

February–March 2024 / Adar I–Adar II 5784

Volume 21 • Issue 1 • INTERNATIONAL EDITION



The Chosen People

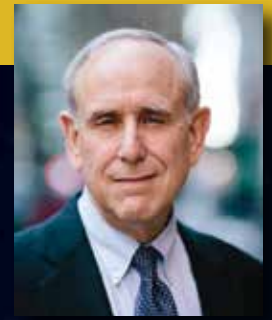
SERVING THE JEWISH PEOPLE SINCE 1894



CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

Today

A HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM ~ UK NEWS ~
INTERNATIONAL NEWS BRIEFS ~ RESOURCES



Dr. Mitch Glaser
International
Director
Chosen People
Ministries

Christian Zionism

Shalom, dear friend,

As I write this letter, the war in Israel and its repercussions are still impacting the lives of Israelis. They are hurting and in great need of our prayers and support. Please also remember to pray for the forty-plus Chosen People Ministries staff members currently serving in the land. They are faithful amid incredible challenges to their lives and ministries!

In light of current events, I am especially eager to present to you this current volume of our newsletter. It addresses the critical and contemporary issue of Christian Zionism, or Christian support for the modern State of Israel, which should be a central concern for all who love the God of Israel, the Messiah of Israel, and the land of Israel. This month's feature article was written by Reverend Thomas Fretwell, who leads the Ezra Foundation and partners with Chosen People Ministries (UK). We welcome Tommy's excellent contribution to this newsletter and are pleased to offer you two of his books as a resource. To purchase, please visit us online at shop.chosenpeople.org.uk.

This newsletter will answer the question: *What role does the Bible ask Christians to play regarding modern Israel?*

Let Us Start at the Beginning!

In Genesis 12:2–3, God made a covenant with Abram (later renamed "Abraham"), which included making him a great nation, giving him a land, and granting his descendants a holy purpose. The Jewish people were also to be *a bridge of blessing to the world*. God did not choose Jewish people for this task because Abram or his descendants somehow deserved this role. Rather, God chose Israel because of His love for her (Deuteronomy 7:7–8).

The Abrahamic Covenant not only established the unique role of Israel in the world, but also forged an extraordinary relationship between Israel and the nations. There were mutual obligations for both Jewish and Gentile people toward one another embedded in the covenant from the very start! God would bless all the families of the earth through Jewish people. Gentiles were also to bless Israel (Gen 12:3).

Paul recognized the key role his own people would play in the drama of world redemption when he wrote to the Roman believers, *"From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable"* (Rom 11:28–29, emphasis added).

The Land of Promise

I understand that godly and sincere Christians might not see eye to eye about how to understand the covenant God made with Abraham. But according to a recent poll, 80 percent of evangelical Christians do believe God gave the land to Jewish people based upon Genesis 12:1–3.¹ If you are one of those

who do, then you are a biblical Zionist, one who believes God gave the land to Abraham and his descendants. God provided the boundaries of the land gifted to Abram so there would be no mistake regarding the parcel Abram and his descendants would inherit: *"From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates"* (Gen 15:18). The promise of the land and its boundaries were specific and even larger than those of the modern-day State of Israel.

The One who created the heavens and the earth is sovereign over the boundaries of nations and holds the hearts of the kings of nations in His powerful hand (Deuteronomy 32:8–9; Proverbs 21:1; Acts 17: 24–27). We should not think it odd at all for God to delineate the specific boundaries of Israel's territory when He first called Jewish people as His special nation.

The Promise of the Land Endures

God's promise of the land passed from Abraham to his son, Isaac:

Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. (Genesis 26:3, emphasis added)

God then made these same promises to Jacob, after He changed his name to Israel:

God also said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come forth from you. The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you." (Genesis 35:11–12, emphasis added)

In summary, God created and chose Jewish people to be a holy nation and a blessing to the nations. The greatest blessing from Jewish people came when the greatest Jewish person who ever lived, Jesus the Messiah, was born into this world. The story of His first coming was set within a Jewish context, and His second coming will be the same. The Jewish people and the land of the Saviour's birth will play a major role in His glorious return. In fact, He will return to Jerusalem when, and only when, Jewish people turn to Him as Saviour and Lord (Matthew 23:37–39; Zechariah 12:9–10).

Biblical Zionism

The hope of Zion and the promise of God to Jewish people of a land, a purpose, and a destiny is not a political philosophy, but a truth from the Word of God.

What, then, are the responsibilities of believers in Jesus?

First, we are called to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. In Psalm 122:6, the psalmist tells us to pray for God's peace to come to Jerusalem. Jerusalem also represents the whole nation of Israel, so please pray for all Israel and Jewish people worldwide. We need to pray for the Prince of Peace to return to His rightful throne in Jerusalem and reign over Jewish people and the nations with true righteousness.

I hope that every follower of Jesus will support Jewish people as Israel is home to more than half of the world's Jewish population. Supporting Israel, however, does not mean every Christian must agree with every decision made by the prime minister of Israel or the government of Israel. Rather, followers of Jesus should support the right of the State to exist and thrive, and ultimately be a place ready for Messiah's return. Overall, Christians should bless Jewish people in any way possible as instructed by God (Genesis 12:2-5).

Of course, one of the most obvious responsibilities Christians have toward Jewish people is to proclaim the good news of Jesus. Paul instructs Gentiles to make Jewish people jealous of the Jewish Messiah living in their hearts (Romans 11:11).

Finally, it is very important to bless Jewish people by standing against antisemitism. The line between anti-Zionism and antisemitism is being crossed regularly. We see this fact in the exponential rise in global antisemitism since October 7, which is no coincidence. Today, the political, ethical, moral, and spiritual issues intertwine in ways difficult to separate. Christians must show God's love for Israel and Jewish people by countering antisemitism on social media. There is also prejudice against Jewish people and Israelis on many college campuses; we should speak up against it at our alma maters and on campuses in our respective towns.

In light of the massacre of Israelis on October 7, 2023, it is very important for those who love the Lord to make a clear, unequivocal statement of love and support for Israel and Jewish people. Supporting modern Israel and caring about Palestinians are not mutually exclusive! A testimony of your love for Jewish people and the State of Israel will demonstrate God's love and faithful commitment to His Jewish people.

I hope you enjoy the rest of this urgent newsletter, and I encourage you to continue to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Your brother in the Messiah,



Dr. Mitch Glaser
International
Director

Endnotes

- 1 "Evangelical Attitudes Toward Israel Research Study: Evangelical Attitudes Towards Israel and the Peace Process," Lifeway Research, 2017, <https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Evangelical-Attitudes-Toward-Israel-Research-Study-Report.pdf>.

FIONA SORBALA REPORTS

CO-DIRECTOR CPM (UK)



Recently I have had the opportunity to spend time with some Jewish ladies supporting and encouraging them in their walk with the Lord. It is a deeply moving and humbling experience to bear witness to what the Lord is doing in their lives as he draws them closer to Himself. The Lord has used them to remind me that the Lord cares for everyone. We continue to hear from Jewish people about their anxiety over the rise in anti-Semitism here in the UK which has risen steeply since the 7th Oct. We invite you to join us in praying for Israel and the release of the hostages and to head over to our website to see our prayer topics and pray for our nation. The Lord has promised to bless or punish based on how people relate to the Jewish People.

Although of late we've seen a few members move on from the congregation, moving out of the area, we've also been encouraged by having some Jewish believers begin to attend our services. Ensuring that we are a safe space for Jewish people has been of paramount importance to the leadership of the congregation.

We are preparing for the Jewish holiday season, a season that reminds us of God's power to deliver His people from the yoke of oppression: Purim, the deliverance from Persia and Passover from Egypt. We are planning a joy-filled Purim celebration. With the traditional Purim *spiel* (play) and the traditional pastries. What Jewish festival is complete without symbolic foods?

Our Chosen People Ministries Bible study continues on Tuesday evenings, having begun a new series looking at the apostle Paul's letter to the Galatian churches and exploring the Jewish background to Paul's message. If you're not receiving an e-mail invite and would like to join, please contact the office and feel free to invite your friends.

In March I will be in South Carolina, America speaking in churches and presenting Messiah in the Passover in the run-up to Easter. Passover itself is very late this year, occurring the last week of April, which means if your church would like to experience a Messiah in the Passover presentation, during the Passover season and learn more about how this celebration of deliverance relates to the Christian celebration of Easter and Communion then please contact the office to arrange a speaker.



A History of Christian Zionism

With the terrorist attacks against the State of Israel on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent shocking manifestation of global antisemitism, it is now more important than ever for the church to have an accurate understanding of God's plan for Israel.

Although the topic of Israel is a major theme found throughout the Scriptures, it also generates a lot of confusion in the church today. The church has historically fluctuated between two positions when it comes to formulating a theology of Israel and the church. The first is *supersessionism*, which broadly believes the coming of Jesus spiritually fulfilled the covenantal promises to Israel through the church. This perspective not only removes any distinctive role for Israel as a national entity but also universalizes the specific land promises. As a result, according to proponents of supersessionism, the New Testament redefines the land promises as the whole world. In short, there is neither a specific role for Israel nor any particular land promises for the Jewish nation.

Historically, this viewpoint has resulted in varying levels of anti-Jewish behaviour and belief. While supersessionism does not necessarily lead to antisemitism, an analysis of historical antisemitism leads one to agree with theology professor Michael J. Vlach: "It is undeniable that anti-Jewish bias has often gone hand in hand with the supersessionist view."²

The other main perspective, *Christian Zionism*, opposes supersessionism. David Schmidt, a scholar of Middle East history, aptly summarizes its basic tenets:

*The return of the Jews to the Holy Land and the restoration of a physical Israel is in accordance with biblical prophecy. Furthermore, Christian Zionism is motivated by a biblically based religious conviction that the Jewish people are still God's Chosen people and are entitled to possess the land of Israel for all time.*³

Christian Zionism was confirmed for many Christians in 1948 when the modern State of Israel was reborn in her ancient homeland. However, it would be a mistake to conclude, as many critics do, Israel's rebirth was the cause of this belief, or Christian Zionism is simply a contemporary political ideology.

There have been Christians waiting for the return of Jewish people to the land of Israel long before 1948, and even before the secular Zionist movement of Theodor Herzl in the late nineteenth century. Herzlian Zionism, as represented in his book *The Jewish State* (1896), argues for a Jewish return to Zion as the only means to escape antisemitism. Christian Zionism, while similar to its secular counterpart in several ways, is primarily a biblical and theological conviction based upon a particular reading of the Scriptures. Although the term "Christian Zionist" first appeared in the late nineteenth century, those who affirmed a Jewish return to the land and a future role for Israel were referred to as "restorationists" before this time. According to Eugene H. Merrill, an Old Testament scholar, this group "pre-dated modern political Zionism, and when political

Zionism arose within the Jewish community in the late nineteenth century, many Christian restorationists gave it their enthusiastic support."⁴

Much of the discussion surrounding Zionism today is concerned with the political and legal questions dominating the conversation in the public sphere. However, those who affirm a biblical role for Jewish people base their arguments first upon the Bible, and then usually move to offering valid justifications for Israel's self-determination today.

The Biblical Roots of Christian Zionism

The beliefs of Christian Zionism are primarily rooted in the covenants and promises God made to Israel. These include the election of Israel as a nation (Deuteronomy 7:6; Psalm 135:4), and the promise of a land for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Psalm 105:9–11).

God also promised Israel global blessing through Abraham's seed (Genesis 12:3), and a future national redemption at the end of the age (Zechariah 12:10). Christian Zionists acknowledge the Bible speaks both of the nation going through times of dispersion from the land and the promise to be regathered back into the land (Ezekiel 36:24–26).

Not believing in the Messiah does not disqualify ethnic Israel from these covenantal promises, as the apostle Paul states, "*The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable*" (Romans 11:29). God is faithful to keep His promises to both individuals and nations. The nation in unbelief is still beloved for the sake of the fathers (Rom 11:28). Gentiles who partake of the spiritual blessings of these covenants should earnestly desire and pray for the salvation of Israel (Rom 10:1, 15:27).

These promises find their origin in the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, 15:18, and 17:1–5. The promises include both personal ones to Abraham and national ones to his descendants—who would become a great nation and receive the land of Canaan as an everlasting inheritance. The Abrahamic Covenant has been described as the "central theological rubric of the Old Testament"⁵ because it contains the roots of redemption to come through a land, a nation, and ultimately universal blessing through a person descended from this nation—the Messiah Jesus. These promises are confirmed and amplified by the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:12–16) and the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:27–33), as well as numerous statements found in the prophets. The New Testament never rescinds these promises and, contrary to supersessionist claims, neither does it reinterpret them.

Contemporary Christian Zionism

In Britain, Christian Zionism reached its peak in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Several factors coincided, leading to Christian Zionists having significant cultural and political influence during this century. These included the rise of Victorian evangelicalism and social

activism and the beginnings of Herzl's political Zionist movement. Many of these Christian Zionists in Britain at this time held title and influence among the political elite of their day. Ultimately, this support would lead to a decisive policy change by the British government in the Balfour Declaration (1917), which committed to providing a national home for Jewish people in Israel.

In the twentieth century, the mantle of Christian Zionism shifted to the United States. Many historians attribute this to the rise of dispensationalism, a view of biblical theology emphasizing the distinction between Israel and the church, and its influence in parts of North America through seminaries and Bible conferences. As dispensationalism spread quickly in the early twentieth century, it served as a unifying force for American evangelicalism. Dispensationalists had a keen interest in eschatological events and a firm belief in the continued election and importance of Israel.

In addition, Christian Zionism has spread rapidly around the world, particularly in South America and South Korea, so much so it has become quite a global phenomenon. With this popularity, there has also arisen a strong stream of Christian anti-Zionist sentiment among those holding to a supersessionist theology. This perspective advocates strongly for the pro-Palestinian narrative and rejects any Christian support of Israel as complicit in alleged Israeli oppression. A recent letter from some Palestinian Christians expressed their "horror" at the "unwavering" support many churches have toward Israel.⁶

Biblical Christian Zionism should not advocate for anything violating the teaching of the New Testament, which means there is a requirement to show genuine love and concern for the spiritual and physical well-being of Palestinians and all inhabitants of the Middle East. At the same time, Christians should denounce horrific acts of terrorism for what they are—evil.

Believing in the faithfulness of God to keep His promises to Israel does not require supporting every Israeli policy or denigrating Palestinians. Christian Zionists fully affirm God loves Jewish people, Arabs, and all inhabitants of the Middle East, and He sent His beloved Son, Jesus the Messiah, to provide a way for all people to be reconciled to God and to each other. Therefore, Christian Zionists will continue to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and for the gospel to go forth in the Middle East.



Thomas Fretwell is currently undertaking PhD research in a field related to Jewish-Christian studies. He is the founder and ministry director of The Ezra Foundation—working in Partnership with CPM (UK)—which exists to encourage and facilitate the serious study of the Word of God by producing resources promoting a biblical understanding of Israel in the plan of God. Thomas hosts the Theology & Apologetics podcast and serves as the senior pastor at Calvary Chapel Hastings. Please pray for his US tour, March 2–10, 2024, in Los Angeles, California.

WAR AND RISING ANTISEMITISM LEAD TO DEEP CONVERSATIONS

Conversations in Israel go deep very quickly these days. The war leaves people with many big life questions. One of our Israeli staff was talking to her neighbours Yossi* and Chaya.* As they spoke of the difficulties of the war and global antisemitism, the conversation turned to internal peace and hope in the midst of it all. They know about her faith and have had short conversations about Jesus before, but now they are more interested.

"So, it's not just that being a Jewish follower of Jesus is a religion, but it somehow affects your daily life?" they asked. Our missionary talked about having a relationship with God, praying, reading His Word, and knowing He is with us in a personal way. Then she spoke about forgiveness, redemption, and eternal life through Jesus our Messiah. They asked how our staff member came to believe this. After telling her testimony and reading Isaiah 53, they said it was really interesting. They seem open in a new way!

TURKISH MAN HEARS THE GOSPEL IN MUNICH, GERMANY

A couple of months ago, one of our staff in Germany was working part-time as a counsellor for a refugee centre in Munich. Her supervisor explained she could talk about her faith if clients would be open to it. When Kemal,* a young Turkish man, first came into the office, he was deeply troubled. "So, do you believe in God at all?" our staff member eventually asked him.

"Actually, I am so interested in Christianity! But I cannot find any information on it around here," Kemal responded. Imagine Kemal's surprise when he found out our staff member was a follower of Jesus and the wife of a congregational leader!

The very next day, Kemal was holding his first New Testament (*İncil* in Turkish) in his hands, which he finished reading the following week! "How can I thank you? You've changed my life!" Kemal exclaimed to our staff member.

Only the Jewish Messiah can turn the hearts of all nations to God and to each other! Proclaiming Jesus to Jewish and Gentile—at just the Right Time!

2 Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 5.

3 David W. Schmidt, *Partners Together in This Great Enterprise: The Role of Christian Zionism in the Foreign Policies of Britain and America in the 20th Century* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2011), xx.

4 The Faith and Order Commission, *God's Unfailing Word: Theological and Practical Perspectives on Christian-Jewish Relations* (London: Church House Publishing, 2019), 79.

5 Eugene H. Merrill, "Israel According to the Torah," in *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel: Israel and the Jewish People in the Plan of God*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2014), 34.

6 Heather Preston, "Palestinian Christians Urge Western Church to Repent of 'Appalling' Israeli Support," *Premier Christian News*, October 25, 2023, sec. World News, <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/palestinians-urge-western-christians-to-repent-of-appalling-israeli-support>.

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WE WELCOME THOMAS FRETWELL'S EXCELLENT CONTRIBUTION TO THIS NEWSLETTER AND ARE PLEASED TO OFFER YOU TWO OF HIS BOOKS ON THESE CRUCIAL TOPICS AS A RESOURCE.

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Why Israel? Understanding God's Plan for Israel & the Nations explores the topic of Israel through the lens of Scripture, bringing clarity to a controversial topic. Has the Church replaced Israel in the plan of God? Does ethnic Israel still have a future? What about Israel today? These questions and more will be answered by providing readers with an outline of a biblical theology of Israel. (93 pages)

Why the Jewish People? Understanding Replacement Theology & Antisemitism is an in-depth study of the origin and impact of replacement theology throughout the centuries to the present day. This book examines the disastrous consequences of replacement theology and its links to antisemitism. A concise and comprehensive examination of history and theology bringing clarity and understanding to this often-misunderstood topic. (112 pages)

Messiah in the Passover covers a full range of topics including the biblical foundations for the Passover and the Lord's Supper, the Passover throughout Jewish and Church history, as well as how Jewish people celebrate Passover today. The book provides all that is needed to conduct a Passover Seder in your home that glorifies the Messiah Jesus as the Lamb of God. Also included are crafts for the children, recipes so that you can make delicious Passover foods, and great detail on how to use the Passover as an evangelistic tool in reaching your Jewish friends. *The Gospel in the Passover* is a condensed version of *Messiah in the Passover* written for those who want to explore the traditions of the Passover and deepen their understanding of the links between Passover, the Last Supper, and Communion.

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A new trend of antisemitism is surfacing world-wide. With the result of the chilling reality found in this book, *They Have Conspired Against You: Responding to the New Anti-Semitism*, Jewish people are again the target of anti-semitism around the world. The hope of this book is that it will expose, educate and call many to action. This book is an excellent primer for those new to the history of anti-Semitism. In addition to providing historical context, it also contains material generated from Europe in recent years. Taken altogether, this is a thought-provoking study—written by Chosen People Ministries' staff member, Olivier Melnick—in a lively and readable style.

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The Chosen People UK Edition newsletter is published bimonthly by Chosen People Ministries (UK). To receive a copy or for more information call on 0208 455 7911, write to Chosen People Ministries (UK), PO Box 47871, Golders Green, LONDON, NW11 1AL, or email us at info@chosenpeople.org.uk. UK edits: Natalie Cooke. Design: Lois Ruedinger.

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