Modern Israel and Biblical Israel: A Case for Continuity

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It was obvious he wasn't buying what I was selling. In the presentation I had just delivered (entitled "Why Christians Should Care about Israel"), I had made the case (based largely on the Abrahamic Covenant) that Christians today should love the Jewish people and adopt a generally supportive posture toward the state of Israel. A major element of my appeal had revolved around God's promise to Abraham (and his Jewish progeny) that "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you" (Gen 12:3)[1]—fairly standard dispensationalist fare. The young man had listened attentively, but as he approached me after the church service, I could tell from the look on his face that he remained unconvinced. "That's all well and good," he said, "but how do you justify taking promises that God made to *biblical Israel* and applying them to the *modern state of Israel*—which didn't come into existence until 1948? How do you know they're the same thing?"

It was an insightful question, and by no means an uncommon one. Some variation of it is frequently asked when I have occasion to present on topics related to Israel and the Jewish people. The nub of the issue at question is this: *what level of continuity exists between biblical Israel and modern Israel?*

This paper is an attempt to answer that question.

Preliminary Comments

The question raised in this paper is important for at least two reasons. First, it has implications for *biblical eschatology* (what relationship, if any, does the modern state of Israel have to the "Israel" that is described in biblical prophecies about the eschaton?). And second, it has implications for *how we think about Israel's present relationship to God* (are the promises that God made to Israel still applicable and operative, to some extent or measure, today?). How we understand the level of continuity or discontinuity that exists between *biblical Israel* and *modern Israel* (hereafter BI and MI, respectively) will inform our answers to those other questions.

Of course, to supersessionists, the question raised in this paper will doubtless seem uninteresting; after all, if the church has permanently replaced national Israel in God's plans and program, then MI's relationship to BI would be at best irrelevant and at worst a distracting

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Berean Standard Bible (BSB), Public Domain.

and distortive issue to raise in the first place. But I have observed, even among many non-supersessionists, a tendency today to posit essential discontinuity between BI and MI on the grounds that BI was a theocracy, whereas MI is a secular state; or, relatedly, on the grounds that most of MI presently rejects Jesus. For example, Costi Hinn (a dispensationalist) defines BI as "The covenant people chosen by God in the Old Testament who were descendants of Abraham, set apart under the Mosaic Covenant, with the law, the temple, and the promises", and MI as "The modern state of Israel, established in 1948, is a political nation-state in the Middle East made up largely of Jewish people from diverse backgrounds (Ashkenazi, Sephardic, and Mizrahi), and it operates as a democratic state with a largely secular system of governance and is distinct from the covenant people of God described in Scripture." He observes that BI was unique because of these four identifiable characteristics:

> A covenant people (Deut. 7:6)
> Governed by God's law (Exod. 19–24)
> Centered on temple worship and sacrifice
> Recipients of specific promises and blessings

Hinn concludes:

> The modern nation of Israel is obviously a real country with real people who are ethnically and religiously Jewish. Somewhere in the population of those who identify as Jews, there is a line that is connected to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who were not wiped out or washed out, but that does not mean all modern Jews are automatically viewed as "God's chosen people," or those who will be part of the remnant God fulfills promises to in the last days. Modern Israel is also totally distinct from Biblical Israel in that it is *not* a covenant people that became a nation under God's law.[2]

In a recent interview, Carmen Imes (a non-dispensationalist) took a similar tack:

> I would not view [Israel's establishment in 1948] necessarily as a fulfillment of prophecy for the reason that, when Israel is in the land in the Old Testament, they are a theocracy. They're in covenant with Yahweh, and they're gathered around His presence. There's no temple [today], the modern-day state of Israel is a secular state, and so I don't think it's automatic that we should see the secular, modern state of Israel as the heirs of those covenant promises.

[2] Costi Hinn, "Is Modern Israel the Biblical Israel?", For the Gospel (March 25, 2026), www.forthegospel.org/read/is-modern-israel-the-biblical-israel [accessed July 2026]. Emphasis in the original.

Earlier in the interview, Imes had also argued on the basis of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 that, although God's land-promise to Israel is eternally valid, Israel's *enjoyment* of the land-promise is always conditioned on her obedience: "The promise of land is forever, but accessing the benefits of that promise is contingent, I would say, on covenantal faithfulness."[3]

Contra viewpoints like Hinn's and Imes's, this paper will argue for an essential continuity between BI and MI. My central contention is that MI is best understood as being *continuous with* (although not strictly *identical to*) BI. I will argue that both BI and MI exist today—the former as a broader category, and the latter as a narrower expression of the former. BI is composed of the sum total of all the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who are alive at any given point in time. The *national-political expression* of BI may take on any number of different forms (or no form at all, as in the years of the diaspora) throughout history. Today, MI is a self-consciously Jewish state, composed mostly of Jewish people, and existing in the historic Jewish homeland. Thus, MI should be understood as a *subset within* and *valid national-political expression of* BI.

My argument is two-pronged: (1) Biblically, membership in Israel is determined primarily ethnically: "Israel" is principally composed of all the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (whether dwelling in or out of the Promised Land).[4] And (2) Israel's national government took many different forms throughout biblical history, yet all those forms were regarded as legitimate expressions of Israel—the chosen, covenant people. This remained true whether Israel was in obedience or disobedience to God; was ruled by Davidic or non-Davidic rulers; and had accepted or rejected Jesus.

If successful, the first prong establishes that MI *should* be conceptualized as continuous with BI, since it is a majority-Jewish state, and all Jewish people are members of BI by birthright and by covenantal promise. The second prong defeats the objection that MI's present unbelief and/or secular governmental structure undermine continuity, since unbelief and fluctuating governmental structures never severed or overrode BI's connection to the covenant or her status as God's elect nation during biblical times.

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[3] Carmen Imes, interviewed by Sean McDowell, "The BIG Question: Does God Still Have a Plan for Israel? Difficult Passages #16" (June 14, 2026), https://youtu.be/ExMDYZRgcow [accessed July 2026].

[4] Strictly speaking, "Israel" during biblical times was not *identical to* or *coterminous with* the sum total of all living Jews at any point in time, since Torah made provision for ethnic non-Jews to join with the people of Israel and thereby receive a status and standing essentially equivalent to that of native-born Israelites (e.g., Exod 12:48–49; Lev 19:33–34; 24:22; Num 15:15–16). Famous examples of Gentiles who evidently underwent this process include Caleb, Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah. So, BI as a category is slightly broader than the sum total of all living Jewish people. Nevertheless, the portion of BI made up of Gentile sojourners in the land during biblical times seems to have been rather exceptional and uncommon; the vast majority of BI was constituted by the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Israel: The People and the Nation

What are the conceptual boundaries of BI, and what determines inclusion in (or exclusion from) that entity? This section will argue that, per the Abrahamic Covenant, all physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob should be understood as composing the primary membership of BI; and that the duration of BI's existence is open-ended and eternal. Furthermore, it will argue that the membership of all Jewish people in BI remains valid regardless of whether they are living inside the Holy Land under the auspices of a Jewish state, or outside the Holy Land, subject to Gentile powers.

A Great and Eternal Nation

The way the Bible describes the formation of BI strongly suggests the *Israelite nation* consists of all those who are physically descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The first intimation of national Israel in the Bible is found in Genesis 12:2, where God promises to make Abram into a "great nation" (גּוֹי גָּדוֹל).[5] Later, in 15:3–5, when the Abrahamic promises are about to be formalized into a covenant, God further reveals that this great nation will be formed from Abram's physical offspring (זֶרַע).[6] Later still, the line of promise is demarcated further: the great nation will comprise the physical descendants of Isaac (Gen 17:19–21; 26:2–4) and Jacob (Gen 27:28–29; 28:3–4, 13–15). It is God Himself who changes Jacob's name to *Israel* (Gen 32:28), by which appellation the nation will also be called. Throughout the divine speech in the patriarchal narratives, the close association of *nation* (גּוֹי—Gen 12:2; 35:11; 46:3) and *seed* (זֶרַע—Gen 12:7; 13:15–16; 15:5, 13, 18; 17:7–10, 19–20; 21:12; 22:17–18; 24:7; 26:3–4, 24; 28:13–14; 35:12;

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[5] Alexander writes on this verse, "the Hebrew term גּוֹי ('nation') denotes people inhabiting a specific geographical location and forming a political unit" (T. Desmond Alexander, "Abraham Re-Assessed Theologically: The Abraham Narrative and the New Testament Understanding of Justification by Faith," in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12—50*, ed. R. S. Hess, P. E. Satterthwaite & G. J. Wenham [Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1993], 10). This understanding of *nationhood* is similar to Bauder's definition of *peoplehood* in the Bible: "A people is a nation or people group, unified by its descent from a common ancestor and sharing a common language, culture, territory, and especially religion" (Kevin T. Bauder, "Israel and the Church: Is There Really a Difference?", in *Dispensationalism Revisited: A Twenty-First Century Restatement*, ed. Kevin T. Bauder & R. Bruce Compton [Plymouth, MN: Central Seminary Press, 2023], 77–78). Both these conceptions of nationhood/peoplehood do a good job of articulating how God *ideally intends* for BI's nationhood to function. However, as we will see, the Bible also regards the Jewish people as an Israelite nation even when some of these definitional components are not present (e.g., when they are in dispersion, and/or when they are lacking in religious and cultural unity).

[6] It is sometimes objected, based on Paul's argument from the singular זֶרַע (Gk. σπέρμα) in Galatians 3:16, that the Abrahamic promises have their terminus in Jesus Christ rather than in the Jewish people considered collectively. But this argument overlooks the fact that the Abrahamic seed-promise contains *both* collective (Gen 13:16; 15:5; 22:17a) *and* individual (Gen 22:17b; cf. 24:60) dimensions. See Jared M. August, "The Messianic Hope of Genesis: The *Protoevangelium* and Patriarchal Promises," *Themelios* 42 no. 1 (Spr 2017): 46–62; "Abraham's Faith: An Analysis of Genesis 12—22," *JMAT* 27 no. 2 (Fall 2023): 75–92.

48:4) reinforces the physical and biological circumscription of the nation: physical descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the primary element constituting and demarcating the national entity, BI.[7]

Genesis 46:2–4 is especially instructive on this point: God promises to Jacob—who is referred to as both יִשְׂרָאֵל and יַעֲקֹב in this passage—that He will make Jacob's family into a *great nation* (גּוֹי גָּדוֹל) during and by means of their sojourn in Egypt. This directly connects the *great nation* promise of Genesis 12:3 to the Israelite people group that develops from Jacob's twelve sons and their progeny in Exodus 1:1–7. BI's specific *national-political form* does not begin to take shape until the Mosaic Covenant is established at Mt. Sinai (Exod 19—40), but the people group itself is already in existence in the first chapter of Exodus. Or, one could plausibly argue that it is already recognized as a collective people group even earlier, in Genesis 34:7. There, Shechem's defiling of Dinah is described as a נְבָלָה ... בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל. The force of בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל could be understood either *locatively* (in the sense of "in Israel," i.e. the land of Israel[8]—somewhat anachronistic) or *adversatively* (in the sense of "against Israel," i.e. both Israel the individual and Israel's family group[9]). If the latter understanding is correct, then, as Fruchtenbaum notes, "This is the first time the word [*Israel*] is used for the whole group. Jacob's family now saw itself as a distinct entity from the rest of the people. Their family members were separate; they made up their own ethnic national entity."[10] Thus, the *terminus a quo* for BI's existence as a discrete people group would seem to be either the birth of Jacob's twelve sons (Gen 29:31—30:24) or the multiplication of Jacob's descendants (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, Exod 1:7) in Egypt, prior to the Exodus (Exod 1:1–7).[11]

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[7] Of course, it might be objected that Paul in Romans 9:6 establishes a different, non-physical, purely spiritual constitutive and demarcative standard for BI, but this objection fundamentally misunderstands Paul's argument. He is not addressing the *boundaries of* BI in this passage, but rather the *righteous remnant within* BI. See David Gunn, "Two Problem Passages on Israel and the Church for Traditional Dispensationalists" (paper presented to the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, Clarks Summit, PA, Sept 2015), 4–13.

[8] So Bruce K. Waltke & Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 464; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16—50*, WBC vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 311–12; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12—36, A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 538.

[9] So David W. Cotter, *Genesis*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 255; Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Genesis*, Ariel's Bible Commentary (San Antonio, TX: Ariel, 2008), 492; Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1967), 184; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27—50:26*, NAC vol. 1B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 598–99.

[10] Fruchtenbaum, *Genesis*, 492.

[11] Fruchtenbaum's comments defining *Jewishness* in terms of physical and biological descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and locating its source in the Abrahamic Covenant, are on point: "From the Abrahamic Covenant a simple definition of Jewishness can be deduced. It lies in the repeated statement that a nation will come through the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and thus defines Jewishness in terms of nationality. ... Biblically speaking, the Jewish people are a nation. Today we are a scattered nation, but we are, nevertheless, a nation. We are a nation because we are descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The implication of this definition is that no matter what

But what is the *terminus ad quem* for BI's existence? In fact, there is none. God's sidelining of Abram during the Abrahamic Covenant's enactment ceremony indicates that the covenantal promises are unilateral and unconditional in nature.[12] Furthermore, God Himself specifies the open-ended duration of the covenant in Genesis 17:7–10. It is to be an "everlasting covenant" (בְּרִית עוֹלָם—v. 7) which Abraham's Jewish offspring (his זֶרַע—v. 9) are to keep "throughout their generations" (לְדֹרֹתָם).

Centuries later, the Psalmist (evidently David—cf. 1 Chron 16:7) confirms that God's use of open-ended, eternality language in these covenant promises to Abraham is not mere hyperbole. Psalm 105:8–10 indicates that God "remembers His covenant forever, the word He ordained for a thousand generations— the covenant He made with Abraham, and the oath He swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant." The twofold repetition of "forever/everlasting" (עוֹלָם) and the explicit reference to "a thousand generations," indicate that the Abrahamic Covenant has no expiration date. And since the seed-promise component of the Abrahamic Covenant is the force that constitutes BI as a discrete people group, BI's eternal existence is therefore secured.

Centuries later still, Jeremiah provides further corroboration of this point. In his discussion of the future (eschatological) enactment of the New Covenant, Jeremiah records God's promise that "Israel's descendants" (זֶרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל) would cease to be a "nation before me" (גּוֹי לְפָנַי) only when the fixed order of sun, moon, and stars should pass out of existence; and that He would reject "Israel's descendants" (זֶרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל) only when the "heavens above could be measured and the foundations of the earth below searched out" (Jer 31:36–37).[13]

We see, then, that God has guaranteed BI's continuous existence as a people and nation throughout all time—or, at the very least, up until one thousand generations after the time of David,[14] and up through the eschaton. Since neither of those timeframes has yet elapsed, I conclude that BI must still exist today.

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a Jew does he can never become a non-Jew; no matter what the individual Jew may believe or disbelieve he remains a Jew." (Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Hebrew Christianity: Its Theology, History & Philosophy* [Tustin, CA: Ariel, 1983], 7–8.)

[12] For standard dispensational expositions of this point, see Keith H. Essex, "The Abrahamic Covenant," *TMSJ* 10 no. 2 (Fall 1999): 199–202; Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel, 2001), 334–44; Steven L. McAvoy, "Abrahamic Covenant," in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 30–31; Charles C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers,1953), 52–61; etc.

[13] Note, once again, the close connection between *ethnic peoplehood based on physical descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* (זֶרַע) and *nationhood* (גּוֹי). The verbiage of v. 36 suggests that the former is prior to and constitutive of the latter.

[14] Goldingay observes that at the time of this Psalm's composition, "Yhwh had not yet been mindful of the covenant forever, or even for a thousand generations (and still has not); but the qatal verb [זָכַר] declares that this

Israel Is Israel, Gathered or Dispersed

From the very beginning, it was God's intention for BI to exist as a single national entity, in the Promised Land, in fellowship with Him, with a functioning worship system centered on a tabernacle or temple. But, as is so often the case in a fallen world, reality falls short of the ideal. There have been two major waves of dispersion in BI's history: the first in the aftermaths of 722 B.C. and 586 B.C., and the second in the aftermath of A.D. 70. During both those periods, large portions of the Jewish population were dispersed from the Holy Land and forced to reside in Gentile countries. And during those dispersions, from 586 to 516 B.C., and then again from A.D. 70 to the present, there was no Jewish temple standing on the Temple Mount. But in these times, the Bible still consistently regards and characterizes the Jewish people as legitimate members of BI.

Daniel 9:24–27 is particularly instructive on this point. Although Daniel and his countrymen are presently in exile, the prophecy given to him by Gabriel is said to concern "your people and your holy city" (9:24). This shows that, although Daniel and his compatriots are physically separated from Jerusalem, they are nonetheless regarded as being connected to it. As the prophecy unfolds, Gabriel establishes an essential and programmatic continuity between:

1. Israel in Babylonian captivity (v. 24);
2. Israel after the return from exile, during the rebuilding project (v. 25); and
3. Israel in the intertestamental period and first century A.D. (v. 26).[15]

Thus, in God's eyes, there is no discontinuity whatsoever between *Israel dispersed from the Holy Land and deprived of a temple* on the one hand, and *Israel established in the Holy Land with a functioning temple* on the other hand.

Furthermore, biblical language suggests that diaspora Jews continue to be regarded as full and legitimate members of BI even when they deliberately choose to remain in the diaspora after

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mindfulness has started, which is part of the basis for knowing it will persist, and has been effective for twenty or thirty generations by the psalmist's day" (John Goldingay, *Psalms vol. 3: Psalms 90—150,* BCOTWP [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008], 206–7). Using the standard rule of thumb that a "generation" in the Bible equals approximately 40 years, a thousand generations, taken as a strict construction, would equal at least 40,000 years. (And, as of now, only about 3,000 years have elapsed since David's time!) But much more likely, the Psalmist is using the 1,000-generation figure as a poetic way of indicating an unlimited, open-ended timeframe (similar to the way Jesus in Matthew 18:22 uses either the 77 or 490 figure to indicate an unlimited, open-ended number of offenses that must be forgiven).

[15] For further detail on the way dispensationalists have typically understood this prophecy, see Alva J. McClain, *Daniel's Prophecy of the 70 Weeks* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969); Renald E. Showers, *The Most High God: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1982), 115–37; John F. Walvoord, *Daniel*, The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries, ed. Charles H. Dyer & Philip E. Rawley (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 264–96; John J. Yeo, "An Exegetical and Biblical-Theological Case for Prophetic Foreshortening between Daniel 9:26 and 9:27," *JMAT* 27 no. 1 (Spr 2023): 21–73; etc.

permission to return to the Holy Land had been granted. When preaching to a group of diaspora Jews assembled at Jerusalem to observe *Shavuot*, Peter addresses the multitude as "men of Israel" and members of the "house of Israel" (Acts 2:22, 36).[16] Similarly, when preaching to a crowd of diaspora Jews in Pisidian Antioch, Paul addresses the crowd as "men of Israel" and regards them as members of "this people Israel" (Acts 13:16–17).

For that matter, Paul himself could perhaps be considered a diaspora Jew: although he spent a sizeable chunk of his life residing in the Holy Land, he was originally born in Tarsus[17] (Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3), and during the years of his missionary activity he evidently regarded Syrian Antioch as his home base (Acts 11:25–26; 13:1–3; 14:26–28; 15:35–36; 18:22–23; cf. Gal 2:11–14). Both these areas lay well outside the land of Israel (even at the peak of Israelite territorial expansion in the Solomonic era). Yet Paul has no qualms about describing himself as being "of the people of Israel" (Phil 3:5), "a Hebrew," and "an Israelite" (2 Cor 11:22). When standing before the Sanhedrin, Paul in his citation of Exodus 22:28 seems to include himself in the "your people" (i.e., the people of Israel) over whom the Jerusalem-based High Priest has jurisdiction. And when addressing the leaders of the diaspora Jews in Rome, Paul refers to the Israelites in Jerusalem as "our people" (Acts 28:17), and to Israel collectively as "my nation" (Acts 28:19). Romans 11:1 is probably the most explicit passage on this point, as it not only establishes *the fact* of Paul's inclusion in BI, but also explains *the reason* for that inclusion: "I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham." In other words, Paul is an Ἰσραηλίτης *precisely because* he is ἐκ σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ. Physical descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is sufficient, in and of itself, to render him a member of BI, his place of residence and citizenship in or out of the Holy Land notwithstanding.

One final passage may also be of interest on this point: In Zechariah 9:11, apparently referring to eschatological Israel,[18] God's intention to regather His people from their dispersion is explicitly grounded in His regard for the covenant: "As for you, because of the blood of My covenant, I will release your prisoners from the waterless pit [i.e., from worldwide

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[16] That the multitude was largely composed of diaspora Jews from a variety of Gentile countries is made explicitly clear in vv. 5–11.

[17] Acts 21:39 is particularly interesting, as Paul here identifies Tarsus as the place of his primary citizenship. The expression οὐκ ἀσήμου πόλεως πολίτης almost certainly refers to Paul's *Tarsian* citizenship, not his *Roman* citizenship (which does not surface in this pericope until 22:25—see John B. Polhill, *Acts,* NAC vol. 26 [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992], 455–56).

[18] Lindsey notes, "God's faithfulness to His covenants with Israel is His basis for delivering her from worldwide dispersion. The immediate addressees in these verses may have been Jewish exiles still in Babylon, but the covenant-fulfillment theme suggests an ultimate reference to Israel's end-time regathering." (F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck [Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985], 1:1563.)

dispersion[19]]." Precisely which covenant God and Zechariah have in mind here is left unspecified. But in any case, this verse suggests that God's covenantal relationship with Israel remains fully intact during the years of Israel's dispersion.

We have seen, then, that BI has existed as an entity from biblical times until today; that its membership primarily comprises all physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (whether they reside inside or outside of the Holy Land); and that it will forever continue to exist. But although this divinely-chosen people group has had continuous existence from its formation in the Patriarchal Era until today, the precise form of its *national-political expression* has fluctuated over time—to which subject we now turn.

The Changing Shape of Israel's National-Political Expression

A statement like "BI was a theocracy, but MI is a modern secular state" may sound like a convincing argument for discontinuity at first blush, but it operates by oversimplifying the complexities of Israel's biblical history.[20] A cursory glance at the Old Testament's narrative material reveals that BI's national-political structure was neither monolithic nor fixed. Instead, it morphed and fluctuated over time. Briefly recounted, the story of that fluctuation may be summarized as follows:

- From the birth of Jacob's sons to Exodus 1, BI was a large family with no political structure whatsoever (other than the implicit internal political dynamics that governed the social life of all Ancient Near Eastern families).

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[19] The proceeding verses up through 10:12 make this clear. On the use of *imprisonment* language to refer to national exile, see Carol L. Meyers & Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9—14*, AB vol. 25C (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 140ff.

[20] Arguably, it may also overstate MI's secularity. Frankel observes, "Contemporary Jewry, to a very large extent, continues to understand the national and spiritual calling of the Jewish people in light of the national and spiritual calling of biblical Israel as recorded and expounded in the sacred text. And it is obviously in light of this most basic Jewish self-understanding that the Zionist movement chose to establish the modern Jewish State of Israel specifically in the territorial setting of the land of the Bible. In spite of the marked secularization of contemporary Jewish society, a significant number of Jews, both Israeli and non-Israeli, both religious and secular, continue to see in the Hebrew Bible the foundation for their own connection to the land and an authoritative source on how Jews should relate to it and/or live in it as a people." (David Frankel, *The Land of Canaan and the Destiny of Israel: Theologies of Territory in the Hebrew Bible*, Siphrut vol. 4 [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011], 178–79.) On this point, see also Joshua O. Haberman, "A Jewish Understanding of the State of Israel," in *A Time to Speak: The Evangelical-Jewish Encounter,* ed. A. James Rudin & Marvin R. Wilson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 178–79; and Alice & Roy Eckardt, *Encounter with Israel: A Challenge to Conscience* (Broadway, NY: Association Press, 1970), 16ff. On a possible analogy between the secularity of MI and the quasi-secularity of the Jewish community in Persia during the days of Esther, see John C. Whitcomb, *Esther: The Triumph of God's Sovereignty* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 23ff.; 112.

- From the Exodus to the death of Joshua, BI was a theocracy with clearly defined tribal identities, a functioning priesthood, and a single national leader (first Moses, then Joshua) who functioned as God's mediatorial representative.
- From the death of Joshua to the crowning of King Saul, BI functioned more as a loose confederation of tribes than as a single national entity. It was led during this period by a succession of judges—military leaders whom God raised up on an *ad hoc* basis to deliver BI from successive waves of foreign oppressors.
- During the United Monarchy period (from Saul's reign to Solomon's), BI functioned as a theocratic monarchy, with the kings functioning as God's mediatorial representatives.
- During the Divided Monarchy period (from the fracturing of the kingdom in Rehoboam's reign until 722 B.C. for the northern kingdom and 586 B.C. for the southern kingdom), BI was two separate but related kingdoms. The Davidic dynasty only held authority in the south; the northern kingdom changed hands several times, but its kings were always non-Davidic (and unfaithful to Yahweh).
- After the northern kingdom's defeat by Assyria and the southern kingdom's defeat by Babylon, a portion of BI went into exile in Babylon for 70 years. During this time there was no temple, and the portion of BI that remained in the Promised Land functioned as a vassal state to Babylon—a pagan Gentile nation.[21]
- Even after the Babylonians were defeated by Medo-Persia and Cyrus permitted BI to return to the Promised Land and rebuild the temple, BI remained a vassal state to a succession of pagan Gentile nations: Medo-Persia, Macedonia, the Ptolemies, and the Seleucids.
- After the Maccabean Revolt in the 160s B.C., BI reclaimed a measure of sovereign independence. The Hasmonean Dynasty ruled over BI from 141 to 37 B.C. The Hasmoneans were not Davidic kings, but Levitical priest-kings.
- The Hasmonean Dynasty came to an end in 37 B.C., when Rome installed Herod as King of the Jews. From that point forward—and certainly after Rome's annexation of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea in A.D. 6 and its reimposition of direct Roman rule in A.D. 44—BI functioned as a vassal state to Rome. This condition persisted until BI's dispersion from the Holy Land as a result of the Jewish-Roman Wars (A.D. 66–135).
- Finally, from the Jewish-Roman Wars until the formation of MI in A.D. 1948, BI had essentially no political-national expression whatsoever. Instead, it was scattered among the nations (in fulfillment of prophetic passages such as Lev 26:33–35 and Deut 28:64–65).

[21] Whitcomb observes that at this point, the "first phase of Israel's experience as a divinely-appointed theocratic kingdom on earth had come to an end" (John J. Davis & John C. Whitcomb, *Israel from Conquest to Exile: A Commentary on Joshua—2 Kings* [Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2012], 494).

But despite the massive fluctuations in BI's national-political contours throughout these periods, BI ever remained the special, chosen, covenant people of God. Accordingly, the Bible seems to regard all of those various national-political structures as valid expressions[22] of BI, regardless of whether they were in obedience or disobedience to God; were ruled by Davidic or non-Davidic kings; and had accepted or rejected Jesus the Messiah.

Obedience or Disobedience

During many (or most?) of the periods recounted above, BI persisted in a state of covenant faithlessness and disobedience to God. This means, for large swaths of its history, BI was a theocracy only nominally; its actual conduct and practice were wildly out of step with God's revealed will. But this disobedience never severed the Jewish people from the Abrahamic Covenant or caused them to cease being BI.

In Numbers 24:9, God through Balaam applies the language of the Abrahamic Covenant (specifically Gen 12:3) to the children of Israel during the four decades of judicially-imposed wilderness wandering. At this time, the children of Israel are under judgment for the first generation's disobedience at Kadesh Barnea (Num 14), and the second generation evidently has not even been circumcised (Josh 5:4–5)—which, in light of the stringent language on the necessity of circumcision as a covenant sign in Genesis 17:14, might cause one justifiably to wonder about their status as covenant people! But Balaam's oracle confirms that, even while under judgment for disobedience and in an uncircumcised state, the Jewish people remain a party to the Abrahamic Covenant, and thus they remain BI.

In the Divided Monarchy period, both Israel (Hos 6:4, 7; 8:1) and Judah (Jer 22:9) are charged with having "forsaken the covenant" (referring, presumably, to the Mosaic Covenant).[23] Yet this does not invalidate their status as a chosen, covenant people (in the Abrahamic-Covenantal sense). These very same books that charge BI with breaking the covenant also explicitly affirm

[22] By calling them "valid expressions," I do not intend to imply that God necessarily *approved of* every feature of those national-political expressions; only that He seems to have regarded all of them as genuine iterations of BI, still party to the Abrahamic Covenant and in continuity with other iterations of BI, despite their many and varied shortcomings.

[23] Similarly, looking backwards in history, Zechariah issues the following assessment of BI's behavior during the divided monarchy period: "But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder; they stopped up their ears from hearing. They made their hearts like flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD of Hosts had sent by His Spirit through the earlier prophets" (Zech 7:11–12).

God's ongoing love for BI and His determination never to cast them away utterly (Hos 11:8–9; 14:4–7; Jer 31:20, 35–37).[24]

After the return from exile, BI once again falls into a pattern of sinful behavior and a stubborn refusal to listen to Yahweh. Malachi traces a continuity of persistent disobedience from pre-exilic BI to post-exilic BI: "from the days of your fathers, you have turned away from My statutes and have not kept them" (Mal 3:7). Nevertheless, because of His own immutability, God refuses to destroy BI: "Because I, the LORD, do not change, you descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed" (3:6).[25]

Disobedience to God does not place Jewish people, or any particular national-political expression of the Jewish people, outside the fold of BI.

Davidic or Non-Davidic Kings

Judah's monarchical primacy over BI was announced centuries before the formation of the monarchy itself, in Jacob's prophecy: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the staff from between his feet" (Gen 49:10). And David's eternal dynastic authority was explicitly secured in the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:11–16). Yet, during the divided monarchy period, every single king of the northern kingdom was non-Davidic. (They were also deeply wicked to a man; not one received a positive assessment, as they all "did evil in the sight of the LORD" [1 Kings 15:26, etc.].) This might cause one to wonder about the northern kingdom's covenant status during that time. Was the lack of Judahite and Davidic kingship enough to exclude the northern kingdom from membership in BI? In fact, it was not: in 2 Kings 13:23, Yahweh's grace and compassion toward the northern kingdom is explicitly grounded in "His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." So, the northern kingdom remained a party to the Abrahamic Covenant, despite its wickedness and its aberrant monarchical structure.[26]

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[24] The passages cited here are merely representative samples; many other examples of similar passages from the Hebrew prophets during this period in BI's history could easily be adduced.

[25] Divine immutability seems to entail, in the present context, God's refusal to violate the promises He made to the patriarchs in the Abrahamic Covenant—see Richard A. Taylor & E. Ray Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, NAC vol. 21A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 402.

[26] Bimson notes, "Just as Judah's preservation has been linked to God's promises to David (1 Ki. 11:36; 15:4; 2 Ki. 8:19) so in v 23 Israel's preservation is linked to a much older covenant—God's covenant with the ancestors of the whole nation, which involved the promise of the land. Humanly speaking, Israel's survival at this time hung by a slender thread, but in truth it was guaranteed by a covenant made and upheld by God" (John J. Bimson, "1 and 2 Kings," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994], 373).

Later, during the intertestamental period, non-Davidic kings again arose over Israel: first the Levitical Hasmoneans, then the Idumean Herodian dynasty. Furthermore, immediately prior to the Hasmonean dynasty, and coincident with the Herodian dynasty, BI was not really a Jewish theocratic monarchy at all, but was rather a vassal state to various pagan Gentile nations. But once again, in all these periods, the aberrant monarchical structure did not sever the Jewish people's connection to the Abrahamic Covenant or render them discontinuous with BI. Shortly before Jesus' birth, Zechariah, prophesying at the Holy Spirit's prompting, traced a line of continuity from first-century Israel all the way back to the patriarchs, and he indicated that the Abrahamic Covenant was still operative for Israel in his day: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has visited and redeemed His people … to show mercy to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath He swore to our father Abraham" (Luke 1:68, 72–73). Accordingly, the Bible refers to first-century Jewish people living in the Holy Land as "sons of Israel" (Luke 1:16) or "Israel" (John 1:31), and Jesus characterized His own mission as being directed, first and foremost, "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24). His offer of the messianic kingdom ("Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near"—Matt 4:17) was a legitimate offer to a legitimate iteration of BI.

Having an aberrant monarchical structure does not place Jewish people, or any particular national-political expression of the Jewish people, outside the fold of BI.

Acceptance or Rejection of Jesus

Rejecting Jesus the Messiah was undoubtedly BI's greatest misstep in her entire history. As a result, she suffered several harsh consequences: the withdrawal and postponement of the kingdom offer (Matt 21:43; 23:39),[27] the desolation of A.D. 70 and subsequent dispersion among the nations (Matt 23:38; Luke 21:20–24), and a judicial hardening of hearts that continues to this day (Rom 11:26). But the way the New Testament consistently regards and characterizes Israel post-Calvary indicates that, even though a majority of the Jewish people have chosen to reject Jesus, they nevertheless remain a part of BI and a party to the Abrahamic Covenant.

Preaching to an unbelieving Jewish audience in Solomon's portico, Peter addresses his audience as "men of Israel" (Acts 3:12) and indicates that he considers them organically connected to the

[27] For further detail on the offer and postponement of the kingdom, as it is typically understood by dispensationalists, see Dave Fredrickson, "Three Barely-Disguised References to Kingdom Postponement in Matthew 13/Psalm 78," *JMAT* 27 no. 1 (Spr 2023): 75–93; David Gunn, "The Matthean Outer Darkness Passages in Kingdom Exclusion Theology: An Analysis and Critique" (Ph.D. diss., Clarks Summit University, 2023), 212–25; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come: Tracing God's Kingdom Program and Covenant Promises throughout History* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995), 203–14; 225–28, 261–62; Stanley D. Toussaint, "No, Not Yet: The Contingency of God's Promised Kingdom," *BibSac* 164 no. 654 (Apr 2007): 131–47.

Old Testament prophets, and party to the Abrahamic Covenant: "And you are sons of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers when He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all the families of the earth will be blessed'" (Acts 3:25). Speaking to Ananias, Jesus indicates that Paul will preach the gospel not only to "the Gentiles and their kings," but also to "the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). As the narratives of Paul's missionary activities unfold, it quickly becomes apparent that many (most?) of the Israelite people who hear his preaching will choose to reject it (see esp. Acts 13:45). This makes them *unsaved* (from a Christian perspective), but it does not make them anything other than "the people of Israel."

In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul argues that, even for Jews who reject Jesus, there are still advantages to being Jewish. Not only had the Jews "been entrusted with the very words of God" (Rom 3:2),[28] but they also presently possess "the adoption as sons," "the divine glory and the covenants," "the giving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises," and theirs "are the patriarchs" (Rom 9:4–5). In this remarkable passage, Paul unequivocally affirms that the Jewish people post-Calvary retain their status as God's chosen people (likely drawing on sonship language from Old Testament passages such as Exod 4:22–23; Jer 31:9; Hos 11:1) and remain connected to the patriarchs; and that at least some of God's covenants with Israel continue to be operative for them. It is evident that Paul is speaking here primarily of *unbelieving Jews* (i.e., Jewish people who reject Jesus), since in the immediately preceding verses (vv. 2–3) he has just expressed great sorrow over their unsaved state; and since, before his discourse on Israel is finished, he will characterize them as those who have "stumbled over the stumbling stone" (9:32), who need salvation and are ignorant about God (10:1–3), who "did not submit to God's righteousness" (10:3), who "failed to obtain" what they were seeking as most were "hardened" (11:7), who "stumbled" (though not beyond recovery—11:11), who have been "broken off" from the metaphorical olive tree of God's blessing (11:17),[29] who are currently persisting "in unbelief" (11:23), and who, "regarding the gospel," are "enemies on your [Gentile Christians'] account" (11:28). But despite all these negative appraisals of first-century, post-Calvary Israel's relationship to God, Paul nevertheless affirms all the benefits listed above (in 9:4–5), and he reiterates unbelieving Israel's elect status at the discourse's conclusion: "but regarding election, they are loved on account of the patriarchs. For God's gifts and His call are irrevocable" (11:28–29).

Rejecting Jesus does not place Jewish people, or any particular national-political expression of the Jewish people, outside the fold of BI.

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[28] That Paul intends to include *unbelieving* Jews—i.e., Jewish people who reject Jesus—in this assessment, is evidenced by his use of ἠπίστησάν in the very next verse.

[29] On the meaning of Paul's olive tree metaphor, see George Gunn, "Romans 11:17, Israel, the Church & the Olive Tree" (paper presented to the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, Kansas City, MO, Sept 2014).

We have seen, then, that BI had multiple shifting and fluctuating national-political structures and expressions throughout her history. But none of those fluctuations ever called into question her status as God's covenant people. All by itself, this observation should be enough to cast doubt on contemporary attempts to posit discontinuity between BI and MI. But one further iteration of BI also needs to be factored into the equation: eschatological BI.

Israel in the Future

Many passages in the Hebrew prophets (e.g., Isa 11:11–12; Jer 23:3–8; 31:1–40; Ezek 20:37–44; 36:24–28; Amos 9:11–15) foretell a future regathering of BI into the Holy Land when the Messiah arrives and establishes His kingdom. Dispensationalists believe this will happen concurrently with (or immediately following) Jesus' Second Coming, at the end of the tribulation.[30] But the Hebrew prophets *also* suggest that BI will exist in the Holy Land in some form *before* the tribulation begins. Snoeberger refers to this phase of BI's restoration as a *pregathering.*[31] This pregathering (an establishment of BI in the Holy Land in unbelief) may be hinted at in the first phase of Ezekiel's Dry Bones prophecy (Ezek 37:7–8), and it is virtually demanded by the sequence of Daniel's Seventy Weeks prophecy.

We saw earlier that this prophecy (specifically Dan 9:24–26) establishes an essential and programmatic continuity between three phases of BI's historical existence (namely, during the Babylonian Captivity; after the return from exile; and during the intertestamental period up through the first century A.D.). But it *also* goes a step further and extends that essential and programmatic continuity to a future, eschatological, pregathered iteration of BI. If, as dispensationalists have traditionally understood, Daniel 9:27 ("he will confirm a covenant with many for one week") refers to the Antichrist's making some sort of peace treaty with Israel for the duration of the 7-year tribulation period, then Israel must first exist in the Holy Land as a national entity in order to make such a treaty possible. And since the verse proceeds to foretell that "in the middle of the week [7-year period] he [the Antichrist] will put an end to sacrifice and offering," it stands to reason that this pregathered iteration of BI will have a functioning temple and sacrificial system either before the tribulation begins, or at least before the tribulation's midpoint. Elaborating on Daniel's prophecy, Jesus later corroborates the idea of a Jewish presence in Judea during the first half of the tribulation, and further suggests that this

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[30] E.g., Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1948), 4:399; Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel, 2003), 413–20; Mark Hitchcock, *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012), 400.

[31] Mark A. Snoeberger, "Does Dispensationalism Provide Firm Footing for a Christian Zionist Impulse?" (paper presented to the Evangelical Theological Society Midwest Region, Grand Rapids, MI, March 2026), 3.

iteration of BI will be Sabbath-observant to some degree (Matt 24:15–20). Since this iteration of BI will agree to enter into an agreement with the Antichrist, it is evidently an Israel that persists in unbelief—i.e., in its rejection of Jesus Christ.

This does not, all by itself, establish MI's continuity with BI. No one can (or should) claim with absolute certainty that MI is the partial fulfillment of Ezekiel 37:7–8, and therefore the pregathered iteration of BI indicated in Daniel 9:27. After all, we simply do not know when the eschaton will arrive (Matt 25:13). Nevertheless, it seems entirely plausible that MI as presently constituted *could* easily become the pregathered Israel of which these prophecies speak—perhaps even in the not-too-distant future. So, while these eschatological data do not prove MI's continuity with BI *per se*, they do make it much more difficult to posit an essential discontinuity between MI and BI. If nothing else, they severely undermine the argument that MI cannot be considered BI because of present unbelief, since these prophecies explicitly predict a future time when BI will act in unbelief, and Daniel 9:24–27 places that unbelieving future iteration of BI in direct continuity with the BI of ancient times.

Conclusion and Implications

If this paper's argument is accepted, then MI should not be considered *identical to* BI, but it should be thought of as *essentially and programmatically continuous with* it. Both entities exist today as overlapping categories: BI as the broader category of worldwide ethnic Jewry,[32] and MI as a narrower, national-political expression of the Jewish people—the world's sole Jewish state, established in the Jewish people's historic homeland. I believe this way of conceptualizing the relationship between BI and MI can shed light on some of the commonly-raised questions

[32] This assumes, of course, that ethnic Jewry today is truly biologically descended from the Jewish people of biblical times. I understand that that may be considered a controversial question in some circles. But there is a sizeable body of scientific work establishing a genetic kinship between all major Jewish ethnic groups, and tracing their common origin back to the Levant in ancient times. (E.g., Lily Agranat-Tamir et al., "The Genomic History of the Bronze Age Southern Levant," *Cell* 181 no. 5 [May 2020]: 181, 1146–57.e11; Gil Atzmon et al., "Abraham's Children in the Genome Era: Major Jewish Diaspora Populations Comprise Distinct Genetic Clusters with Shared Middle Eastern Ancestry," *AJHG* 86 [Jun 2010]: 86, 850–59; Doron M. Behar et al., "The Genome-Wide Structure of the Jewish People," *Nature* 466 [Jun 2010]: 238–42; H. Ostret & K. Skorecki, "The Population Genetics of the Jewish People," *Hum Genet* 132 no. 2 [Feb 2013]: 119–27.) See also Thomas Ice, *The Case for Zionism: Why Christians Should Support Israel* (Green Forest, AR: Green Leaf Press, 2017), 127–47.

Perhaps relatedly, it is interesting that a conviction about global diaspora Jewry's fundamental national oneness seems to have underlain some of the theorizing of the early Zionist movement: in articulating the rationale for his proposed project, Herzl wrote, "Wir sind ein Volk, ein Volk." And, "Die Volkspersönlichkeit der Juden kann, will und muß aber nicht untergehen. Sie kann nicht, weil äußere Feinde sie zusammenhalten. Sie will nicht, das hat sie in zwei Jahrtausenden unter ungeheuren Leiden bewiesen. Sie muß nicht, das versuche ich in dieser Schrift nach vielen anderen Juden, welche die Hoffnung nicht aufgaben, darzutun. Ganze Äste des Judentums können absterben, abfallen; der Baum lebt." (Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat* [Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1920], 10, 12.)

concerning how Christians should think about and relate to MI today. The two questions I have in mind here pertain to MI's claim to the Holy Land, and what obligation (if any) Christians have to support MI.

Does Modern Israel Have a Biblical Claim to the Holy Land?

Yes. If MI is continuous with BI, then the Abrahamic Covenant's land promises to BI (Gen 12:7; 13:14–15; 15:18–21; 17:8; 26:3–4; 28:13) would seem to be applicable and directly relevant to modern events and issues in the Middle East. But MI's biblical claim to the Holy Land probably should not be thought of as an *absolute* or *unlimited right*—as if Israel thereby had carte blanche permission from God to occupy the land irrespective of all other ethical and moral considerations. Hypothetically, if tomorrow Israel were to launch an unprovoked war of aggression to capture all the territory from the Nile River to the Euphrates River (Gen 15:18) while mercilessly slaughtering that territory's current inhabitants and then bragging about it online, I cannot imagine supporting such a decision. Imes's assertion that "The promise of land is forever, but accessing the benefits of that promise is contingent … on covenantal faithfulness" is facially correct. God's promise of the Holy Land to Israel is made in eternal and unconditional language, but throughout biblical history God reserved the right providentially to establish Israel in the land, or uproot her from it, purely at His own good pleasure. Snoeberger explains this dynamic in terms of a distinction between a *title deed* and an *occupancy permit*: the former has no expiration date, but the latter can be given, revoked, and/or reinstated at any time of God's choosing.[33] So, while the Abrahamic Covenant gives Israel a biblical claim on the Holy Land, it does not necessarily, in and of itself, authorize her occupancy of the land at any given period of time.

However, this observation should also be paired with the fact that God did *not* automatically kick Israel out of the Holy Land every time she embraced wickedness and unbelief. Rather, He frequently permitted her to continue residing in the land, in a state of unbelief and disobedience, for centuries upon centuries of time. And when He finally did decide to uproot her from the land, He executed that judgment providentially, through the intermediary agency of seemingly ordinary developments in the movements of human kings and kingdoms (Assyria, Babylon, and Rome). Likewise, when He chose to restore Israel to the Holy Land after the Babylonian Captivity, He employed intermediary human agency to bring that about.

It is therefore illegitimate to deny Israel the right to reside in the Holy Land today simply on the grounds that the majority of her population does not believe in Jesus—for God has frequently allowed Israel to remain in the land in periods of unbelief and disobedience; and if

[33] Snoeberger, "Does Dispensationalism Provide Firm Footing for a Christian Zionist Impulse?", 2.

our reading of biblical eschatology is correct, He intends to do so again sometime in the future! Nor would it be valid to deny her that right on the grounds that Israel's modern formation came about through human agents and actions—for how can anyone say with any degree of certainty that the rise of the Zionist movement, the United Nations' decision to establish Israel as a sovereign nation, the Israeli Declaration of Independence, and the Israel Defense Forces' military victories in the defensive wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973, were *not* God's providential means of restoring His people to their land?[34] It seems to me, quite to the contrary, that we should err on the side of assuming that the Abrahamic Covenant's land-grant provisions are in effect—or, to use Snoeberger's terminology, that God has chosen to reinstate Israel's occupancy permit—unless and until Israel does something to call that conviction into question (such as maintaining or expanding her residence in the Holy Land in an overtly unethical and morally indefensible manner[35]); or, unless and until God chooses providentially to remove her from the land. If He should choose to do so before the eschaton arrives, then that is His business and prerogative. But in the meantime, I do not find it advisable or wise to stand against Israel's presence in the Holy Land when God has made it so abundantly clear that He intends to give her that land.

In What Sense (If Any) Should Christians Support Israel Today?

Christians should be motivated to act vis-à-vis the Jewish people (BI) and the state of Israel (MI) in a way that is informed by all that God has said on the subject of Israel. Included in this rather large and weighty dataset would be all the verses in which God professes His special and inviolable love for Israel (e.g., Isa 49:14–16; Jer 31:3; Zech 2:8); Paul's teaching on Israel's present status as an elect people in covenant relationship with God (Rom 9:4; 11:28–29); and the requirement to *bless Israel* (and refrain from *cursing Israel*) implicit in the language of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:3).[36] From this, it follows that Christians should cultivate a love

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[34] Numerous works have surveyed the historical events that formed MI with an eye on the doctrine of divine providence. Two that I have found particularly helpful are David L. Larsen, "Tracing the Critical Steps in the Establishment of the Modern State of Israel in 1948" (paper presented to the Pre-Trib Study Group, Irving, TX, 2004); and Elwood McQuaid, *It Is No Dream*, rev. ed. (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 2019), 77–171.

[35] I realize this parenthetical comment runs the risk of opening a whole other can of worms, since MI's critics routinely accuse her of precisely this kind of ethical failing. But in my opinion, many (most?) of those critiques—at least, the ones I have encountered—tend to be very slanted, and do not stand up to scrutiny. For helpful defenses of MI on this score, see Alan Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2003); and Jennifer Miles, *Israel: Whose Land Is It Anyway?* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 2019).

[36] On the blessing and cursing language in Genesis 12:3, Katulka notes, "'I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse' is the promise given to assure Abraham of God's protection. The phrase 'whoever curses you I will curse' consists of two different Hebrew words translated 'curse.' The first use of 'curse' (*qālal*) literally means 'to take lightly,' while the second 'curse' ('*ārar*) was God's oath that anyone who took Abraham or

for the Jewish and Israeli[37] people (for it is axiomatic that we should endeavor to love whatever God loves), and should desire their good (for treating them lightly or wishing them harm would put us at cross-purposes with God's expressed intentions in Genesis 12:3).

If this is correct, then some form of Zionism would seem to be the proper posture for Christians to take at this moment in history—depending, of course, on how *Zionism* is defined. Several of us at the Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry like to use this quick and easy definition: Zionism is the belief that "the Jewish people have a right to live sovereignly and securely in their historic homeland."[38] Because of the nature of the issues at stake, the Zionism question seems to demand a response, either positive or negative: one either believes that the Jewish people have a right to statehood and self-determination in their historic homeland, or one does not.[39] And it is very difficult for me to imagine how one could simultaneously seek to bless the Jewish people and desire the best for them on the one hand, while denying them the right to statehood and self-determination on the other.[40]

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this promise lightly would be excluded from the blessing of the covenant." (Christopher J. Katulka, *Israel Always: Experiencing God's Pursuit of You through His Chosen People* [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2022], 16.)

[37] It might be objected that I am equivocating here, since up to this point my argument has centered on *ethnic Jewry*, yet the category "Israeli" in the modern sense includes many individuals who are not ethnically Jewish (in fact, about 27% of Israel's current population is ethnically Gentile). I would respond to this objection by noting that the overwhelming majority of Israeli citizens *are* ethnically Jewish, so the entire nation of MI should be thought of as standing in continuity with BI. As for that minority of Israeli citizens who are ethnically Gentile, proximity to and identification with God's chosen people comes with certain benefits and blessings—as was the case in biblical times (e.g., Num 35:15; Josh 10:6–15; 1 Kings 8:41–43).

[38] Ty Perry, "Why I Am a Christian Zionist," Friends of Israel (May 4, 2018), www.foi.org/2018/05/04/why-i-am-a-christian-zionist [accessed Aug 2026]. For a helpful overview of the Zionist movement's historical background, development, and major tenets and personalities, see Fred Skolnik & Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2d ed. (Farmington Hills, MI: Macmillan, 2007), 21:539ff.

[39] Granted, mediating or moderate positions may offer various levels of nuance on the means whereby the Zionist project should be undertaken, where the precise boundaries of a Zionist state should be drawn, and so on. And such nuances could, in some cases, be very helpful. But at bottom, the central Zionist conviction must be either accepted or rejected; it is not clear to me how one could be a *partial Zionist* (any more than one could be *partially pregnant*)! I suppose one could simply choose to suspend judgment on the issue and maintain an attitude of agnosticism on the Zionism question. But *should* a Christian maintain such an attitude—particularly in light of all that the Bible says about Israel's place in God's plan, and God's intentions for Israel vis-à-vis the Holy Land? Surely agnosticism on this point would leave a massive, gaping, Israel-shaped lacuna in one's worldview.

[40] Since I have referred to Mark Snoeberger's paper "Does Dispensationalism Provide Firm Footing for a Christian Zionist Impulse?" at several points, perhaps I should offer my assessment of his argument. I consider Snoeberger a friend and brother-in-arms. He is a reliable and articulate spokesperson for dispensational theology, and I have appreciated his work immensely. But I confess to finding his argument in this paper less than compelling. I have two major objections. First, I believe he tailors his definition of *Christian Zionism* too narrowly. He articulates a five-fold definition of Christian Zionism, concluding on p. 3, "Christian Zionists may incidentally believe *more* than these five points, but not less!" Yet I am a Christian Zionist, and I do not accept or believe all five of Snoeberger's proffered defining characteristics. Specifically, I would reject his second tenet (p. 2—"A belief that ethnic Israel also has … a perennial *occupancy permit* from God that authorizes them to settle in the land, and even to establish a

Of course, that does not mean Christians are obligated to approve of every decision the Israeli government makes, or every action the Israel Defense Forces take, or every element of Israeli culture! The Bible itself models the way for us on this point: Israel frequently made missteps throughout the biblical record, and God's Word did not hesitate to criticize them when they did so. Thus, if this paper's conceptualization of MI as a subset and expression of BI is accepted, then what held true for BI in ancient times should likewise hold true for MI today: there is plenty of room for Christians to disagree with—or even criticize—the modern state of Israel for any actions that they might reasonably deem objectionable. But I believe such disagreements and criticisms should be offered from a place of genuine affection for Israel and a desire for her good, perhaps accompanied by a disposition to give Israel the benefit of the doubt whenever feasible. Such an attitude would, of course, stand in stark contrast to the reflexively anti-Israel impulses that permeate so much of the global media coverage of Israel today.

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majority-Jewish nation there at any time in history"), and would strongly quibble with the language in which his fourth tenet is expressed (p. 3—"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"). I do not believe Israel necessarily has God's permission to occupy the Holy Land at *any point in history whatsoever*—as discussed above on pp. 17–18, God is free providentially to establish Israel in or to uproot her from the land at any time of His choosing. Nor would I say that MI is *almost certainly* fulfilling the Bible's prophecies about a pregathering in unbelief; only that it *may plausibly* be doing so.

Second, if I have understood his argument correctly, Snoeberger's major reason for rejecting Christian Zionism is that *we cannot know for sure* that MI is presently fulfilling biblical prophecies related to Israel's pre-tribulational pregathering; and therefore, Christians are under no biblical obligation to support Israel in its current national-political form. But surely the reach exceeds the grasp here! Couldn't one argue, using precisely the same logic, that neither can we know for sure that the modern state of Israel *is not* the fulfillment of biblical prophecies related to Israel's pre-tribulational pregathering? And that therefore, a pro-Zionist perspective, rooted in a dispensational understanding of Scripture, shouldn't be dismissed out of hand? After all, if our ignorance of the prophecies' fulfillment timeframe leaves us with insufficient grounds to definitively *establish* Zionism, then surely, by the same token, it furnishes insufficient grounds to definitively *reject* it too! In that case, mightn't we suggest that Christians would perhaps be on safer ground maintaining a reflexively pro-Israel posture rather than a reflexively anti-Israel one—especially in light of Genesis 12:3? (To his credit, Snoeberger *does* agree that "we Gentiles have an obligation, seated in the Abrahamic Covenant, to 'bless' Israel. We should not wish Israel harm or hold them in contempt for being who they are, and we should singularly seek their best interests" [13–14]. But exactly how one can consistently do that while simultaneously adopting an anti-Zionist position—and therefore, presumably, denying or questioning the Jewish people's right to statehood and national self-determination—is beyond me. Then again, perhaps Snoeberger's intention is not really to reject Zionism *per se*, but only to reject the narrowly-tailored definition of *Christian Zionism* that he sketches out at the beginning of the paper. In that case, I suppose I would have no major objections to his argument's conclusion; only to its premises.)