretation of Revelation 9:13-19, M.R. DeHann and Hal Lindsey contradict one another:

<b>M.R. DeHann (1946)</b>	<b>Hal Lindsey (1973)</b>
‘In Revelation 9:13-21 we have a description of an army of two hundred million horsemen ... seems to be a supernatural army of horrible beings, probably demons, who are permitted to plague the unrepentant sinners on the earth.’ <sup>9</sup>	‘The four angels of Revelation 9:14-15 will mobilize an army of 200 million soldiers from east of the Euphrates ... I believe these 200 million troops are Red Chinese soldiers accompanied by other Eastern allies.’ <sup>10</sup>

For DeHann and also LaHaye, the 200 million are ‘a supernatural horde of 200 million demonic horsemen’<sup>11</sup> while for Lindsey and Schuyler English they are literally Chinese soldiers.<sup>12</sup> Lindsey

<sup>8</sup> Lindsey, Briefing, op.cit., 7th January (1999).

<sup>9</sup> M. R. DeHann, Revelation, 35 Simple Studies in the Major Themes of Revelation, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1946), p148.

<sup>10</sup> Lindsey, There’s, op.cit., pp142-143.

<sup>11</sup> Tim LaHaye & Jerry B. Jenkins, Are We Living in the End Times?, (Wheaton, Tyndale House, 1999), pp190-192.

<sup>12</sup> Schuyler English, New, op.cit., p1334.

does, however, suggest their 'horses' are symbolic for mobilized ballistic missile launchers.<sup>13</sup> Each claims his is a 'literal' interpretation of the text. William Hendrikson raises several questions about this form of hermeneutics in his own commentary on the book of Revelation:

*'Because among the thousands of dates and events and persons in history that show certain traits of resemblance to the symbol in question, who is able to select the one and only date, event or person that was forecast by this particular symbol? Confusion results. We get thousands of "interpretations" but no certainty. And the Apocalypse remains a closed book.'*<sup>14</sup>

The fundamental error made here is the refusal to acknowledge how Jesus and the Apostles reinterpreted the Old Testament. For example, Jesus annulled the Levitical food laws.

*"Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.") (Matthew 7:18-19)*

A vision of unclean food is specifically used by God to help the apostle Peter realise that in Christ there is now no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile. Both are accepted as equal in the kingdom of God.

*"Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The voice*

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1 <sup>13</sup> Lindsey, There's, op.cit., p143.

<sup>14</sup> William Hendrikson, More than Conquerors, (London, Inter-Varsity, 1962). p40-41.

*spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." (Acts 10:11-15)*

Only when Peter encounters Cornelius does he begin to realise the implications of the vision for the way he should now view Jews and Gentiles. "I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." (Acts 10:34-35). Logically, if God does not show favouritism, the Jews cannot presume to enjoy a favoured or exclusive status. This movement in biblical revelation is explained more fully by the writer to the Hebrews. The Old Testament revelation from God often came in shadow, image and prophecy. In the New Covenant that revelation finds its consummation in reality, substance and fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

*By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. (Hebrews 8:31)*

*The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. (Hebrews 10:1)*

It is fundamental that Christians read the Scriptures with Christian eyes, and that they interpret the Old Covenant in the light of the New Covenant, not the other way round. In Colossians, for example, Paul uses a typological hermeneutic to explain this.

*Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the*

*things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. (Colossians. 2:16-17)*

The question is therefore not whether the promises of the old covenant are to be understood literally or allegorically as Christian Zionists like to polarise the issue. It is instead a question of whether they should be understood in terms of Old Covenant shadow or in terms of New Covenant reality. This is the most basic hermeneutical error which Christian Zionists consistently repeat. This is illustrated in the way the Jews are designated by Christian Zionists as God's 'chosen people'.

## **2. The Jewish People Remain God's 'Chosen People'**

Arising from their ultra-literal hermeneutic, Darby and Scofield taught that God has two separate peoples. The Church and Israel. Promises made to the Jews may never be applied to the Church, and vice versa. So, Scofield insists, *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>15</sup>

In its classical form, Charles Ryrie insists the *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism to be:

- 1. A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct...*
- 2. This distinction between Israel and the church is born out of a system of hermeneutics that is usually called literal interpretation....*<sup>16</sup>

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1 <sup>15</sup>C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course*, 19th edn. (Chicago, Moody Bible Institute), p. 23.

2 <sup>16</sup>Ryrie, *Dispensationalism.*, pp. 39-40.

Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, today the second largest seminary in the USA, elaborates further on this dichotomy between Israel and the church,

*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.<sup>17</sup>*

This notion contradicts Jesus own clear and unambiguous statements to the contrary. John the Baptist warned,

*Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." (Luke 3:8-9)*

Similarly Jesus warned, *"If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did..." (John 8:39)*

For this reason Peter warned his Jewish audience soon after the Day of Pentecost that if they persisted in refusing to recognise

Jesus as their Messiah, they would cease to be the laos of God, *'Anyone who does not listen to him (Christ) will be completely cut off from among his people.'* (Acts 3:23)

Jesus and the apostles repudiated the notion that the Jews continued to enjoy a special status or relationship apart from belief

in Jesus as their Messiah. Indeed Paul refutes the notion that Jewishness may be defined by race or adherence to Jewish law.

*“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.” (Romans 2:28-29)*

Christian Zionists fail to recognise that in the Bible, 'chosenness' becomes progressively universalised, the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ to all who trust in Him, irrespective of their race.

In the New Testament the concept of 'chosenness' is applied to those who have or who will believe in Jesus Christ. It is never used exclusively of the Jewish people, apart from as members of the Church.. For example,

*‘But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, ... 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)*

The term 'chosen' has been invested with new meaning to refer to all who trust in Jesus Christ.

### **3. The Restoration to and Occupation of Eretz Israel**

In Genesis 15:18 God promised Abraham, *“To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.”*

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3 <sup>17</sup>Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Dispensationalism* (Dallas, Seminary Press, 1936), p. 107.

Since Israel has never occupied all of this land, taking the Bible literally, Christian Zionists believe they will do so. The geographical extent of 'Eretz Israel', However, such a view fails to take account of the way the Old Testament itself interprets this promise.

Joshua insists, '*So Joshua took the entire land, just as the Lord had directed Moses.*' (Joshua 11:23). At the end of the book of Joshua, the same assessment is repeated but more emphatically,

*'So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there ... Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.'* (Joshua 21:43-45).

Zionists fail to recognise that 'meekness' rather than 'chosenness' was always a precondition of remaining in the land, whereas arrogance or oppression were reasons for exile. "*But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.*" (Psalm 37:11) This is reiterated and universalised by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount "*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*" (Matthew 5:5).

Zionists also invariably ignore the conditional nature of the covenant promises. They were not unconditional. Moses and the Hebrew Prophets repeatedly insist the land belongs to God and residence there is always conditional. For example,

*The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.* (Leviticus 25:23)

In Deuteronomy residence in the land is explicitly made conditional on adherence to the Law. Notice the “if” and “because”

*“If the LORD your God enlarges your territory, as he promised on oath to your forefathers, and gives you the whole land he promised them, because you carefully follow all these laws I command you today--to love the LORD your God and to walk always in his ways...” (Deuteronomy 17:8-9)*

#### **4. Jerusalem, The Eternal and Exclusive Jewish Capital**

The place and purpose of Jerusalem, or ‘Zion’ as it is sometimes called,<sup>18</sup> is deeply felt within Christian Zionism. Lindsey points out that

*‘From ages past, Jerusalem has been the most important city on this planet ... More prophecies have been made concerning Jerusalem than any other place on earth.’<sup>19</sup>*

For example, Zechariah 14 is frequently cited as evidence that one day all the nations of the earth will come to worship God in the Temple in Jerusalem.

*“I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city... Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.” (Zechariah 14:2, 16)*

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<sup>18</sup> Zion more specifically refers to the hill on the western edge of the Old City of Jerusalem.

<sup>19</sup> Lindsey, Israel, op.cit., p20.

On the basis of this passage the ICEJ holds an annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration drawing followers from many nations and at which successive Israeli Prime Ministers have been guests of honour. Notice, however, what Zechariah predicted they would do - offer a large number of animal sacrifices each day during the Feast of Tabernacles (See Numbers 28:26-29:39 - bulls, rams and lambs).

The New Testament, however, knows nothing of this preoccupation with a nationalistic and materialistic earthly Jerusalem. Instead through faith in Christ we already inhabit the heavenly Jerusalem and look forward to its appearing.

*But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. (Hebrews 12:22-23)*

*But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother (Galatians 4:26)*

In Galatians 4 Paul criticizes the 'Jerusalem-dependency'<sup>20</sup> of the legalists who were infecting the Church in Galatia. Galatians 4:27 is a quotation from Isaiah 54:1 which referred to the earthly Jerusalem. Paul now interprets the passage to refer to the home of all who believe in Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup> Access to heaven no longer

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2 <sup>20</sup>Peter Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 129.

3 <sup>21</sup>Walker, *Jesus.*, p. 131.

has anything to do with the earthly Jerusalem. Jesus had already made this clear to the woman of Samaria.

*Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup> ... a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth....* (John 4:21-23)

At his trial Jesus explained why.

*My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.* (John 18:36)

Jesus redefines the boundaries of the kingdom of God and thereby the meaning of chosenness. The expansion of the kingdom of God throughout the world requires the exile of the Apostles from the land. They must turn their backs on Jerusalem and their hopes of a materialistic kingdom. They are sent out into the world but never told to return. Subsequent to Pentecost, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles begin to use Old Covenant language concerning the Land in new ways. So for example, Peter speaks of an inheritance which unlike the Land, '...can never perish, spoil or fade.' (1 Peter 1:4). There is no evidence that the Apostles believed that their inheritance lie in Palestine, still less that Jerusalem would play a central aspect of God's future purposes for the world.

The contradiction between the flow of biblical revelation in the New Testament and the Zionist agenda is no where more clearly seen than in the question of the Jewish Temple. This is

also the most controversial issue uniting Christian Zionists with the more extreme Jewish Zionists.

## **5. The Rebuilding of the Jewish Temple**

Many Christians are convinced that the Jewish Temple will be rebuilt very soon. The most frequently cited passage regarding a future Temple is Daniel 9:26-27.

*“After the sixty-two `sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. <sup>27</sup> He will confirm a covenant with many for one `seven.' In the middle of the `seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.” (Daniel 9:26-27)*

In order to justify this exegesis it is necessary for dispensationalists to place a two thousand year parenthesis between Daniel 9:26 (the destruction of the Temple) and 9:27 (a subsequent desecration which presumably requires another Temple to be built) - yet something entirely unwarranted in the text. The conviction that the Jewish Temple must be rebuilt is, ironically, the Achilles' heel of Christian Zionism for it is inevitably also associated with the reintroduction of the Mosaic sacrificial system. The Temple described in Ezekiel assumes the offering of animal sacrifices. Scofield in his *Reference Bible* claimed that the sacrifices mentioned in Ezekiel 43:19, will be ‘memorial’ offerings.

*Doubtless these offerings will be memorial, looking back to the cross, as the offerings under the old covenant were anticipatory, looking forward to the cross. In neither case have animal sacrifices power to put away sin (Heb. 10.4; Rom. 3.25).<sup>22</sup>*

However, the verse explicitly refers to the sacrifice of a ‘*young bullock as a sin offering.*’ If Scofield appears to fudge the issue suggesting this is only a memorial sacrifice, the *New Scofield Reference Bible* note on the same verse goes further, undermining the entire hermeneutical premise of Dispensationalism.

*The reference to sacrifices is not to be taken literally, in view of the putting away of such offerings, but is rather to be regarded as a presentation of the worship of redeemed Israel, in her own land and in the millennial Temple, using the terms with which the Jews were familiar in Ezekiel’s day.<sup>23</sup>*

If this particular reference to sacrifice in Ezekiel 43 need not be taken ‘literally’ then the ultra-literalist distinction between Israel and the Church collapses, flawed by its own internal inconsistency.<sup>24</sup> The immediate context for Ezekiel vision of a rebuilt Temple is the promised return of the Jews from Babylonian exile, not some long distant eschatological event. This would have been utterly meaningless to the exiles longing to return to Israel.

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4 <sup>22</sup>C.I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 890.

5 <sup>23</sup>*The New Scofield Reference Bible* ed. E. Schuyler English (New York, Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 864.

In the New Testament the Temple is used as a vivid metaphor for Jesus Christ, for the individual Christian and corporately the Church as the Body of Christ and dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup> This is precisely what Jesus predicted in John 2 and 4.

*“Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” The Jews replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” But the temple he had spoken of was his body.”*  
(John 2:19-21)

While Jesus warned of the destruction of the Temple, he never promised that it would ever be rebuilt.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, in the Book of Hebrews, the writer describes the offering of sacrifices between the death of Christ and the destruction of the Temple as an ‘*illustration*’ of, and ‘*copies*’ of, heavenly realities, a ‘*reminder of sins*’ but unable, unlike the finished work of Christ, to take sin away.<sup>27</sup>

There is in fact not a single verse in the New Testament which promises that a Jewish Temple would be rebuilt, that a 2000 year ‘parenthesis’ should be placed between references to its desecration and destruction, or indeed that the Temple in Jerusalem would play any part in God’s purposes after the cross. Christian Zionists must therefore ignore the way in which the

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6      <sup>24</sup>Cornelis P. Venema, *The Promise of the Future* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 2000), p. 285

7      <sup>25</sup>1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21; 1 Corinthians 6:19.

8      <sup>26</sup>John 2:19, Mark 26:61, 27:40; Mark 14:58, 15:29.

Temple is invested with new meaning in the New Testament and becomes instead an image of the Church.

For example, Paul, in writing to the Church in Ephesus, describes them as part of the new living Temple.

*Consequently, you are ... members of God's 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. (Ephesians 2:19-21)*

Peter uses the same terminology to describe the way Christians are being made into the new house of God,<sup>28</sup> in which Jesus is the 'precious cornerstone'.<sup>29</sup>

*you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)*

Similarly, in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul takes a quote from Isaiah 52:11, referring to the Temple, and instead applies it to the Church.

*"For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. 'Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.'" (2 Corinthians 6:16-7)*

The movement in the progressive revelation of Scripture is always from the lesser to the greater. It is never reversed. The New

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9 <sup>27</sup>Hebrews 9:9, 23, 10:1-3, 11.

10 <sup>28</sup>1 Peter 2:5.

11 <sup>29</sup>1 Peter 2:7.

Testament repeatedly sees such Old Testament concepts as the Temple, High Priest and sacrifice as ‘types’ pointing to and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup> Christians who therefore advocate the rebuilding of the Temple are regressing into a pre-Christian sacrificial system, superseded, made redundant and annulled by the finished work of Jesus Christ. The Temple was only a temporary edifice, a shadow and type anticipating the day when God would dwell with people of all nations through the atoning work of the true Temple, Jesus Christ.<sup>31</sup>

By insisting on such an arbitrary and dualistic separation between God’s purposes for the Jews and those of the Church, Christian Zionists are promoting Old Testament ‘shadows’ alongside their New Testament ‘substance’.<sup>32</sup> In doing so they are seeking to revive what is now obsolete. Turning the clock back in redemptive history<sup>33</sup> they are Judaizing the Christian faith.<sup>34</sup> It is not surprising perhaps that Christian support for Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount, attempts to destroy the Dome of the Rock and rebuild the Jewish Temple, inflames tensions between Jews and Arabs, Christian and Moslem.

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12 <sup>30</sup>John 1:14; 2:19-22; Colossians 2:9.

13 <sup>31</sup>John 1:14.

14 <sup>32</sup>Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 10:1, 5.

15 <sup>33</sup>Venema, *Promise.*, p. 288.

16 <sup>34</sup>Galatians 3:1-5; 3:13-16; Hebrews 8:13; .

## 6. Antipathy Toward Arabs and Palestinians

Christian Zionists, while lovers of Israel, rarely show the same feelings toward Arabs and Palestinians. Anti-Arab prejudices and Orientalist stereotypes are common in their writings.<sup>35</sup>

Comparisons between Hitler and the Arabs are common.<sup>36</sup> Hal Lindsey, the most prolific Christian Zionist writer, insists,

*Long ago the psalmist predicted the final mad attempt of the confederated Arab armies to destroy the nation of Israel... The Palestinians are determined to trouble the world until they repossess what they feel is their land. The Arab nations consider it a matter of racial honour to destroy the State of Israel. Islam considers it a sacred mission of religious honour to recapture Old Jerusalem.*<sup>37</sup>

While the United Nations is invariably viewed with mistrust, the two nations of America and Israel, like Siamese twins, are perceived to be pitted against an evil world dominated by Islam,<sup>38</sup> in which people like Saddam Hussein are seen as contenders for the role of Anti-Christ.<sup>39</sup> Attempts are even made to find a strategic role for America in Biblical prophecy. Mike Evan's is only the latest in a series of Christian Zionists to make this claim. This is part of the review on Amazon's website:

*How is America tied into ancient biblical prophecies?  
According to author Michael Evans, ... biblical prophets*

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17 <sup>35</sup>Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, Vintage, 1978)

18 <sup>36</sup>Jan Willem van der Hoeven, *Babylon or Jerusalem?* (Shippensburg, Pasadena, Destiny Image Publishers, 1993), pp. 132-133.

19 <sup>37</sup>Lindsey, *Israel and the Last Days* (Eugene, Oregon, Harvest House, 1983), pp. 38-39.

20 <sup>38</sup>Merrill Simon, *Jerry Falwell and the Jews* (Middle Village, New York, Jonathan David, 1984), pp. 63-64, 71-72.

21 <sup>39</sup>Charles Dyer, *The Rise of Babylon* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1991)

*already predicted that America is doomed to collapse unless its government stops accommodating the Arab world for the sake of oil and instead offers full military and diplomatic support to Israel. He believes that God wants Israel to have full control of the West Bank and Gaza, and Americans are risking God's wrath by not fully supporting this biblical mandate. Evans also theorizes that much of America's problems--including the attack of 9-11--are indications of God's fury over America's split allegiance between the two famous descendents of Abraham: Ishmael and Isaac... Evans uses 17 chapters to weave in interpretations of scripture that support his theory that America faces a mammoth choice--ruin or salvation.<sup>40</sup>*

Regrettably this kind of speculation, common among Christian Zionist writers who demonise Arabs, regard Palestinians as 'aliens' and deny them the basic right to self determination, is difficult to square with the a New Testament ethic. The followers of Jesus Christ are called to be peace makers<sup>41</sup>, to love their enemies and seek reconciliation.<sup>42</sup> In the parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus insists we may no longer regard people on the basis of their race but their need. The New Testament ethic is one that call us to reach out to the widow and orphan, the poor the sick and the stranger, through a ministry of reconciliation, irrespective of their race.<sup>43</sup> Tragically, many Christian Zionists, it seems, are more concerned with fighting wars than building peace.

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<sup>40</sup> [www.amazon.com http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/044652252X/103-2116324-4283859](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/044652252X/103-2116324-4283859)

1 <sup>41</sup>Matthew 5:9.

2 <sup>42</sup>Matthew 5:44.

3 <sup>43</sup>2 Corinthians 5:16-20.

## 7. Anxious for Armageddon

In the history of Christian theology, speculation concerning the interpretation of Revelation 20:1-10 and the meaning of the millennium has led theologians to suggest three main alternatives:<sup>44</sup> Amillennialism teaches that the millennium is symbolic, or already 'realised'<sup>45</sup> and refers to heaven where departed souls reign with Christ (Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Berkhof). Postmillennialism teaches a literal or symbolic period of a thousand years in which the Church triumphs over evil before Christ returns (George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards). Premillennialism teaches that Christ will return to save the Church from evil and then reign for a literal thousand years on earth (Darby, Scofield, Chafer, Ryrie).

The 1967 'Six Day War' marked a significant watershed for Christian interest in Israel and Zionism and the decades leading up to the new Millennium saw a heightened interest in a pessimistic form of Premillennialism popularized by best selling authors such as Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* and Tim LaHaye's *Left Behind* series.

For example, Lindsey insists,

*'And look what's happening in the Middle East - ground zero in the endtimes events.... This phoney peace deal in the Middle East thus only ensures that eventually there will be a*

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<sup>44</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze, Sorting out Evangelical Options*, (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1992); Robert G. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium*, (Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 1977); Cornelis P. Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 2000), pp189-362.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p235.

*thermonuclear holocaust in the Middle East... This seems to parallel predictions in Revelation and else where almost to a T. Mark my words. It will happen.*<sup>46</sup>

Lindsey's last but one book, *The Final Battle*, includes the following,

*Never before, in one book, has there been such a complete and detailed look at the events leading up to 'The Battle of Armageddon.'*<sup>47</sup>

Lindsey, along with people like Jack Van Impe offer graphic maps showing future military movements of American, Russian, Chinese and African armies and naval convoys which they claim will contend with one another in the battle of Armageddon.<sup>48</sup>

## **A Critique of Christian Zionist Theology**

In this brief survey we have explored seven basic tenets of Christian Zionism. An ultra-literalist hermeneutic, the belief that the Jews remain God's chosen people, the restoration of Jews to Eretz Israel will continue, Jerusalem will be the eternal and exclusive capital of the Jews, the Temple will be rebuilt, the priesthood consecrated and sacrifices reinstated. Arabs and Palestinians are seen as the enemies of Israel in what is about to become the battle of Armageddon.

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1 <sup>46</sup>Lindsey, *Planet.*, pp. 243-244.

2 <sup>47</sup>Hal Lindsey, *The Final Battle* (Palos Verdes, California, Western Front, 1995), front cover.?

3 <sup>48</sup>Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (London, Lakeland, 1970), p. 155; Louis Goldberg, *Turbulence Over the Middle East* (Neptune, New Jersey, Loizeaux Brothers, 1982), p. 172.

By contrast, in the New Testament, followers of Jesus Christ are called to be 'peacemakers' – indeed it is peacemaking that Jesus insists identifies the authenticity of those who claim to be his followers. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9).

The apostle Paul elaborates on this radical yet intrinsic role of Christ-followers in 2 Corinthians 5:

*"So from now on we regard no-one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5:16-20)*

We are to repudiate worldly criteria that distinguishes and categorises people on the basis of wealth, race, colour or creed. God is not willing that any should perish.

*"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)*

The vision of the future found in the Book of Revelation is ultimately a message of hope not despair. We see in the closing chapters, God's dream not his nightmare.

*“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”  
(Revelation 21:3-4)*

The closing chapter of the New Testament takes us back to the imagery of the Garden of Eden and the removal of the curse arising from the Fall.

*“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb... On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”  
(Revelation 22:1-2)*

Surely this is what Jesus had in mind when he instructed his followers to work and pray that God’s kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven.