

# Christian Zionism



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## Introduction

Christian Zionism is predominantly a political movement within Protestant fundamentalist Christianity that views the modern state of Israel as somehow the fulfilment of biblical prophecies made to Abraham and the Jewish people. Christian Zionists argue that Christians must therefore recognise what God is doing and give the State of Israel unconditional economic, moral, political and theological support. They suggest God will bless nations that bless Israel and will curse those that oppose her.

## The Origins of Christian Zionism

The Zionist dream, so forcefully articulated in 1896 by Theodor Herzl in *Der Judenstaat* and a year later at the First Zionist Congress, may actually be attributed to the writings and activities of Christians like Edward Irving, Lewis Way, Joseph Wolff and Henry Drummond from as early as the 1820s. A series of prophetic conferences held at Drummond's estate in Albury, Surrey, England, gave birth to a proto-Zionist movement committed to the restoration of the Jews to Palestine. Early nineteenth-century organizations founded for this purpose included the London Jews Society and Palestine Exploration Fund.



**In the 1830s, Powerscourt, Co. Wicklow, Ireland, was the venue for a number of conferences on unfulfilled Bible prophecies, which were attended by men such as John Nelson Darby and Edward Irving. The Powerscourt Prophetic Conferences contributed to the previous conferences, held in Albury, Surrey, England, in establishing a proto-Zionist movement committed to the restoration of the Jews to Palestine.**

Through the efforts of Christian leaders such as Charles Simeon and Charles Spurgeon, the idea of active British involvement in the restoration of the Jews to Palestine also took shape. Their theological ideas were translated into political reality through the zealous efforts of British politicians such as Lord Shaftesbury, Lord Palmerston, David Lloyd George and Lord Balfour, who saw the strategic value to the British Empire of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.



The Jewish Zionist movement itself grew in no small measure due to the involvement of Christians such as William Hechler and Henry Dunant, founder of the Red Cross. Zionism eventually gained international recognition through the Balfour Declaration, which in 1917 finally guaranteed a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

During the nineteenth century two distinct strands emerged. In Europe the movement remained predominantly premillennial and covenantal, while in the United States dispensationalism emerged through the influence of John Nelson Darby, James Brookes, William Blackstone and Cyrus Scofield.

### **The Distinctive Theology of Christian Zionism.**

Christian Zionism is founded on a very literalistic and futurist interpretation of the Bible which distinguishes between references to Israel and the church. Injunctions and promises concerning the ancient Jews are applied to the contemporary State of Israel rather than to the church. From this hermeneutic flows the conviction that the Jews remain God 's "chosen people," distinct from the church.



God 's end-time purpose for the Jews is their final ingathering from the nations and known as restorationism. The destiny of the Jewish people is to return to the land of Israel and reclaim their inheritance promised to Abraham and his descendants forever. This inheritance extends from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates. Within their land, Jerusalem is recognised to be their exclusive, undivided and eternal capital, and therefore it cannot be shared or divided.

At the heart of Jerusalem will be the rebuilt Jewish temple, to which all the nations will come to worship God. Just prior to the return of Jesus, there will be seven years of calamities and war known as the tribulation, which will culminate in a great battle called Armageddon, during which the godless forces opposed to both God and Israel will be defeated.



Jesus will then return as the Jewish Messiah and king to reign in Jerusalem for a thousand years, and the Jewish people will enjoy a privileged status and role in the world.



**While Christian Zionism is strongest in the United States, it has influence among Christians in other countries, including South Africa, Holland, Sweden and Germany. The Unity Coalition for Israel brings together 200 different Jewish and Christian Zionist organisations and claims a support base of 40 million active members.**

## The Political Implications of Christian Zionism

Based on this ultra-literalist reading of selected Old Testament passages, the belief that the Jews remain God's chosen people leads Christian Zionists to seek to bless Israel in material ways, lobby on her behalf in the media, politically and through solidarity tours to Israel.

As God's chosen people, the final restoration of the Jews to Israel is therefore actively encouraged and financed through partnerships between Christian organizations and the Jewish Agency. Eretz Israel, as delineated in scripture, belongs exclusively to the Jewish people, therefore the land must be annexed and the settlements adopted and strengthened. Jerusalem is regarded as the eternal and exclusive capital of the Jews and cannot be shared with the Palestinians. Therefore, strategically, Western governments are placed under pressure by Christian Zionists to relocate their embassies to Jerusalem to reinforce this. Christian Zionists offer varying degrees of support to Jewish organizations committed to destroying the Dome of the Rock and rebuilding the Third Temple.

Most Christian Zionists are convinced there will be an apocalyptic war between Israel and Arabs. Indeed, to advocate that Israel compromise with Islam or coexist with Palestinians in a "land for peace" deal is seen as a lack of faith in God's promises and to identify with those destined to oppose God and Israel in the imminent battle of Armageddon.



## The Significance of the Christian Zionist Movement

Christian Zionism as a movement is very diverse. Three distinct strands can be identified: political, evangelistic and apocalyptic.

Christian Zionism is pervasive within many evangelical, charismatic and independent denominations, as well as many independent mega-churches. These views are disseminated worldwide through over numerous Christian radio and TV stations, and 250 different Christian Zionist organizations founded in the last twenty-five years. While Christian Zionism is strongest in the United States, it has influence among Christians in other countries, including South Africa, Holland, Sweden and Germany.

Political Christian Zionist movements often identify with right-wing Israeli opinion, lobbying the US government to continue to finance Israel's agenda. Other organizations are primarily evangelistic or messianic but also espouse Zionism on biblical grounds, and some organizations specialize in facilitating the transportation of Jews to Israel from Russia and Eastern Europe or encourage churches to adopt illegal Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories.

Popular apocalyptic Christian Zionist writers include Tim LaHaye, Hal Lindsey, John Hagee, Mike Evans, Charles Dyer and Dave Hunt. These individuals have achieved considerable influence in popularising a pessimistic view of the future, predicting a literal war of Armageddon between Israel and her enemies.



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Estimates as to the size of the movement as a whole vary considerably. While critics suggest 25-30 million adherents, advocates such as Pat Robertson and John Hagee claim weekly access to 100 million supporters. The Unity Coalition for Israel brings together 200 different Jewish and Christian Zionist organisations and claims a support base of 40 million active members. These organisations, in varying degrees, make up a broad coalition that is shaping the Christian Zionist agenda today.



The U.S. based Unity Coalition for Israel, which brings together over 200 different autonomous organisations, is the largest pro-Israel network in the world. They claim to have 40 million active members and lobby on behalf of Israel through 1,700 religious radio stations, 245 Christian TV stations and 120 Christian newspapers.

## A Critical Assessment of Christian Zionism.

The fundamental theological question Christian Zionists must answer is this: what difference did the coming of the kingdom of God in the person of Jesus Christ make to the traditional Jewish hopes and expectations concerning the land and people? Was it the fulfilment or the postponement of those promises? Christian Zionists appear to believe that the coming of Jesus Christ made little or no difference to the nationalistic and territorial aspirations of first-century Judaism. As a result, the Middle East Council of Churches, representing the indigenous and ancient Oriental and Eastern Churches, regard Christian Zionism as a heresy. The Jerusalem Declaration, published by the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem in 2006, assert that Christian Zionists have aggressively imposed an aberrant expression of the Christian faith and an erroneous interpretation of the Bible, which is subservient to the political agenda of the modern State of Israel. Christian Zionism endorses a theocratic and ethnocentric nationalism on the Middle East and emphasizes events leading up to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today.

Christian Zionism thrives on a literal and futurist hermeneutic in which Old Testament promises made to the ancient Jewish people are transferred to the contemporary State of Israel in anticipation of a final future fulfillment. It ignores,



marginalizes, or bypasses New Testament passages that reinterpret, annul or view these promises as fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ and his followers. Most Christian interpreters today see the process of redemptive history as having yielded a dramatic movement, from shadow to substance. The land that God once constrained to the specific place of his redemptive purpose he then expanded to the entire breadth of the created cosmos, through the New Covenant.

S. Sizer



## Appendix I

### Influential Christian Zionist organisations and people

The most well known and influential Christian Zionist organisations include the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ); the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People, also known as The Israel Trust of the Anglican Church within Israel (CMJ or ITAC); Christian Friends of Israel (CFI); Intercessors For Britain (IFB); Prayer Friends of Israel (PFI); Bridges for Peace (BFP); The American Messianic Fellowship (AMF); The Messianic Jewish Alliance America (MJAA); Jews for Jesus (JFJ); the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary; and the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ). These organisations, in varying degrees, and for a variety of reasons, some contradictory, are part of a broad coalition, which is shaping the content of the Christian Zionist agenda today.

Of all the Christian Zionist organisations, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem ICEJ is probably the most influential and controversial. ICEJ was founded in 1980, specifically in Jerusalem, in an attempt by Zionist Christians to reverse the effect of the decision by the international community to vacate their embassies in Jerusalem in protest of Israel's occupation of the West Bank. Ironically ICEJ is housed in the confiscated home once belonging to the family of Dr Edward Said.

Contemporary British Christian leaders such as Derek Prince, David Pawson, Lance Lambert, Walter Riggans, along with Americans like Pat Robertson, Hal Lindsey, Mike Evans, Charles Dyer, John Walvoord, Dave Hunt, the late Jerry Falwell, and the German, Basilea Schlink, have had considerable influence in popularising an apocalyptic premillennial eschatology and Zionist vision among Western Christians.



## Appendix II

### "THE JERUSALEM DECLARATION ON CHRISTIAN ZIONISM"

#### Statement by the Patriarch and Local Heads of Churches in Jerusalem

*"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God." (Matthew 5:9)*

Christian Zionism is a modern theological and political movement that embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism, thereby becoming detrimental to a just peace within Palestine and Israel. The Christian Zionist program provides a worldview where the Gospel is reduced to an ideology of empire, colonialism, and militarism. In its extreme form, it places an emphasis on apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today.

We categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as a false teaching that corrupts the biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation.

We further reject the contemporary alliance of Christian Zionist leaders and organizations with elements in the governments of Israel and the United States that are presently imposing their unilateral pre-emptive borders and domination over Palestine. This inevitably leads to unending cycles of violence that undermine the security of all peoples of the Middle East and the rest of world.

We reject the teachings of Christian Zionism that facilitate and support these policies as they advance racial exclusivity and perpetual war rather than the gospel of universal love, redemption and reconciliation taught by Jesus Christ. Rather than condemn the world to the doom of Armageddon we call upon everyone to liberate themselves from ideologies of militarism and occupation. Instead, let them pursue the healing of the nations!

We call upon Christians in Churches on every continent to pray for the Palestinian and Israeli people, both of whom are suffering as victims of occupation and militarism. These discriminative actions are turning Palestine into impoverished ghettos surrounded by exclusive Israeli settlements. The establishment of the illegal settlements and the construction of the Separation Wall on confiscated Palestinian land undermines the viability of a Palestinian state and peace and security in the entire region.

We call upon all Churches that remain silent, to break their silence and speak for reconciliation with justice in the Holy Land.

Therefore, we commit ourselves to the following principles as an alternative way:

- We affirm that all people are created in the image of God. In turn they are called to honor the dignity of every human being and to respect their inalienable rights.



- We affirm that Israelis and Palestinians are capable of living together in peace, justice and security.
- We affirm that Palestinians are one people, both Muslim and Christian. We reject all attempts to subvert and fragment their unity.
- We call upon all people to reject the narrow world view of Christian Zionism and other ideologies that privilege one people at the expense of others.
- We are committed to non-violent resistance as the most effective means to end the illegal occupation in order to attain a just and lasting peace.
- With urgency we warn that Christian Zionism and its alliances are justifying colonization, apartheid, and empire-building.

God demands that justice be done. No enduring peace, security, or reconciliation is possible without the foundation of justice. The demands of justice will not disappear. The struggle for justice must be pursued diligently and persistently but non-violently.

*“ What does the Lord require of you, to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. ” ( Micah 6:8 )*

This is where we take our stand. We stand for justice. We can do no other. Justice alone guarantees a peace that will lead to reconciliation and a life of security and prosperity for all the peoples of our land. By standing on the side of justice, we open ourselves to the work of peace -- and working for peace makes us children of God.

*“ God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men 's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ” ( 2 Cor 5:19 )*

*His Beatitude Patriarch Michel Sabbah,  
Latin Patriarch, Jerusalem*

*Archbishop Swerios Malki Mourad,  
Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem*

*Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal,  
Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East*

*Bishop Munib Younan,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land*

**August 22, 2006**



## Glossary

**apocalyptic** Derived from Revelations 1:1 and meaning 'unveiling', it refers to biblical or extra-biblical literature that reveals the mystery of God's end-time purposes prior to the return of Jesus Christ.

**armageddon** From the Hebrew for 'Mountain of Megiddo', it is mentioned in Revelation 16:16 as the place where the final battle on earth will take place. Others understand it as a symbol of the final overthrow of evil by God.

**covenant** A solemn and binding commitment between God and his people. Based on Jeremiah 31 and the New Testament, the 'new' covenant is a synonym for God's grace revealed in the redemption of Christ resulting in a church of Jews and Gentiles

**dispensationalism** Seven periods of time during which humanity has been or will be tested according to some specific revelation of God. Israel and the church are separate. The millennium will be the culmination of God's purpose for Israel.

**end-times** Synonymous with the 'last days' and used in Scripture to describe the period of history from the death of Christ to his return. More particularly used by premillennialists and dispensationalists to describe the present era.

**eschatology** From the Greek *eschatos* meaning 'last' and *logos* meaning 'word'; the doctrine of the future and specifically the events proceeding the return of Christ. Variants include futurist, idealist, historicist and realised.

**evangelicalism** A movement within Protestant Christianity that emphasizes a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, a commitment to the Bible as the infallible Word of God, and the sharing of the gospel with unbelievers.

**hermeneutic** The Greek word *hermeneia* (meaning 'interpretation') denotes the principles used in biblical interpretation. Historically these include allegorical (Roman Catholic), typological (Reformed) and literalist (fundamentalist).

**premillennialism** A literal 1,000-year kingdom on earth following the sudden return of Christ. There are two variants, covenantal and dispensational, depending on whether Israel and the church will share eternity together.

**restorationism** The conviction that the Bible predicts and mandates a final and complete restoration of the Jewish people to Israel. This Christian movement preceded the rise of Jewish Zionism and facilitates Jews to make *aliyah* (return to their homeland).

**zionism** The national movement for the return of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland and the resumption of Jewish political sovereignty in the land of Israel centred on Jerusalem as their eternal and undivided capital.



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## Recommended links

### **With God On Our Side**

Website dedicated to the film *With God On Our Side* which takes a look at the theology of Christian Zionism, which teaches that because the Jews are God's chosen people, they have a divine right to the land of Israel. Aspects of this belief system lead some Christians in the West to give uncritical support to Israeli government policies, even those that privilege Jews at the expense of Palestinians, leading to great suffering among Muslim and Christian Palestinians alike and threatening Israel's security as a whole.

<http://withgodonourside.com/>

A study guide to accompany the film can be downloaded here.

<http://withgodonourside.com/Study%20Guide/WGOOS%20Study%20Guide.pdf>

### **Bethlehem Bible College**

Bethlehem Bible College is providing a powerful and much needed Christian witness in the community, and provides training for young native Arab Palestinians to minister the Gospel of Jesus Christ to their own people. Founded in 1979 by local Arabs, the college usually enrolls 135 students who are interested in Christian service in the Middle East.

<http://bethbc.com/>

### **Christ at the Checkpoint Conference: Theology in the Service of Peace and Justice**

Bethlehem Bible College invites you to continue to participate in what was a unique conference of Palestinian and international Evangelical Christians concerning the theology of the land held in Bethlehem in March 2010. Lectures and articles from the conference are available on the site.

<http://www.christatthecheckpoint.com/>

### **Holy Land Trust**

Holy Land Trust is a not-for-profit organization established in Bethlehem in 1998. Holy Land Trust ( HLT ) seeks to empower the community through mobilizing its strengths and resources in order to address the challenges of the present and create real opportunities for the future.

<http://holylandtrust.org/index.php>

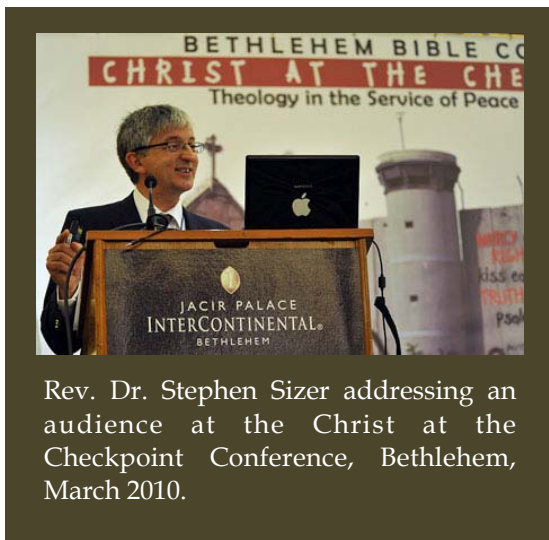
### **Kairos Palestine 2009: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of the Palestinian suffering.**

This historic document is the Christian Palestinians' word to the world about what is happening in Palestine. Palestinian Christians declare that the military occupation of their land is a sin against God and humanity, and that any theology that legitimizes the occupation is far from Christian teachings because true Christian theology is a theology of love and solidarity with the oppressed.

[www.kairopalestine.ps](http://www.kairopalestine.ps)

The document can be downloaded here.

<http://www.kairopalestine.ps/sites/default/Documents/English.pdf>



Rev. Dr. Stephen Sizer addressing an audience at the Christ at the Checkpoint Conference, Bethlehem, March 2010.

**Rev. Dr. Stephen Sizer is a patron of Sadaka - The Ireland Palestine Alliance.** Stephen is the vicar, or senior pastor, of Christ Church, Virginia Water, Surrey, U.K. He was ordained in 1983 and was appointed vicar of Virginia Water in 1997. Stephen is a Trustee of the International Bible Society – Send the Light (IBS-STL) Ministries Trust, who sponsored and publish the New International Version (NIV), the most widely read Bible translation in English. He is a Patron of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHU-UK), a founding member of the Institute for the Study of Christian Zionism (ISCZ), a member of the Advisory Council of Evangelicals for

Middle East Understanding (EMEU) and the UK Board of Reference for the Mar Elias Educational Institutions, in Ibillin, Galilee, founded by Archbishop Elias Chacour. He has Press Accreditation as a photographer from the Palestine News Network (PNN) and Holy Land Trust. He co-authored the Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism for the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem in 2006, and the Bethlehem Evangelical Affirmation, endorsed by participants at the international Christ at the Checkpoint conference sponsored by Bethlehem Bible College in March 2010.

He is a consultant and contributor to the film *With God on our Side* and the Bible study guide that accompanies the film. He is a contributor to *Bridges of Faith*, the international Evangelical-Muslim Dialogue Group. He has attended and contributed to their four annual consultations in Chicago, Tripoli, Pasadena and Toronto. He is the author of three books, *In the Footsteps of Jesus and the Apostles*, (Eagle, 2004) *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon* (IVP, 2004) and *Zion's Christian Soldiers: The Bible, Israel and the Church* (IVP, 2007). He also writes occasionally for various journals and magazines.

He has an extensive international ministry, teaching regularly in churches, seminaries and universities in the USA, Africa, Europe and the Middle East.

A more comprehensive biography can be found here.

<http://www.stephensizer.com/about/>

### Stephen Sizer

Books, articles, sermons, blogs, audio, video, links and photographs

[www.stephensizer.com](http://www.stephensizer.com)



Sadaka - an Arabic term meaning "friendship" - is an Association established in Ireland in 2009 to promote the cause of Palestine throughout Ireland, raising public awareness and engaging in political dialogue. It aims to persuade those in Government to champion the cause of justice for the Palestinian people.

The Board of Sadaka consists of: Marie Crawley (Chair), Noreen Byrne (Secretary), Adnan Shabab (Treasurer), Dr. David Morrison, Philip O' Connor, Des McGuinness, Alan Lonergan and Elaine Murtagh.

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