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## Evangelicals and Israel/Palestine FAQ

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### Frequently Asked Questions on Christian Zionism

#### Overview

A faction of evangelical Christians, known as Christian Zionists, have shaped the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from its very beginnings. Today they count among Israel's most fervent supporters, directly sending hundreds of millions of dollars annually to Israel and lobbying in support of often extreme "pro-Israel" causes, such as Israeli settlements.

How and why did this relationship come about? Is it really that significant? And where is it headed? This FAQ aims to answer some of these foundational questions.

But it has a larger purpose, too.

Despite its motivations, evangelical support for Israel—also called "Christian Zionism"—has had disastrous consequences for all Palestinians. Perhaps ironically, it has made the pursuit of peace for both Israelis and Palestinians alike much more difficult.

This FAQ ultimately aims to highlight emerging critiques of Christian Zionism, as well as other movements within evangelicalism that might help contain or transform this dangerous and destructive—and globally ascendant—movement.

After all, the only path to a sustainable and just peace in the so-called "Holy Land" will include faith communities. Along with Palestinians, Israelis and connected diasporas, these constituencies care—and will care—most about this place. Without different voices and models of activism that center the fundamental value and basic rights of all Palestinians and Israelis—as opposed to Christian Zionism's one-sided approach—a just peace will forever remain elusive.

At Telos, we support freedom, dignity, and security for both Israelis and Palestinians in equal measure. We call this approach pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, and pro-peace, or "pro/pro/pro." We hope this FAQ will better equip pro/pro/pro activists to build multi-faith, multi-partisan movements that can finally help Palestinians and Israelis achieve the freedom, dignity, and security they all equally deserve.

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## Glossary of 5 Key Terms

*These terms appear frequently throughout this FAQ. Basic familiarity with them will make this FAQ more accessible.*

- **Evangelical:** A Christian worldview and culture that emphasizes biblical authority, a personal relationship with Jesus, and spreading the Christian faith. For a more detailed understanding of evangelicalism, please see our comprehensive FAQ on the subject.
- **Zionism:** Jewish nationalism, or the idea that the Jewish people should have a nation-state/homeland of their own, which today is Israel. Like evangelicalism, there are many contemporary and historic varieties of Zionism.
- **Christian Zionism:** An organized Christian movement that roots political, financial, and spiritual support for Israel in certain evangelical readings of the Bible.
- **Dispensationalism:** The theology—or interpretive reading of the Bible—that gave rise to the first Christian Zionist movements.
- **Eschatology:** Theology about the End Times. Just as the Bible describes the beginning of the world, it also describes its end. Eschatology figures prominently in dispensationalism.

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## Table of Contents

### Background:

1. [\*What is Christian Zionism?\*](#)
2. [\*What are some core Christian Zionist beliefs?\*](#)
3. [\*What is dispensationalism? And are most American Christian Zionists dispensationalist?\*](#)
4. [\*Are all evangelicals Christian Zionist?\*](#)
5. [\*What do Palestinians—especially Palestinian Christians—think of Christian Zionism?\*](#)
6. [\*Why do some critics of Christian Zionism allege it is antisemitic?\*](#)
7. [\*Many Christian Zionists express excessive love and support for the Jewish people \(philosemitism\). Given the long history of antisemitism, why is this a problem?\*](#)
8. [\*How and when did Christian Zionism evolve into a consequential American political movement?\*](#)
9. [\*Who are some prominent Christian Zionists?\*](#)
10. [\*Are there significant communities of Christian Zionists outside America?\*](#)

### Implications:

11. [\*How and why must Christian Zionism be countered?\*](#)
12. [\*How do Christian Zionists support Israel?\*](#)
13. [\*What do Christian Zionists think of Palestinians, whether Christian or Muslim?\*](#)
14. [\*How do Christian Zionists square their support for policies that diminish the lives of millions of Palestinians with the teachings of Jesus?\*](#)
15. [\*What changes are happening within Christian Zionism?\*](#)
16. [\*Are younger evangelicals embracing Christian Zionism?\*](#)
17. [\*Why is it important for non-evangelicals to partner with evangelicals to advance fundamental human rights for both Israelis and Palestinian?\*](#)
18. [\*Why should American Christians care about Israel/Palestine?\*](#)
19. [\*Are there effective strategies to help Christian Zionists care and advocate for universal human rights?\*](#)

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## **Background**

### 1. What is Christian Zionism?

Most broadly, Christian Zionism is both (a) an ideology and (b) an organized political movement that ties support for the modern nation-state of Israel to Christian theology.

Specifically, Christian Zionists see Israel as unique among the nations, holding a special place in God's unfolding plan for humanity. They typically conflate the Israel of the Bible with the State of Israel, founded in 1948.

There are many different forms of Christian Zionism, but most organized forms are a hybrid of (a) *Covenantal Christian Zionism*, which emphasizes God's covenants with Abraham, and (b) *Prophetic Christian Zionism*, which places importance on End Times theology (see [Question #2](#)).

As noted in [Question #4](#), Christian Zionism as an organized movement must be distinguished from other Christian expressions of support for Israel: Some Christians support Israel for non-theological reasons and therefore might be termed or identify as "Zionist"; however, they often do not ground that support in Christian theology or organize politically, as millions of Christian Zionists do.

This FAQ focuses on the organized, political Christian Zionist movement, which explicitly grounds its focus on Israel and the Jewish people in Christian theology.

### 2. What are some core Christian Zionist Beliefs?

"Israel" figures prominently throughout all the books of the Bible. Accordingly, the biblical story of Abraham and his descendants, the people of Israel, shapes how many evangelicals understand both their own Christian faith and God's plan for the world.

Nearly all Christian Zionists see Israel as unique among modern nations and believe it holds a special place in God's plan. Most Christian Zionists do not distinguish between biblical Israel and the modern nation-state, created in 1948. Aside from these foundational views of Israel, today's Christian Zionism has many varieties, some of which contradict each other.

Various forms of Christian Zionism tend to fuse together two other theological views on Israel, which we term: (a) *Covenantal Christian Zionism*, which is rooted in God's covenant with

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Abraham; and (b) *Prophetic Christian Zionism*, which emphasizes eschatology, or theology around the End Times. Some Christian Zionists hold more robust views about the covenants or the End Times, but nearly all see both as significant in their understanding of how to relate to Israel and the Jewish People.

*Covenantal Christian Zionism* places the greatest importance on God's covenant with Abraham, which they believe is still active, and holds that the "New Covenant" between God and the Church does not replace God's original covenant with Abraham (as some Christians believe).

In Genesis 12:3, God says to Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse." Since Abraham is seen as the father of the Jewish people, many Christian Zionists interpret this to mean that the blessing of individuals and nations today is directly related to the ways they bless and support the Jewish people and the modern State of Israel. They see the biblical and ongoing "chosenness" of the Jewish people as central to God's plan, and in particular, many American evangelicals believe the prosperity of the United States is directly tied to US support for Israel. Conversely, they worry that those who "curse Israel" will face God's wrath.

*Prophetic Christian Zionism* places varying importance on the unfolding of God's plan for the world, which includes the Second Coming of Jesus and the End Times.

Many Christian Zionists believe that in order for Jesus to return, the Jewish people need to be restored to the biblical Land of Israel. Then, true believers will be "raptured"—or disappeared—to heaven in the "twinkling of an eye." With the Second Coming of Christ and the Battle of Armageddon, all but 144,000 Jews—12,000 for each of the tribes of Israel—will die and the rest will accept Jesus as their messiah. They view historic events like the re-establishment of Israel as key moments in God's prophetic clock, indicating that we are progressing closer to the end of the world and Jesus' triumphant return.

Some Christian Zionists today reject many End Times prophecies and believe that Christian Zionists are unfairly caricatured as praying for war and destruction. Some prominent American Christian Zionists like Gerald McDermott<sup>1</sup> have even rejected dispensationalism—the reading of the Bible that emphasizes the End Times.

Yet Prophetic Christian Zionism has significantly shaped the American and now global evangelical imagination. Popularized through varieties of media and activist pastors, it still animates significant popular support for Israel. And many Christian Zionists who place special emphasis on covenantal theology still view modern events including 1917's Balfour Declaration, 1948's establishment of the modern State of Israel, 1967's six-day war, and even 2017's move of the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem as fulfillment of biblical prophecy—serving as proof that the covenants with Abraham still apply to the Jewish people.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald McDermott, *The New Christian Zionism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2017)

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While these Christian Zionists may not [“pray for Amageddon,”](#)<sup>2</sup> their support for Israel is still located within a dispensationalist framework which views war in the Middle East as the inevitable precursor to Jesus’ return, explicitly or implicitly. This affects the way many evangelical Christians think about efforts to solve the conflict in Israel/Palestine. Dr. Erwin Lutzer, former pastor at The Moody Church in Chicago, speaks for many Christian Zionists when he [says](#)<sup>3</sup>: “What chance does peace have in the Middle East? In my opinion, none until Jesus returns to establish His kingdom.”

These evangelicals also tend to view the Middle East through a [“clash of civilizations” lens.](#)<sup>4</sup> They tend to identify Israel and Judaism with Christianity and the West, which they believe is engaged in an epic “good versus evil” struggle with Islam, which is often viewed as a “false religion.” Israel then, is viewed as a beleaguered God-anointed nation that offered an essential place of refuge for the Jewish people following the Holocaust, but is now surrounded by evil enemies bent on its annihilation, including the Palestinians. “Standing with Israel,” a common refrain among these evangelicals, is thus an act of faith and devotion to God.

They also tend to emphasize what they see as common values with Israel and the Jewish people. Some even incorporate Jewish ritual practice into their faith practice—including observing the Sabbath, following some Kosher rules, celebrating [Christianized versions](#)<sup>5</sup> of the Jewish Seder meal, and blowing the Shofar—as a way to connect with [their “Jewish roots.”](#)<sup>6</sup> In recent years, they often now see themselves as key players in the fight against antisemitism, though many critics see Christian Zionism as a philo-semitic movement (see [Questions #6 and #7](#))

### 3. What is dispensationalism? And are most American Christian Zionists dispensationalist?

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<sup>2</sup> Erwin Lutzer, “Why The Middle East Must Await The Return Of Jesus Christ,” March 3rd, 2013, The Moody Church, 25:42, <https://www.moodymedia.org/sermons/-/why-middle-east-must-await-return-jesus-christ/>

<sup>3</sup> Erwin Lutzer, “Is There Hope for Peace in the Middle East?” *OnePlace*, accessed December 20th, 2021, <https://www.oneplace.com/ministries/running-to-win/read/articles/is-there-hope-for-peace-in-the-middle-east-17029.html>

<sup>4</sup> Amy Fallas, “American Protestantism’s Commodification of the Middle East’s ‘Holy Lands,’” *Sojourners*, September 21st, 2020, <https://sojo.net/articles/american-protestantisms-commodification-middle-east-s-holy-lands>

<sup>5</sup> Ashlie D. Stevens, “For many in the Jewish community, so-called ‘Christian Seders’ are ‘100% cultural appropriation,’” *Salon*, April 2, 2021, <https://www.salon.com/2021/04/02/christian-passover-seder-easter-jewish-cultural-appropriation-jesus/>

<sup>6</sup> Alissa Wilkinson, “Why Christians keep appropriating Jewish ritual symbols,” *Vox Magazine*, January 15, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/22229063/judaism-christian-evangelical-shofar-jericho-seder>

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“Dispensationalism” is the theology that gave rise to Christian Zionism. It makes sense of God’s plan for the world by dividing the Bible into seven (sometimes six) different periods of time—or dispensations—from Creation to the End Times, and emphasizes the connection between biblical and modern Israel.

Unlike most previous readings of the Bible, all forms of dispensationalism place special emphasis on eschatology—or theology of the End Times. The books of Daniel and Ezekiel from the Hebrew Bible and the book of Revelation from the New Testament are key prophetic and apocalyptic writings used by dispensationalists to interpret modern and future events as the final unfolding of God’s plan.

English theologian John Nelson Darby developed premillennial dispensationalism in the 19th century where it gained some influence on British leaders, including the Foreign Secretary Sir Arthur Balfour, who issued the [Balfour Declaration in 1917](#).<sup>7</sup> It also crossed the Atlantic and became deeply entwined with the Fundamentalist movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and was popularized by C.I. Scofield whose popular Scofield Reference Bible served as the dominant commentary on scripture for Fundamentalist Christians.

[Dispensationalism](#)<sup>8</sup> teaches that the world is irredeemably broken and will decline into ever more sin and chaos until Jesus returns. The restoration of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is the necessary precursor for the dramatic Rapture (or miraculous ascent into heaven) of all those who believe in Jesus. Those left behind will suffer through a period of Great Tribulation and the Battle of Armageddon in which the Antichrist will be defeated. Many will die, including all but 144,000 Jews who will accept Jesus as their true Messiah. Jesus will then rule over the Earth for 1,000 years, and the world and heavens will be made new.

For most Christian Zionists who read the Bible in this way, events like the Balfour Declaration, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the 1967 “Six Day War, and President Trump’s 2017 move of the United States Embassy to Jerusalem provide evidence of the unfolding of God’s plan. They celebrate these events as one step closer to the day of Jesus’ promised return to remake the world in wholeness. To differing degrees, dispensationalism [informs](#)<sup>9,10</sup> a lot of Christian Zionist support for a Jewish State in Israel.

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<sup>7</sup> Zena al Tahhan, “More than a century on: the Balfour Declaration Explained,” *Al Jazeera*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/11/2/more-than-a-century-on-the-balfour-declaration-explained>

<sup>8</sup> Michael J. Vlach, “Dispensational Theology,” *The Gospel Coalition*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/dispensational-theology/>

<sup>9</sup> Rammy M. Haija, “The Armageddon Lobby: Dispensationalist Christian Zionism and the Shaping of US Policy Towards Israel-Palestine,” *Holy Land Studies: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 5, no. 1, (2006): 75-95.

<sup>10</sup> Paul O’Donnell “For Some, the US Embassy’s Move Fulfills Divine Prophecy”, *Religion News Service*, May 14, 2018, <https://religionnews.com/2018/05/14/some-christians-and-jews-hail-embassy-move-to-jerusalem-as-key-to-a-biblical-plan/>



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#### 4. Are all evangelicals Christian Zionist?

No.

As with any group identity, it's nearly impossible to say "all" evangelicals are anything. That said, most American evangelicals, and many evangelicals and other Christians around the world, hold at least [some Christian Zionist beliefs](#).<sup>11</sup>

(Again, it's also important to distinguish between Christian Zionism as an organized political ideology, and Zionists who happen to be Christian as a broader category of Christians who are inclined to support Zionism but not for theological reasons or as part of an organized Christian movement. (see [Questions #1 & #2](#)))

While not all evangelicals would explicitly say they are Christian Zionist or know what the term means, most know that it's just a part of their faith to be "pro-Israel." In [2017, 80% of evangelicals](#)<sup>12</sup> said that the events surrounding the creation of the modern nation state of Israel were a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Whether this means they embrace an End Times theology like dispensationalism (see [Question #3 above](#)) or see supporting the Jewish state in Israel as honoring God's covenant (see [Question #2](#)), or simply feel an affinity towards Jews over a general sense of shared history, values, and holy texts (*i.e.* what's commonly referred to as "Judeo-Christian values"), it's fair to say that most evangelicals believe there are biblical reasons for support for Israel today.

Yet a small minority of evangelicals do organize against a [politicized Christian Zionist agenda](#).<sup>13</sup> So while many Christians and most evangelicals are Zionist, many aren't part of the influential "Christian Zionist" movement which has become associated with its emphasis on covenant and prophecy—and which has successfully helped shape US foreign policy and the realities on the ground in the Middle East.

#### 5. What do Palestinians—especially Palestinian Christians—think of Christian Zionism?

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<sup>11</sup> Sean Illing, "This is why evangelicals love Trump's Israel policy," *Vox Magazine*, May 14, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2017/12/12/16761540/jerusalem-israel-embassy-palestinians-trump-evangelicals>

<sup>12</sup> Joel Rosenburg, "Evangelical Attitudes Toward Israel Research Study," *LifeWay Research*, December 2017, <https://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Evangelical-Attitudes-Toward-Israel-Research-Study-Report.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Gregory Khalil, "Evangelical Christians must rethink their reflexive support for Israel," *Religion News Service*, May 27, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/05/27/evangelical-christians-must-rethink-their-reflexive-support-for-israel/>



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Palestinians in general strongly object to Christian Zionism as an ideology that either devalues their humanity or caricatures them as part of an evil force hellbent on Israel's destruction.

In particular, Palestinian Christians, who represent the world's oldest Christian community and trace their roots to the first century church, have for years offered sharp theological critiques of Christian Zionism. They have also endeavored to persuade their co-religionists in the West and elsewhere to embrace theologies of justice, the land, and peacemaking that take their own presence into account and that work for the flourishing of all.

While there are a few Palestinian Christians who are sympathetic to certain aspects of Christian Zionism, the overwhelming majority of all Palestinian Christians have [denounced](#)<sup>14</sup> Christian Zionism. In fact, Palestinian Christians, who represent more than a dozen active denominations of Christianity, launched [Kairos Palestine](#),<sup>15</sup> an initiative modeled on the Kairos South Africa declaration to end apartheid. Kairos Palestine begins by naming Israel's occupation and other violations of Palestinian human rights as "sin" and calls on Christians around the world to hear their stories, engage their realities, combat human rights violations against Palestinians, and to boycott Israeli goods and services until Palestinian human rights are protected.<sup>16</sup>

And Bethlehem Bible College, which is an evangelical protestant college and seminary, regularly hosts a convening called "[Christ at the Checkpoint](#)," which invites evangelicals from around the world to re-examine their theology and practice in relation to the harsh realities that all Palestinians endure under Israeli control.

## 6. Why do some critics of Christian Zionism allege it is antisemitic?

Although many Christian Zionists profess love and support for the Jewish people, both Prophetic and Covenantal Christian Zionism have received criticism for being [antisemitic](#).<sup>17</sup>

Prophetic Christian Zionism sees Jews as a tool in God's larger plan—not as complex, full individuals, or a highly diverse group of people. Scholar Dan Hummel argues that many Christian Zionists view Judaism as "[incomplete](#)" and Jews as "[spiritually condemned](#)."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Jack Sara, "What's Behind the Uproar in Jerusalem?" *Bethlehem Bible College* (blog), May 13, 2021, [https://bethbc.edu/blog/2021/05/13/whats-behind-the-uproar-in-jerusalem-by-rev-dr-jack-sara/?fbclid=IwAR1vqHtDQVJOVi7szWF5Jjm7Ptg3l87IA5Y8Lr8GMCHrQvgKc2CrUYedQ\\_o](https://bethbc.edu/blog/2021/05/13/whats-behind-the-uproar-in-jerusalem-by-rev-dr-jack-sara/?fbclid=IwAR1vqHtDQVJOVi7szWF5Jjm7Ptg3l87IA5Y8Lr8GMCHrQvgKc2CrUYedQ_o)

<sup>15</sup> Kairos Palestine, "Home," Kairos, accessed December 18, 2021, <https://www.kairospalestine.ps/>

<sup>16</sup> Some notable Palestinian Protestant Christians include Naeem Ateek, Khalil E. Jahshan, Jonathan Kuttub, Mitri Raheb, Sami Awad, Jack Sara, and Munther Isaac.

<sup>17</sup> Lynn Gottlieb, "The antisemitic theology behind the Christian Zionism lobby," *Religion News Service*, July 8, 2019, <https://religionnews.com/2019/07/08/the-anti-semitic-theology-behind-the-christian-zionist-lobby/>

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Hummel, *Covenant Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews, and U.S.-Israel Relations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019)

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Christian Zionism can be seen as both instrumentalizing the Jewish people and Jewish state as objects that are necessary to bring about the End Times and also failing to recognize and respect Jewish beliefs and practice.

Many critics also point out that a key tenet of dispensationalist theology—which influences some Christian Zionists—is that most of the Jews will be killed in Armageddon, and those who survive will accept Jesus as their savior and convert to Christianity. The critique is that this isn't genuine support for the Jewish people, but rather an antisemitic use of Jews to bring about a desired Christian outcome. This critique is particularly insensitive to many Jews since the Jewish people have historically been persecuted or forced to convert under Christian rule for not believing in Jesus as the Messiah (see [Question #2](#)).

But many Christian Zionists increasingly argue that combating antisemitism is nevertheless an essential aspect of Christian Zionism. Christians United for Israel, which is the world's largest Christian Zionist organization, describes "combating antisemitism" as part of its [core mission](#).<sup>19</sup> Many if not most Christians are unaware of the long and fraught relationship between Judaism and Christianity. In fact, much of [two millennia of antisemitism in the West](#)<sup>20</sup> has been fueled by weaponized Christian theologies—like the charge of deicide against the entire Jewish people (*i.e.* that "the Jews" killed Jesus), or replacement theology, which holds that Christian believers are now the "chosen people," allowing Jews to be demonized. Given this tortured history, the fact that some Christian Zionists lead with combating antisemitism is of note; however it should not detract from core Christian Zionist beliefs about Jews which are often antisemitic, as well as other attitudes and beliefs which diminish the humanity of Palestinians and Muslims.

Still, many prominent Christian Zionists have [deep relationships](#)<sup>21</sup> with Jewish communities in Israel, cultivated intentionally over decades. Some leaders quip about fiery End Times prophecies that "one of us may later be proven wrong," minimizing these elements of the relationship that may appear horrifically antisemitic to outsiders and instead focusing on the common cause these communities have forged: Supporting Jewish presence in the Land of Israel, encouraging Jewish immigration to Israel (*aaliyah*), defending Israel politically and militarily, and securing financial and cultural support of Israel and Jewish causes.<sup>22</sup>

Of note, the larger question of what should and should not be considered antisemitic has increasingly become the subject of debate, especially within Jewish communities. Some

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<sup>19</sup> "Mission," Christians United for Israel, accessed December 20, 2021, <https://cufi.org/about/mission/>

<sup>20</sup> Gervase Phillips, "Antisemitism: how the origins of history's oldest hatred still hold sway today," *The Conversation*, February 27, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/antisemitism-how-the-origins-of-historys-oldest-hatred-still-hold-sway-today-87878>

<sup>21</sup> *Til Kingdom Come*, directed by Maya Zinshstein (Abramorama, Ventureland, and Passion Pictures, 2020), 1:26:00. <https://showcasenow.showcasecinemas.com/film/til-kingdom-come/>

<sup>22</sup> Maxine Dovere, "A Rabbi on Jewish Christian Relations." *The Algemeiner*, July 27, 2012, <https://www.algemeiner.com/2012/07/27/a-rabbi-on-jewish-christian-relations/>

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commentators<sup>23</sup> have observed a relatively modern conflation between anti-Zionism (opposition to Israel as a Jewish state) and antisemitism (hatred of Jews). Equating critique of Israel with antisemitism stifles advocacy for Palestinian human rights, which are often violated by Israel. Many human rights activists—Israeli and Palestinian—increasingly work to distinguish between antisemitism and anti-Zionism or critique of Israeli policy. And despite the relationships that some Christian Zionists and Israeli Jewish communities have been able to negotiate, many Jews view ongoing efforts to convert Jews to Christianity as problematic and inherently antisemitic too. Ultimately, many Israelis and Jews look upon this relationship between Christian Zionists and Israel with suspicion at best and disgust at worst. Christian Zionists like [Mike Evans](#)<sup>24</sup> and [John Hagee](#)<sup>25</sup> are often criticized on mainstream Israeli media outlets like Haaretz for their antisemitic and Islamophobic views. Some journalists have argued their ideologies erase Jewish agency by fetishizing Jews as a role in an apocalyptic "cosmic drama" and creating a false dichotomy between "good" Jews (those supporting the Christian Zionist vision of Israel) versus "bad" Jews (those critical of Israel).

7. Many Christian Zionists express excessive love and support for the Jewish people (philosemitism). Given the long history of antisemitism, why is this a problem?

Christian Zionism is sometimes described as [philosemitic](#)<sup>26</sup>—or exceptionalizing Jews and expressing excessive interest in and support for Jewish people simply because they are Jewish. Philosemitism often also instrumentalizes the Jewish people as a way to receive personal blessing. Many prominent Christian Zionists, for example, encourage their followers to [“pray for the peace of Jerusalem”](#) not only as a way to “support Israel” but so that they themselves might be blessed and “prosper.”<sup>27</sup> Or to “bless Israel [and the Jewish people through Christian Zionist ministries] so that you will be blessed.” They also warn of Godly wrath for “cursing Israel” or the Jewish people (see [Question #2](#)).

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<sup>23</sup> More about Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism here: <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>

<sup>24</sup> Joshua Shanes, “‘Pro-Israel’ Evangelicals Furious at Netanyahu’s Fall Turn to Sickening Antisemitism,” *Haaretz*, June 6, 2021, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.HIGHLIGHT-pro-israel-evangelicals-furious-at-netanyahu-s-fall-turn-to-sickening-antisemitism-1.9878749>

<sup>25</sup> Joshua Shanes, “John Hagee Is a Muslim-hating, Antisemitic, Annexationist Extremist. He’s No Friend of Israel,” *Haaretz*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-john-hagee-is-a-hate-preaching-annexationist-extremist-he-s-no-friend-of-israel-1.8938713>

<sup>26</sup> Mairav Zonszein, “Christian Zionist philo-Semitism is driving Trump’s Israel policy,” *The Washington Post*, January 28, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/01/28/trump-thinks-supporting-israel-means-letting-it-do-whatever-it-wants/>

<sup>27</sup> “International Day of Prayer – Pray for Peace of Jerusalem – Ways to Bless Israel,” *Christians United for Israel*, Accessed December 20, 2021, <http://dev.cufi.org/resource/lesson-4-international-day-of-prayer-pray-for-peace-of-jerusalem-ways-to-bless-israel/>

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So rather than supporting a Jewish state and Jews solely for their own sake, some Christian Zionists support Israel based on the belief they themselves will receive God’s blessings if they bless God’s “chosen people.” This type of philosemitism loves the idea of the Jewish people but is often disconnected from authentic relationships and real allyship with Jews on their own terms. Some Jews in particular find offensive and problematic the [appropriation of Jewish traditions](#)<sup>28</sup> like the celebration of Jewish holidays for Christian religious purposes.

Finally, advocating for a Jewish state in Israel is sometimes based in the belief that [all Jews belong in Israel, or should want to live there](#).<sup>29</sup> This can lead to a lack of support for Jewish communities outside of Israel where they face antisemitism and need support irrespective of whether they live or want to live in Israel. It also feeds a pernicious antisemitic trope that Jews have “divided loyalties”—meaning that they are more loyal to other Jews or Israel than they are to their own countries. Many Europeans—including governments—that supported Zionism did so at first to get rid of their “Jewish problem.” Encouraging Jewish immigration to Israel was a way to remove their unwanted Jewish population—which, of course, is a deeply antisemitic motivation.

## 8. How and when did Christian Zionism evolve into a consequential American political movement?

Christian Zionism traces its roots to the mid 1800s: Some evangelicals had been predicting the imminent return of Jews to Palestine since before the birth of the actual Jewish Zionist movement. Yet Christian Zionism didn’t evolve into a consequential American political movement until the 21st century.

Throughout the 20th century, certain Christian Zionist beliefs began to move from the margins of evangelicalism to achieve consensus. Meanwhile, evangelicalism became increasingly politicized. Around the turn of the 21st century, activists began translating the decades of movement building and cultural gains of Christian Zionism into more organized and consequential political expression. Today, Christian Zionists are arguably some of the most passionate and consequential “pro-Israel” advocates. Ron Dermer, former Israeli Ambassador to the United States, famously [stated](#) in 2021 that *“if you look just at numbers, you should be spending a lot more time doing outreach to evangelical Christians than you would do to Jews.”*<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Dan Hummel, “Why many evangelical Christians now celebrate Jewish holidays,” *The Washington Post*, August 19, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/08/19/why-many-evangelical-christians-now-celebrate-jewish-holidays/>

<sup>29</sup> Oma Seddiq, “‘Textbook anti-Semitism’: American Jews condemn Trump for repeatedly telling them that Israel is ‘your country,’” *Business Insider*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/american-jews-condemn-trump-for-saying-israel-is-your-country-2020-9>

<sup>30</sup> Sam Sokol, “Israel Should Focus on Evangelicals, Not U.S. Jews Who Are More Critical, Says Dermer,” *Haaretz*, May 10, 2021, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-israel-should-focus-outreach-on-evangelicals-not-u-s-jews-former-envoy-says-1.9790303>

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The rise of evangelical cultural consensus on Israel can be charted through historical events. Specifically, the birth of Israel in 1948 was viewed as miraculous by many evangelical Christians—a clear fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The aftermath of the 1967 Israeli-Arab War, which many Christians interpreted as a miraculous event, gave rise to the popularization of theologies of the End Times. One of the best selling books of the 1970s was *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsay, which was followed in the 1990s and 2000s by Tim LaHaye’s *Left Behind* series of novels accounting dispensationalist views on the events of the end of the world. During this period, evangelical attachment to the modern State of Israel increased, as did belief that current events were leading toward a final battle between good and evil with modern Israel at its epicenter. Attachment to Israel also grew as many came to see its existence as necessary for a people who had so recently endured the genocide of the Holocaust.

It was during this same period of time that evangelicals were mobilized and formed into a voting bloc (see our *Evangelicalism FAQ*). As this new “Religious Right” became a part of Republican coalitions, they brought with them a firm commitment to “bless Israel.” They also brought a growing sense of affiliation with Jewish culture as America began to imagine its heritage as an inheritance of “[Judeo-Christian](#)”<sup>31</sup> values. Politicians and community leaders began emphasizing the shared biblical foundations of Christianity and Judaism in the public square, largely as a strategy to unify communities in resistance to the threat of communism and fascism. Jewish leaders at the time were [skeptical](#)<sup>32</sup> of the sudden inclusion however, and the “Judeo-Christian” descriptor sometimes came to be used in connection with a distrust of Islam. These commitments created the support necessary for policies that were explicitly exclusionary of any Palestinian claims.

After the Oslo Accords were signed in the 1990s, when many American Jewish groups endorsed a negotiated peace process and ultimately the two-state solution, evangelicals often stood in opposition to any territorial compromise or any form of Palestinian autonomy anywhere between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. When President George W. Bush made the two-state solution official US policy in 2003, the loudest voice of domestic dissent came from evangelical Christians, who began to politically mobilize through organizations like Christians United for Israel, which now claims more than ten million active members.

The 2016 election brought some conservative evangelicals perhaps their greatest access to political power since the Reagan Administration in the 1980s. Those leaders closest to the White House successfully [lobbied the Administration to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to](#)

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<sup>31</sup> James Loeffler, “The Problem With the ‘Judeo-Christian Tradition,’” *The Atlantic*, August 1, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/08/the-judeo-christian-tradition-is-over/614812/>

<sup>32</sup> Marc Hills, “Beyond the Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Solidarity with the Palestinian People,” *The Link* by Americans for Middle East Understanding 25, no. 2 (1992): 3-15

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[Jerusalem](#),<sup>33</sup> as well as other measures designed to remove any possibility of a two-state solution. President Trump [declared](#): “I did it for the evangelicals.”<sup>34</sup>

Today, Christian Zionists have not only created the largest pro-Israel organizations in America, but have also become significant shapers of the more traditional pro-Israel lobby, including AIPAC. And while Christian Zionism may not have the same political power internationally, the movement is growing rapidly around the world, shaping cultural attitudes about Israel throughout sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and other parts of the world (see [Question 13](#)).

## 9. Who are some prominent Christian Zionists?

Early proponents of variations of Christian Zionism include William Wilberforce, William Blackstone, C.I. Scofield, and Charles Spurgeon. Sir Mark Sykes, of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which drew the borders of the modern Middle East, as well as Lord Arthur Balfour, the former British Foreign Secretary whose declaration supporting a Jewish homeland in Palestine is often viewed by scholars as the birth of the modern Israeli-Palestinian conflict, were both part of faith communities that held Christian Zionist beliefs.<sup>35</sup>

Some of the most prominent Christian Zionists in America include the leaders of the Religious Right movement that emerged in the late 1970s like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and James Dobson, and more recently, Pastor John Hagee, founder of Christians United for Israel. Additionally, prominent American politicians have all publicly espoused Christian Zionist beliefs, including former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, former Congresswoman Michelle Bachman, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, and former Vice President Mike Pence.

## 10. Are there significant communities of Christian Zionists outside America?

Yes. Christian Zionism was once centered in the United States. Now, it is a truly global movement.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> David Kirkpatrick, Elizabeth Dias, and David Halbfinger, “Israel and Evangelicals: New U.S. Embassy Signals a Growing Alliance,” *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/19/world/middleeast/netanyahu-evangelicals-embassy.html>

<sup>34</sup> TOI Staff, “Trump says he moved US embassy to Jerusalem ‘for the evangelicals’,” *The Times of Israel*, August 18, 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-says-he-moved-us-embassy-to-jerusalem-for-the-evangelicals/>

<sup>35</sup> Donald Miller, *The Origins of Christian Zionism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014)

<sup>36</sup> <https://christianzionismworkshop.com/>



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American evangelicals were instrumental in developing and exporting Christian Zionist beliefs and have long served as some of the most prominent leaders in the movement. Through American missionaries abroad, Christian Zionism has been exported around the world.

In recent years Christian Zionism [has become increasingly internationalized](#),<sup>37</sup> spreading to Asia, Africa, and [Latin America](#).<sup>38</sup> The International Christian Embassy of Jerusalem, a Christian Zionist organization, reported that [thousands of Christians from over 115 nations](#)<sup>39</sup> attended their virtual 2020 Feast of the Tabernacles, ICEJ's annual celebration of the Jewish holiday Sukkot. While the 2020 celebration took place online due to COVID-19, the feast has typically drawn over 5,000 Christians from over 100 nations to Jerusalem in past years.

## **Implications**

### 11. How and why must Christian Zionism be countered?

Generally, Christian Zionism ultimately harms both Palestinians and Israelis. Despite good intentions of many Christian Zionists, this theology supports ongoing, systemic human rights abuses against Palestinians, promotes antisemitic and philosemitic worldviews by instrumentalizing and exceptionalizing Jews and Israelis, and makes mutual flourishing for Palestinians and Israelis alike much less likely.

While demographic trends suggest that Christian Zionism's influence in the United States might soon wane, it is ascendant globally. So anyone serious about promoting freedom, dignity and security for Palestinians and Israelis alike must contend with this reality: Christian Zionism will continue to be a formidable force for ongoing support of anti-peace, anti-human rights extremists—if it remains uncountered.

Christian Zionism is a relatively modern, nationalistic theology that for some Christians runs directly counter to the teachings and spirit of Jesus. As Telos cofounder Todd Deatherage says, "Many Christians today are seeking to embrace a discipleship of peacemaking and a faith rooted in a love of God and neighbor that pursues justice in a way that is oriented toward

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<sup>37</sup> Emma Green, "White Evangelicals Used to Dominate Christian Zionism, but Not Anymore," *The Atlantic*, October 20, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/feast-of-the-tabernacles/543378/>

<sup>38</sup> Jewish News Syndicate, "Hispanic Evangelicals among Israel's greatest supporters," *Jerusalem Post*, November 24, 2014, <https://www.jpost.com/christian-news/hispanic-evangelicals-are-among-israels-biggest-supporters-382695>

<sup>39</sup> David Parsons, "Christians Worldwide Holding Sukkot Celebrations Linked to ICEJ Feast," *International Christian Embassy Jerusalem*, October 7, 2020, <https://int.icej.org/news/special-reports/christians-worldwide-holding-sukkot-celebrations-linked-icej-feast>



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healing and reconciliation. And they're rejecting weaponized theologies that are used to make vulnerable people more vulnerable. The growing embrace of a robust theology and practice of Christian peacemaking represents a direct challenge to both antisemitism and the politicized version of Christian Zionism, as well as other theologies that deny that all are made in the image of God and work against God's shalom."

Finally, at Telos we believe that without both (a) consequential alternative movements within Christianity that challenge and circumvent Christian Zionism; and (b) multi-faith, multi-partisan coalitions, a just peace will remain elusive in the Holy Land and the broader Middle East. After all, the communities that care most about this place—other than Palestinians and Israelis themselves—are primarily people of faith. They have organized politically to advocate for certain realities on the ground since the very beginnings of the modern conflict. They will continue to be intimately connected to this place for the foreseeable future. Any approach that ignores this reality is incomplete and inadequate at best.

The challenge today is three fold:

First, those of us with connections to Christian Zionists must remember that this, too, is a diverse community. While many folks in this community will resist any engagement, we may be able to reach and ultimately influence some.

Second, many evangelicals and Christians hold Christian Zionist worldviews received from broader culture but have never truly examined them. Christians need to provide both critiques to Christian Zionism specifically and other forms of Christian Nationalism generally, as well as offer compelling alternative models rooted in orthodox readings of the Bible.

Third, many active non-Christians must understand the significance of these communities today—and the potential of engaging evangelicals and Christians who may only share common cause on this and a handful of other issues. While these movements did not exert significant political influence until recent decades, they wield considerable power today. A progressive movement for Palestine will not alone bring the change that both Palestinians and Israelis need. Segments of the various *just peace* movements, including progressives and pro/pro/pro evangelicals must learn how to work and build coalitions across lines of difference. These diverse coalitions are necessary but insufficient movements to finally bring freedom, dignity, security, and equality to all Palestinians and Israelis.

## 12. How do Christian Zionists support Israel?

Christian Zionist organizations and individuals offer financial, spiritual, and political support to Israel and causes they believe to advance Israeli interests and/or those of the Jewish people.

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The largest Christian Zionist organizations, such as Christians United for Israel (CUFI) and the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (IFCJ) in America, raise tens of millions of dollars for causes in Israel, including supporting Holocaust survivors, *aaliyah* (or Jewish immigration to Israel), various humanitarian causes primarily affecting Jewish Israelis, and [expansion of Jewish-only communities in the West Bank](#)<sup>40</sup> (known as settlements).

As a testament of the close relationship between Israel and these organizations, recent reports document that Christian Zionist groups like CUFI and On Eagle's Wings have also received millions of dollars in funding from the Israeli government.<sup>41</sup>

Christian Zionists also engage in political advocacy, mobilizing their dollars and their voices to support policies that they say provide US support for Israel. President Trump famously declared that he moved the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem ["for the evangelicals."](#)<sup>42</sup> A [study by Christianity Today](#)<sup>43</sup> found "support for Israel" was the largest advocacy category of the 25 biggest Christian advocacy organizations at around \$130 million annually.

Because most Christian Zionist organizations hold stringent beliefs about Jewish control of the Land of Israel, many Christian Zionists champion some of Israel's most controversial projects, even in contravention of international law.

For instance, many Christian Zionists are [prominent supporters](#)<sup>44</sup> of illegal Jewish-only towns and cities, known as settlements, in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian Territories—often referred to as "biblical Judea and Samaria." Believing in the exclusive Jewish right to all the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, major Christian Zionist organizations have sometimes used their political influence to oppose peace negotiations for a two state solution or any territorial compromises made by Israel, while encouraging recognition of Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem and other parts of the West Bank.

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<sup>40</sup> Jim Rutenberg, Mike McIntire and Ethan Bronner, "Tax-Exempt Funds Aid Settlements in West Bank," *The New York Times*, July 5th, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/06/world/middleeast/06settle.html>  
For more information on International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, <https://www.ifcj.org/>

<sup>41</sup> *Boycott*, directed by Julia Bacha (Just Vision, 2021), 1:13:00. <https://justvision.org/boycott>

<sup>42</sup> Times of Israel Staff, "Trump says he moved US embassy to Jerusalem 'for the evangelicals'," *Times of Israel*, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-says-he-moved-us-embassy-to-jerusalem-for-the-evangelicals/>

<sup>43</sup> Daniel Silliman, Twitter post, April 2, 2021, 3:09 PM, <https://twitter.com/danielsilliman/status/1378061922986119169>

<sup>44</sup> "West Bank settlements not illegal, Pompeo announces in historic shift," Christians United for Israel, November 19, 2019, <https://cufi.org/issue/west-bank-settlements-not-illegal-pompeo-announces-in-historic-shift/>

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### 13. What do Christian Zionists think of Palestinians, whether Christian or Muslim?

Many prominent Christian Zionists openly express hostility towards Palestinians, sometimes calling them “[an invented people](#).”<sup>45</sup> They tend to view all Palestinians as members of the “[false religion](#)” of Islam and therefore engaged in a cosmic battle of “good and evil” in which “God’s chosen people” Israel is the side Christians must support.<sup>46</sup> They also frequently reference not just the blessings promised in [Genesis 12:3](#) but the “curse” that will befall people and nations who “curse Israel.”<sup>47</sup> Many do not see most Palestinian Christians as “Christian” because they do not hold evangelical beliefs (see our general *Evangelical FAQ*).

Some Christian Zionist organizations offer support to Palestinian Christians, but do so within an anti-Islam and anti-Palestinian frame that ultimately [marginalizes Palestinian Christians](#)<sup>48</sup> as neither Christian or Palestinian. Some Christian Zionist organizations even sponsor missions including schools and other humanitarian aid, targeting Palestinian Christians for evangelization since they do not see most Palestinian Christians as true Christians. Due to Christian Zionism’s exclusionary premises that reject any claim to the Land of Israel other than that of the Jewish people, Christian Zionists often oppose national claims of the Palestinian people and lobby [to end or decrease aid to Palestine](#).<sup>49</sup>

### 14. How do Christian Zionists square their support for policies that diminish the lives of millions of Palestinians with the teachings of Jesus?

Almost all Christian Zionists believe that the modern state of Israel plays a special role in God’s plan. This means their primary concern is with Israel. If Israel is blessed, they will be blessed. If Israel is cursed, they will be cursed. And if Israel prospers, that means God is working to redeem the entire world through Israel.

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<sup>45</sup> Associated Press, “Palestinians are an invented people, says Newt Gingrich,” *The Guardian*, December 9, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/10/palestinians-invented-people-newt-gingrich>

<sup>46</sup> Micah Danney, “The faces of ‘The End of Days’: Christian Zionism in Israel,” *The Ground Truth Project*, April 12, 2019, <https://thegroundtruthproject.org/the-faces-of-the-end-of-days/>

<sup>47</sup> Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman, “‘I will bless those who bless you:’ Christian donors give \$6.2m to Israel for Passover,” *Jerusalem Post*, March 24, 2021, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/i-will-bless-those-who-bless-you-christian-donors-give-62m-to-israel-for-passover-663060>

<sup>48</sup> “Israel: Safest Place for Christians in the Middle East,” *United with Israel*, January 5, 2013, <https://unitedwithisrael.org/israel-safest-place-for-christians-in-middle-east/>

<sup>49</sup> Ron Kampeas, “Christian pro-Israel group lobbies to cut funding to Palestinians,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, July 17, 2017, <https://www.jta.org/2017/07/17/politics/christian-pro-israel-group-lobbies-to-cut-funding-to-palestinians>

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Some Christian Zionists see the only answer to the incomprehensible suffering of the world as Jesus' return. For them, what's happening to Palestinians cannot be addressed by humankind. Instead, when Jesus returns, he will rule over the earth in peace. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. Many even see Israel in a "spiritual war." Sometimes Muslims and/or Palestinians are cast as demonic forces.

While some Christian Zionists reject this apocalyptic worldview, which is largely a working out of dispensationalist eschatology, increasing numbers who show concern for Palestinians—particularly the plight of Palestinian Christians—still refuse to acknowledge the impact of the Israeli denial of Palestinian rights. Instead, they blame the plight of Palestinian Christians on the Palestinian Authority, persecution by Palestinian Muslims, or their supposed rejection of a Zionist world-view.<sup>50</sup>

Adding to the problem, because most Palestinian Christians are not evangelical but are rather Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or Melkite, many Christian Zionists do not see them as fellow members of the Body of Christ. They see the current situation as God-ordained, and thus absolve themselves of responsibility for the suffering and massive human rights violations their movement causes—even when they allow themselves to see it.

## 15. What changes are happening within Christian Zionism?

Today, new forms of Christian Zionism are emerging. And young evangelicals in the US show less interest in Israel and Christian Zionism generally (see *Question #16*). Yet changes within Christian Zionism still devalue the humanity of Palestinians, enabling continued violations of their human rights.

Not all Christian Zionists ground their support for Israel in an end times theology like dispensationalism. Today there are efforts by Gerald McDermott and others to articulate a "New Christian Zionism" that is more rooted in a theology of land and covenant.<sup>51</sup> These New Christian Zionists also posit their philosemitism as a critical counter to the church's history of weaponized theologies like supersessionism. Supersessionism, also known as "replacement theology," asserts that the new covenant in Jesus Christ replaces the old covenant with the Jewish people, which means that the Christian church succeeded the Israelites as the chosen people of God. These theologies supported centuries of virulent antisemitism.

Another change within Christian Zionism is the way some are making efforts to acknowledge the existence of Palestinian Christians in the land. Unfortunately, this is often done in a very

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<sup>50</sup> Michael Danney, "The Faces of the End of Days: Christian Zionism in Israel," *The Groundtruth Project*, April 12, 2019, <https://thegroundtruthproject.org/the-faces-of-the-end-of-days/>

<sup>51</sup> Gerald McDermott, *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land* (Intervarsity Press, 2016)

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exploitative manner where Palestinian Christians are framed as a minority under attack by Muslims that need saving rather than as a vital and vibrant part of Palestinian society more broadly. The fact that nearly all Palestinian Christians reject both the theology and political ideology of Christian Zionism has often reduced these efforts to highlighting only the voices of those incredibly few Palestinians who embrace some form of Christian Zionism.

## 16. Are younger evangelicals embracing Christian Zionism?

In 2021, the Christian research firm Barna released [polling](#)<sup>52</sup> showing a dramatic loss of interest in Israel among evangelicals aged 18-29 in the United States. Support fell from 69% in 2018 to 33.6% in 2021, with 42.2% of the sample indicating lack of a preference for either Israelis or Palestinians. These numbers represent a dramatic shift and while they will need further corroboration, pollsters like Shibley Telhami at the University of Maryland say data consistently show that there is a major shift happening, though the causes and extent of that shift are not yet clear.

At Telos, we've witnessed and likely influenced some of this change—along with many others. Our preliminary assessment, however, postulates that these shifts are rooted more in a deeper transformation among younger evangelicals about how they view their faith than in anything directly connected to Israel/Palestine. Many young evangelicals reject the culture wars of their parents' generation and seek a faith rooted in the teachings of Jesus, which focus on radical, sacrificial love. This reimagining of faith is impacting how this generation engages a wide variety of issues as well as how they worship and engage with each other, not just Israel and the Palestinians. This trend has not yet been observed globally.

## 17. Why is it important for non-evangelicals to partner with evangelicals to advance fundamental human rights for both Israelis and Palestinians?

Increasing numbers of evangelicals are beginning to see Israel/Palestine through a lens of common humanity rather than a Christian Zionist lens. Many of these evangelicals who have had first hand experience on the ground feel particularly convicted to promote human rights for both Palestinians and Israelis, as they feel that their communities, churches, and theologies are in part to blame.

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<sup>52</sup> Shibley Telhami, "As Israel increasingly relies on US evangelicals for support, younger ones are walking away: What polls show," *Brookings*, May 26, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/05/26/as-israel-increasingly-relies-on-us-evangelicals-for-support-younger-ones-are-walking-away-what-polls-show/>

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Given that Christians and other people connected to the Abrahamic faith traditions will always have an important spiritual connection to the so-called “Holy Land,” it is important for these evangelicals to have a place in the broader movement advocating for human rights for Palestinians and Israelis in equal measure. In fact, it is difficult to imagine a different reality on the ground without a new way for many evangelical Christians to engage the Holy Land. Financial and political support for the current reality comes from organized segments of the evangelical movement in the US and other parts of the world. There is opportunity for this political and financial support to be transformed to support both Palestinians and Israelis.

Partnership with evangelicals is thus not only possible but necessary. Yet it is important for potential partners—whether individuals or institutions—to gain clarity on the purposes of their partnership and the limits of their agreements. Working across lines of difference—whether they be interfaith, secular-religious, progressive-conservative, or other—requires agreement about only one shared value or common goal, and has to be done with an open-eyed understanding that there are many important issues about which both parties hold fundamentally different views and engage in different kinds of activism.<sup>53</sup> Activists who care about a future of security, dignity, and freedom for Israelis and Palestinians in equal measure will need to learn how to build authentic multi-faith, multi-partisan movements on Israel/Palestine if they actually want to shift how power consistently engages this region.

## 18. Why should American Christians care about Israel/Palestine?

It’s not a question of whether American Christians are involved but how. For anyone serious about building a coalition to support human rights for all Palestinians and Israelis, American Christians represent a key—though often misunderstood or undervalued—constituency.

For many American evangelicals in Telos’ network, engaging Israel/Palestine through a pro/pro/pro lens affords American Christians a truly unique opportunity: To model a Jesus-centric way of engaging conflict while atoning for decades of harmful interventions led by American Christians.

After all, American Christians have shaped and sustained this conflict for decades. And this conflict has been imported into their churches, dividing many communities of faith. They impact the reality on the ground—with billions of dollars of philanthropy and by advocating and shaping policy. To date, this money and these political interventions have supported an historic injustice that, ironically, is helping to decimate the oldest Christian community in the world.

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<sup>53</sup> One helpful frame for thinking about this is found in a book by John Inazu called “Confident Pluralism: Surviving and Thriving Through Deep Difference”

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**Telos co-founder Todd Deatherage** says “The opportunity exists for Christians in America to intentionally find ways to live out the teachings of Jesus in ways that support mutual flourishing for both Israelis and Palestinians, and that help heal the damage that their interventions have historically caused. When Christians embrace peacemaking as central to their discipleship it not only transforms their own lives and communities but has an impact in places like the Middle East.”

## 19. Are there effective strategies to help Christian Zionists care and advocate for universal human rights?

Yes. At Telos, we have seen a variety of effective—and ineffective ways—to engage not just Christian Zionists but also evangelicals and other Christians more generally.

First, contact with Palestinian Christians is critical. Even though many evangelicals do not see most Palestinian Christians as fellow Christians, this contact can provide an important opening for Christian Zionists to begin a journey. And, of course, there are a variety of prominent evangelical Palestinian Christian associations, all of which openly oppose Christian Zionism. Prominent evangelical Palestinian Christians include Sami Awad, formerly at Holy Land Trust, and Jack Sara at Bethlehem Bible College, which invites evangelicals, including Christian Zionists, to the “Christ at the Checkpoint” Conference where they contend with the realities faced by Palestinian Christians.

Many evangelicals who now advocate for Palestinian rights trace their journey to meeting Palestinian Christians and being forced to reconcile their theology with the realities that the theology supports. This includes progressive evangelicals like Shane Claiborne, and others, like Brian Zahnd, who openly reject Christian Zionism.

Second, inviting Christian Zionists to engage the realities facing Palestinians and Israelis on the ground through the framework of Jesus’ teachings, in particular the Beatitudes, often opens up new conversations and realizations for Christians. Theology is like “software,” says prominent Palestinian Christian Mitri Raheb. He argues that Christian Zionism (as well as other forms of Christian nationalism) is incompatible with the teachings of Jesus. Engaging the current realities experienced by all Palestinians and Israelis through the Beatitudes affords not only the opportunity for Christian Zionists to see their theology’s incompatibility with Jesus’ core teachings but also a framework with which to replace it.

Third, providing evangelicals with other avenues—such as the robust model of peacemaking codified by Telos—to view the world differently, including Israel/Palestine, is essential. At its core peacemaking is about engaging the other to work for the flourishing of all—or as we define it at Telos, “collaboration across lines of difference for the common good.” Embodied peacemaking need not be a faith-based practice, but it is very firmly rooted within faith traditions including the teachings of Jesus. Todd Deatherage says that “historically, evangelicals have



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placed undue influence on evangelizing the other, rather than seeing the other, even our so-called enemies, as equally beloved in the eyes of God. Peacemaking allows leaders to learn how to model Jesus' teachings on how to treat and love the other, and not just to convert them.”