Evangelical Christian Zionism: Justifying Apartheid in the Name of God
Living Stones 2021 Yearbook

Introduction

Donald Trump probably accomplished more for Israel in his short time in office than any other US President since Harry Truman unilaterally recognised the State of Israel in May 1948. President Truman did so, going against the advice of his State Department, US Mission to the United Nations and ambassadors in the Middle East. President Trump continued the same unilateral, idiosyncratic tradition but with gusto.

In December 2017, for example, reversing decades of US foreign policy, he announced the United States recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and ordered the relocation of the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. On 14 May 2018 - the 70th anniversary of Israel's founding - the US officially moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Also, in May 2018, to please Israel, President Trump announced that he was unilaterally withdrawing the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or Iran nuclear deal.

In August 2018, the Trump administration announced it was going to cut all funding to UNRWA, the UN agency that supports Palestinian refugees, alleging its business model and fiscal practices were of an "irredeemably flawed operation". Then in February 2019, the US Senate passed a bill allowing state governments to refuse to do business with companies that boycott Israel. A month later, in March 2019, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at his side, President Trump declared that the US unilaterally recognised Israeli sovereignty over the Syrian Golan Heights.

In July 2019, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a resolution rejecting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel. And in November 2019, Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo declared that the US government no longer considered Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories illegal under international law, preparing the ground for their expansion and annexation by Israel.

How did Donald Trump come to lead the most pro-Israel administration in the history of the United States? The answer is very simple. In the USA today, white evangelicals are twice as likely as Jewish Americans to believe God gave the land of Israel for the Jewish people (72% of US evangelicals compared with 40% of US Jews). And while American Jews typically vote Democrat, 81% of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 election.[1]

In March 2018, Benjamin Netanyahu went as far as to compare Donald Trump with the Persian king, Cyrus the Great.

> "During his visit to Washington, DC, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu heavily implied Trump was Cyrus's spiritual heir. Thanking Trump for moving the American embassy to Jerusalem, Netanyahu said, "We remember the proclamation of the great

[1] https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/

> King Cyrus the Great — Persian King. Twenty-five hundred years ago, he proclaimed that the Jewish exiles in Babylon can come back and rebuild our temple in Jerusalem...And we remember how a few weeks ago, President Donald J. Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Mr. President, this will be remembered by our people throughout the ages."[2]

Morgan Strong, in an article "How Christian Zionists got their man into the White House" observed,

> "The Christian Zionists managed, through the positioning of Mike Pence and fellow believers in the White House, an incredible measure of influence over the most powerful nation on earth… Pence is not alone in his efforts to convince Trump to fulfill what the Christian Zionists regard as a biblical prophecy. Mike Huckabee, the former governor of Arkansas, his daughter Sara Huckabee Sanders, now the White House press secretary, and Sara Palin wield great influence in the Trump administration and are ardent Christian Zionists."[3]

Christian Zionism, in its various forms, evangelistic, political and apocalyptic, is without doubt a theology held by the majority of white evangelicals in the USA.[4]

1. The Historical Roots of Christian Zionism

Were it not for the intervention of a small group of eccentric aristocratic British Christian leaders in the early 19th Century, Zionism, much like contemporary Kurdish or Armenian aspirations for autonomy, would in all probability have simply remained a frustrated political aspiration.

Convinced the Jews would become a Christian nation before the return of Christ, influential evangelical leaders including Lewis Way, Edward Irving, Henry Drummond, Lord Shaftesbury and William Hechler, lobbied politicians in Britain as well as in Europe to facilitate the Jewish colonisation of Palestine.

The movement gained traction from the middle of the 19th Century, when Palestine increasingly became strategic to competing British, French and German colonial designs in the Middle East. Although largely ignored by Zionist historians, Christian proto-Zionism or Restorationism preceded Jewish Zionism by more than 50 years. Indeed, it was probably Shaftesbury who inspired Israel Zwangel to coin the phrase, 'A land of no people for a people with no land.'

A generation earlier, imagining Palestine to be empty, Shaftesbury wrote to Foreign Minister George Hamilton Gordon, Lord Palmerston, in 1853 that Greater Syria was "a country

[2] https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/3/5/16796892/trump-cyrus-christian-right-bible-cbn-evangelical-propaganda
[3] Morgan Strong, "How Christian Zionists got their man into the White House" 29 January 2019, https://www.middleeasteye.net/big-story/how-christian-zionists-got-their-man-white-house
[4] Mimi Kirk, 'Countering Christian Zionism in the Age of Trump' 8 August 2019, https://merip.org/2019/08/countering-christian-zionism-in-the-age-of-trump/

without a nation" in need of "a nation without a country… Is there such a thing? To be sure there is: the ancient and rightful lords of the soil, the Jews!"[5]

In May 1854, Shaftesbury wrote in his diary,

> "Syria is wasted without an inhabitant: these vast and fertile regions will soon be without a ruler, without a known and acknowledged power to claim dominion. The territory must be assigned to someone or other... There is a country without a nation; and God now in his wisdom and mercy, directs us to a nation without a country."[6]

Theodore Herzl acknowledged his own indebtedness to the Revd William Hechler, the Anglican chaplain in Vienna. In his diary for 10 March 1896 Herzl records a meeting with Hechler.

> "The Reverend William Hechler, Chaplain of the English Embassy here, came to see me. A sympathetic, gentle fellow, with the long grey beard of a prophet. He is enthusiastic about my solution of the Jewish Question. He also considers my movement a 'prophetic turning-point' - which he had foretold two years before…"[7]

In March 1897, the year Hechler had predicted the Jews would begin returning to Palestine, Herzl described another meeting, this time at Hechler's apartment. He was apparently amazed to find a large military staff map of Palestine made up of four sheets covering the entire floor of Hechler's study.

> "He showed me where, according to his calculations, our new Temple must be located: in Bethel! Because that is the centre of the country. He also showed me models of the ancient Temple. 'We have prepared the ground for you!' Hechler said triumphantly … I take him for a naive visionary … However, there is something charming about his enthusiasm … He gives me excellent advice, full of unmistakable genuine good will. He is at once clever and mystical, cunning and naive."[8]

Christian Zionism may be defined as a political movement, largely confined to Protestant Christianity, that views the modern state of Israel as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, thus deserving our unconditional economic, moral, political, and theological support. Grace Halsell summarises the message of the Christian Zionism: "every act taken by Israel is orchestrated by God, and should be condoned, supported, and even praised by the rest of us."[9]

2. The Growth and Significance of the Evangelical Zionist Movement

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[5] Cited in Adam M. Garfinkle, "On the Origin, Meaning, Use, and Abuse of a Phrase," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Oct. 1991, p. 543.

[6] Edwin Hodder, The Life and Work off the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, K.G. London: Cassel & Company, 1887. p. 478.

[7] The complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl, edited by Raphael Patai, translated by Harry Zohn, Herzl Press, New York, 1960, p. 312

[8] Cited in Payl Merklely, *The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948*, London, Frank Cass, 1998, pp. 16-17.

[9] Grace Halsell, 'Israeli Extremists and Christian Fundamentalists: The Alliance', *Washington Report*, December, 1988, p. 31.

Christian Zionism is now pervasive within American evangelical, charismatic and independent denominations including the Assemblies of God, Pentecostals and Southern Baptists, as well as many of the independent mega-churches and among television evangelists. Christian Zionism is much less prevalent within the historic denominations (Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian), which show a greater respect for the work of the United Nations, support human rights, the rule of international law, empathize with the Palestinians and cooperate with the indigenous Middle East churches.

A 2005 Pew Forum survey of American Evangelicals and Israel (conducted in 2003) found that compared to other Americans, white evangelical Protestants were...

- significantly more sympathetic to Israel than to the Palestinians — 55% sympathized more with Israel, only 6% with the Palestinians (versus 41% and 13%, respectively, of all those surveyed).
- significantly more likely to say that religious beliefs were the single biggest influence in leading them to sympathize more with Israel — 46% versus 26% of all those surveyed.
- significantly more likely to believe that God gave the land of Israel to the Jews — 72% versus 44% of all those surveyed.
- significantly more likely to believe that Israel fulfills the biblical prophecy about Jesus' second coming — 63% versus 36% of all those surveyed. [10]

An earlier 2004 survey found that that "traditionalist" evangelicals — who are characterized by a high level of orthodox belief and a high level of church attendance, and who are the largest subgroup of evangelicals — are even more likely to agree that U.S. policy should tilt towards Israel: 64% agreed, while 18% disagreed, with 18% expressing no opinion.

Nearly a third of Americans, around 100 million people, lean towards evangelical Christianity and of these perhaps a third embrace the Christian Zionist perspective and deeply passionate in its support for Israel.[11] As Jerry Falwell once boasted, "The Bible Belt is Israel's safety net in the United States."[12]

In 2017, Life Way Research conducted a survey of Evangelical Attitudes to Israel and the Peace Process.[13]

> "Research found that 80% believe that "God's promise [of land] to Abraham and his descendants was for all time." By a 46% to 19% margin, the surveyed evangelicals disagreed with the notion that Palestinians have any such "historic right." Notably, LifeWay found that 80% of the surveyed evangelicals believe that the modern rebirth of Israel and the return of millions of Jews to that land are a fulfillment of Bible prophecy and show "we are getting closer to the return of Jesus Christ."[14]

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[10] https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2005/04/EvangelicalsIsrael.pdf

[11] Paul Rogers, 'Trump, Pence, Jerusalem: The Christian Zionism connection
The political use of a religious vision spells danger for Israel, America, and the world.' 14 December 2017.
https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/trump-pence-jerusalem-christian-zionism-connection/

[12] ibid.,

[13] http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Evangelical-Attitudes-Toward-Israel-Research-Study-Report.pdf

[14] Tom Gjelten 'As U.S. Jews Cool To Israel, Evangelicals Flock There As Tourists' 25 August 2019,

The Life Way findings offer some hope, however, for Palestinians in observing a significant generational shift away from unconditional support for Israel among younger evangelicals.

> "Only nine percent of older respondents considered the "rebirth" of Israel in 1948 as an injustice to Palestinians, while 62 percent disagreed and 28 percent said they weren't sure. Among younger evangelicals, nineteen percent said that Israel's creation was an injustice to Palestinians, 34 percent disagreed, and almost half weren't sure. Such a trend may hold promise for Palestinians and allies working to shift the Christian Zionist narrative and secure Palestinian human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and beyond."[15]

Contemporary Israeli politicians, ever conscious of the need to nurture and maintain Christian support, willingly acknowledge their continued indebtedness. In 2012, at an event dedicating the restoration of the windmill, originally built in 1858 by Moses Montefiore in Jerusalem, Benjamin Netanyahu said,

> "I don't believe that the Jewish State and Modern Zionism would have been possible without Christian Zionism. I think that the many Christian supporters of the rebirth of the Jewish State and the ingathering of the Jewish people in the 19th century made possible the rise of Jewish Zionism - modern Jewish Zionism… We value our friends, and we never forget them, and we think that you have helped establish here a powerful memorial to our friendship and common ideals"[16]

Pastor John Hagee is one of the leaders of the Christian Zionist movement. He is the Founder and Senior Pastor of Cornerstone Church, a 19,000-member evangelical church in San Antonio, Texas. His weekly programmes are broadcast on 160 TV stations, 50 radio stations and eight networks into an estimated 100 million homes in 200 countries. In 2006 he founded Christians United for Israel (CUFI) admitting,

> "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."

In March 2007, Hagee spoke at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) Policy Conference. He began by saying:

> "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:

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https://www.npr.org/2019/08/25/753720351/as-u-s-jews-cool-to-israel-evangelicals-flock-there-as-tourists?t=1574529777483

[15] Mimi Kirk, 'Countering Christian Zionism in the Age of Trump' 8 August 2019, https://merip.org/2019/08/countering-christian-zionism-in-the-age-of-trump/

[16] Benjamin Netanyahu, 28 August 2012. https://www.facebook.com/IsraeliPM/photos/a.155541071127313/512520212096062/

> "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."[17]

By 2012, CUFI had gained one million members; two million by 2015; five million by 2018 and claims to have seven million today, making it the largest pro-Zionist organisation in the United States, equivalent in size to the entire Jewish population in America.

Other leading Christian Zionist organisations include the International Christian Embassy (ICEJ); Bridges for Peace; Christian Friends of Israel (CFI); Jerusalem Prayer Team and Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC). There are at least 200 Christian Zionist organisations known to have been founded since 1980.

This growth in Christian Zionism in recent years forms just one part of the wider increase in the conservative evangelical movement, the fastest-growing sector within Christian churches. Donald Wagner estimates that it now numbers 100-130 million which is at least a third of the entire population of the United States (327 million).[18]

It is difficult to estimate the number of Christian Zionists in Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia combined but conservatively, given estimates of 100 million in the USA alone, the number globally must surely be more than double that.

It is sobering to realise that Zionism today is primarily a Christian political conviction, rather than a Jewish one, but infused with religious and apocalyptic fervour. It is a simple fact that Christian Zionists outnumber Jewish Zionists by at least ten to one.

3. The Evangelical Zionist Political Agenda

Evangelical Zionists have been active in implementing six political convictions that arise from their theology:

3.1 Lobbying for and Promoting Israel

The belief that the Jews remain God's chosen people leads Christian Zionists to seek to bless Israel in material ways. However, this also invariably results in the uncritical endorsement of, and justification for, Israel's racist and apartheid policies, in the media, among politicians and through solidarity tours to Israel.

In July 2017, Vice President Pence delivered the keynote address at the annual summit of Christians United for Israel (CUFI) in Washington, Pence was the first sitting vice president or president to speak to the Christian Zionist organization in its 13-year history. His speech marked a fundamental change in the language which the White House has historically employed to articulate the United States' relationship with Israel.

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[17] Shelly Neese, 'Let our unconditional alliance be mutual', 17 July 2007. https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Let-our-unconditional-alliance-be-mutual

[18] Paul Rogers, 'Christian Zionists and neocons: a heavenly marriage', 3 February 2005. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/article_2329jsp/

Dan Hummel of the Washington Post observes the significance of this speech,

> "Although Christian Zionism has a long history in American politics, it has never captured the bully pulpit of the White House. Past administrations often used general biblical language in reference to Israel, but never has the evangelical theology of Christian Zionism been so close to the policymaking apparatus of the executive branch. By identifying with Christian Zionism while in office, Pence risks the Trump administration's ongoing search for an "ultimate deal" to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and erodes the U.S. claim that it can be an "honest broker" in the Middle East."[19]

While other congressmen and senators have spoken at Christian Zionist events and talked about the Christian roots of their support for Israel,

> "never has the ideology been articulated by the White House. This is a crucial distinction, with the bulk of foreign policymaking power residing in the executive branch. Rarely has the executive branch spoken in overt religious terms about a region in which it wishes to be seen as impartial. But Pence will, if his long public record of Christian Zionism holds true."[20]

In July 2017, Vice-President Pence was once again a guest speaker at the CUFI annual summit in Washington along with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. This time however, Pence encountered some opposition from members of Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA).

> "They were confronted by over 100 Christian, Jewish and Muslim faith leaders and community members protesting CUFI's support for Israeli occupation. Several protesters disrupted Hagee and Pence's speeches shouting and holding banners. Tarek Abuata, director of Friends of Sabeel North American (FOSNA), stood shouting, "Zionism is racism." Security handcuffed Abuata and carried him out of the convention center. He continued to shout, "People of God, wake up! Protect the Palestinian people."
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> Christian and Jewish faith leaders then interrupted the U.S. vice president, chanting, "Israel kills children. Jews and Christians say no to Zionism." Security dragged them outside. Rochelle Watson, FOSNA national organizer who disrupted Pence, stated, "We have reached a point where remaining faithful requires us to take bold action by speaking truth to power."
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> This Counter CUFI action was inspired by a coalition including Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA), Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), American Muslims for Palestine (AMP), and US Campaign for Palestinian Rights (USCPR). Abuata said of the action: "We are here to bear sacred witness and hold CUFI accountable to a theology of love."[21]

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[19] Dan Hummel, 'What you need to know about Mike Pence's speech to Christians United for Israel, 17 July 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2017/07/17/what-you-need-to-know-about-mike-pences-speech-to-christians-united-for-israel/

[20] Ibid.,

[21] https://religionnews.com/2019/07/10/faith-leaders-disrupt-u-s-vice-president-mike-pence-during-cufi-summit/

Hummel concludes,

> "Moreover, defining Israel and the Middle East in explicitly religious terms presents a holy war framework of clashing religions in a region that is already racked by sectarian violence and extremism. The identification of the United States as a sectarian actor (as opposed to a neutral arbiter, however transparent at times) could strain relations with Muslim-majority nations or drain credibility with key allies in the region and beyond — especially given the already flagging confidence in U.S. leadership since January. Ultimately, Pence's appearance before CUFI signals a new era of Christian Zionist influence in the White House with the potential to leave a lasting mark on U.S. policy toward Israel."[22]

At the CUFI event in July, Vice president Pence insisted,

> "My passion for Israel springs from my Christian faith … It's really the greatest privilege of my life to serve as vice president to a president who cares so deeply for our most cherished ally."[23]

Support for Israel among evangelicals is growing as a result of increased numbers participating in biblio-political tours of the Holy Land. Drawing on research by Daniel Hummel, Tom Gjelten notes,

> "Not only do [US evangelicals] they outpace U.S. Jews in their support for policies that favor the Israeli government, but U.S. evangelicals have also become the fastest-growing sector of the Israeli tourism market…
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> Evangelical leaders of the Christian Zionism movement, from Jerry Falwell Sr. to John Hagee, have attributed their fervent support for the state of Israel to their own Holy Land travel, according to Daniel Hummel, author of *Covenant Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews, and U.S.-Israeli Relations*. "They say visiting Israel was a key part of their political awakening," Hummel says, "and this goes down to the rank-and-file people in their organizations."
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> "Most of these tours are very highly controlled and curated to convey a particular sense of Israel," Hummel says, "and that's to emphasize the Jewishness of the land, that this is the homeland of the Jewish people, that the history that matters is the history that's in the Bible… There is definitely an understanding on the Israeli government side that tourism is a key way to connect with American evangelicals"[24]

Jonathan Cook, a Nazareth based British journalist, observes,

> "A recent editorial in Haaretz noted that Netanyahu and his officials were now "endeavoring to make evangelicals – who support Israel's hawkish rejectionism regarding the Palestinians – the sole foundation of American support for Israel."

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[22] Ibid.,

[23] https://www.cufi.org/mike-pence-to-cufi-i-support-israel-because-i-am-a-christian/

[24] Tom Gjelten, 'As U.S. Jews Cool To Israel, Evangelicals Flock There As Tourists', 25 August 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/08/25/753720351/as-u-s-jews-cool-to-israel-evangelicals-flock-there-as-tourists?t=1574529777483

> The truth is that these Christian Zionists view the region through a single, exclusive prism: whatever aids the imminent arrival of the Messiah is welcomed. The only issue is how soon God's "chosen people" will congregate in the Promised Land. If the Palestinians stand in Israel's way, these tens of millions of foreign Christians will be quite happy to see the native population driven out once again – as they were in 1948 and 1967."[25]

3.2 Facilitating the Emigration of Jews to Israel

Believing contemporary Jewish people remain God's chosen people, their return or restoration to Israel is actively encouraged, funded and facilitated by Christian agencies working in partnership with the Jewish Agency. The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, for example, has been at the forefront of facilitating Jews from the former Soviet Union, Ukraine, Ethiopia and other countries to make Aliyah.

> "The Jewish Agency has asked the Christian Embassy to assist with funding for the huge influx of French Jews expected to come home to Israel this year. Nearly half of the 550,000 Jews in France escaped there from North Africa several generations ago and many still live in poorer neighbourhoods alongside Muslim immigrants. They are the most vulnerable Jews at present, and the least able to afford the expenses of moving to another country. The ICEJ will be funding aliyah seminars, ground transport, flight tickets, absorption costs and other expenses involved in the immigration process."[26]

3.3 Advocating for Greater Israel and Annexation of the Settlements

Christian Zionists believe that Eretz Israel, from the Nile to the Euphrates, belongs exclusively to the Jewish people, therefore all the land, at least from the Mediterranean to the Jordan must be annexed, Palestinians must be persuaded or driven from their homes and the illegal Jewish settlements expanded and consolidated.

Mustafa Abu Sneineh, writing in *Middle East Eye* notes,

> "The Trump administration's bombshell announcement that it no longer considers Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank illegal under international law has sent shockwaves through the region… Some 20,000 illegal Israeli settlers also live on the plateau. Trump's decree was a gift to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ahead of the April elections, and was signed in his presence alongside Friedman, Greenblatt and Kushner. Returning the favour, Netanyahu announced that Israel was renaming an illegal settlement in the Golan as Trump Hill. "All Israelis were deeply moved when President Trump made his historic decision," Netanyahu said in a video statement."[27]

Jack Jenkins reports,

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[25] Ibid.,
[26] https://int.icej.org/french-aliyah
[27] Mustafa Abu Sneineh, 'Trump's gifts to Israel: Jerusalem, the Golan and now the settlements' 19 November 2019, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/trumps-gifts-israels-netanyahu-jerusalem-west-bank-settlements-and-golan-heights

> "Mike Evans, founder of The Jerusalem Prayer Team and a member of Trump's informal group of evangelical Christian advisers, praised the move. In an interview with Religion News Service, Evans said Pompeo called him shortly after the press conference while on route to meet President Trump. "I told (Pompeo) it was a tremendous answer to prayer from evangelicals," he said, asking the secretary of state to express gratitude to the president… He told RNS it reminded him of a passage from the Biblical book of Genesis in which God refers to Israel by saying, "I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse those who curse you." "In our opinion, it's recognizing the Bible as legal,"[28]

Evangelical Zionists have also been at the forefront of funding and lobbying for the illegal Jewish colonies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC) was founded in 1995 in response to the Oslo Peace Accords. On their website they claim,

> "Christians around the world were deeply troubled by Israel's major territorial concessions and felt compelled to stand with the people of Judea and Samaria. CFOIC Heartland provides a much-needed vehicle for Christians to become better informed about the Jewish communities in the heartland of Biblical Israel, to visit these areas and to provide practical support for vital community needs.
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> CFOIC Heartland enables Christians to connect with the Jewish communities (settlements) in the heart of Biblical Israel. Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") are not occupied territory. These communities are the birthplace of the Jewish people… Through CFOIC Heartland, thousands of Christians from around the world have become valuable friends and supporters of the pioneers of Biblical Israel. Churches, ministries and individuals have visited the communities and biblical sites of Judea and Samaria and have connected directly with the people living there. The have provided financial support for community projects and have made a real difference for those living in the communities of Judea and Samaria."[29]

Jonathan Cook reports how Evangelicals are developing ever-closer ties with Israeli Jewish religious extremists, especially in the settlements.

> "Recent initiatives have included online and face-to-face Bible studies programmes run by Orthodox Jews, often settlers, targeted specifically at evangelical Christians. The tutorials are designed to bolster the settlers' narrative, as well as demonising Muslims and, by extension, Palestinians.
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> The most popular course offered by Root Source, one such venture, is titled "Islam – Insights and Deceptions". It uses the Old and New Testaments to make the case that Islam "is extremely dangerous". A few months ago, Haaretz, Israel's leading liberal newspaper, published an investigation into the growing flow of evangelical volunteers

[28] Jack Jenkins, "Trump advisor calls Pompeo's West Bank decision an answered prayer" Religion News Service, 19 November 2019, https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/trump-advisor-calls-pompeos-west-bank-decision-answered-prayer

[29] https://www.cfoic.com/background-information/

and money into the West Bank's illegal settlements – the chief obstacle to achieving a two-state solution.

One US organisation alone, Hayovel, has brought more than 1,700 Christian volunteers over the past 10 years to help in a settlement close to Nablus, in the heart of the West Bank. An increasing number of similar initiatives have been aided by new rules introduced last year by the Israeli government to pay Christian Zionist groups such as Hayovel to advocate abroad for the settlements.

It is much harder to know exactly how much evangelical money is pouring into the settlements, because of a lack of transparency regarding US donations made by churches and charities. But the Haaretz investigation estimates that over the past decade, as much as $65m has flowed in. Ariel, a settler town sitting in the very centre of the West Bank, received $8 million for a sports centre from John Hagee Ministries a decade ago."[30]

3.4 Recognizing Jerusalem as the Exclusive Capital of Israel

Jerusalem is regarded by Christian Zionists as the eternal and exclusive capital of the Jews, and must not be shared with the Palestinians. Christian Zionists have for decades, lobbied the US Administration to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem to ensure the city is recognised as the exclusive capital of Israel.

Julian Borger observes,

"Trump's order to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv– over the objections of his foreign policy and national security team – is a striking example of evangelical clout… the orchestration of the embassy opening ceremony last May, reflected the audience Trump was trying hardest to appease. The two pastors given the prime speaking slots were both ardent Christian Zionists: Robert Jeffress, a Dallas pastor on record as saying Jews, like Muslims and Mormons, are bound for hell; and John Hagee, a televangelist and founder of Christians United for Israel (Cufi), who once said that Hitler and the Holocaust were part of God's plan to get Jews back to Israel, to pave the way for the Rapture. For many evangelicals, the move cemented Trump's status as the new Cyrus, who oversaw the Jews return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple."[31]

Robert Jeffress explains the religious justification for moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem.

"Jerusalem has been the object of affection of both Jews and Christians down through history and the touchstone of prophecy. But most importantly, God gave Jerusalem - and the rest of the Holy Land - to the Jewish people,"[32]

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[30] Jonathan Cook, "How Evangelical Christians risk setting the Middle East on fire", 8 July 2019, https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/how-evangelical-christians-risk-setting-middle-east-fire

[31] Julian Borger, 'Brought to Jesus': the evangelical grip on the Trump administration' 11 January 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/11/trump-administration-evangelical-influence-support

[32] Barry Kimbrough, Is Trump's Jerusalem Declaration a Prophecy Fulfilled? 14 December 2017, http://religiousliberty.tv/trumps-jerusalem-declaration-prophecy-fulfilled.html

Mimi Kirk notes,

> "…the Trump administration very purposefully chose Jeffress and Hagee for the occasion. The pastors—and their white evangelical followers, who comprise a significant portion of Trump's base with 81 percent having voted for him in 2016—had lobbied the president hard to move the embassy. In an interview with the far-right site Breitbart, Hagee related that he had told Trump: "The moment that you [move the embassy], I believe that you will step into political immortality."[33]

An editorial in Haaretz entitled "Israel's Unholy and Transient Alliance with U.S. Evangelicals", published in May 2018, warned that this alliance was short-sighted,

> "U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to relocate the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was intended first and foremost to reward evangelical Christians for their enthusiastic support for him during and after his election campaign. The participation in Monday's dedication ceremony of two extremist, controversial evangelical leaders, both of whom have made disparaging comments about Jews in the past, highlights this unholy alliance…
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> U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman recently joined his Israeli counterpart, Ron Dermer, in endeavoring to make evangelicals — who support Israel's hawkish rejectionism regarding the Palestinians — the sole foundation of American support for Israel. This partnership further erodes Israel's standing in its traditional power centers — above all U.S. Jews, who view evangelicals as a concrete threat to their values.
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> This dangerous wager poses a double hazard: On one hand, Israel is distancing itself from supporters it may need as soon as November, in the event the Democrats win control of the U.S. Senate or the House of Representatives. On the other hand, nothing lasts forever: Polls show that younger evangelicals oppose blind support for Israel. A responsible Israeli government would change its policy, extend a hand to forces it has neglected and weaning itself of exclusive dependence on messianic Christians.[34]

Despite Trumps demise, Christian Zionists are now focussing on pressuring other nations to move their embassies to Jerusalem.

3.5 Supporting the Rebuilding of the Jewish Temple

Christian Zionists offer varying degrees of support for organisations such as the Temple Mount Faithful who are committed to destroying the Dome of the Rock and rebuilding the Jewish Temple on the Haram Al-Sharif. In February 2014, the *independent* newspaper published a headline, "Mounting tension: Israel's Knesset debates proposal to enforce its sovereignty at Al-Aqsa Mosque – a move seen as 'an extreme provocation to Muslims worldwide'.

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[33] Mimi Kirk, 'Countering Christian Zionism in the Age of Trump' 8 August 2019, https://merip.org/2019/08/countering-christian-zionism-in-the-age-of-trump/

[34] Haaretz editorial, "Israel's Unholy and Transient Alliance With U.S. Evangelicals" 18 May 2018, https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/israel-s-unholy-and-transient-alliance-with-u-s-evangelicals-1.6097404

> "The Arab-Israeli conflict took on an increasingly religious hue when the Jordanian parliament voted unanimously to expel Israel's ambassador in Amman after Israeli legislators held an unprecedented debate on Tuesday evening over a proposal to enforce Israeli sovereignty at one of Jerusalem's holiest sites, currently administered by Jordan, and to allow Jewish prayer there'"[35]

Gershon Salomon is the controversial figurehead of the movement and founder of *The Temple Faithful.* Speaking as a guest of the ICEJ, at the Christian Zionist Congress in 1998, Salomon insisted:

> 'The mission of the present generation is to liberate the Temple Mount and to remove – I repeat, to remove – the defiling abomination there … the Jewish people will not be stopped at the gates leading to the Temple Mount … We will fly our Israeli flag over the Temple Mount, which will be minus its Dome of the Rock and its mosques and will have only our Israeli flag and our Temple. This is what our generation must accomplish.*"*

In a subsequent interview with Sam Kiley in the London *Times* newspaper, Salomon insisted that the Islamic shrine must be destroyed:

> 'The Israeli Government must do it. We must have a war. There will be many nations against us but God will be our general. I am sure this is a test, that God is expecting us to move the Dome with no fear from other nations. The Messiah will not come by himself; we should bring Him by fighting.'[36]

David Reagan is the founder and director of the Texas-based Lamb and Lion Ministries, whose weekly TV show can be accessed by over 110 million Americans. Barry Kimbrough cites Reagan as saying:

> "Evangelical Christians in America generally agree that most likely there will be a war against Israel which the scriptures call the 'war of annihilation' in which all the Muslim nations which have a common border with Israel, who are named in Psalm 83, will attack Israel and Israel will defeat them. Then the Arab world will go into a panic and cry out for Russia to come to their aid. And the Russians will come down with a specified group of Muslim nations, countries like Persia (Iran) and Turkey and they will be destroyed on the mountains of Israel." [37]

Many Christians see the move of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem in recognition of exclusive Israeli sovereignty as a step toward a new temple being built there.

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[35] Ben Lynfield, Independent Newspaper, 27th February 2014, and https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/violence-will-continue-for-as-long-as-access-to-al-aqsa-mosque-is-curtailed-9844899.html

[36] Sam Kiley, 'The righteous will survive and the rest will perish' The Times , 13 December 1999, p.39.

[37] Barry Kimbrough, Is Trump's Jerusalem Declaration a Prophecy Fulfilled? 14 December 2017, http://religiousliberty.tv/trumps-jerusalem-declaration-prophecy-fulfilled.html

Kade Hawkins is the CEO and founder of *Prophecy News Watch*, which specializes in biblical prophecy associated with current global events and changing political platforms. In an article, 'Trump and The Third Temple'**,** Hawkins speculated,

> "If President Trump really has a similar calling to King Cyrus, could it be that God would use this real estate developer turned President to facilitate the greatest property development of modern time – the rebuilding of the Temple?" The President is compared to ancient King Cyrus because the Persian ruler helped re-establish the Jews in their homeland after they were captive 70 years in Babylon."[38]

Thankfully, this particular 'prophecy' did not come true. However, John Hagee and Christians United for Israel appeared so upset by the continued presence of the Islamic Dome of the Rock dominating the view of Jerusalem, they simply airbrushed it out of their website logo. The iconic Western Wall is visible as is the garden on top but there is no Dome of the Rock, no Al Aqsa Mosque. They have simply vanished.[39]

3.6 Anxious for Armageddon

Christian Zionists invariably have a pessimistic view of the future. Many are convinced that there will be an apocalyptic war of Armageddon in the imminent future. They are deeply sceptical of a lasting peace between Jews and Arabs, oppose the peace process and are highly critical of the UN.

> "The tightening of the evangelical grip on the administration has also been reflected in a growing hostility to the UN, often portrayed as a sinister and godless organisation. Since the US ambassador, Nikki Haley, announced her departure in October and Pompeo took more direct control, the US mission has become increasingly combative… the United States locked into a holy war against the forces of evil who they see as embodied by Iran".[40]

Indeed, to advocate an Israeli compromise implicit in the "Two State Solution" is seen as a rejection of God's promises to Israel and therefore to support her enemies. Within the Christian Zionist worldview, Palestinians are regarded as temporary alien residents in the land who emigrated to Israel from the surrounding Arab nations for economic reasons after Israel had become prosperous.

A fear of and deep-seated hatred of Islam also pervades their apocalyptic theology.
In May 2018, as Trump was pulling the US out of the Iran deal, Heather Timmons, writing for *Quartz*, observed that "Trump's foreign policy looks a lot like Rapture Christians' plan to welcome the apocalypse". In an interview with Bill Moyers, John Hagee insisted,

> "We want you to recognize that Iran is a clear and present danger to the United States of America and Israel. And… that it's time for our country to consider a military pre-emptive strike against Iran if they will not yield to diplomacy."[41]

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[38] https://www.prophecynewswatch.com/article.cfm?recent_news_id=1015#VQz5cQrsmLae7rAs.99 See also https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-trump-is-playing-with-fire-at-the-al-aqsa-mosque-1.7573662
[39] Christians United for Israel http://www.cufi.org
[40] Julian Borger, 'Brought to Jesus': the evangelical grip on the Trump administration' 11 January 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/11/trump-administration-evangelical-influence-support
[41] Bill Moyers Journal http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/blog/2007/10/an_evangelical_christian_for_p_1.html

In July 2109 the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "spoke via satellite with Pastor John Hagee at the CUFI (Christians United for Israel) conference in Washington DC" about their mutual concerns regarding the Iranian nuclear threat. Netanyahu said,

> "So it's so important that President Trump decided boldly to leave this bad deal, and he decided to restore sanctions. And Israel is deeply grateful for that, because this is vital for Israel's security, for the security of the region, for the security of the United States, for the security of the world. Now Iran is trying to lash out to reduce the pressure. They attack tankers, they down American drones, they're firing missiles at their neighbors. It's important to respond to these actions not by reducing the pressure, but by increasing the pressure. We should stand up to Iran's aggression now. And Europe should back the sanctions instituted by President Trump. We certainly did."[42]

In the view of evangelical Zionists, the Bible is God's Word and his unconditional promises made to the Jewish people supersede international law. Morgan Strong concludes,

> "The Republican Party leans heavily on the Christian Zionists for both cash, and votes. They have a profound effect on the direction of the party, even if the party now seems to be more Theocratic than political. The Christian Zionists are most likely to vote; they number over twenty million, and are generous contributors. They are the base of this new Republican theocracy. They do not want peace with the Palestinians. The Palestinians have no place in Biblical Israel. The Christian Zionists want them gone to purify the nascent Kingdom of Israel and allow their eternity of bliss in paradise."[43]

These are six distinctive elements that comprise the political agenda of evangelical Zionism: Lobbying political leaders, especially the US Congress and Senate on behalf of Israel; facilitating Jews to make Aliyah to Israel; advocating for greater Israel and expanding the settlements; recognising Jerusalem as the exclusive capital of Israel; Supporting the Temple Movement and rebuilding the Jewish Temple; and opposing the peace process and Palestinian rights.

Tragically, Christian Zionism, as a modern theological and political movement, embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism. It has become deeply detrimental to a just peace between Palestine and Israel. It propagates a worldview in which the Christian message is reduced to an ideology of empire, colonialism and militarism. In its extreme form, it places an emphasis on apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today.

A Response from the Middle East Church

In April 2004, the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Centre in Jerusalem arranged a ground breaking conference on the theme of Christian Zionism. I helped to draft the closing conference declaration repudiating Christian Zionism. In 2006, this statement was

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[42] https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2019/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-speaks-with-Pastor-John-Hagee-at-the-CUFI-Conference-in-Washington-8-July-2019.aspx

[43] Morgan Strong, "How Christian Zionists got their man into the White House" 29 January 2019, https://www.middleeasteye.net/big-story/how-christian-zionists-got-their-man-white-house

subsequently endorsed by four of the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem; His Beatitude Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch, Jerusalem; Archbishop Swerios Malki Mourad, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem; Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal, Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East; and Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

> The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism
>
> "We categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as a false teaching that corrupts the biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation.
>
> We further reject the contemporary alliance of Christian Zionist leaders and organisations with elements in the governments of Israel and the United States that are presently imposing their unilateral pre-emptive borders and domination over Palestine. This inevitably leads to unending cycles of violence that undermine the security of all peoples of the Middle East and the rest of world.
>
> We reject the teachings of Christian Zionism that facilitate and support these policies as they advance racial exclusivity and perpetual war rather than the gospel of universal love, redemption and reconciliation taught by Jesus Christ. Rather than condemn the world to the doom of Armageddon we call upon everyone to liberate themselves from ideologies of militarism and occupation. Instead, let them pursue the healing of the nations!
>
> We call upon Christians in Churches on every continent to pray for the Palestinian and Israeli people, both of whom are suffering as victims of occupation and militarism. These discriminative actions are turning Palestine into impoverished ghettos surrounded by exclusive Israeli settlements. The establishment of the illegal settlements and the construction of the Separation Wall on confiscated Palestinian land undermines the viability of a Palestinian state and peace and security in the entire region."
>
> The patriarchs concluded, "God demands that justice be done. No enduring peace, security or reconciliation is possible without the foundation of justice. The demands of justice will not disappear. The struggle for justice must be pursued diligently and persistently but non-violently." The prophet Micah asks, "What does the Lord require of you, to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8).[44]

Conclusions

Christian Zionism is now the largest, most controversial and probably most destructive organised lobby within Christianity today. It bears primary responsibility for perpetuating tensions in the Middle East, justifying Israel's apartheid colonialist agenda, inciting military aggression toward surrounding nations and thwarting the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians.

[44] https://imeu.org/article/the-jerusalem-declaration-on-christian-zionism

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 act as ambassadors of peace and reconciliation. Let us work together to bring about justice, peace and reconciliation – then may God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

Stephen Sizer
7,000 words

Bio

The Revd Dr Stephen Sizer, a former Anglican priest, is the founder and director of Peacemaker Trust, a charity dedicated to peacemaking, especially where minorities are persecuted, justice is denied, human rights are suppressed or reconciliation is needed. Two of Dr Sizer's books, *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armagedon?* And *Zion's Christian Soldiers: The Bible, Israel and the Church* are published by Wipf & Stock. For more information see www.stephensizer.com and www.peacemakers.ngo