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Should Dispensationalists Be Christian Zionists?

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"Israel has only two solid friends in the world…certain evangelical Christians and some of our own people" (Menachem Begin)[1]

"If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Ps. 137:5-6 NKJV)

"It is impossible to assess the love for Jerusalem embodied in the Jewish people" (Elwood McQuaid)[2]

Introduction

The HAMAS attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, and the expected Israeli military response have caused an astonishing rise in antisemitism especially in western nations. One might say that it was not a cause but a revelation. These events (the attack and response) most likely disclosed the latent antisemitism that already exists in various anti-Jewish, anti-Israel, and anti-Zionist circles such as American universities. One aspect of the fallout from these heart-wrenching developments is a belief on the part of many that the government of present-day Israel is not worthy of support. Snoeberger expresses the sentiment clearly: "Recent carnage, humanitarian crises, and ostensible *delicta juris gentia*[3] in Gaza, Iran, and Lebanon have raised fresh concerns about the legitimacy of supporting the modern state of Israel."[4] This sentiment does not reside merely in the secular public square but has invaded our local churches. Many evangelicals concerned, rightly or wrongly, with alleged atrocities performed by Israel, are challenging other brothers and sisters in the pews next to them who claim to be Christian Zionists. The idea, not always clearly stated, is that a Zionist position for a

[1] Quoted before the table of contents in Elwood McQuaid, *The Zion Connection: Evangelical Christians and the Jewish Community…Destroying the Myths Forging an Alliance*" (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 2003). This work was originally published by Harvest House in 1996.

[2] Elwood McQuaid, *For the Love of Zion* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 2007), 274. McQuaid was a former Executive Director for The Friends of Israel.

[3] *delicta juris gentia* = crimes against the law of nations

[4] Mark A. Snoeberger, "Does Dispensationalism Provide Firm Footing for a Christian Zionist Impulse?, 1 (used by permission). Versions of this article were presented in two venues earlier this year. Snoeberger, a teacher at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, is an able scholar, excellent historian, discerning theologian, and a staunch defender of traditional dispensationalism. An updated version of the article will appear in the 2026 volume of the *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*. The page numbers follow the pagination of the unpublished copy which I am using.

Christian appears to be a moral contradiction.

Dispensationalists, who often claim to be Zionists, have not been immune from this debate. In this regard, some detractors voice the charge that dispensationalists present an unwanted distortion of the Old Testament. Naim Ateek, an Anglican Palestinian Arab writes, "Palestinian Christians are looking for a hermeneutic that will help them identify the authentic Word of *God* in the Bible and to discern the true meaning of those biblical texts that Jewish Zionists and Christian fundamentalists cite to substantiate their subjective claims and prejudices."[5] Dispensationalists are among those who are called Christian fundamentalists. In his mind, they have hijacked the Old Testament forcing it to serve the political interests of Zionism.

While dispensationalists will readily and easily dismiss such specious reasoning,[6] critique from within the ranks of traditional dispensationalism is another matter. Snoeberger affirms belief in the promises (including land promises) of the Abrahamic Covenant, a distinction between Israel and the Church, a prominent future for national and ethnic Israel in the millennial kingdom, and the need for Gentiles to bless Israel.[7] Yet, he concludes that "Christian Zionism can find no firm foundation or pedigree in historic dispensational theology, and in my assessment, should be rejected."[8] Such a conclusion may sound startling to many dispensationalists who view themselves solidly in the Zionist category. What follows is an assessment of the debate over the definition of Christian Zionism and the eschatological and political arguments that are sometimes attached to it. In the end, I will affirm my comfort with the label *Christian Zionist* for dispensationalists, but at the same time I will agree with some of the theological and historical sensitivities voiced in Snoeberger's assessment.

Toward a Definition of Christian Zionism

At the center of the issue is the concept of Zionism. The word *Zion* itself in Scripture refers to the city of David, that is, the southern slope down from the temple mount (1 Kings 8:1; 2 Chron. 5:2), the temple mount itself (Ps. 2:6; 20:2), the city of Jerusalem (Ps. 48:1-2; 11-14; Isa. 40:9), or Judah and Israel (Ps. 126, Zech. 2:6-12; 9:13).

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[5] Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 79. Although Ateek, who is in his late 80s, has resided in Israel through the years, he has apparently moved to the United States.

[6] On the face of things, the dispensationalist will ask why they cannot simply believe the text as it was written. Of course, the reason is that they do not accept the conclusions brought by literal interpretation.

[7] Snoeberger, "Christian Zionist Impulse," 12-13.

[8] Ibid., 13.

Of course, the term *Zionism* does not occur in the Bible, although the Bible expresses the idea of Zionism as we will see. In wrestling with this expression, theologians and historians have produced both narrow and broad definitions. This is especially true when we speak of "Christian Zionism." The issue is not insignificant. Bock notes that the character of God is on the line in these matters:

> Christian Zionism is not an oxymoron; it is an appeal in an era of narratives to get the story right about God, his character and his promises. Whether one thinks theologically, morally, historically, politically or legally, the way one views Israel is also a reflection of how one thinks about God. This discussion is a big deal because the character of God, his faithfulness and his promises are in view. Seeing Israel in the program of God says God keeps his promises to those he originally addressed.[9]

Consequently, Christians, especially those who want to claim the label *Zionist*, cannot fail to handle this issue correctly. What follows is an exploration of a narrow definition of Zionism followed by an application to Christian Zionism. Then, an analysis of the broader proposal for definition will be undertaken.

Narrow Definition

Someone advertised a T-Shirt on social media with the words "Zionist Because God Is!" The slogan refers to a belief that Palestine is a Jewish homeland because God said so in the Bible. Behind this slogan is the *attachment* of the Hebrews, Israelites, or Jewish people to Zion in its uses mentioned earlier. This simple understanding comes close to what is meant by the narrow definition of Zionism (without ruling out any necessary nuances). Of course, the nature of the *attachment* of the people to the land must be fleshed out.

Horner describes the attachment in the following way: "This heartfelt religious longing became embodied in the expression 'Zionism,' that is, the collective Jewish passion for free reestablishment in the land of Israel as a Jewish nation."[10] Similarly, the historian David Rausch sees in the term *Zionism* a "philosophy of the Jewish people's restoration to 'Zion,' which early in Jewish history was identified with Jerusalem. After the Roman expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem in A.D. 135, this 'Zion' idea was never

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[9] Darrell Bock, "How Should the New Christian Zionism Proceed?" in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel & the Land* edited by Gerald R. McDermott (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016), 305.

[10] Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Ani-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2023), 107.

divorced from Jewish thinking, and Jewish prayers (both individual and corporate) emphasized the desire to return to their homeland."[11] In another work, Rausch notes that "In pre-modern times, Zion was tied to the Messiah, His deliverance, and a return from exile to the Land of Promise: Eretz Yisrael. The Zion idea was enshrined in the hearts of Jews throughout the world and was firmly tied to the Jewish religious experience throughout the centuries of dispersion."[12] In both of these Christian authors (Horner & Rausch), the ideas involved in Zionism have an ancient past and are not simply some political posturing beginning in the late nineteenth century.[13] In fact, according to Thomas Ice, "Regardless of what one may think about the Zionist movement, it was the instrument God used to bring about the reestablishment of the modern Jewish state of Israel. It enabled Jews to realize the dream of 'next year in Jerusalem.'"[14] It is possible in this light to see the modern Zionist movement as the means that God used to bring about the fruition of the Zionist impulse long embedded in the Jewish heart since Roman expulsion from the land.

Following these kinds of definitions, Zionism is not some recent phenomenon from the last century and a half. It is a modern expression tied to the deepest longings that reach into the distant past. The idea of Zionism is rooted in the Jewish history of the last two thousand years. Jewish researcher Lyn Julius communicates how thoroughgoing this mindset exists in many Jewish lives down through the centuries:

> For 2,000 years Jews outside Palestine felt as if they had personally been exiled from the Land of Israel, with which they harbored strong spiritual ties. The ingathering of the exiles in *Eretz Yisrael* is considered the necessary prelude to the coming of the Messiah. Twenty-one of the 613 commandments in the Torah can only be observed in Israel. All pious Jews, wherever they are in the world, pray three times a day for the return to Zion and 'Next year in Jerusalem' at

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[11] D. A. Rausch, "Zionism" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* edited by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 1308.

[12] David A. Rausch, *Building Bridges: Understanding Jews and Judaism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 155. I had the great privilege of interviewing Dr. Rausch while working on my Ph.D. dissertation on Arno C. Gaebelein. Rausch had published an analytical biography of Gaebelein (*Arno C. Gaebelein, 1861-1945: Irenic Fundamentalist and Scholar* [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983]).

[13] Alan Dershowitz reminds us that the earliest Jewish refugees who came into the land that was to become modern Israel, were not directly associated with the political movement of Zionism. Instead, they were simply fleeing persecution in the lands where they lived (*The Case for Israel* [Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003]), 20-21. In other words, they were not seeking to start a nation but to escape oppression.

[14] Thomas Ice, "What Should We Think About the Zionist Movement?" in *What Should We Think About Israel?* edited by J. Randall Price (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2019), 37.

> Passover. Jerusalem is invoked at a baby's circumcision. A bridegroom crushes a glass under his wedding canopy to recall the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Soil from the Holy Land is sprinkled on the corpse at Jewish funerals. Religious Jews (and until the 18th century Enlightenment, there was no other kind) had, through the ages, aspired to end their days in *Eretz Yisrael*, or at least be buried there. What could have been more natural than for traditionalist twentieth century Jewish communities to see Zionism as the fulfillment of the exiles' centuries-old longing to return to their ancestral homeland?[15]

Some of the illustrations given by Julius are traditional, but some are grounded in biblical teaching.

The overwhelming presence of the Jewish impulse to live in the land following biblical promise is exemplified in multiple Jewish sources after the Roman expulsion. One can easily begin with the various Haggadahs for the Passover Seder which read something along the following lines: "This year we are here, next year we will be in the Land of Israel [or in Jerusalem]. This year we are slaves, next year we will be free."[16] The Rabbi poet Yehuda Halevi (d. 1141) stated it mournfully, "My heart is in the East, and I am in the end of the West."[17] The rabbis of the Middle Ages debated whether Jewish people were commanded to live in the land of Israel. Perhaps the most interesting presentation along these lines can be found in the rather strongly worded statements of the famous Jewish rabbi Maimonides (d. 1204):

> One should not emigrate from the Land of Israel, except for purposes of studying Torah or in order to get married…so, too, one may leave for the purposes of business. However, one may not leave on a permanent basis.
>
> Our sages said that any [Jewish] person who lives in the Land of Israel will be forgiven for his sins…even if he walks four cubits there, he will merit life in the world to come. So, too, if a person is buried there, he is atoned for…

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[15] Lyn Julius, *Uprooted: How 3000 Years of Jewish Civilisation in the Arab World Vanished Overnight* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2018), 202.

[16] In the Haggadah I use when leading Passover Seders, the phrase "Next Year in Jerusalem!" is cited after a reading of Psalm 126; see *Passover Haggadah* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 2001), 36.

[17] Yehuda Halevi, *Libi baMizrach*. The last time I searched for this resource on Amazon, I did not get a written book, but options for downloading music for the lyrics of this poem.

> A person [Jewish] should always live in the Land of Israel, even in a town which is mainly inhabited by non-Jews, rather than live in the Diaspora in a town which is predominantly Jewish.
>
> If a person leaves [the land of Israel] to go to the Diaspora, it is as if he worshiped idols.[18]

The evangelical will surely reject the works-oriented salvation that Maimonides' teaching supports. His teaching was contested by some rabbis in his own day as well as by those today.[19] However, one must not miss the capturing of the Jewish affection for the land illustrated by one of the most famous rabbis of the Middle Ages.

One of the most stirring illustrations of modern Jewish people longing for their ancient homeland is found in the words of Israel's national anthem, *Hatikvah* (The Hope).

> As long as in a Jewish breast
> The soul's stirring has not ceased
> The eye for longing will not rest
> Until it gaze on Zion in the east
>
> Our ancient hope will not perish
> Hope from ages long since past
> To live free in the land we cherish
> Zion and Jerusalem at last.[20]

The words of *Hatikvah* were written in 1878 by Naftali Herz Imber, a European Jewish poet. The earliest tune was affixed in 1887 by Shmuel Cohen. The newly formed Israeli government adopted it as its national anthem in 1948. Notice that the writer speaks of the Jewish longing as an "ancient hope."

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[18] *Mishneh Torah: Maimonides' Code of Law and Ethics*, Abridged and Translated by Philip Birnbaum (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1944), 324-25. The *Mishneh Torah* was completed in 1180.

[19] One source summarizing both the ancient and recent discussions about Maimonides' teaching about the land of Israel is Eliezer Finkelman, "The Contested Commandment to Live in Israel, *The Times of Israel*, August 7, 2023; https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-contested-commandment-to-live-in-israel/; accessed September 3, 2026. See also David Silverberg, "Maimonides and the Obligation to Live in the Land of Israel," *Maimonides Heritage Center;* Rabbi Bernie Fox, "Parshat Shelach: Are We Required to Live in Israel?," *Rabbi Fox on Parsha*; https://outtorah.org/p/236; accessed September 5, 2026. .

[20] This poetic English translation is taken from the previously noted *Passover Haggada*, 43-44.

Evidence outlined by Julius, the Passover Seder, Maimonides, and Hatikvah highlight the age-long nature of the Jewish longing for the land. Gottheil, in his article on Zionism in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, goes beyond tradition to show the biblical basis of this Zionist impulse.

> The idea of a return of the Jews to Palestine has its roots in many passages of Holy Writ. It is an integral part of the doctrine that deals with the Messianic time, as is seen in the constantly recurring expression, "shub shebut" or "heshib shebut," used both of Israel and Judah (Jer. xxx. 7, 1; Ezek. xxxix. 25; Lam. ii. 14; Hos. vi. 11; Joel iv. 1 et al.).[21] The Dispersion was deemed merely temporal: "The days come . . . that . . . I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof… and I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land" (Amos ix. 14; comp. Zeph. iii. 20); and "I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon" (Zech. x. 10; comp. Isa. xi. 11). In like strain the Psalmist sings, "O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad" (Ps. xiv. 7; comp. cvii. 2, 3). According to Isaiah (ii. 1-4) and Micah (iv. 1-4), Jerusalem was to be a religious center from which the Law and the word of the Law were to go forth.[22]

Gottheil added at the end of this paragraph, "In a dogmatic form this doctrine is more precisely stated in Deut. xxx. 1-5." In that biblical passage, God promises to bring Israel back into the land despite the curses established in Deut. 28. The list of the curses, in general, would no doubt have challenged the Israelites as they listened to Moses. However, the possibility that God would judge them by removing them from the land He had promised them was a startling warning.[23] The promise of return to the land assured that God's giving of the land was a permanent pledge on His part. In this way,

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[21] The reference for Jeremiah is likely a typo. Jer. 30:17-18a is most likely meant: "For I will restore you to health and I will heal you of your wounds, declares the LORD, because they have called you an outcast, saying: 'It is Zion; no one cares for her'. Thus says the Lord, behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob…"

[22] Richard Gottheil, "Zionism," *Jewish Encyclopedia*; Internet; www.JewishEncyclopedia.com; accessed 29 August 2026.

[23] We will leave aside the issue of the conditionality of Deut. 30 in its context. Israel's required obedience is not my main concern at this point. The issue is the deep-seated longing for the land that is part and parcel of the Mosaic legislation.

the desire for Zion becomes perhaps the strongest Jewish hope. Interestingly, much of Gottheil's paragraph could have been written by a dispensationalist.

More can be said about the biblical basis for the Zionist impulse. The ancient promise of land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob under the Abrahamic Covenant begins the biblical thread (Gen. 12-15; 26:2-3; 28:13; 35:12; 48:3-4). After the Exodus, the sacrifices under Mosaic legislation began outside the land in the Sinai wilderness. After the Conquest, the practice of those sacrifices transferred to the land, ultimately in a permanent, non-moving, temple in Jerusalem. The priesthood operated in the land. The unique presence of God in the temple on the Day of Atonement occurred in the land (Lev. 16). Although the festivals today are part of Jewish practice to a limited extent, an absolute observance of the three required pilgrimages (Pesach/Passover; Shavuot/Feast of Weeks; Sukkot/Feast of Booths) depends upon presence in the land (Ex. 23:14-19; Deut. 16:16). The Davidic Covenant promises that there will always exist David's sons, and the legal right to rule Israel will flow through David's house. Such is not possible without the nation's land. Even the spiritual anticipation of the New Covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34 is placed textually between discussion of national restoration (31:1-30) and details of permanence of the people and building in the land (31:35-40). Daniel prays toward Jerusalem (Dan. 6:10). The prophets overwhelming affirm the regathering of the nation to the land (Amos 9:11-15; Isa. 11; Zech. 12-14). This focus on the land and a longing for that land is not a side issue. It is at the heart of biblical teaching in the Old Testament. As a result, the promise of land, a Zionist impulse, is embedded in the heart and minds of the people of ethnic Israel going back to the deliberate act of God to give them *Eretz Israel*. It continues as an unbroken thread that never diminishes in the biblical witness.

The question, however, must be asked. What does all of this have to do with so-called Christian Zionism? If we are to follow the narrow definition of Zionism that sees its essence as the continuation of biblical longing for Jewish presence in Zion (the land) and of which the modern political movement of Zionism is only one instance, *Christian Zionism* should share a narrow definition as well. Thus, I propose a definition of a Christian Zionist as a believer in Jesus who accepts and embraces the Jewish longing for presence in the land of Zion. Some implications of such a definition are the following:

1. Christian Zionism accepts the Bible literally when it speaks of all the many ways the Jewish people are connected to the land of Israel, whether they are in or outside of the land.

2. As a result, it accepts the fact that through the providence of God (that is, as God allows following Deut. 28-32), the Jewish people have a right to live in the land granted to them by God.

3. Beyond that, it also believes that Jewish people have a right to a "nation" in the land like in Bible times. The way they are restored nationally to the land after exile or expulsion is not an issue here. Suppose that European Jews in the 1930s gathered an army and conquered Palestine to recapture their ancient homeland. The definition of Zionism or Christian Zionism would not be altered. Of course, it did not happen that way for the present return to the land. Instead, a sequence of historical events forge a path: centuries of persecution such as the Spanish Inquisition, the Russian pogroms that began in the 19th century, the modern movement of political Zionism beginning in the 1890s, the victory of Western powers over the Ottoman Empire in World War I, Nazism and the Holocaust, the United Nations partition plan of 1947, and the Israeli War of Independence beginning in 1948.

Furthermore, in the providence of God, dispensational Christian Zionists believe that God will one day restore the fortunes of the nation of Israel spiritually as well as nationally in a permanent sense in keeping with biblical teaching (Amos 9:11-15).

Another narrow definition of Christian Zionism refers to Christian belief that Israel has a national future, not just that individual Jewish people come to faith in Christ. Irwin notes that, "As early as 1840, Darby matter-of-factly wrote that Scripture foretold that Israel would one day be restored to its ancestral land."[24] Along similar lines, McDermott gives a helpful list of such past writers including John Milton, Thomas Brightman, John Cotton, Increase Mather, Jonathan Edwards, and Karl Barth who all held to a future for national Israel.[25] This is perhaps a tad bit narrower than the definition I have provided, since it only speaks in terms of God's ultimate plan for Israel in the eschaton rather than the Christian embrace of Jewish longing to be in the land at any time in history. Of course, the writers listed did not use the term *Christian Zionism* to express what they were declaring, and most were not dispensationalists.

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[24] Brian P. Irwin and Tim Perry, *After Dispensationalism: Reading the Bible for the End of the World* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2023), 65.

[25] Gerald R. McDermott, *Israel Matters: Why Christians Must Think Differently about the People and the Land* (Grand Rapids, MI: BrazosPress, 2017), 36-40. McDermott, a non-dispensationalist, seems to embrace the notion that Christian Zionists are those believers in Jesus who accept a national future for Israel.

Broad Definition

In the other direction, some Christian scholars have opted for a broader definition of Christian Zionism. For example, amillennialist Gary Burge notes, "This unqualified support of Israel's politics based on biblical principles has spawned a movement called Christian Zionism, which has utterly wed religious conviction with political realities and interpreted biblical faithfulness in terms of fidelity to Israel's future."[26] By biblical principles, he refers to (1) the dispensational distinction between Israel and the Church, and (2) the belief that prophecy was fulfilled in the regathering of Jews to the land in modern Israel. Burge, whose theological perspective is replacement of Israel by the Church, sees these theological points joined to political advancement of Israel, seemingly accepting the political and military decisions made by the Israeli government: "Many of us within the evangelical church are offended by Christian Zionism. While we are committed to peace and justice for all parties in Israel/Palestine, we are offended by those people whose faith is consumed by the politics of Israel's restoration."[27] I do not accept Burge's negative description of how the modern Israeli nation has come to pass. His accusations of oppression of the Palestinians by Israel are greatly overstated and fuel the fire of hostility toward Israel and Jewish people which we see at the present time. However, Burge understands that the land is at the core of what Christian Zionism entails.

A more helpful treatment giving a broad definition of Christian Zionism comes from the dispensationalist Snoeberger, who cites five propositions as part of his definition of Christian Zionism.[28] He insists that Christian Zionists believe all five points. If I understand him correctly, he rejects the label *Christian Zionist* for a dispensationalist because he cannot accept all the five points.[29] As I react to his five points below, my main concern is that theological truths that I agree with do not necessarily have to be attached to the definition of Christian Zionism, while others show evidence of overstatement if further qualification is not given. However, there are two concerns

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[26] Gary M. Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), 240.

[27] Ibid., 246. Burge shows his overall distaste of modern Israel in his chapter entitled "Modern Israel in the Land" (130-64).

[28] Snoeberger, "Christian Zionist Impulse," 2-3.

[29] Much of his assessment throughout relies on the historical developments within the Christian Zionist camp. This brief analysis is useful. As well as consulting theologians, he often invokes historians like Daniel G. Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2023).

raised by Snoeberger that should trouble all dispensationalists, the problem of sensationalism and support for Israel's political and military decisions without evaluation. Below I state the five propositions with my response.

Proposition 1. A belief that the ethnic descendants of Abraham have a perpetual title deed to the promised land, given to them by Yahweh, seated in the Abrahamic Covenant.

Here Snoeberger asserts the biblical truth that Abraham's physical descendants (I would add through Isaac and Jacob) have a perpetual (forever) title deed to the land of Israel by the gift of God. Following grammatical-historical hermeneutics, this is the only conclusion one can come to in reading the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. This is the biblical basis, discussed earlier, which is the impetus for the Zionist impulse, the zeal to be in the land that God has given. When held by a believer in Jesus, this proposition is certainly part of what it means to be a Christian Zionist.

Proposition 2. A belief that ethnic Israel also has, as it were, a perennial occupancy permit from God that authorizes them to settle in the land, and even to establish a majority-Jewish nation there at any time in history.

This second point is related strongly to the first. While the first mentions that Israel possesses a title deed to the land, the second asserts that they have an ongoing occupancy permit or right to settle the land, even to the point of establishing themselves nationally at any time in history. I agree with Snoeberger that the idea of a title deed and occupancy permit should be taken up separately. I also assert that this falls within my definition of Christian Zionism if held by Christians. It seems to me that this point simply acknowledges the scriptural fact that God revealed in the Mosaic legislation (Deut. 28) and executed in history the removal of Israel from the land as an act of judgment (Assyrian/Babylonian Exile & Roman Expulsion). However, the Mosaic legislation itself and many other prophetic passages predict also the restoration of the people to the land in spite of the judgment (Deut. 29-32, Isa. 11, Amos 9:11-15, Zech. 12-14, etc.). For a Christian to accept this biblical record of God's promises to Israel means he or she has embraced the impulse toward Zion possessed by the Jewish people.

Proposition 3. A belief that Israel will one day embrace Jesus as their Messiah en masse, paving the way for his earthly reign, during which the Israelite people will live in perpetual safety in their land.

In this point, Snoeberger outlines what I believe to be the correct biblical and dispensational outline concerning Israel at the end of the tribulation period: (1) all Jewish people will embrace Christ Jesus [at the Second Coming according to most dispensationalists]; (2) Jesus will establish His earthly kingdom; and (3) as a result, Israel will have peace in its land. While this statement voices something that dispensationalists readily believe, it is not best to add it to our definition of Christian Zionism. In doing so, we rule out many brothers and sisters in Christ whose overall theological positions do not match dispensationalism but still embrace the Jewish impulse to be in the land.

One example would be dual covenant theologians. Dual covenant theology, sometimes called two-covenant theology, teaches that Jewish people come to God by keeping the Law of Moses, while Christians come to God by faith in Jesus. The evangelicals (and there are not many) who would espouse this stance claim to be Christian Zionists. The narrow definition allows for their declaration to be true. The broad definition here would not allow them to include this proposition. They would not hold to the belief that all Jewish people will embrace Jesus. It would be an occurrence that is unnecessary, since Jesus would not factor into Jewish salvation.[30]

Postmillennialism should also be considered in this light. The older Edwards position can be outlined as the fall of the Antichrist (Papacy), conversion of the Jews, and then the start of the kingdom ushered in by the Church. This is not voiced in terms of a short timeline like a seven-year tribulation. Elements could be mapped loosely to dispensational premillennialism in spite of different end time charts (e.g., conversion of the Jews, destruction of the Antichrist, an earthly kingdom is begun). Nonetheless, the average postmillennialist today is not going to view himself as in agreement with Snoeberger's third proposition. Yet, there is a growing number of postmillennialists today who are voicing a Christian Zionism that sees a restoration of Israel to the land in light of such passages as Romans 9-11.[31] In this way, they embrace the Jewish impulse

[30] The major dispensationalist that has been accused of holding dual covenant theology is John Hagee. I heard him in person deny that he holds that view. The clearest examples would be outside of evangelical circles such as Reinhold Niebuhr. It makes no sense whatsoever for an evangelical to claim this view.

[31] I am thinking here of Doug Wilson & Tim Orr. See Tim Orr, "Postmillennialism: Why the Israel Debate Has Been Theologically Misdiagnosed," *The Times of Israel*, November 26, 2025; https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/

for Zion. While dispensationalists will challenge the overall theology of postmillennialism, they should welcome their growing adoption of a future for Israel in its land.

Proposition 4. A belief that Israel, prior to their mass conversion, will experience (and, for post- 1948 Christian Zionists, almost certainly is experiencing) a faithless pregathering in their land during the Church Age.

Virtually all dispensationalists affirm that there is a regathering of Jewish people to their land *prior* to the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom. Furthermore, dispensationalists uniformly believe that this pregathering is in unbelief. There are clear, exegetical reasons for accepting this teaching (Jer. 31-32; Zeph. 2:1-2; Eze. 20:33-38, 22:17-22, 36:22-24; Zech. 12-14). In addition, reasonable theological deductions can be made to draw the same conclusion. For example, when Paul tells us that Israel will be saved (in a day), that fact implies that before that time Israel is in unbelief (Rom. 11:26; Isa. 66:8; Zech. 12:1-13:1; Rev. 1:7). Thus, there is no reason to doubt these aspects of proposition 4.

Two aspects of the proposition, however, need further elaboration. First, Snoeberger's concern is that many dispensationalists hold dogmatically that the pregathering of Israel in unbelief happens in the Church Age. The problem is that this conclusion does not follow from reading the Scriptures by themselves. It comes about in many writers by correlation to the restoration of Israel as a nation in 1948. In other words, it is the Bible plus an interpretation of current events in the present Church Age that leads to the claim. Based on the Bible, it is theoretically possible that the regathering of Israel in unbelief happens, not in the Church Age, but after the rapture and before the tribulation period. We know there is an Israel to start the tribulation period (Dan. 9:27). Theoretically, God could scramble the eggs of history and do the regathering after the rapture. In this assessment, I agree with Snoeberger so that my beliefs are grounded clearly in the text of the Bible. However, I am happy to see that Snoeberger also admits that the regathering predicted in the Bible *may* have already begun through the modern Zionist movement and the establishment of Israel in 1948. But, in light of Scripture alone, it is not possible to AFFIRM or DENY in a dogmatic fashion that the regathering *must* be in the Church Age.

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postmillennialism-why-the-israel-debate-has-been-theologically-misdiagnosed/; accessed September 7, 2026.

This leads naturally to the second concern. Snoeberger summarizes, "there is no reason to believe that the present regathering of Israel is 'the' end-times regathering anticipated in Scripture."[32] In other words, can Israel be kicked out of the land in another exile or expulsion as in times past? Is it guaranteed that this is the final regathering? I agree with Snoeberger that, according to Scripture, this is an open question. It is theoretically possible that God would remove Israel by nuclear, chemical, or biological warfare or other means. Do I expect that to be the case? Not really. But my personal belief is not the same as biblical foundation. If the cycle of exile and return in Deut. 28-32 is still operative in the world, God would just bring Israel back into the land at a later time, if He ever chose to remove present Israel. However, we must also state clearly: it is not possible to AFFIRM or DENY in a dogmatic fashion that the present regathering in Israel is the final regathering before the coming of Christ. I tend to think it is. We could very well be living in the "setup" for the end time days. When will we know? When we get to the end-time days. In the end, only God decides the matter.

I prefer to see such discussions as this proposition raises as separate from the question of Christian Zionism. Varying theological debates about the fine points of eschatology should be handled on their own without crowding the definition. Christians on all sides of such queries embrace the Jewish impulse toward Zion and Israel's right to the land.

Proposition 5. A belief that Israel should receive support in facilitating this pregathering of Jews to their land as part of the standing responsibility, established in Genesis 12, to "bless" Abraham's offspring.

This proposition is the most difficult to evaluate due to the vagueness of some terms.[33] First, what does it mean to *support* by means of *facilitating* the current regathering of Jews to their land? I suppose it means, at least, that I do not *oppose* Jewish people going back to their ancient homeland. On the positive side, though, what can be said? Since this is part of Snoeberger's definition of Christian Zionism, can I be a Christian Zionist if I do not give money to help Jewish people in the Diaspora to do Aliyah, that is, return to their land? Must I call the White House or write my congressman every time Israel is attacked by a terrorist network? If I ever criticize a Jewish person or the nation of Israel, does it mean that I am under judgment from God according to Gen. 12:3? Must I

[32] Snoeberger, "Christian Zionist Impulse," 13.

[33] Ibid., 3 n9; Snoeberger notes: "I deliberately leave the agency of this 'help' undefined. Some see the help as God's expectation of individuals, churches (primarily evangelistic), or nations (principally civic), or all three. In any case, Israel should get help."

support every wartime decision that the leadership of Israel makes? In my opinion, the prophets of Israel throughout history criticized Israel severely without violating Genesis 12:3. If I am a Gentile, am I not allowed to make an honest and accurate evaluation as well? Many of the details I would leave to personal conscience and God's direction in life to decide the level of engagement with support for national Israel or the Jewish people worldwide. The chosen level should not impinge upon whether someone is a Christian Zionist in his or her belief system.

However, there are several points worth raising at this juncture:

1. It would be acceptable to *support* Jewish return to the land at any time in history as God allows. If this is what is meant by the point, then it would be consistent with my narrow definition of Christian Zionism. However, if it is affirming by use of the word *pregathering* that this is automatically support for Israel *because* this is the end-time days, see my discussion above under proposition 4.

2. The Bible teaches that there is coming a *judgment of the nations* of the world whereby they are judged based upon their treatment of Israel (Matt. 25:31-46; Joel 3). So, a Christian's treatment of the Jewish people and national Israel should, on the whole, be a positive one. This is a teaching consistent with Gen. 12:1-3. It seems to me that Christian welcoming of the Jewish impulse to the land (what I am calling Christian Zionism) would be one way to bless the people of Israel in the nation and in the Diaspora.

3. Christian Zionists should not surrender the right or inclination to criticize the modern state of Israel when necessary.[34] For example, in 2023 legislation was proposed in the Israeli Knesset that proposed jail time for anyone attempting to convert an adult from one religion to another. One concern was that this was a slippery slope to attack Israeli Christians. To the credit of Israel's leaders, the proposal was not approved.[35] If such a ban was ever passed, Christian Zionists would be obligated, in my view, to criticize the nation. Such criticism would not be contrary to their Zionist outlook. Another illustration involves the prevalent charge that Israel has committed

[34] Alan Dershowitz, the retired Jewish professor of law at Harvard, mentioned earlier in a note, does a good job of showing how legitimate support for Israel does not mean the absence of necessary criticism of Israel when it is deserved. See *The Case for Israel*.

[35] Lazar Berman, "Despite PM's Assurances, Christian Zionists Bedeviled by Anti-Missionary Bill," *The Times of Israel*, March 22, 2023; https://www.timesofisrael.com/despite-pms-assurances-christian-zionists-bedeviled-by-anti-missionary-bill/; accessed September 8, 2023.

> and is committing genocide relative to the Arabs in Gaza. Christian Zionists cannot turn a blind eye to such charges, but must weigh the evidence. In this case, it is quite easy to see that Israel is trying to eliminate up to 40,000 military troops possessed by the terrorist organization HAMAS. They have no desire to wipe out the entire two million Arab population of Gaza. There has been no dramatic drop in the number of Gazans since the war began. In light of the persistence of arguments on the other side, one must note that analysis of Israel's political and military behavior does not begin with reports from the United Nations, Al Jazeera, Palestinian liberation theologians, American replacement scholars, or university presidents.

Conclusion

Many definitions of Zionism and Christian Zionism exist in Jewish, historical, and biblical studies. I have presented one example of a broad definition with five beliefs collectively making up the definition of Christian Zionism. I have rejected this definition because many of the points involve theological argumentation for which those in the dispensational camp itself have disagreement. I think our discussions are better served to keep those sidebar theological debates separate from what we mean by Christian Zionism. That way we can focus on the main point of Christian acceptance of the Jewish longing for the land rather than argue about end-time eschatology charts. Such arguments should be dealt with elsewhere.

Interestingly, Theodore Herzl, the father of modern political Zionism, comes close to supporting my narrow definition of Zionism. David Baron, a Jewish Christian, attended the Third Zionist Congress in Basel (1899) and recorded the speech of Herzl. Herzl's words showed that, in his mind, the resounding response to the modern Zionist movement was part of something larger than just the political moment at hand.

> Zionism seeks to find for the Jewish people a public, legally secured home in Palestine. This programme we established three years ago for ever. It must have responded to a very deep need, a very ancient yearning of our people, otherwise there is to be found no reasonable explanation as to why it has effected what it has, and met with the reception that has been accorded to it….Our reappearance in the land of our fathers, prophesied by Holy Writ, sung by our poets, yearned

> for midst tears of our stricken nation, and jeered at by miserable scoffers—that return is a matter of political moment to the powers that have interests in Asia.[36]

Herzl's statement reminds us that *Zionism* [and for a believer in Jesus *Christian Zionism*] is not merely a movement of the last 150 years or so. It is the spirit of the Jewish yearning for the land that has been expressed down through the years but also in certain ways in the modern events that have led to the reestablishment of Israel. Since I join my Jewish friends in their longing for the land, as a dispensationalist, I am happy to call myself a Christian Zionist.

[36] David Baron, *The Ancient Scriptures and the Modern Jew* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1901), 155-56.