Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?
Iranian Centre for Christian Culture and Thought

Why is there such a close relationship today between the Christian Right, the political establishment and the State of Israel? Why after 40 years, does Israel continue to occupy territory in Lebanon (the Sheba Farms), Syria (the Golan Heights) and Palestine (the West Bank) while Syria has been pressured to withdraw from Lebanon? Why is Israel able to develop chemical, biological and nuclear weapons disregarding every international agreement while Iran is threatened with pre-emptive attack for seeking nuclear technology? Why has Israel been the subject of more UN Resolutions than any other country in the world? Why has the USA vetoed virtually every one of them? Why have Britain and America become the focus of so much hatred from the Islamic world? Why are our countries the target for Islamist terrorism - despite our commitment to the rule of international law, democracy and human rights? The answers to these questions remain inexplicable unless we factor in what is now probably the most influential and destructive movement amongst Christians today – Christian Zionism.

Christian Zionism Defined

> "Christian Zionism is [essentially] a political movement within Protestant evangelical Christianity that views the modern state of Israel as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, [mandated by God] thus deserving our unconditional economic, moral, political, and theological support."

Christian Zionists are convinced that God blesses those nations that stand with Israel and curses those that don't. Christian Zionism also provides a biblical justification for greater US intervention in the Middle East. It is deeply mistrustful of the United Nations and the European Community, demonises Muslims and actively opposes the implementation of international law, the Middle East Peace Process and the right of Palestinians to an independent sovereign state alongside Israel.

The Significance of the Christian Zionism

Let me give you a flavour of the movement and their strategy from a recent speech given by John Hagee. Hagee is the Founder and Senior Pastor of Cornerstone Church, an 18,000 member evangelical church in San Antonio in Texas. Hagee broadcasts a national radio and television ministry to Americans on 160 T.V. stations, 50 radio stations and eight networks into an estimated 99 million homes worldwide on a weekly basis. In 2006 he founded Christians United for Israel with the support of 400 other Christian leaders. Last year he admitted:

> "For 25 almost 26 years now, I have been pounding the evangelical community over television. The bible is a very pro-Israel book. If a Christian admits "I believe the Bible," I can make him a pro-Israel supporter or they will have to denounce their faith. So I have the Christians over a barrel, you might say."[1]

[1] John Hagee, The One Jerusalem Blog, 25 January 2007.
http://www.onejerusalem.org/blog/archives/2007/01/audio_exclusive_12.asp <Accessed March 2007>

The assumption Hagee makes, that Bible-believing Christians will be pro-Israel, is the dominant view among evangelical Christians, especially in the USA. In March 2007, Hagee was a guest speaker at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) Policy Conference. He began with these words:

> "The sleeping giant of Christian Zionism has awakened. There are 50 million Christians standing up and applauding the State of Israel…"

As the Jerusalem Post pointed out, his speech did not lack clarity. He went on to warn:

> "It is 1938. Iran is Germany, and Ahmadinejad is the new Hitler. We must stop Iran's nuclear threat and stand boldly with Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East… Think of our potential future together: 50 million evangelicals joining in common cause with 5 million Jewish people in America on behalf of Israel is a match made in heaven."[2]

Now we don't have time to explore the roots of this movement – for that I commend my book *Christian Zionism* and Sabeel's *Challenging Christian Zionism* – both in the bookstore.

The Contemporary Catalyst

The founding of the State of Israel in 1948, and the capture of Jerusalem and the West Bank in the 1967 Six Day War came to be seen as the most significant fulfilment of biblical prophecy, mandated by God,[3] indeed for many, '*the greatest piece of prophetic news that we have had in the 20th Century*.'[4] Following the 1967 war, Billy Graham's father-in-law Nelson Bell, then editor of *Christianity Today*, expressed the sentiments of many evangelicals when, in an editorial for the magazine he wrote,

> 'for the first time in more than 2,000 years Jerusalem is now completely in the hands of the Jews gives a student of the Bible a thrill and a renewed faith in the accuracy and validity of the Bible.'[5]

In 1976 a series of events brought Christian Zionism to the forefront of US mainstream politics. Jimmy Carter was elected as the 'born again' President drawing the support of the evangelical right. In Israel, Menachem Begin and the right wing Likud Party came to power the following year. A tripartite coalition slowly emerged between the political

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[2] "Christians for Israel" Editorial, *The Jerusalem Post*, 14 March 2007. http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1173879085796&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull <Accessed March 2007>

[3] Stanley J. Grenz, The Millennial Maze, (Downers Grove, Illinois, InterVarsity, 1992), p92; Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth, (London, Lakeland, 1970), pp43, 53-58; Hannah Hurnard, Watchman on the Walls, (London, Olive Press, 1950), pp11-12.

[4] Louis T. Talbot & William W. Orr, The Nation of Israel and the Word of God!, (Los Angeles, Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1948), p8.

[5] Donald Wagner, 'Evangelicals and Israel: Theological Roots of a Political Alliance' The Christian Century, November 4, (1998), pp1020-1026.

Right, evangelicals and the Jewish lobby. Grace Halsell describes Falwell's own conversion:

> 'The stunning Israeli victory made a big impact not only on Falwell, but on a lot of Americans ... Remember that in 1967, the United States was mired in the Vietnam War. Many felt a sense of defeat, helplessness and discouragement. As Americans, we were made acutely aware of our own diminished authority, of no longer being able to police the world or perhaps even our own neighborhoods ... Many Americans, including Falwell, turned worshipful glances toward Israel, which they viewed as militarily strong and invincible. They gave their unstinting approval to the Israeli take-over of Arab lands because they perceived this conquest as power and righteousness ... Macho or muscular Christians such as Falwell credited Israeli General Moshe Dayan with this victory over Arab forces and termed him the Miracle Man of the Age, and the Pentagon invited him to visit Vietnam and tell us how to win that war.'[6]

In 1979, the same year Falwell founded Moral Majority, the Israeli government gave him a Lear jet to assist him in his advocacy of Israel. When Carter vacillated over the aggressive Likud settlement programme and proposed the creation of a Palestinian homeland, he alienated the pro-Israeli coalition of Jews and evangelicals who switched their support to Ronald Reagan in the 1980 elections. Reagan's election as President gave a considerable boost to the Christian Zionist cause. Don Wagner shows, 'The election of Ronald Reagan ushered in not only the most pro-Israel administration in history but gave several Christian Zionists prominent political posts.'[7] 'White House Seminars' became a regular feature of Reagan's administration bringing bringing Christian Zionists like Jerry Falwell, Mike Evans and Hal Lindsey into direct personal contact with national and Congressional leaders. In a personal conversation reported in the *Washington Post* two years later in April 1984, Reagan elaborated on his own theological convictions:

> 'You know, I turn back to the ancient prophets in the Old Testament and the signs foretelling Armageddon, and I find myself wondering if - if we're the generation that is going to see that come about. I don't know if you've noted any of these prophecies lately, but believe me they certainly describe the times we're going through.'[8]

George W. Bush was also an advocate for America's God-given 'manifest destiny'. At the Israeli-Palestinian summit at the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, in 2003 Bush confessed,

> 'I am driven with a mission from God'. God would tell me, 'George go and fight these terrorists in Afghanistan'. And I did. And then God would tell me 'George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq'. And I did… "And now, again, I feel God's words

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6 Ibid.

7 Donald Wagner, 'Beyond Armageddon', The Link, New York: Americans for Middle East Understanding; October-November, (1992), p5.

8 Ronnie Dugger, 'Does Reagan Expect a Nuclear Armageddon?' Washington Post, 18 April (1984).

> coming to me, 'Go get the Palestinians their state and get the Israelis their security, and get peace in the Middle East'. And, by God, I'm gonna do it."'

During the recent election campaign Obama and McCain sought to outdo one another to show their loyalty to Israel. This is largely due to the influence of the Christian Zionist lobby, considered to be the most powerful in the USA.[9]

The Size & Significance of the Christian Zionist Movement

While critics claim, between '25 to 30 million' subscribe, leaders such as Pat Robertson and John Hagee have weekly access to at least 100 million sympathetic Christians.[10] The Pew Research Centre recently discovered that 60% of US evangelicals said they supported the state of Israel,[11] and 32% cited their religious beliefs as the primary reason for such support. Leading Christian Zionists include Pat Robertson, James Dobson, John Hagee, Mike Evans, Tim LaHaye, Kenneth Copeland, Franklin Graham, Paul Crouch, Chuck Missler and Jimmy Swaggart. The Unity Coalition for Israel, founded in 1991, is the largest pro-Israel network bringing together over 200 different organizations. They claim to have 40 million active members, and lobby on behalf of Israel through 1,700 religious radio stations, 245 Christian TV stations, and 120 Christian newspapers. Besides, Christian's United for Israel (CUFI), the other three largest Christian Zionist organizations are the International Christian Embassy, Jerusalem (ICEJ), Christian Friends of Israel (CFI) and Bridges for Peace (BFP). A powerful lobby movement? Christian Zionism is undoubtedly a dominant force shaping US foreign policy in the Middle East.[12]

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:

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[9] Michael Lind, 'The Israel Lobby and American Power' Prospect, April (2002), pp22-29; Halsell, Prophecy., op.cit.

[10] 'Christians Call for a United Jerusalem' New York Times, 18 April (1997), http://www.cdn-friends-icej.ca/united.html

[11] The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Many Americans Uneasy with Mix of Religion and Politics," August 24, 2006. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, http://peoplepress.org/reports/display.php3?PageID=1084 <accessed March 2007>

[12] See Robert Jewett & John Shelton Lawrence, *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2003); Timothy Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals became Israel's Best Friend* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2004); and John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, 'The Israeli Lobby', *The London Review of Books*, 23 March 2006, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n06/mear01_.html <Accessed March 2007>

'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.' [13]

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.[14]

1.1 Changing Literalism

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.

1980's Countdown to Armageddon	Planet Earth 2000 AD
'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.'[15]	'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.'[16]

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.[17] In *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) the threat comes from 'The Russian force'.[18] By 1997 this had become, 'The Russian-Muslim force'.[19] In keeping pace with the changing Middle East scene, by 1999 Lindsey was claiming this axis of evil was now led by a 'Muslim-Russian alliance.'[20]

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,

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1 [13] C.I. Scofield, Scofield Bible Correspondence Course, (Chicago, Moody Bible Institute, n.d.), pp45-46.

2 [14]Kathy Kern, '*Blessing Israel? Christian Embassy Responds'* Christian Peacemakers Team, Internet:menno.org.cpt.news@MennoLink.org 2 November 1997.Y

3 [15] Lindsey, 1980's, op.cit., p68.

4 [16] Lindsey, Planet, p216.

5 [17] Lindsey, Chapter 1 of The Final Battle, (Palos Verdes, California, Western Front, 1995), is entitled 'The New Islamic Global Threat', p1.

6 [18] Lindsey, Late, op.cit., p160.

7 [19] Lindsey, Apocalypse, op.cit., p153.

8 [20] Lindsey, Briefing, op.cit., 7th January (1999).

conclusions. For example, in their interpretation of Revelation 9:13-19, M.R. DeHann and Hal Lindsey contradict one another:

M.R. DeHann (1946)	Hal Lindsey (1973)
'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.'[21]	'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.'[22]

For DeHann and also LaHaye, the 200 million are 'a supernatural horde of 200 million demonic horsemen'[23] while for Lindsey and Schuyler English they are literally Chinese soldiers.[24] Lindsey does, however, suggest their 'horses' are symbolic for mobilized ballistic missile launchers.[25] 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*.'[26]

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

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1 [21] M. R. DeHann, Revelation, 35 Simple Studies in the Major Themes of Revelation, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1946), p148.

2 [22] Lindsey, There's, op.cit., pp142-143.

3 [23] Tim LaHaye & Jerry B. Jenkins, Are We Living in the End Times?, (Wheaton, Tyndale House, 1999), pp190-192.

[24] Schuyler English, New, op.cit., p1334.

1 [25] Lindsey, There's, op.cit., p143.

[26] William Hendrikson, More than Conquerors, (London, Inter-Varsity, 1962). p40-41.

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.*[27]

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

1. A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct...

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1 [27]C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course*, 19th edn. (Chicago, Moody Bible Institute), p. 23.

> *2. This distinction between Israel and the church is born out of a system of hermeneutics that is usually called literal interpretation....*[28]

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.*[29]

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,

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2 [28]Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*., pp. 39-40.

3 [29]Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Dispensationalism* (Dallas, Seminary Press, 1936), p. 107.

> *'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*." 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)

The New Testament knows nothing of this preoccupation with an earthly kingdom. As John Stott says, 'Christ's kingdom, while not incompatible with patriotism, tolerates no narrow nationalisms.'[30] Instead, Jesus redefines the boundaries of the kingdom of God to embrace the whole world. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes a promise made to the Jewish people concerning the Land from Psalm 37, and applies it to his own followers any where in the world.

Psalm 37:11	Matthew 5:5
But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.	Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

[30] John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p. 43.

Subsequent to Pentecost, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles begin to use Old Covenant language concerning the Land in new ways. Shortly after the Day of Pentecost, Peter explains how the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus had been predicted inaugurating an expanded kingdom embracing all who would trust in Jesus.

> *Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed*. (Acts 3:24-25)

Here Peter claims that the promise made to Abraham (Genesis 12:3; 22:18) and repeated to Isaac (Genesis 26:4) and to Jacob (Genesis 28:14) was being fulfilled in the birth of the international community of Christ followers.

The inheritance of the saints was ultimately never an 'everlasting' share of the territory in Palestine but an eternal place in heaven. Indeed, the Book of Hebrews shows that even Abraham, the Patriarchs and later Hebrew saints looked beyond Canaan to 'another' country in which the covenant promises of God would be fulfilled

> *"For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them… 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 11:10-16, 39-40).

There is therefore no evidence that the Apostles believed that their inheritance was in Palestine, still less that the Jewish people had a divine right to the Land in perpetuity, or that Jewish possession of the Land would be an important, let alone central, aspect of God's purposes for the world.

The land had served its purpose – to provide a temporary residence for the ancestors of the Messiah, David's greater Son, to host the incarnation, a home for the Lord Jesus Christ, and so be made for ever holy through the shedding of his innocent blood upon it. The Land provided a base, a strategic launch pad for God's rescue mission, from which the apostles would take the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. In the New Testament, the Land, like an old wineskin, had served its purpose. It was and remains irrelevant to God's ongoing redemptive purposes for the world.

4. Jerusalem, The Eternal and Exclusive Jewish Capital

The place and purpose of Jerusalem, or 'Zion' as it is sometimes called,[31] 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*.'[32]

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)

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'[33] 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.[34] Access to heaven no longer 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. [22] … a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth….* (John 4:21-23)

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[31] Zion more specifically refers to the hill on the western edge of the Old City of Jerusalem.

1 [32] Lindsey, Israel, op.cit., p20.

2 [33] Peter Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 129.

3 [34] Walker, *Jesus*., p. 131.

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. [27] 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).[35]

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*.[36]

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.[37] 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.

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.[38] 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.[39] 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*.[40]

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

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4 [35]C.I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 890.

5 [36]*The New Scofield Reference Bible* ed. E. Schuyler English (New York, Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 864.

6 [37]Cornelis P. Venema, *The Promise of the Future* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 2000), p. 285

7 [38]1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21; 1 Corinthians 6:19.

8 [39]John 2:19, Mark 26:61, 27:40; Mark 14:58, 15:29.

9 [40]Hebrews 9:9, 23, 10:1-3, 11.

therefore ignore the way in which the 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,[41] in which Jesus is the 'precious cornerstone'.[42]

> *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 Testament repeatedly sees such Old Testament concepts as the Temple, High Priest and sacrifice as '*types*' pointing to and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.[43] 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.[44]

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'.[45] In doing so they are seeking to revive what is now obsolete. Turning the clock back in redemptive history[46] they are Judaizing the Christian faith.[47] It is not surprising perhaps that Christian support for Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount, attempts to destroy the Dome of

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[41] 1 Peter 2:5.

[42] 1 Peter 2:7.

[43] John 1:14; 2:19-22; Colossians 2:9.

[44] John 1:14.

[45] Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 10:1, 5.

[46] Venema, *Promise*., p. 288.

[47] Galatians 3:1-5; 3:13-16; Hebrews 8:13; .

the Rock and rebuild the Jewish Temple, inflames tensions between Jews and Arabs, Christian and Moslem.

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.[48] Comparisons between Hitler and the Arabs are common.[49] 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*.[50]

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,[51] in which people like Saddam Hussein are seen as contenders for the role of Anti-Christ.[52] 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 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*.[53]

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[54], to love their enemies and seek

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17 [48]Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, Vintage, 1978)

18 [49]Jan Willem van der Hoeven, *Babylon or Jerusalem?* (Shippensburg, Pasadena, Destiny Image Publishers, 1993), pp. 132-133.

19 [50]Lindsey, *Israel and the Last Days* (Eugene, Oregon, Harvest House, 1983), pp. 38-39.

20 [51]Merrill Simon, *Jerry Falwell and the Jews* (Middle Village, New York, Jonathan David, 1984), pp. 63-64, 71-72.

21 [52]Charles Dyer, *The Rise of Babylon* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1991)

[53] www.Amazon.com http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/044652252X/103-2116324-4283859

1 [54]Matthew 5:9.

reconciliation.[55] 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.[56] Tragically, many Christian Zionists, it seems, are more concerned with fighting wars than building peace.

6. **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:[57] Amillennialism teaches that the millennium is symbolic, or already 'realised'[58] 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 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*.'[59]

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*.'[60]

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.[61]

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2 [55]Matthew 5:44.

3 [56]2 Corinthians 5:16-20.

[57] 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.

[58] Ibid., p235.

1 [59]Lindsey, *Planet*., pp. 243-244.

2 [60]Hal Lindsey, *The Final Battle* (Palos Verdes, California, Western Front, 1995), front cover.?

John Hagee takes a similarly aggressive approach toward Iran.

At the July 19th, 2006 Washington DC inaugural event for Christians United for Israel, after recorded greeting from George W. Bush, and in the presence of four US Senators as well as the Israeli ambassador to the US, John Hagee stated :

> *The United States must join Israel in a pre-emptive military strike against Iran to fulfil God's plan for both Israel and the West... a biblically prophesied end-time confrontation with Iran, which will lead to the Rapture, Tribulation, and Second Coming of Christ*.[62]

And President Bush seems to be listening. On 13 July 2008, the Times Newspaper reported that "President George W Bush … told the Israeli government that he may be prepared to approve a future military strike on Iranian nuclear facilities if negotiations with Tehran break down, according to a senior Pentagon official. Despite the opposition of his own generals and widespread scepticism that America is ready to risk the military, political and economic consequences of an airborne strike on Iran, the president has given an "amber light" to an Israeli plan to attack Iran's main nuclear sites with long-range bombing sorties, the official told The Sunday Times.

"Amber means get on with your preparations, stand by for immediate attack and tell us when you're ready," the official said." "It's really all down to the Israelis," the Pentagon official added. "This administration will not attack Iran. This has already been decided. But the president is really preoccupied with the nuclear threat against Israel and I know he doesn't believe that anything but force will deter Iran." The Times went on to say, "Senator Barack Obama's previous opposition to the war in Iraq, and his apparent doubts about the urgency of the Iranian threat, have intensified pressure on the Israeli hawks to act before November's US presidential election. "If I were an Israeli I wouldn't wait," the Pentagon official added."

> However we understand the future, it is noteworthy to observe how the Book of Revelation ends:
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> *Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell 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." ... 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 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit,*

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3 [61]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.

[62] Sarah Posner, "Pastor Strangelove" The American Prospect Online, http://www.prospect.org/web/page.ww?section=root&name=ViewPrint&articleId=11541 <Accessed March 2007>

yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 21:1-4, 22:1-2)

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 reinstituted. Arabs and Palestinians are seen as the enemies of Israel in what is about to become the battle of Armageddon.

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)*

As we have seen, 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)

What is your vision of the future? However we understand the detail of God's working in our world today, these verses describe where the world is heading. This is God's purpose and therefore our mandate - the healing of the nations. God's plan is nothing less than paradise restored. We look forward to the beauty, harmony and intimacy of a restored relationship between God and his people, where pain, suffering and death are no more. Is the way we view Israel and the Church assisting or hindering God's plan? Are we furthering the biblical mandate to proclaim the gospel to Jew and Gentile or have we substituted 'another' gospel? Are we 'doing justice and loving mercy' in the Middle East or are we exacerbating tensions? Are we walking in the way of peace or we hindering reconciliation between Arabs and Israelis?

Garth Hewitt has written many songs about the plight of the Christian community in Israel and Palestine. One of them, based on some verses from the Jewish Talmud, is called 'Ten measures of beauty God gave to the world'. I would like to close by using it as a prayer.

May the justice of God fall down like fire
and bring a home for the Palestinian.
May the mercy of God pour down like rain
and protect the Jewish people.
And may the beautiful eyes of a Holy God
who weeps for His children
Bring the healing hope for His wounded ones
For the Jew and the Palestinian.