

AMERICAN HERESY:
CHRISTIAN ZIONISM AND THE SCRIPTURAL RESPONSE

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ABSTRACT

Christian Zionism is an increasingly pervasive heresy that has sprung up and flourished in the American Evangelical zeitgeist. While it is primarily an American Protestant issue, Lutherans in this country are not immune to its dogmas, which often claim to be based on scriptural principles and a high regard for the Bible and God's promises. And as charismatic preachers who espouse Zionist doctrine become ever more accessible in media, it is easy to see why members of even Lutheran churches need a Scriptural defense against it. The goal of this paper is to provide such a defense. First, the paper examines the *status quo* and how we got here, looking at the current state of affairs and tracing the history of Christian Zionism in America. Second, this paper presents the Scripture's response to the various claims made by Christian Zionists. Ultimately, we see that Christian Zionism is a theology of glory that reads too much into a small number of passages, completely ignores the central message of the Scriptures, and finally cannot hold water when examined under scrutiny. The appendix is intended to be printed as a sort of "reference page" when looking at the various claims that Christian Zionists make. It provides concise scriptural responses that might be useful to pastors or laypeople.

IN THE ZEITGEIST: WHY CHRISTIAN ZIONISM MATTERS

The year was 1948. For decades, immigrants streamed into a seemingly uninhabitable wasteland on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea.¹ These were not just any immigrants: but Jewish immigrants. Some of these Jews were wealthy businessmen. Others were trained in agriculture. Some had been fleeing anti-Semitic pogroms in Eastern Europe. Others came in response to the 1917 Balfour Declaration.² The latest came ashore after the horrific tragedies of the Holocaust. And now, after years of struggle, passion, and zeal, the Jews of Palestine rejoiced at the creation of the State of Israel – their own independent nation.

But they were not the only ones rejoicing.

On far distant shores, *others* watched the flag of Israel being raised with awe and wonder. They beheld with rapture the subsequent conflict—known to history as the Six-Day War—as the fledgling and miniscule nation of Israel cast each of their aggressors into the dust.³ They shouted for joy, because they knew their Bibles well. They believed with all their heart and soul that Israel’s return meant something special. It meant the end of everything that was evil. It meant the

1. “During the decadent Ottoman Empire’s control of Palestine, the ancient systems of water conservation and of proper drainage had been completely neglected. Thus the most fertile regions, the Philistine Plain and the Plain of Sharon along the Mediterranean Coast flanking Judea and Samaria, also the Valley of Esdraelon between Samaria and Galilee, had degenerated into malarial swamps, which were largely uninhabited. It was land in these regions which the absentee Turkish landowners were quite ready to sell to the Jews, if, as they thought, the Jews were foolish enough to buy such worthless land.” Carl Lawrenz. “Reflections Concerning Israel, the Restored Homeland of the Jews.” Taken from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 1970, 2.

2. The Balfour Declaration was a public statement by the British government during the First World War, which offered support for “a national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine. It’s issuance and the subsequent British Mandate in Palestine paved the way for further Jewish immigration.

3. The Six-Day War, as its name would suggest, lasted less than a week in June 1967. Israel absolutely trounced their foes, winning “one of the most remarkable victories in recorded warfare.” Lawrenz, “Reflections,” 3.

imminent return of Jesus Christ. And it meant the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. So who were these others? These were Christians Zionists. And in particular, these were American Christian Zionists.

American Christianity from the very beginning grabbed hold of certain millennialist narratives that were imported from across the Atlantic along with its people. Israel and the Jews featured prominently in these narratives. The Puritans and other American Protestants were "trying to build the Kingdom of God" in this new land, but their beliefs always "included the conversion of the Jews to Christianity and the restoration of that people to Palestine."⁴ In the crucible of the American frontier, where unionists and other enthusiastic brands of Christianity thrived, so too did Christian Zionism grow to become a part of the American Evangelical blood.⁵

The fervor with which these Christian Zionists met the creation of the modern state of Israel has not gone away. And the influence they wield is not limited to the interior of a church building. Christian Zionism is a part of the modern American zeitgeist. Thanks in part to premillennialist "gateway drugs" like Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*,⁶ which sold over 28 million copies by 1990, the nation of Israel and its relationship to the United States has

4. Yaakov Ariel, *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews*. New York: NYU Press. 2013.

5. Brad Harper. "Apocalypse Soon?: Premillennialism and Popular Responses to Zionism: A Brief History." *Cultural Encounters* 7, no. 1 (2011). The author of this article describes growing up in an Evangelical church, and in particular a Zionist church: "We Evangelicals were united in our convictions regarding the conflict. Simply stated, the Jews in Israel were the good guys and all who opposed them, both inside and outside of Israel, were the bad guys. According to our understanding of the Bible, the Jews were the covenant people of God, living in the Promised Land of God, and their presence there would soon bring about the glorious culmination of the plan of God for human history, and especially the church of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, we were generally favorable to anything Israel did, politically, socially or militarily to secure and expand its boundaries and its national prominence. In short, we were Christian Zionists." Page 67.

6. Harper, "Apocalypse Soon," 73. In this book, Lindsay explains "how the reestablishment of Israel and the then current arrangement of powers in Europe and Asia were exact fulfillments of the Bible's prophecies of what would be happening in the generation just before the second coming of Christ."

become a topic worthy of actual debate for the average American Protestant. It has even taken over the consciousness of our grandest political stages.

In 2016, during the Republican presidential primary, Donald Trump and Ted Cruz were in competition to see who could promise greater support for Israel.⁷ After Trump was in office, he drew international ire by moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, ostensibly declaring that the ancient city was the rightful capital of the nation.⁸ He added to this by appointing a Jewish Zionist⁹ as his ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, who asserted Israel's sovereignty over all of Palestine.¹⁰ Both of these actions, as well as his unwillingness to condemn Israeli aggression into the West Bank and Gaza,¹¹ earned him the praise of the often

7. Sean Durbin. "From King Cyrus to Queen Esther: Christian Zionists' discursive construction of Donald Trump as God's instrument." *Critical Research on Religion*, 8 no 2 Aug 2020. "Speaking before Cruz, Trump boasted of his long history of support for Israel, telling the audience that his 'number one priority' as president would be to dismantle the Iranian nuclear deal." Page 123. Cruz retorted that "America will stand unapologetically with the nation of Israel," 124

8. Coulter Louwerse and Ron Dart. "Donald Trump and the Christian Zionist Lobby: Letter From Canada." *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 16.2 (2017), 240

9. In fairness to the original movement, it needs to be noted that there is a distinction between Jewish Zionism and Christian Zionism. Jewish Zionism was born out of European Jewish sentiments largely begun by Theodore Hertzl's 1896 work, *Der Judenstaat*, which advocated for the creation of a Jewish state. Other voices like Chaim Weizmann, who became the first president of Israel in 1949, were instrumental in bringing about the vision of a national home for the Jews in Palestine. This movement and subsequent campaigns to help encourage modern Jews of the diaspora to return to Palestine are rightly called Jewish Zionism. Christian Zionism, on the other hand, is not a political or ideological movement, but a religious belief system. In fact, many Jewish people in Israel today have no interest or are even hostile to Christian Zionists, whom they see as turning the Jewish people into pawns of some grand divine scheme. For the sake of consistency, all subsequent references to "Zionism" in this paper are referring to Christian Zionism, and not Jewish Zionism. Cf. Smith, Robert O. "Toward a Lutheran Response to Christian Zionism." *Dialog* 48, no. 3 (Fall 2009), 284: "Christian Zionism precedes Jewish political Zionism and is not dependent upon it. It is, in fact, its own movement, operating under its own motivations and to its own ends."

10. Louwerse and Dart. "Christian Zionist Lobby." The author quotes Friedman in a 2017 speech to Trump's supporters in Jerusalem: "The Trump administration will never pressure Israel into a two-state solution or any other solution that is against the will of the Israeli people," 241.

11. John Podhoretz, "Realism: America and Israel in the Trump Era." *Commentary*. Mar2018, Vol. 145 Issue 3, 15.

fanatical Zionist voting bloc.¹² And while Trump himself has never espoused Christian Zionist views per se, other American politicians certainly have, and see his actions as indicative of God's imminent return.¹³

The voices and actions of politicians are symptomatic of an ever growing brand of Evangelical Christians that views Israel and the Jews as part of God's ultimate plan for the world, and who have found a home in the right-most fringes of the American political landscape.¹⁴ Zionist organizations like Christians United for Israel (CUFI) boast over 10 million members, and have successfully advocated for pro-Israel policies in the country for decades.¹⁵ Evangelical ministers have proclaimed Zionist doctrine from their pulpits and from the radios of millions of Americans. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, men like Jerry Falwell¹⁶ and Pat

12. "We see a situation in which Christian Zionist leaders are open to being used by politicians, politicians who in turn see in Christian Zionist leaders access to an easily mobilized political bloc." Smith, "Lutheran Response to Christian Zionism," 280.

13. Former Minnesota Congresswoman Michele Bachmann said in an interview with an Evangelical magazine: "There's always been this war between God and Satan. Satan hates Israel because Israel is the blessing to the world. From Israel comes the Messiah. God's plan begins and ends in Jerusalem. That's why Satan has this continual desire to kill Jews, to destroy the Jewish state, to destroy the Jewish way of life so that the blessings for the world are destroyed." Akers, Shawn A. 2018. "Bachmann: 'There Is No Greater Proof of God's Word Than the Existence of Israel.'" Charisma News, November 16, 2018. Florida State Senator Doug Broxton said at a rally, "When I heard about Jerusalem—where the King of Kings—where our soon coming King is coming back to Jerusalem, it is because President Trump declared Jerusalem to be capital of Israel." Palma, Sky. 2017. "Crowd Cheers When GOP Senator Says Trump's Jerusalem Decision Will Usher in The End Times." Dead State, December 9, 2017.

14. Harper, "Apocalypse Soon," 78. "More recently... evangelicals have gained notoriety as overwhelming supporters of the Republican Party, which has been strongly pro-Israel for decades."

15. Sean Savage, "How CUFI has awakened the 'sleeping giant' of Christian Zionism" (9 March 2021). CUFI, established in 1975, was instrumental in lobbying for the movement of America's embassy to Jerusalem, and has opposed the Iran Nuclear Deal in support of Israel.

16. Harper, "Apocalypse Soon," 74. See also Merrill Simon (1984). *Jerry Falwell and the Jews*. New York: Jonathan David Publishers, where Falwell is quoted as saying, "I feel that the destiny of the state of Israel is without question the most crucial international matter facing the world today. I believe that the people of Israel have not only a theological but also a historical and legal right to the land. I am personally a Zionist, having gained that perspective from my belief in Old Testament Scriptures. I have also visited Israel many times. I have arrived at the conclusion that unless the United States maintains its unswerving devotion to the State of Israel, the very survival of that nation is at stake ... Every American who agrees Israel has the right to the land must be willing to exert all possible pressure on the powers that be to guarantee America's support of the State of Israel at this time."

Robertson¹⁷ brought Israel and Zionism into the public consciousness. Christian authors like Hal Lindsey¹⁸ sailed mightily on the rising tides of this dispensationalist narrative. Perhaps the most influential of all Zionist voices today would be Dallas Theological Seminary's¹⁹ John Hagee.

Hagee's sermons and speeches embody the modern Zionist spirit in America. And his voice travels far within the Evangelical community. "Support for Israel," he claims, "is God's foreign policy."²⁰ His statements practically define American Christian Zionism:²¹

Make no mistake - at some moment in the future, Russia, together with its Arab allies, will lead a massive attack upon the nation of Israel that will probably involve nuclear weapons. The prophet Ezekiel clearly described the coming battle, which I believe will take place just before the Antichrist steps forward to take his place on the world stage.²²

17. William N. Dale. "The Impact of Christian Zionism on American Policy." *American Diplomacy* 9, no. 2 (2004). Robertson was the president of the Christian Broadcasting Network and leader of the Christian Coalition in the early 2000s. See also Eric Fingerhut. "Robertson sees Armageddon in Jerusalem struggle." Feb 3, 2009, where Robertson is quoted as saying, "Armageddon is not going to be fought at Megiddo but will be the battle of Jerusalem, when the forces of all nations come together and try to take Jerusalem away from the Jews... Jerusalem is a spiritual symbol that must not be given away because Jesus Christ the Messiah will come down to the part of Jerusalem that the Arabs want, and that's not good."

18. Dale, "Impact of Christian Zionism." Lindsey is a dispensationalist theologian and a prolific writer who has connected Zionist eschatology and politics for decades. Many of his books, including *The Late Great Planet Earth*, were bestsellers for weeks, and sold millions of copies. Dale notes "The common theme [of his books] includes the emergence of the anti-Christ, the rise of Israel, the return of Christ, Armageddon, the victory of good over evil, the rebuilding of the Temple and the coming of an era of peace and justice. These events were to peak in 1988. Fortunately, the major force for evil, the Soviet Union, collapsed at about this time, so the struggle subsided." As will be expounded later, dispensationalists in general seek to connect contemporary historical events and actors (like the Soviet Union of the late 20th century) with biblical prophecy in a very direct way. Of course, since the collapse of the USSR, dispensationalists have seen China or Iran as the new "enemy" that will bring about Armageddon.

19. "Dallas Theological Seminary has been the academic and ideological Vatican of dispensational premillennialism ever since its founding in the 1920s." John M. Brenner, "American Lutheran Views on Eschatology and How They Related to the American Protestants," 5.

20. Harper, "Apocalypse Soon," 76.

21. I would love to plaster the entire Hagee body of work here to really cement this point. His books and sermons just *are* Christian Zionism to a tee. His writings and sermons have galvanized Zionists in the country, and have served to shape the interpretations of very specific passages used to defend the Zionist worldview. These few quotations will have to suffice to show the reader exactly the sort of rhetoric that he is proclaiming.

22. John Hagee. *Attack on America* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 143. Quoted in Rachel Tabachnick. "Hagee in His Own Words: Part Two." *Talk to Action*. May 25, 2010.

Katrina was an act of God for a society that has become Sodom and Gomorrah reborn... Stop forcing Israel to give up the land that God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants forever... So what does that have to do with America? Plenty. Right now we as a nation are pushing something called the Road Map to Peace. We have been pushing it since 2/02 with the great quartet of Great Britain, Russia, and the European Common Market... What's God's position? What's God's position, because I assure you, when push comes to shove God is going to have the last word. Here is what God says my position is on my land, Joel 3:2... God says when you divide up my land, or cause it to be divided up, I will bring you into judgment. And right now the peace process that we call the Road Map to Peace is forcing Israel to divide up the land that God has given to the Jewish people. And God's response is 'I am going to bring judgment on the nation that does this.' I am going to say this without blinking. If America continues to force Israel to give up land to the enemies of Israel, the judgment of God will come to America in unprecedented portions.²³

And then the Bible says that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is going to be glorified in Jerusalem. They are going to have a spiritual revival in that nation and they will say there is one God of Israel, it is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and he is the holy one of Israel, bless his holy name... One bomb into Iran's nuclear plant could start the holy war. And believe me that could happen this afternoon. And that holy war is described in Ezekiel 38:39. One terrorist attack by a plane loaded with explosives could fly into a major refinery in Saudi Arabia... and the American economy could vaporize and that is so completely possible... I believe the church of Jesus Christ will be raptured before this starts.²⁴

One of the specifications of the agreement between Israel and the Antichrist will allow the religious Jews to rebuild the Temple and to initiate daily sacrifices. We know this because the Antichrist will stop sacrifices and offerings at the mid-point of the Tribulation, and sacrifices have been started again in order for the Antichrist to stop them.... Now the rebuilding of the Temple constitutes an enormous political and religious problem, for the place the Bible decrees for the location of the Temple is currently occupied by the Dome of the Rock... In response to the destruction of the Dome of the Rock, the Islamic nations of Africa and the Middle East will form a Pan-Islamic Coalition to destroy Israel, eliminate the Jewish people, and destroy the third Temple."²⁵

23. Hagee, "Jerusalem Countdown," Sermon Series (2005), Sermon #1 "Jerusalem and the Road Map to Peace". Quoted in Rachel Tabachnick. "Hagee in His Own Words: Part Two." Talk to Action. May 25, 2010.

24. Hagee, "Beyond Iraq: The End of the Age," Sermon Series (2004) Sermon #2, "Sleeping with the Enemy." Quoted in Rachel Tabachnick. "Hagee in His Own Words: Part Two." Talk to Action. May 25, 2010.

25. Hagee, *Beginning of the End: The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and the Coming Antichrist* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 130, 141-43. Quoted in Rachel Tabachnick. "Hagee in His Own Words: Part Two." Talk to Action. May 25, 2010.

Hagee's church, Cornerstone in San Antonio, boasts more than 22,000 active members.²⁶ He has written over 40 books, including several Zionist bestsellers: *The Jerusalem Countdown*, *The Battle for Jerusalem, From Daniel to Doomsday*, and *The Financial Armageddon*. He founded the aforementioned CUFI, and his organization, Hagee Ministries, has promoted mainline Christian and Zionist values throughout the country. His influence on the modern American Evangelical scene is hard to overstate.²⁷

As Lutherans, it is sometimes tempting to think that we have risen above these tides in the iron-clad ships of our own hermeneutic. After all, we Lutherans patently revile any attempt to connect biblical prophecy with specific modern fulfillments. We have historically avoided the pernicious waves of millennialism in all its forms, and really many of the most divisive combats that came to define the religious landscape of America.²⁸ And so the question of Zionism has consequently not become anything that has threatened the stability or unity of our Lutheran brotherhood.

However, while the issue of Zionism has historically not threatened to, say, tear the Wisconsin Synod apart, that does not mean that our members are immune to the often persuasive messages that Christian Zionists proclaim.²⁹ Our members are Americans. And so they must

26. Figure taken from John Hagee's website, jhm.org.

27. Virtually all the articles and books on the subject of Zionism hail John Hagee as its modern prophet.

28. "While Christian Zionism grows out of commitments that are central to the modernist/fundamentalist split, Lutherans were able to take different courses in North America, resulting in Lutheran communities that were neither quite fundamentalist, nor quite what came to be known as mainline. Lutherans fit uneasily with the dominant contours of the American religious landscape." Robert O. Smith, "Toward a Lutheran Response to Christian Zionism." *Dialog* 48, no. 3 (Fall 2009), 288.

29. "Although Lutherans generally have not been in the forefront of millennial studies and the writing of apocalyptic literature, they have not been immune to the millennial impulse in America. The millennial hopes expressed by Lutherans in America have often... been expressed as a conscious or unconscious reaction to the American religious environment." Brenner, "American Lutheran Views," 1.

navigate the waters of the American zeitgeist. An increasingly virulent concoction of Zionist messages has boiled for decades in this country. Television, radio, books, and now social media offer ever greater opportunities for Lutheran parishioners to interact with and be influenced by charismatic Zionist preachers. Many Lutherans who have never considered their own hermeneutical approach to Scripture may be entranced by the novel approach to biblical prophecy, which attributes world-shattering consequences to events that are part and parcel of their otherwise rather ordinary lives. Or they may be taken in by arguments that appeal to the Lutheran's own piety. *After all*, a Lutheran might think, *am I really refusing to take God at his Word by not supporting the Zionist position?*³⁰

Without proper inoculation, it is easy to understand how even lifelong Lutherans could fall victim to this world view. Frankly, it's attractive to Americans. And it's attractive to Christians who want to see God visibly active in their lives. All this is to say: Christian Zionism is one more manifestation of a theology of glory. As we break down the main arguments to support the Zionist position, we'll see how it fundamentally misunderstands not only the Bible's eschatology, but even the very core of God's message of salvation. Understanding the arguments of Christian Zionists is the first step toward a proper biblical response.

30. "Lutherans, who show no interest in the Zionist Movement are at times faulted by such [Evangelical radio] preachers for not taking God at His word." Lawrenz, "Reflections," 8.

A SPIRIT HOVERING ACROSS THE WATERS: THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM IN AMERICA

American Christian Zionism did not develop in a vacuum. It is the product of centuries of theological evolution, which had its origins in England and moved across the Atlantic.³¹

Millennialist interpretations of Scripture and even some Zionist views were well entrenched in many Christian denominations that emigrated to North America in the late 18th century.³² In particular, the 18th century was a time where the doctrine of post-millennialism dominated the Evangelical Christian scene.³³ Post-millennialists believe that by leading proper, Christian lives and loving our neighbors as Christ has commanded, Christians can usher in a new golden age of peace and righteousness on the earth *before* Christ returns. This golden age will last for a thousand years.³⁴ The post-millennial worldview is brought about by optimism, and so it is no

31. Tracing the entire lineage of Zionist theology from this point is beyond the scope of this paper. For those interested, read Stephen Sizer's seminal work, *Christian Zionism: and the Roadmap to Armageddon*. Sizer's history of individuals and movements that produced the modern Zionist movement is bar none.

32. "Puritan eschatology was essentially postmillennial and, based on Romans 9–11, believed the conversion of the Jews would lead to future blessing for the entire world." Sizer, *Christian Zionism: and the Roadmap to Armageddon*, 28.

"The Puritans, therefore, came to America to set up a new Zion. They believed they had a millennial mission to fulfill." Brenner, "American Lutheran Eschatology," 2.

33. "By the late 17th Century and right through the 18th Century, especially during the period of the Great Awakening, postmillennial eschatology came to dominate European and American Protestantism. The writings and preaching of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), as well as George Whitefield, were influential in the spread of the belief that the millennium had arrived, that the gospel would soon triumph against evil throughout the world and God's blessings of peace and prosperity would follow the conversion of entire nations, including Israel, prior to the glorious return of Christ." Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 30.

34. "The key element in Postmillennialism is optimism. On this view, the world will gradually become more and more righteous before the second coming of Christ." Harper, "Apocalypse Soon," 68.

surprise that at the turn of the 19th century, there was a notable shift from post-millennial theology to a much more pessimistic pre-millennial one.

The optimism that had so much dominated the 18th century quickly fell apart in the wake of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, the American Civil War, Franco-Prussian War, and other conflicts which ravaged the western world. In fact, such was the ire and shock at Napoleon for ravaging Europe and arresting the Pope that some Christians believed he was the anti-Christ and a sign that the end of the world was surely upon them.³⁵ Pre-millennialism thrived on the resultant dread. While a post-millennial worldview held that the world was going to get better and better before the return of Christ, pre-millennialists held the exact opposite. The world would become more and more evil before Christ returned with the voice of the archangel to judge the wicked. This pre-millennial world view is essential to understanding modern Zionism.³⁶

Zionist theology grows directly out of this pre-millennialist eschatology. During the 19th century, several Evangelical preachers popularized these theological narratives. Men like Lewis Way³⁷ and Charles Spurgeon³⁸ held that the conversion of the Jews and that the restoration of the

35. See the aptly named contemporary work entitled, *The Identity of Napoleon and Antichrist completely demonstrated, or, A commentary on the chapters of the Scripture which relate to Antichrist : where all the passages are shown to apply to Napoleon in the most striking manner : and where especially the prophetic number 666 is found in his name, with perfect exactness, in two different manners.* (New-York: Erza Sargeant, 1809).

36. "For some Bible students and pastors, the violence of the period surrounding the French Revolution led to the idea that the world was not going to get better and that only a cataclysmic work of God could save it. Along with this growing pessimism there was a developing interest on the part of some Christians concerning the restoration of Jews to Israel." Harper, "Apocalypse Soon," 68.

37. Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*. "Lewis Way may be regarded as the founder of the LJS [London Jews Society] as well as the foremost exponent of 19th Century Restorationism and Christian Zionism. ... Way galvanized evangelical support for Zionism by promoting a futurist eschatology which anticipated that the exiled Jewish people would soon return to their promised homeland," 38-39.

38. Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*. "Spurgeon was probably England's most influential 19th Century nonconformist preacher. With 67 volumes of his sermons published, this is more than any other author in English history. Indeed, more of his works are in print today than of any other Christian author, alive or deceased," 43.

Jewish nation factored greatly into the eschaton in a general sense.³⁹ But John Nelson Darby, a radical clergyman in the Irish church,⁴⁰ distilled this watery pre-millennialist eschatology into highly concentrated liquor known as *Dispensationalism*.

Darby's dispensationalist theology professed that God had divided the world into several "dispensations," or time periods, that defined the way in which he dealt with humankind. The modern era was the "dispensation of the gentiles." But because the Church had so distanced itself from its original mission, Darby held that God would soon end the world and begin the "dispensation of the Jews."⁴¹ His writings and sermons are some of the most formative influences on modern Christian Zionism:

[Darby preached that] all Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel would be fulfilled literally at the end of the age [dispensation]. But presently, during the church age, no prophecy about Israel would be fulfilled. After the rapture of the church, the "prophecy clock" would restart and God would begin working with Israel again. During the great tribulation, the nation of Israel would turn en masse to Jesus as the Messiah. But the nation would undergo horrific persecution at the hands of the Antichrist during the seven year tribulation (the 70th week of Daniel), after which Christ would return, destroying the Antichrist and his armies and delivering the Jewish people at the battle of Armageddon. Then Christ would set up his Jewish kingdom, ruling from Jerusalem for a period of peace and prosperity for all the earth lasting one thousand years. One of the important ramifications of dispensationalism, which contributed to popular evangelical support for

39. Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*. "Spurgeon saw the millennium as the culmination of God's promises and purposes for both the Old and New Testament Church, yet at the same time allowed a distinct role for a converted Israel during the millennium," 46.

40. Darby was actually convinced that Christ's true Church on earth essentially no longer existed. He declared his own church body apostate, and held that "the entire nature and purpose of the church has become so perverted that it is diametrically opposed to the fundamental reason for which it is instituted." J. N. Darby, 'Reflections on the Ruined Condition of the Church', *The Collected Writings of John Nelson Darby*, edited by William Kelly (Kingston on Thames, Stow Hill Bible and Trust Depot, 1962) Eccl. IV, XX, p456. Quoted in Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 58-59.

41. Darby lectured on prophecy in Geneva in 1840, railing mightily against the church of his day and proclaiming what are essentially Zionist doctrines: "What we are about to consider will tend to show that, instead of permitting ourselves to hope for a continued progress of good, we must expect a progress of evil; and that the hope of the earth being filled with the knowledge of the Lord before the exercise of His judgement, and the consummation of this judgement on the earth, is delusive. We are to expect evil, until it becomes so flagrant that it will be necessary for the Lord to judge it.... Truly, Christendom has become completely corrupted; the dispensation of the Gentiles has been found unfaithful: can it be restored? No! impossible." "Progress of Evil on the Earth" *Collected., Letters of John Nelson Darby, 1832-1868, 1*, (London, Stow Hill and Bible Tract Depot) Prophetic, 1, pp 471, 483, 486. Quoted in Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 60.

Zionism, is that the Jews would have to return to Palestine and reestablish Israel as a Jewish state. Until this happened, there could be no Antichrist, no battle of Armageddon, and no second coming of Christ.⁴²

Darby's dispensationalist dogma was and still is attractive to Americans.⁴³ Other tenets of Darby's dispensationalism can be found among modern American Evangelicals: literalistic interpretation of biblical prophecy, certainty in connecting modern historical and political events to prophecy, divisive compartmentalization of the redemptive plan of God, and a general non-denominational spirit.⁴⁴ This is because Darby himself spent a long time in America spreading his teachings, and his views profoundly influenced American Evangelicals like Dwight Moody,⁴⁵ William Blackstone, and Cyrus Scofield.

Blackstone in particular was instrumental in making Zionism palatable to American Christians, and was one of the staunchest advocates for the Zionist cause at the turn of the 20th century.⁴⁶ A Methodist preacher and prolific evangelist, he advocated for Darby's

42. Harper, "Apocalypse Soon," 69-70.

43. Smith, "Lutheran Response to Zionism." "Tied together, Darby's system of premillennial dispensationalism made for a highly dramatic approach to the Christian life: you conduct yourself properly at all times because the rapture could occur at any moment and you do not want to be left behind to endure the suffering of the Tribulation," 282.

44. Clarence Bass. *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1960), 176.

45. Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 86. "There are several references in Moody's writings that indicate his sympathy for the Jewish people and Restorationism." Moody on Genesis 22: "That promise was made 4000 years ago, and even now you can see that the Jews are a separate and distinct nation, in their language, in their habits and in every respect. You can bring almost every nation here and in fifty years they will become extinct, merged into another, but bring a Jew here, and in fifty years, a hundred years, or a thousand years, he is still a Jew. When I meet a Jew I can't help having a profound respect for them, for they are God's people." D. L. Moody, "To All People: Comprising Sermons, Bible Readings, Temperance Addresses, and Prayer-Meeting Talks," (Boston, The Globe Publishing Company, 1877), 354.

46. William E. Blackstone, *Jesus is Coming*, 3rd edition (Chicago, Fleming Revell, 1916), 240. "Let it be carefully noted that while God has repeatedly promised to gather Israel, with such a magnificent display of His miraculous power, that it shall no more be said, 'The Lord liveth that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands whither he had driven them', Jer. 16:14; yet has He also said, 'Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation that hath no longing, before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you.' Zeph. 2:1,2. Could this prophecy be more literally fulfilled than in this present Zionist movement?"

dispensationalist eschatology and was one of the strongest supporters of both Jewish and Christian Zionism⁴⁷ (the lines of which were blurry in the early 20th century).⁴⁸ In fact, Jewish scholar Yaakov Ariel credits the cementing of the Zionist dispensationalist worldview within the zeitgeist of American Christianity to Blackstone:

Blackstone devised a theory that... the United States had a special role and mission in God's plans for humanity, that of a modern Cyrus, assigned the task of restoring Jews to Zion and thus helping to advance the messianic timetable... This vision of America... enabled American evangelicals to combine their messianic belief and understanding of the course of human history with their sense of American patriotism.⁴⁹

But perhaps no other theologian has influenced the worldview of American fundamentalist Christians than Cyrus Scofield. Scofield took the dispensationalism which Darby was proclaiming and crystallized it into a system that could be reproduced en masse. And indeed it was when Scofield published the dispensationalist flagship, the *Scofield Reference Bible*. This Bible, which sold millions of copies, contained Scofield's commentary in the margins, which espoused the most rigid dispensationalist theology to date.⁵⁰ And rather than being pushed to the

47. Brenner, "American Lutheran Views," 5. "Since the Jewish people figured so prominently in his eschatological system, [William Blackstone] became an early supporter of the Zionism [sic] and the establishment of the nation of Israel in Palestine. His efforts included drawing up a petition signed by prominent Americans urging President Benjamin Harrison to seek international support for making Palestine a haven for persecuted Russian Jews."

48. The early 20th century was a time when Jewish Zionism was in an absolute fervor, and Christian Zionism, especially in America was in its adolescent development. There were bound to be intersections. But while Jewish Zionism was a largely agnostic political and ethnic movement to create a secular and prosperous Jewish state, Blackstone's Christian Zionism was still focused far more on the spiritual and eschatological purpose behind the movement. See Harper, "Apocalypse Soon," 71. "But for Blackstone, the return of the Jews to Israel was not intended to bring about a safe and secure life for them. Rather, their return was a prerequisite to the rapture for the church, which would be the beginning of the great tribulation. The great tribulation would entail the persecution of the Jews in Israel by the Antichrist before their glorious deliverance by Christ at his second coming."

49. Yaakov Ariel, "How Are Jews and Israel Portrayed in the Left Behind Series? A Historical Discussion of Jewish-Christian Relations," in *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series*, ed. Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 137.

50. Harper, "Apocalypse Soon," 70. "Then, in 1915, C. I. Scofield, a nationally known conservative Bible teacher, published the Scofield Reference Bible. Under the text of Scripture on each page was Scofield's commentary, which came from the literalist dispensational premillennial perspective. His words came to be seen by many as the interpretation of the Bible. Millions of copies were sold and dispensationalism spread like wildfire."

side as a radical new interpretation of Scripture, American Evangelicals ate this up, and this work became one of the most widely distributed works in the Christian world well into the 20th century.⁵¹ Scofield's dispensationalist hermeneutic insisted that God "divides biblical history and revelation into airtight compartments sealed off not only from our contemporary era but also even from each other."⁵² And included in this interpretation is the notion that the last and seventh dispensation includes God's earthly millennial kingdom, and notably that the Jews will feature prominently in that time. At last, Americans could embrace a fully mature Christian Zionist eschatology: "According to Scofield, at the conclusion of this dispensation the church will be raptured before the great tribulation. The seventh dispensation will be Christ's millennial kingdom in which God's plan for Jews, Gentiles and the church will be brought to fulfillment. Scofield's dispensational plan became the 'standard theological framework for American Fundamentalism.'"⁵³

For almost a hundred years now, dispensationalism and the Zionist interpretation of Scripture has been circulating in the American Christian fish-tank. In the 21st century, these ideas have only grown in their proliferation and advocacy (as noted in the first chapter). And while the pre-millennialist predictions about eschatological prophecy seem to change their feathers with the times, the theological basis for the dispensationalist and the Zionist worldview has largely

51. Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 95. "Craig Blaising, professor of Systematic Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary and a dispensationalist, similarly acknowledges, 'The Scofield Reference Bible became the Bible of Fundamentalism, and the theology of the notes approached confessional status in many Bible schools, institutes and seminaries established in the early decades of this Century.'" Craig A. Blaising "Dispensationalism, The Search for Definition" in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, edited by Craig A. Blaising & Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1992), 21.

52. Tony Lee Richie. 2009. "Can Anything Good Come out of Premillennialism?: A Response to Robert O. Smith." *Dialog* 48 (3), 292.

53. Brenner, "American Lutheran Views," 5. Quote is from *Makers of Christian Theology in America*, ed. by Mark Toulouse and James Duke (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 360-62.

remained the same since Darby and his disciples. It is therefore imperative that we examine the arguments they make from Scripture to defend their eschatological positions, and then dismantle them.

GHOST OF THE PATRIARCHS: THE THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

The theological basis for Zionism relies on a number of scriptural presuppositions, including the dispensationalist hermeneutic, a pre-millennialist eschatology, a denial of so-called “replacement theology,”⁵⁴ a conviction that the Jews are “God’s chosen people,” and a belief that any and all Old Testament promises to or about Israel continue to apply to modern Jews and the state of Israel. Passages like Genesis 12—the call of Abram—and Romans 11—Paul’s discourse on Israel’s hardening and conversion—feature prominently in Zionist narratives and apologetics, as they seek to prove from Scripture that the Jewish people have a special place in God’s plan for the world.⁵⁵

A Literal Futurist Hermeneutic

“Christian Zionism is constructed upon a novel hermeneutic in which all scripture is generally interpreted in an ultra-literal sense; the prophetic parts of scripture are seen as pre-written history; and eschatologically are believed to find their fulfilment in the interpreter’s

54. “Replacement theology,” sometimes called “supersessionism,” is the term that Zionists use to describe the identification of “Israel” in Scripture with the New Testament Church. They see this as a fundamental misreading of Scripture. See Gerald McDermott, *Israel Matters: Why Christians Must Think Differently about the People and the Land*, (Grand Rapids: BrazosPress, 2017), 19-31.

55. Zionists will use other passages like Joel 3:2 and Ezekiel 37:25 to support their arguments, but in general Genesis 12:1–3 and Romans 11 are their biggest guns. Zionists will of course also fall back on passages that are often used to support a pre-millennialist eschatology, like Daniel 9:24–27 and Revelation 20. But analysis and rebuttal of pre-millennialism as a whole is outside the scope of this paper. As such we will focus our attention primarily on the main arguments that Zionists draw from Scripture.

generation.”⁵⁶ For Zionists, this means that all references to Israel in the Old Testament always and only refer to physical Israel. Scofield, in describing this hermeneutic, said, “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.”⁵⁷

This approach to Scripture is often called “futurism” for its insistence that prophecy can be mapped to specific, contemporary events and people in world history.⁵⁸ For Zionists, this means again that God’s promise to the descendants of Abraham that they would possess the land forever indicates the modern Jewish people have a divine claim to the land of Palestine. It is inexplicably connected to the rejection of “replacement theology.”

But there is wild inconsistency in the interpretation of prophecy among the proponents of this hermeneutic. Despite falling back on a “literal” interpretation of Biblical prophecy,⁵⁹ those who hold to this futurist reading of Scripture tend to make fairly extreme equations out of biblical prophecies and modern events. Hal Lindsey, for example, saw amazingly specific fulfillments in John’s vision of the “Battle of Armageddon”⁶⁰ in Revelation:

56. Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 135.

57. C.I. Scofield, *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course*, (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, n.d.), pp 45-46. Quoted in Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 145.

58. Gerhard F. Hasel. “Israel in Bible Prophecy.” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 3, no. 1 (Spr 1992): 125.

59. Charles Ryrie, a 20th century dispensationalist, claimed that “Dispensationalism is a result of consistent application of the basic hermeneutical principle of literal, normal, or plain interpretation. No other system of theology can claim this.... The nonliteralist is the nondispensationalist, and the consistent literalist is a dispensationalist.” Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 92.

60. Hal Lindsey’s shifting interpretations of “the final battle” and the end of the world are almost laughable. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, they featured prominently in his predictions about the end times. But after their collapse, that of course needs to change. See Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 155. “In *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) the threat comes from ‘The Russian force’. By 1997 this had become, ‘The Russian-Muslim force’. 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.’ Also page 158, “Lindsey even claims that the reference to the ‘colour

Just exactly how could a first Century prophet describe, much less understand, the incredible advances in science and technology that exist at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries? Yet he testified and God bore witness that he actually saw and heard things like: supersonic jet aircraft with missiles... advanced attack helicopters... intercontinental ballistic missiles with Multiple Independently Targeted Re-entry Vehicles tipped with thermonuclear warheads... biological and chemical weapons, aircraft carriers, missile cruisers, nuclear submarines, laser weapons, space stations and satellites.⁶¹

Indeed, while Zionists are insistent that references to Israel must be interpreted as literally as possible, other references to specific events (like Revelation 9 above) or even to Israel's enemies (like Gog and Magog being variously reimagined over the decades) seem to be flexible in their interpretation.⁶² For this reason, the literal futurist hermeneutic is rightly criticized for being arbitrary, inconsistent, and subject to the whims of the interpreter rather than to Scripture's original intent. Further examination will inevitably follow in the proceeding pages.

God, Abraham, and the Eternal Promise

The most central of all Christian Zionist claims is that God has granted the land (Eretz Israel) to the descendants of Abraham in perpetuity.⁶³ This claim brings us to God's promises to Abraham

of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone' in Revelation 9:17 refers to the 'Chinese national flag... emblazoned on the military vehicles.'" It is amazing, is it not, that the great enemies of God's people just happen to coincide with the national enemies of America at any given moment?

61. Hal Lindsey, *The Apocalypse Code* (Palos Verdes, California: Western Front, 1997), 36.

62. Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 158. "Lindsey claims that while references to 'Israel' always mean Israel, other nations mentioned in prophecy require translation. So, following Darby and Scofield, Lindsey equates ancient tribes and nations mentioned in Old Testament prophecies with contemporary enemies of Israel in the Middle East."

63. Brad Harper in his article, "Apocalypse Soon," on page 74 quotes an excerpt from the proclamation of the third Christian Zionist Conference, ratified in Jerusalem in February of 1996. It well defines the position of Christian Zionists regarding the modern land of Israel in relation to the Jewish people. "According to God's distribution of nations, the Land of Israel has been given to the Jewish People by God as an everlasting possession by an eternal covenant. The Jewish People have the absolute right to possess and dwell in the Land, including Judea, Samaria, Gaza and the Golan. Because of the sovereign purposes of God, Jerusalem must remain undivided, under Israeli sovereignty, open to all peoples, the capital of Israel only and all nations should so concur and place their embassies there. It would be an error for the nations to recognize a Palestinian state in any part of Eretz Israel."

beginning in Genesis 12.⁶⁴ The promise, covenant, and beneficence of God is connected explicitly to the land of Israel; and this connection is strengthened throughout the Old Testament.⁶⁵ The land is a central element in God's relationship with his covenant people. And God is said to have given the Jewish people this specific plot of earthy land forever and ever.

Mention of the land is a frequent theme in the book of Genesis. The covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants was to be an "everlasting covenant" (Gen 17:19), and the land was to be an "everlasting possession" (Gen 13:15; 15:18; 17:7, 8). Many passages concerning the promise of land are found in the first person of the verb, with God himself offering the promise. These passages are often set in the form of an oath, thereby underlining the "certainty of the promise."⁶⁶

This claim is the reason that Zionists are so concerned with the restoration of the Jewish people to the earthly land of Canaan. God's promise to grant the land of Israel to the descendants of Abraham has yet to reach its ultimate fulfillment,⁶⁷ and so we must do everything in our power to help the modern nation of Israel achieve the completion of God's promise. Only after the land is fully restored to the Jewish people and Jerusalem recognized as its capital can Jesus

64. "Any discussion of the modern Zionist movement must begin with the biblical claim that the land of Canaan was given by God to the people Israel. And any discussion of that claim leads back to the call of Abraham in Genesis 12." Gary A. Anderson, "How to Think about Zionism," *First Things* 152 (April 2005), p. 30.

65. "More than one thousand times in the Old Testament the land [eretz] of Israel is either stated or implied. Of the 250 times that covenant [b'rit] is mentioned, in seventy percent of those instances (177 times) covenant is either directly or indirectly connected to the land of Israel. Of the seventy-four times that b'rit appears in the Torah, seventy-three percent (or fifty-four occasions) include the gift of the land, either explicitly or implicitly." Gerald R. McDermott, "Can Evangelicals Support Christian Zionism?" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 43, no. 3 (July 2019), p. 260.

66. Marvin R. Wilson, "Zionism as Theology: An Evangelical Approach," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22, no. 1 (March 1979), p. 29.

67. Zionists claim that the historic possession of Canaan by the Israelites does not constitute the entire fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. On the basis of Genesis 15:18-9, where God lays out the boundaries of Eretz Israel, Zionists say that the historic Israelites never possessed the full land. Therefore, the promises are still awaiting their ultimate fulfillment. "The hopes and dreams of the Hebrew prophets were never fully realized. The triumph of God's kingly rule and the final redemption of his covenant people Israel lay in the future." Wilson, "Zionism as Theology," 31. Naturally, this ultimate and future fulfillment will come to fruition when the modern nation of Israel possesses all of this land, and will then be able to usher in the new millennium.

Christ return to usher in the new Kingdom of God on earth.⁶⁸ And anyone who opposes the Zionist cause, along with any attempt to oppose the modern nation of Israel, is therefore opposing God's cause.⁶⁹

In order to answer the Zionist assertions that Christians must support the modern nation state of Israel based on these promises, we need to take a serious look at the promises in Genesis specifically, as well as the message of the Scriptures as a whole.

God made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15.

“This man will not be your heir, but instead one who will come out of your own body will be your heir.” The LORD then brought him outside and said, “Now look toward the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” He said to Abram, “This is what your descendants will be like....” On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram. He said, “To your descendants I have given this land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates” (Genesis 15:4, 5, 18 EHV).

In this covenant, which is really a renewal of God's covenant in Genesis 12:1–3, God promises Abraham that he would have numerous descendants, and as a sign of that promise, those descendants would possess the land of Canaan. The obvious question to ask is whether God's promise to Abraham here has been fulfilled or not. If it has not yet been fulfilled, then Zionists might have a leg to stand on.⁷⁰ However, Scripture is plain that this promise to Abraham has

68. Durbin, “From King Cyrus to Queen Esther,” 118. “For [Zionists], the establishment of the millennial kingdom on earth would occur after Jesus' second coming. That second coming, however, would only materialize through the restoration of Jews to Palestine, and a series of devastating wars, culminating in the battle of Armageddon.”

69. Dale, “Impact of Christian Zionism.” “The future of the world permits no middle positions allowing compromise. There can be no half-way measures and those who advocate compromise are siding with the enemy.” See also Durbin, “From King Cyrus to Queen Esther,” 119. “Due to Israel's special status in God's economy, failure to support Israel is tantamount to not supporting God. This last point is emphasized with reference to Genesis 12:3 and Romans 15:27 and the claim that ‘blessing Israel’ is a divine decree requiring all Christians to support the modern state of Israel. Moreover, this claim is coupled with the corresponding assertion that supporting Israel reaps individual and national rewards, referred to as ‘blessings,’ while cursing (or criticizing) Israel invites divine judgement.” Also see John Hagee's earlier quote on page 5 regarding hurricane Katrina as God's judgment on America for not supporting Israel properly.

70. Indeed, if this promise of God has not yet been fulfilled, all it would mean is that God has promised that in the future Abraham's descendants will possess the land of Canaan. It does not, however, follow from this fact

already been fulfilled long ago. After the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, Scripture explicitly states that God’s promises to his people were fulfilled. “So the LORD gave to Israel all of the land that he had sworn to give to their fathers.... Not one promise out of all the good promises that the LORD had promised to the house of Israel failed. They all came true!” (Joshua 21:43–45). Abraham’s descendants had indeed become a mighty nation, and they possessed the physical land of Canaan.

As far as the physical land is concerned, God’s promise to Abraham and to the children of Israel never centered on the land itself, but on Abraham’s descendants—and ultimately on his Descendant.⁷¹ The bestowing of the land was simply a sign to Abraham that his promises were trustworthy and true: to make Abraham into a great nation, and to give him a seed through which all families on earth would be blessed. The people of Israel as Abraham’s seed would be a fulfillment of that promise in part, but ultimately all families would be blessed through the Seed of Abraham—the promised Messiah.⁷²

Genesis 15 does declare that the land would be a possession of Abraham’s descendants forever (עַד־עוֹלָם). How are we to understand this in light of the fact that Israel lost the land for some time? Through apostasy, rebellion, and unbelief, the Israelites divorced themselves from

alone that all Christians ought to support the modern state of Israel in their efforts to physically take the land of Canaan from those that currently live there, among other Zionist assertions. Zionists in general seem to have a desire to take God’s plans into their own hands, much like Abraham did when he attempted to fulfil this promise on his own with Hagar. Regardless of whether this promise has been fulfilled (although, as the paper shows, it has been fulfilled), it is not our place to “bring about” the fulfillment of God’s promises. God is God, and he will fulfill his own plans (Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 32:39).

71. Ulrike Bechmann, “Genesis 12 and the Abraham-Paradigm Concerning the Promised Land,” *The Ecumenical Review* 68, no. 1 (March 2016), 62.

72. G. Wolff, “Is the Establishment of the State of Israel a Fulfillment of the Old Testament Prophecy Concerning the Return of All Israel to Canaan?” Translated by Dr. John Sullivan. Taken from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File. “In other words, not the nation of Israel per se is to be a blessing to all nations, but a single descendant of Abraham, Christ, who offered himself up for all; and Israel is a blessing only to the extent that it propagates the message of Christ among the nations.”

the God who had given them this land as a sign. And so they were once carried off into captivity in Babylon, and again scattered among the nations when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. Was God's Word broken?

Here, we answer in two ways. First, עַד-עוֹלָם does not need to mean "forever and ever," but often refers to a period of unbounded time. Abraham's descendants did indeed possess the land as long as they were carrying out their mission as God's ambassadors to the world. That mission lasted until Christ came.

We know from the entire Old and New Testaments that Israel's entire mission and function as God's chosen people should last until the promised Savior would come from its midst and carry out His work of salvation. With Christ's cross, with the completion of His work of redemption, the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles was broken down.... Thus also the promise of the land to Abraham's seed came to an end with the whole purpose, mission, and function of Israel as God's special chosen nation. Just when that time of fulfillment would chronologically take place, God did not reveal to Abraham. That is why עַד-עוֹלָם is very much in place.⁷³

God did give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants for an unbounded period of time. That time happened to be about fourteen-hundred years, from Joshua's conquest to the Jewish diaspora.

The second way we answer the question deals with one of the main contentions of Christian Zionists: that in Scripture the Church and Israel are not the same thing. An examination of the central message of the Scriptures will lead us to see the truth about "replacement theology." As Christians, we rejoice in the wonderful status that God has given to his people on the basis of what Christ Jesus has done, and not on the basis of our bloodlines.

73. Lawrenz. "Reflections," 9.

The People of God

The second most serious contention of Christian Zionists is that references to “Israel” in Scripture must always refer to literal, physical Israel, the nation populated by Abraham’s blood descendants. “Christian Zionists believe that the Jews remain God’s ‘chosen people’ enjoying a unique relationship, status and eternal purposes within their own land, separate from any promises made to the Church.”⁷⁴ In Scofield’s dispensationalist understanding of God’s plan for the world, the Church is merely a “parenthesis” soon to be replaced by the earthly nation of Israel.⁷⁵ The Church will be raptured from the world, and then Christ Jesus will institute an earthly kingdom from the earthly nation of Israel. When he does, the nation of Israel will be converted en masse, and will worship Jesus as his eternal covenant people.⁷⁶

Zionists appeal to the many references to Israel and the Jews in the Gospels which are obviously talking about physical Israel.⁷⁷ They also claim that Paul has a strong pro-Israel stance as evidenced by his discourse in Romans 11.⁷⁸ God promised the land to *Abraham’s seed* into perpetuity. The most obvious, simple, and literal reading of that promise is that Abraham’s physical descendants, the Jewish people, are entitled to the physical land of Israel forever.⁷⁹

74. Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 166.

75. Darby, “The Apostasy of Successive Dispensations,” 94. “The Church has sought to settle itself here, but it has no place on the earth ... [Though] making a most constructive parenthesis, it forms no part of the regular order of God’s earthly plans, but is merely an interruption of them to give a fuller character and meaning to them (the Jews).” Quoted in Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 167.

76. Ronald Muetzel, “All Israel Will be Saved: An Exegesis of Romans 11:25–32.” Taken from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 1.

77. McDermott, *Israel Matters*, 22 cites Luke 7:9, John 1:49, Matthew 2:20–21, among others.

78. McDermott, *Israel Matters*, 30. “In the same breath in which Paul predicted that someday ‘all Israel would be saved,’ he said that Israel’s ‘deliverer’ then would ‘come from Zion’ and that he would ‘banish ungodliness from Jacob (Rom. 11:26). Again, for Paul the land of Israel had a future, with a special destiny for the Jews in that future.”

79. Harper, “Apocalypse Soon,” 75. “The implication [of Zionist positions today] is that the present-day state of Israel comprises the people of God, and so evangelicals must help preserve them.”

Indeed, that would seem to be the most obvious reading of God's promise if we simply ignore the message of the Scriptures as a whole, the point of Paul's discourse in Romans 11, and several other glaringly pointed passages.

All Families of the Earth will be Blessed

What is the central, most important message of the Scriptures? Christ Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 20:31).⁸⁰ From the very beginning of time, before there ever was a concept of Israel or the Jewish nation, God promised a Savior from sin who would destroy the work of the devil and restore paradise to all mankind (Gen 3:15). God chose Abraham and his descendants to bring that Savior into the world (Gen 12:3). He did not choose Israel because they were the most powerful or the most numerous or the most special of the nations of the world, but because of his grace (Ex 19:5). Israel's function was always to be a light to the nations, demonstrating who God is and what he does to save—including the proclamation of the coming Savior (Ex 19:6; Is 60:1–3). Countless passages in the Old Testament demonstrate that God's plan of salvation was always intended for all people, not just the Jews (Dt 32:43; Ps 22:27; Dan 7:14; Is 49:6).

In the New Testament, this central message is not only repeated continually, we see its fulfilment in the person of Christ Jesus of Nazareth. Though Jesus' ministry was done among the

80. "We believe that the entire Bible is Christ-centered. In the Old Testament God repeatedly promised a divine deliverer from sin, death, and hell. The New Testament proclaims that this promised deliverer has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus himself says of the Old Testament, 'These are the Scriptures that testify about me' (John 5:39)." Taken from the WELS website, "This We Believe: I. God and His Revelation," V.

“lost sheep of Israel” (Matt 15:24), he proclaimed the gospel of salvation to Gentiles as well (Matt 15:28; Luke 7:9–10). Jesus’ words in John 10:14–18 are especially pertinent:

I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me (just as the Father knows me and I know the Father). And I lay down my life for the sheep. I also have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock and one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again. This is the commission I received from my Father.

Jesus is the Savior of the whole world: Jew and Gentile; domestic and wild sheep. There is no special salvific or covenantal status given to the earthly children of Abraham by virtue of their bloodline. In fact, the Gospels state repeatedly that trusting in one’s Jewish bloodline for salvation or status before God would get them nowhere (Matt 3:9; John 8:37). Jesus is clear: bloodline does not make one a true child of Abraham. It is Abraham’s faith that makes one a true child of Abraham:

I know you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because there is no place for my word in you. I am telling you what I have seen at the side of the Father. As for you, you do what you have heard at the side of your father.” “Our father is Abraham!” they answered. “If you were Abraham’s children,” Jesus told them, “you would do the works of Abraham” (John 8:37–39).

Paul repeats this exact thought in his letter to the Galatian Christians. Whether Jew or Gentile, the prevailing characteristic of the true descendant of Abraham is to share his faith in the promise which was fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

Just as Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness, then understand that those who have faith are Abraham’s sons. Now the Scripture saw in advance that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and told the good news ahead of time to Abraham, saying, All the nations will be blessed through you. So those who have faith are blessed with Abraham, who had faith (Gal 3:6–9).

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ like a garment. There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:27–29).

God's promise to Abraham was that he would have a Descendant through which the whole earth would be blessed. Abraham believed that promise, and it was credited to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6). Now, all people—regardless of gender, nationality, or social status—rightly claim the lineage of Abraham on the basis of having the same faith, the same righteousness.

Christ Jesus and his gospel is the “new covenant” (Jer 31:31–33) which supersedes the old. There is no longer any reason to continue practicing Jewish customs which separated the Jews from the Gentiles (Col 2:16–17). We do not circumcise or rely on the Israelite law for salvation (Gal 5:1–4). We do not continue the Old Testament sacrifices upon the altar in the Temple in Jerusalem, because “[Jesus] has appeared once and for all, at the climax of the ages, in order to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26).⁸¹ There are not two ways of salvation: one for Jews and one for Gentiles. There is but one Savior, Christ Jesus, who has torn down anything that previously separated us, and made us into one Body, the Church.

Therefore, remember that at one time, you Gentiles in the flesh—the ones who are called “uncircumcised” by those called “the circumcised” (which is performed physically by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separated from Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise. You were without hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace. He made the two groups one by destroying

81. Among the desires of Christian Zionists is indeed the restoration of the Temple and the resumption of the daily Old Testament sacrifices. See Dale, “Impact of Christian Zionism.” “The territory of Greater Israel, the entire city of Jerusalem, and a rebuilt temple have become the chief objects of Christian Zionist attention. The rebuilt temple would require the installation of the ancient priesthood and resumption of practices such as animal sacrifice.” See also John Hagee’s quote on page 6, which states that the sacrifices must be resumed before the Antichrist may appear.

This is a fool’s errand for several reasons. Most importantly, Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice has done away with the necessity for daily sacrifices. The Old Testament sacrifices were always pointing ahead to the work of our Great High Priest. To revert back to the old system of Levitical sacrifices would be trading the freedom of Christ for the slavery of the law once again. And not only that, but the institution of Levitical sacrifices at this point in history would be an impossibility. Only priests and Levites would be able to perform such a function, and there are none left. See Wolff, “Establishment of Israel,” 3. “That the whole Old Testament system of sacrifices is obsolete God demonstrated in history by the course of events. Israel’s genealogies are lost. No one knows who the descendants of the tribe of Levi and of the house of Aaron are, and only such would have the exclusive claim to the priesthood and the offering up of sacrifices. Hence the reestablishing of the system of sacrifices in keeping with the law of Moses is actually an impossibility.”

the wall of hostility that divided them when he abolished the law of commandments and regulations in his flesh. He did this to create in himself one new person out of the two, in this way making peace. And he did this to reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by putting the hostility to death on it. He also came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household. You have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the Cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you too are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Eph 2:11–22).

Indeed, it is almost unfair to label this teaching “replacement theology,” as though Israel were being “replaced” by the Church. It would be better to think of “the Church” as simply another name for “Israel,” the true Israel of God (Gal 6:16). The true Israel is not merely Jewish people, but all of God's people in Christ who have been “grafted on” to the family tree, whether Jew or Gentile. This is exactly what Paul is speaking about in Romans 11, which Zionists often cite in favor of their position that Israel is still distinct from the Church and has a special place in God's eschatological plan.⁸²

All Israel will be Saved

In Romans 11, Paul declares,

And if they [the Jews] do not remain in unbelief, those branches will be grafted in again, because God is able to graft them in again. For if you [Gentiles] were cut off from a wild olive tree and, contrary to nature, were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more easily will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree?

For I do not want you to be uninformed about this mystery, brothers, so that you are not conceited in your opinion of yourselves. There has been a hardening of part of Israel until the full number of Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is

82. “Now is the time to stand with Israel.... Christian friends, “The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29). So must our support for the survival of Israel in this dark hour be irrevocable. Now is the time for Christians to stand by Israel.” “Open Letter to Evangelical Christians from Jews for Jesus: Now is the Time to Stand with Israel.” The New York Times, 23 October (2000). Taken from Sizer, “Roadmap to Armageddon,” 250.

written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion; he will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.

In regard to the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But, in regard to election, they are especially dear for the sake of the patriarchs, because God's gracious gifts and call are not regretted (Romans 11:23–29).

Zionists, in the phrase “in this way, all Israel will be saved,” see a reference to the general conversion of all Jewish people at the end of time “for the sake of the patriarchs,” that is, with the promises that God made to Abraham in mind.⁸³ Though the Jews have been hardened “in part,” all Israel will be grafted back onto the tree as soon as “the full number of Gentiles has come in.” God's “gracious gifts and call are not regretted,” and so he will make sure that all the Jewish people are saved.⁸⁴

83. In Scofield's *Reference Bible*, his notes on Deuteronomy 30:1–9 include a detailed plan for the Jewish people, in which he says that there will be a mass conversion of the Jews as Christ returns to establish his earthly kingdom. “Scofield delineates seven parts to this process under the heading ‘The Palestinian Covenant’:

‘(1) Dispersion for disobedience, v.1 (Deut. 28:63–68. Gen. 15:18).

(2) The future repentance of Israel while in the dispersion, v.2.

(3) The return of the Lord, v.3 (Amos 9:9–14; Acts 15:14–17).

(4) Restoration to the land, v.5 (Isa. 11:11; Jer. 23:3-8; Ezek. 37:21–25).

(5) National conversion, v.6 (Rom. 11:26, 27; Hos. 2:14–16).

(6) The judgement of Israel's oppressors, v.7 (Isa.14:1,2; Mt. 25:31–46).

(7) National prosperity, v.9 (Amos 9:11–14)’” Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 185–86.

Even Lutherans throughout the years have fallen prey to this heresy. “In his classic work, *Pia Desideria* (1675), Spener [a Lutheran pietist] contended that in the future ‘if not all, at least a perceptibly large number of Jews who have hitherto hardened their hearts will be converted to the Lord.’ Quoted in Brenner, “American Lutheran Views,” 6. Joseph Seiss, who was the president of both the Pennsylvania Ministerium and General Council (two large American Lutheran church bodies) in the late 19th century, wrote in his book, *The Last Times* (1878), about the conversion of the Jews and their role in God's eschatological plan: “That during these great and destructive commotions the Jewish race shall be marvelously restored to the land of their fathers, brought to embrace Jesus as their Messiah and King, delivered from their enemies, placed at the head of the nations, and made the agents of unspeakable blessings to the world. That Christ will then re-establish the throne of His father David, exalt it in heavenly glory, make Mount Zion the seat of His divine empire, and, with the glorified saints associated with Him in His dominion, reign over the house of Jacob and over the world in a visible, sublime, and heavenly Christocracy for the period of ‘the thousand years.’” Quoted in Brenner, “American Lutheran Views,” 9.

84. A natural consequence of this doctrine is to completely ignore or downplay the necessity of evangelism to the Jewish people. If, after all, the Jews will all be saved in the end, why bother trying to bring them into God's family now? This is one reason that Zionists have no problem supporting Israel even though it has a policy against Christian proselytism. See “Israel and the occupied territories, International Religious Freedom Report; Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.” US Department of State. 7 Nov 2010. “Despite the legality of proselytism, the government has taken a number of steps that encouraged the perception that proselytizing is against government policy. For example, the MOI [Ministry of Interior] has detained individuals suspected of being ‘missionaries,’ and required of such persons bail and a pledge to abstain from missionary activity, in addition to refusing them entry into the country. It maintained denunciations of such activity from antimissionary groups like Yad L'Achim in its border

Paul, in actuality, is not stating that the Jews will be spontaneously converted at the end of time. He is rather saying that there will continually be Jewish converts to Christianity until the end of time alongside the Gentile converts.⁸⁵ Paul is writing to Gentile Christians who might be tempted to be “conceited in their opinions of themselves” on account of the fact that they were chosen by God while the Jewish people had hardened themselves against the gospel of Christ. Paul is therefore urging the Gentile believers to continue to reach out in love with the gospel to the Jewish people.⁸⁶ The encouragement he offers is that the elect among the Jewish nation will certainly respond in faith to the gospel just as the Gentiles had. There is no salvific embargo on the nation of Israel.⁸⁷ “How much more easily,” he says, “will the Jews be grafted back onto their own olive tree?” After all, they possess the gospel promises that God made to the patriarchs! “Indeed, above all else, they were entrusted with the messages of God” (Romans 3:2).

All Israel will be saved—not the physical race of the Jews, but the entire family of God, both Jews and Gentiles. Paul does not say “Israel has experienced a hardening until the full

control databases. The MOI has also cited proselytism as a reason to deny student, work, and religious visa extensions, as well as to deny permanent residency petitions.”

85. Lawrenz, “Reflections,” 7, 8. “The main *sedes doctrinae* for the teaching of a universal conversion of the Jews before the final end is supposed to be found in verses 25–27 of the 11th chapter of Romans. . . . All the while that God through the Gospel is gathering in His elect from the Gentiles, He is also still gathering in His elect from His chosen people, the Jews. So, when the full number of the Gentiles will have been gathered in, then all of His elect from among the Gentiles and from among the Jews will have been led to salvation. In this manner all Israel, the true Israel of God, the communion of saints, will be saved.”

86. “In [Romans 11:25] Paul revealed the same mystery [that the Gentiles are heirs together with Jews] with a somewhat different purpose: that the Gentile believers not ‘become conceited’ and pridefully withhold the Gospel from Jewish people.” Muetzel, “All Israel will be Saved,” 3.

87. “Not all the people of Israel are hardened. Paul himself is an exception. A number is not assigned to the ‘in part.’ We don’t know the number of those who will constitute Israel’s hardening. Nor do we know how many in Israel will be stones softened by God and made into true ‘children of Abraham’ (Matthew 3:9).” Muetzel, “All Israel will be Saved,” 3. See also C. F. W. Walther quoted in Francis Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics, vol 3* (Concordia: St. Louis, 1953), 533. “True though it be that the Jews have crucified and rejected their own Messiah, still, according to the mystery unfolded by the Apostle, Jews shall be converted as long as Gentiles are converted. Not only will the door of grace remain open till the end, but there shall always be a number of both who actually enter the Kingdom of God.”

number of Gentiles come in, *and then all the Jews will be saved,*” as though this were a prophecy about a mass conversion of the Jews at the end of time. He rather says, “*and so all Israel will be saved, (καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται).*” In this way all of the true Israel, those who by faith are members of God’s family, will be saved.⁸⁸ “Physical Israel has experienced a partial hardening, partial because some still believe and are saved. This will continue to be true until the end when all believing Gentiles will have come into the kingdom and been saved. Conclusion: The result of some Jewish people believing and some Gentiles believing is that ‘all Israel will be saved.’”⁸⁹

There is not a second way to salvation. “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). For both Jews and Gentiles, faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. To teach that the Jewish people are special in this way, or that they will all be converted at the end of time is to invite some other gospel, which is really no gospel at all, and to read against many passages of Scripture which preach the law to both Jews and Gentiles.⁹⁰ The Christian attitude toward the

88. Lawrenz, “Reflections,” 7. “‘All Israel’ does not refer here to Israel according to the flesh but to the true Israel, the elect remnant, God’s chosen believers from the Jews as well as from the Gentiles. In Galatians 6:16 Paul also uses Israel in this sense when he says: ‘And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.’”

89. Muetzel, “All Israel will be Saved,” 5.

90. Muetzel, “All Israel will be Saved,” 5. “Circus tricks are required to fit a last-days, general conversion of physical Israel in with Jesus’ assertion that ‘at that time... the love of most will grow cold’ (Matthew 25:10–12). How can all Israel experience salvation by a resurrection and conversion of dead Israelites, if ‘man is destined to die once, and after that to face the judgment’ (Hebrews 9:27)? Why did the Holy Spirit bother to warn Israelites, ‘Do not harden your hearts’ (Hebrews 3:7–8), if this was a hardening that would be entirely softened? Were the tears Jesus shed outside Jerusalem false tears like the crocodile tears of a child (Luke 19:41)? What was the point of His word to the daughters of Jerusalem, ‘Weep for yourselves and for your children’ (Luke 23:28)? No, so much of Scripture is violated by the general conversion view that one logically ends up with either Christless salvation, universalism or both.

Jewish people should not therefore be to ignore their spiritual welfare in favor of supporting their earthly prosperity, but rather to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to them with vigor and zeal.

The Kingdom of God

One of the biggest reasons for the success and spread of the Zionist movement in the 20th century was, of course, the establishment of the modern state of Israel, which was seen as proof that God's eternal plans for the Jews are coming to fruition, and that the dispensationalist interpretation of prophecy is correct.⁹¹ Zionists continue to hope that the reestablishment of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the resultant inevitable conflict that arises from Israel's continued existence, and the rebuilding of the Temple will usher in the new millennium, the rapture of the Church, the conversion of the Jews, and the return of Christ Jesus who will establish his kingdom of glory on earth.⁹² This desire to usher in the Kingdom of God and to bring about the new age is the primary motivation for the Zionist cause. It is the reason that so much political clout, money, and time is spent lobbying on behalf of Israel. Ultimately, the desire is to usher in God's plans for the end of the world. As one Zionist commentator on Daniel puts it, "When the nation of that

91. Jimmy Carter, "President James Carter and Prime Minister Menachim Begin, "30th Anniversary of the State of Israel Remarks at a White House Reception" (30 May 1978). "The establishment of the nation of Israel is the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and the very essence of its fulfillment." Quoted in Smith, "Lutheran Response to Zionism," 279. See also L. Nelson Bell, "Unfolding Destiny," *Christianity Today* (21 July 1967), 28. "That 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."

92. Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 218-19. "Crucial to this pessimistic reading of biblical prophecy is the conviction that a period of Tribulation is imminent along with the secret Rapture of the church and the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple on the Temple Mount. This will trigger the war of Armageddon in which large numbers of Jews will suffer and die. Jesus will return to rescue the remnant of believing Jews, restore the Kingdom to Israel and rule from Jerusalem for a thousand years."

land to whom God has promised it by covenant is given full and free possession of the land, only then will the nations be at rest and the peace for which men strive shall finally be realized.”⁹³

The desire to see physical Israel restored and a messianic King ruling on earth is hardly a new one. The Jews in Jesus’ day looked forward also to the Messiah who would reestablish the throne of his father David (Isaiah 9:7).⁹⁴ When Jesus the Christ was born, Herod believed “the King of the Jews” was an earthly threat to his own power (Matthew 2:3). And while Jesus walked this earth, there were those who wanted to make him their king by force (John 6:15). Even after his resurrection, Jesus’ disciples still believed that Jesus was going to usher in an earthly messianic Kingdom. “Lord, is this the time when you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

But of course, Jesus’ mission had nothing to do with establishing an earthly kingdom. “My kingdom is not of this world,” he told Pilate (John 18:36). The Messiah repeatedly retreated from any and all efforts to win earthly fame and power, moving on from wherever an earthly following might be gathered (John 6:15; Mark 1:35–39). Even one of Satan’s temptations of Jesus in the wilderness involved using his authority as Messiah to gain earthly power for himself—but Christ Jesus would have none of it! (Matthew 4:8–10). The point of Jesus’ ministry was not to establish an earthly kingdom, but to destroy the devil’s work (1 John 3:8).

The Kingdom of God is not a physical place with visible boundaries. Jesus declares that the Kingdom of God is God’s rule in the hearts of believers: “The Pharisees asked Jesus when the

93. M. R. DeHaan, *Daniel the Prophet, Simple Studies in the Book of Daniel*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 1947), 35. Quoted in Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 236-37.

94. Wolff, “Establishment of Israel,” 6. “Israel abused God’s law and promises in pride and self-exaltation. They imagined that possessing the law was tantamount to keeping it, and regarded this presumption as being the basis for their status as God’s chosen people. This resulted in their transforming the prophecy of a Savior from sin into one of a temporal king who would make Israel a mighty, glorious secular kingdom dominating all the nations of the earth.”

kingdom of God would come. Jesus answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in a way you can observe, nor will people say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘Look, there it is!’ because the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20–21). When we pray, “Thy Kingdom come,” we are not praying for an establishment of some earthly Kingdom of God, but we rather pray that God’s rule would extend into the hearts of all people everywhere.⁹⁵

The mission of the Church is not to establish a Kingdom of God on earth (ala Geneva) or to help the Jews do so in the land of Israel.⁹⁶ Rather, it is to proclaim the gospel, and thus to advance the Kingdom of God within the hearts of men.

Jesus did not come to reestablish David’s kingdom in even greater glory, nor did he instruct his disciples to establish a visible kingdom in Palestine. Quite the contrary; he corrected the erroneous views which they shared with their contemporaries and told them: “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and arise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:46, 47). When the disciples asked him: “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”—they were obsessed with the notion of a visible earthly reign!—Christ’s answer to their question was: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Ac 1:8). Hence the earthly Jerusalem is not the goal of his kingdom, but rather the starting point from which his spiritual kingdom of grace will spread as a result of Gospel preaching to all nations.⁹⁷

95. “We are praying that God reign in our hearts through his Word so that we live to his honor and glory,” and “We pray for God’s kingdom to come to those who are not yet part of the kingdom through faith.” Martin Luther, *Small Catechism* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2017), 256-57.

96. The desire for a physical land and a physical kingdom from which Christ will establish his rule is nothing but a blatant theology of glory: I cannot simply be sure of God’s salvific promises by trusting in his Word—I must see with my eyes that God is working powerfully in the world as proof that his promises are true. God must be living and active in the world because Israel and the Zionist cause are successful. God will and must give ever greater evidence of his power and might through the continued success of Israel. And if I don’t see evidence of God working in this world, then something must be wrong with me, or wrong with God. Luther speaks of the theology of glory in contrast to the theology of the cross. “A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.” Martin Luther, *Theses for the Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), Thesis 21, LW 31:40.

Professor Joel Fredrich expounds on the concept of the theology of glory: “I embrace a theology of glory when A) I focus chiefly on God’s glory and see him best revealed in things that show his glory. B) I see my own glorious deeds as essential for getting right with God. C) I require glorious signs in my own life to show that I am on the right track.” Taken from Prof. Fredrich’s 1 Corinthians class notes. It is the last point that Christian Zionists embrace most fully.

97. Wolff, “Establishment of Israel,” 1.

From the physical land of Canaan, the gospel of Christ Jesus has gone out into the all the earth. Through this gospel, the Spirit of God has brought both Jews and Gentiles together into one body, the Church. And together we look forward not to an earthly millennial reign, but to the ultimate hope of God's heavenly kingdom.

Ultimate Fulfilment

God declares that it is “too small a thing” for his Servant to merely restore Israel to glory. God also appoints him as a “light to the nations, that all the ends of the earth would know his salvation” (Is 49:6). And this is really the prevailing issue with Christian Zionists: their god is too small. In declaring that God's promise to Abraham only applies to the Jewish people, and only applies to the physical land of Canaan, they trivialize God's great love and mercy to all people and the amazing *telos* of God's grace. They minimize the work of Christ Jesus and lose the beautiful hope of glory that God wants all people to enjoy. This is the consequence of the literal futurist hermeneutic that Zionists employ. Rather, we seek to let Scripture itself interpret the prophecies of Scripture.

When God promises the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants forever, he has in mind far more than the earthly boundaries of modern-day Israel.⁹⁸ Even Abraham himself understood that God's promise of the physical land pictured something far greater.

By faith [Abraham] lived as a stranger in the Promised Land, as if it did not belong to him, dwelling in tents along with Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.... One by one, all of these died in faith, without having received the things that were promised, but they saw and welcomed them from a distance. They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Indeed, people who say

⁹⁸ Zionists reduce God's promise to the mere earthly land, and never see a reference to anything more. “The Hebrew Bible... describes an actual piece of earthly real estate marked by carefully-spelled-out geographical boundaries (Gen 15:18–21).” Wilson, “Zionism as Theology,” 30.

things like that make it clear that they are looking for a land of their own. And if they were remembering the land they had come from, they would have had an opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better land—a heavenly one. For that reason, God is not ashamed to be called their God, because he prepared a city for them (Heb 11:9, 10, 13–16).

Hebrews here says that Abraham died in faith, looking forward to the promised land—not the earthly land of Canaan, but a “heavenly land!” God’s promise of the land is not ultimately about the physical real estate, about the earthly land of Israel or the Levantine city of Jerusalem. It is about the heavenly Israel, the “city which God has prepared,” the New Jerusalem.⁹⁹ These earthly realities are types of the spiritual realities that await those who share the faith of Abraham. “The earthly Canaan is in the final analysis both a guarantee and also a type of the heavenly Canaan, of eternal life in the glory of God and Christ. This was the hope of the patriarch who never gained possession of the earthly Canaan.”¹⁰⁰

This is the beautiful truth: Christ Jesus is the Messiah who has fulfilled the promises of God to gather the elect to himself that they might enjoy eternity with him in heaven. It is perfectly legitimate to express this truth in terms which the Old Testament prefigured. And this is exactly what the Apostle John does: “And I heard the number of those sealed: 144,000 sealed from all the tribes of the people of Israel” (Rev 7:4). “Because of this they are in front of the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple” (Rev 7:15). “And I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2). *Israel, temple, Jerusalem*. These are obviously declaring spiritual

99. Lawrenz, “Reflections,” 9. “On the basis of Scripture it can, of course, also be said, as we see from Hebrews 11:9, 13–16, that the earthly Canaan was but a type of the heavenly Canaan. In that sense we can say that Abraham’s seed has a promise. The true spiritual seed of Abraham has the promise of the heavenly Canaan. This promise extended and still extends to all eternity. When applied in this sense, the promise does not pertain to the physical Israel, however, but again to the Israel of God, to Abraham’s believing seed from Jew and Gentile, to all the elect of God.”

100. Wolff, “Establishment of Israel,” 4.

realities in terms of physical, Old Testament imagery.¹⁰¹ “Those sealed from all the tribes of Israel” is referring to all the elect of God, from every tribe, nation, and language—not simply physical Israel. “God’s temple” refers to the fact that our existence in heaven at all times is an act of worship. Everything that they do who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb is temple work. “Jerusalem” is a picture of the eternal city of God, where he has put his Name forever. There we will spend eternity as God’s people.

Because terms like “Mt. Zion,” “Israel,” or “Jerusalem,” ultimately depict heavenly realities for God’s people, they mean far more than the simple geographical or genealogical connotations.¹⁰² When the Psalmist declares, “Worship the LORD, O Jerusalem. Praise your God, O Zion,” (Ps 147:12), it is legitimate to identify with all of God’s people in singing God’s praises, even if you are not a Jew living in literal Jerusalem. When Isaiah declares, “But now this is what the LORD says, the LORD who created you, O Jacob, the LORD who formed you, O Israel. Do not be afraid, because I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine,” (43:1), it is legitimate to identify with all of God’s people who are created, redeemed, and sanctified by the LORD, even if you are not a physical descendant of Jacob.

God’s eschatological plan was always far grander than a mere sliver of earthly land populated by a single group of people. Instead, the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise to

101. Wolff, “Establishment of Israel,” 10. “The prophets are in the habit of describing and depicting the heavenly and spiritual blessings of the Messiah in terms of physical and earthly things, using Old Testament terms for New Testament realities even as they, in speaking of worship in the Spirit, employ terms that were applicable to Old Testament worship under the law.” See Gerhard’s *Loci IX*, p. 106b.

102. Wolff, “Establishment of Israel,” 10. “From the New Testament, but already in some measure from the Old Testament, it is evident that the expressions: ‘the land promised to the fathers,’ ‘the city of Jerusalem,’ ‘Mt. Zion’ in the prophecies referring to the times of the Messiah do not designate spatial, geographical places on this earth, but are rather figurative designations for the place where Christ in a spiritual way, as a King, holds sway in the hearts of his believers by virtue of the Gospel.... Thus, then, also ‘the city of Jerusalem’ and ‘Mt. Zion’ are expressions for the spiritual place where Christ reigns in human hearts through his Gospel, and hence lose their literal meaning as geographical terms.”

Abraham came about through Christ: that all of God's elect would stand before the face of God and worship him eternally in a land that is so full of splendor that it can only be described in terms of the greatest earthly beauty and peace. This is the message of the entire Scriptures: not a visible kingdom of glory on earth on a particular plot of land, but a kingdom of heavenly glory for the elect of God, the true Israel.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Brenner, "American Lutheran Views," 12.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN: CONCLUSIONS

The influence of Christian Zionism on our country must never be underestimated. It has broad appeal among American Evangelicals for its relationship to premillennialist eschatology and to the theology of glory. It also appeals to Christians who consider the Bible to be the inspired Word of God. For those exposed to Zionist preachers espousing this worldview, it can be convincing to hear that God has promised the land of Israel to the Jews forevermore. Their claims, which they draw from Scripture, must also be answered by Scripture. We must be vigilant in our study of God's Word so that we ourselves do not fall prey to this false doctrine. I pray that this paper will be beneficial for those looking to answer Zionist claims with Scripture. To that end, I have provided a short summary of scriptural points with which to answer these Zionist claims. It may be beneficial for some to print it out as a sort of quick-reference.

Any study of Christian Zionism inevitably leads one to examine in detail God's most glorious promises to his people: salvation by faith in Christ alone; God's grace to sinners regardless of earthly status; an eternal home in the heavenly Jerusalem. What a joy to know that we are heirs of these ancient promises by faith in our Savior Jesus! What a joy to be counted among the Israel of God!

SDG

ZIONISM QUICK REFERENCE

Zionist Claim	Scriptural Response
Jews continue to play a special role in God's plans.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The Jewish people are not "the people of God" by virtue of their relationship to Abraham. Rather, Christians are the people of God by virtue of sharing the faith of Abraham in the Messiah. Galatians 3:27–29 2) There is nothing special about the Jewish people when it comes to salvation or the end of the world. We are all united in Christ Jesus into one Body. Ephesians 2:11–22
God has granted the Jewish people the land of Canaan forever.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) God's promise to give the land of Canaan to the Jews עַד-עוֹלָם has already been fulfilled. Joshua 21:43–45 2) Ultimately, God's promise to give his people the land refers to our eternal home in heaven. Hebrews 11:9–16
God promises to bless those who support the Jewish people.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) There is no indication in Genesis 12 that this promise would extend beyond Abraham himself. 2) Abraham's blessing is given not to those who support his physical descendants, but to those who have faith in Christ. Galatians 3:14
The Jewish people will be converted en masse at the end of the age.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) There is only one way to salvation. Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Acts 4:12 2) The Jews will come to faith in Christ until the end of time in the same way that everyone else will, by the preaching of the gospel. Romans 11:25
The Old Testament sacrifices must be reinstated at the Temple in order for Jesus to return.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) There is no need for daily sacrifices anymore now that Christ has come. He has sacrificed himself once for all for the sins of the world. Hebrews 9:28 2) Returning to the Old Testament sacrifices is returning to the law. Trying to be justified by the law is a fool's errand, and results in falling away from faith. Galatians 5:4 3) All the signs of the end times have already happened. Christ may return at any moment. His return is not contingent upon any human action. 1 Thessalonians 5:1–3
Jesus will return to establish an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Jesus' kingdom is not a kingdom of this world, but a kingdom of grace in the hearts of mankind. Luke 17:20–21 2) Jesus' kingdom spreads not by earthly force, but by the proclamation of the gospel. Acts 1:8

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