

EVANGELICAL ZIONISM

AN EVANGELICAL RESPONSE TO ISRAEL'S EVANGELICAL ENEMIES

PART I

Evangelicals Changing Sides

The issue of Israel and the Jewish people has long been controversial. In recent years the controversy has reached fever pitch, even in some Christian circles. Increasingly we are hearing anti-Israel charges¹ that employ terms such as colonialism, occupation, apartheid, even genocide - and now those charges are being levelled by some who identify as evangelicals.

And it is not just Israel that is subject to the harsh criticism of Christian anti-Zionists. For centuries there have been Christians who have stood with the Jewish people. They are now being described as dangerous and their views as deviant or heretical.²

I am not Jewish. I am a Christian and I will argue in favour of a biblical Zionism.

But before going further, it will be important to state what biblical Zionism is *not*. It is not a naive, unquestioning, uncritical support for the State of Israel. Israel is a vibrant liberal democracy in an increasingly unstable region - a region being swamped with barbarism. Israel faces enormous challenges and is far from perfect. My own support for Israel may be unconditional but it is certainly not uncritical.

Criticism of Israel can be appropriate, as with any democracy. What is not acceptable is criticism based on disinformation or the increasingly common demonization and double standards.³

Nor is biblical Zionism anti-Palestinian. Concern for the Jewish people and concern for the Palestinians should not be mutually exclusive. It may seem counterintuitive to those exposed to the popular left wing narrative but I believe it can be demonstrated that those who care most about Palestinian civilians, justice, and human rights, ought to support Israel. In recent

¹ Stephen Sizer, 'Christian Zionism: The New Heresy that Undermines Middle East Peace', *Middle East Monitor*, August 2013, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/guest-writers/6743-christian-zionism-the-new-heresy-that-undermines-middle-east-peace>

Steve Haas, "All of Me": Engaging in a World of Poverty and Injustice, *Lausanne Global Analysis*, January 2015 · Volume 4 / Issue 1, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2015-01/all-of-me>

Texe Marrs, 'Christian Evangelicals Endorse Wicked Nation of Israel', <http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/False%20Religions/Illuminati/curse.htm>

² Sizer, 'Christian Zionism: The New Heresy that Undermines Middle East Peace'.

NT Wright equates Christian Zionism with apartheid, Tom Wright, 'Jerusalem in the New Testament', originally published in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*, P. W. L. Walker, ed., Grand Rapids, 1994, pp. 53-77, http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Jerusalem_New_Testament.pdf

³ Natan Sharansky offers a similar "3D Test of Antisemitism: Demonization, Double Standards, Delegitimization", *Jewish Political Studies Review*, 16:3-4, Fall 2004, <http://www.jcpa.org/phas/phas-sharansky-f04.htm>

conflicts, for example, it was Israel, not the Palestinian leadership, that prioritized the safety of Palestinian civilians.⁴

For decades I have identified myself as an evangelical. So my comments will be made from that perspective and I will be addressing those who identify as evangelicals.⁵

I do not intend to address liberal Christians. They generally do not see the Old and New Testaments as being reliable or as having authority.

Evangelicals, on the other hand, have traditionally been set apart by the claim that their beliefs must be based on the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testaments.⁶ And that in turn has led many evangelicals to become strong supporters of Israel and the Jewish people.

But now there is a strong movement to undermine evangelical support for Israel - and it is gaining momentum.⁷

I hope to show that the anti-Zionism flourishing in certain evangelical circles is inconsistent with the evangelical claim - and that it is profoundly unbiblical.

Most of my Jewish friends will of course strongly reject my Christian presuppositions. But I hope they will be able to see that Christian support for Israel and the Jewish people is at least coherent and consistent.⁸ And that it rests firmly on that which we have in common - the Hebrew Scriptures.

In broad terms Zionism is a movement supporting the return of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland. Many forms of Zionism exist, some religious, others atheistic, some merely political. Most articles on Zionism trace the term and the movement's origin to the late 1800's.⁹ This may be true of *political* Zionism but those who regard the Hebrew Scriptures as historical will recognize that a form of Zionism has in fact existed for more than

⁴ Judah Ari Gross, Defense experts back IDF's 2014 Gaza campaign, claim critics are invoking wrong set of laws, *Times of Israel*, December, 2015, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/international-defense-experts-back-idfs-2014-gaza-campaign/>
Richard Kemp, 'Gaza's Civilian Casualties: The Truth Is Very Different,' *Gatestone Institute International Policy Council*, August 2014, <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4570/gaza-civilian-casualties>

⁵ It is acknowledged that *Evangelicalism* is a broad and contested term. It is used in this series somewhat reluctantly. It seems that no better term is available by which to identify those to whom my comments are addressed.

⁶ I do not mean to suggest that this is the *only* mark of an evangelical. The authority of Scripture however does provide grounds upon which issues of this kind ought to be able to be settled. Many evangelical Statements of Faith begin with an affirmation of the authority of Scripture. e.g. The Evangelical Theological Society's brief "Doctrinal Basis" begins with an expression of a high view of Scripture. Membership Requirements, The Evangelical Theological Society, http://www.etsjets.org/about/membership_requirements

⁷ Dexter Van Zile, 'Evangelical Anti-Zionism Gaining Traction, Time for Some Pushback', *Times of Israel Blog*, December 2015, <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/evangelical-anti-zionism-gaining-traction-time-for-some-pushback/>

⁸ Any system of thought that is internally incoherent ought to be rejected.

⁹ "Zionism emerged in the late 19th century..." <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zionism>
<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/15268-zionism>

2500 years. Since the time of the Babylonian exile the Psalms or Tehilim have recorded the Jewish longing for a return to Zion.¹⁰

The issue of Israel and her land are central biblical themes.¹¹ Other themes may be equally prominent but no theme is *more* prominent in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is that biblical material¹² - and its affirmation in the New Testament¹³ - that most evangelical Zionists would see as foundational.

Christian Zionism is hardly monolithic and I cannot claim to speak for all. Despite efforts to undermine the movement it is still very strong in the USA. Certainly, there are major streams within the movement with which I cannot align. For that reason my primary concern will not be to defend the Christian Zionist movement, as such. Rather, it will be to assert that the Scriptures plainly teach the eventual restoration of the Jewish people to the land of Israel and that it is disingenuous for evangelicals to deny this.

Israel's existence, its enduring connection to its ancient homeland, and its right to defend itself, can be supported historically, archaeologically, legally, morally, and biblically. Evangelicals claim to base their beliefs on both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. I will argue that a biblical Zionist position, one that affirms the Jewish people's unique and ongoing connection to their ancestral homeland, is the only position consistent with that evangelical claim.

¹⁰ e.g. Psalm 137:1-4

¹¹ Christian theologians are once again reclaiming the fact that “the land is central, if not the central theme of biblical faith,” and therefore, as W. D. Davies warned, “it will no longer do to talk about Yahweh and his people, but we must speak about Yahweh and his people and his land.” Likewise, Gerhard von Rad summarized the situation by saying, “Of all the promises made to the patriarchs it was that of the land that was the most prominent and decisive.” In fact, few issues are as important as that of the promise of the land to the patriarchs and the nation of Israel: the Hebrew word ‘erets is the fourth most frequent substantive in the Hebrew Bible.

Walter Kaiser Jnr, quoted by Dr Randall Price in Answering the New Covenant Perspective's Charge on The Absence of Restoration to the Land Texts In the New Testament http://www.lcje-na.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Price_Randall.pdf

¹² e.g. Land references in Genesis include: 12:1–3, 7–9; 13:14–17; 15:7, 18–21; 17:1–27; 22:15–19; 26:2–6, 24,25; 27:28,29, 38–40; 28:1–4, 10–22; 31:3, 11–13; 32:22–32; 35:9–15; 48:3,4, 10–20; 49:1–28; 50:23–25.

¹³ See Part VI.