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# The Challenge of Being in the Minority: Palestinian Christian Theology in Light of Christian Zionism Post-1948

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THE CHALLENGE OF BEING IN THE MINORITY:  
PALESTINIAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY IN LIGHT OF  
CHRISTIAN ZIONISM POST-1948

by

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## INTRODUCTION

I am an Egyptian Arab Christian, who, like any other person growing up in the Arab world, has always been aware of the conflict between Arabs and Israel and recently between the East and West. After I became a pastor and started my studies in the Master's program at ETSC (Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo), I heard about Christian Zionism and was alarmed at the implications of its theology. As I studied this issue, I learned how other Arab Christians and especially the Palestinians were responding. At that time, I came in contact with Father Ateek's understanding of liberation theology in light of the Palestinian occupation. At the same time, one of my concerns is how some Arab Christians have disowned the Old Testament due to Christian Zionists' use and abuse of the texts in order to justify killing and oppression. The writings of Dr. George Sabra, a Lebanese theologian, have helped me to balance this view by formulating a theology that rejects Zionism grounded in a novel hermeneutic of the Old Testament.

My aim is to seek to help myself and my people in the Middle East to understand the Bible in a way that uplifts the narrative of liberation against oppression, while situating these narratives within the rich Middle Eastern cultural and social heritage. My hope for this thesis is to cover the historical and theological aspects on Christian Zionism so we can better understand the challenges presented to a Palestinian contextual theology. Therefore, I seek to investigate how a "Palestinian contextual theology" can address or respond to Christian Zionism. Toward this purpose, I analyze certain key features of

Biblical theology that are in tension with the Zionist interpretation, such as the theology of the Land, the extent of the Covenant, the continuity/discontinuity of biblical Israel and modern Israel, the notion of chosen people, and, in more general terms, how the Palestinian Christian reading of the Old Testament presents particular challenges not present in other contexts.

Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the Six Days War of 1967—when Israel occupied the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, Sinai, and the Golan Heights—the Christian Zionist movement has justified these actions as crystallizations of biblical prophecies. Palestinian Christians have attempted different ways of articulating a theology to address the new reality of the state of Israel since 1948 vis-a-vis the biblical Israel by developing a contextual theology claiming to be a bridge between the Christian faith and their long historical continuity in the land where they live and which now is under occupation. The scope and tenor of this theology, however, has been deeply determined by the type of challenges posited by Christian Zionism.

Christian Zionism is one of the greatest threats to the Palestinian Christians because this movement uses the Bible to support the State of Israel as an entity that is opposed to Palestinians and their rights, including Christians. My thesis, therefore, is that Christian Zionism is a dangerous theological tool directly serving imperialism which not only negates the identity and rights of Palestinian Christians but, in the end, is detrimental for the State of Israel. Christian Zionism follows the tradition implemented by the British Empire, therefore serving as an idol that is oblivious to the suffering of the Palestinian Christians. Nai'm Ateek, the founder of Sabeel, an organization that works for peace, interfaith, and ecumenical dialogue, talks about these problems in his various books and

articles, expressing the problem of dispensationalists not wanting Arabs to exist in the first place.

In order to support my thesis I trace the origins of (secular) Zionism and its relationship with a new hermeneutical strategy developed during the 19th century in England: dispensationalism. I show the connection of this hermeneutic with British imperial policies at the time, and how this same hermeneutical approach has been further developed on American soil during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to give rise to a new ideological strand, Christian Zionism, which has been a key factor in American imperial strategy in the Middle East. I investigate how Palestinian theology has confronted Christian Zionism, both critically and constructively, describing some of the most important theological themes, and I identify some of the issues that continue to be controversial.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE ROOTS OF ZIONISM, 1897-1948

In this chapter I review the origins of Zionism and its main thinkers for the purpose of viewing the marriage between the political movement and Dispensational Theology to better understand why major British and American politicians became interested in the State of Israel in relation to its role to fulfill Biblical prophecy.

#### **Origins of Zionism**

Zionism was an ideology and movement that was born as a result of many European ideologies, as well as European discrimination toward Jews, European used Jews as scapegoats. In France in 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer, was accused falsely of spying and was imprisoned for a long time. Theodore Herzl, the founder of Jewish Zionism, used the Dreyfus case as an example of how Jews were treated and raised the following question: If one Jew did something wrong in one European country, why has European society as whole concluded that all Jews are criminals.<sup>1</sup> Before the first Zionist congress of 1891 and until the Balfour Declaration of 1917, Europe was hit by many waves of new ideas as a result of the French Revolution. This was the result of the age of the Enlightenment, and led to democratization in Europe and to the working class becoming part of political life in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham J. Edelheit, *History of Zionism: A Handbook and Dictionary* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), 39.

<sup>2</sup> Eric. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (New York: Random House, 1987), 142.

A main principle of the French Revolution was emancipation of the working class and marginalized which helped to break down barriers between Jews and society so that Jews started to enter civil society. Jews at that time were divided between those who participated in the Gentile Society and those who rejected integration. The largest Jewish community existed in Eastern Europe, where they didn't face the pressure of assimilating like the Jews of Germany and Austria did. But by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Polish lands were divided between Austria, Prussia, and Russia, and the Jews there faced the same problems as Jews around all Europe.<sup>3</sup>

European nationalism grew in eastern and western Europe from 1880-1914. As a result, many European countries were formed based on common backgrounds like ethnicity, language, religion, and territory. For example, in 1890, Wales became a small nation under the leadership of David Lloyd George, one of the signers of the Balfour Declaration of 1917. In 1893 the Irish started their own national movement, and in 1895 the Basque national party was formed in Spain. Scattered across these new European nations were Jews, who felt like a nation without a state or territory. And Theodore Herzl launched the Zionist movement in 1895 to address the Jewish problem in Europe by promoting the idea of finding a homeland for Jews.<sup>4</sup>

The original Zionist movement was essentially a revolutionary-ideological national movement. Zionism started as secular nationalism, in line with the rest of Europe, and not as religious nationalism, which would later develop. Many countries in Europe played important roles in helping the Zionist agenda. For example, Russia was one of the most important supporters of this new movement because they favored Jews

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<sup>3</sup> David Vital, *The Origins of Zionism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 24.

<sup>4</sup> Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, 145-146.

leaving Russia.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, the British government was very sympathetic to the Zionist movement and their project to return to Palestine because the Palestine territory was a problem for the security of the British Empire. Theodor Herzl's movement offered a solution through the Zionist request to find a national home.

#### Theodor Herzl (1860-1904)

We cannot talk about Christian Zionism without understanding some of the major events and leaders in the secular Zionist movement, because the two movements were sometimes connected historically and theologically. Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), the most important leader of Zionism, was born in Budapest, Hungary, an Austro-Hungarian Jew. He lived his childhood in Vienna and was educated in law, but he devoted himself almost exclusively to journalism and literature and became a writer for the Viennese theater, furnishing comedies and drama.<sup>6</sup>

In 1897, Herzl planned and was elected president of the first Zionist Congress, which was held in Basel, Switzerland. After his election, he began a series of diplomatic interviews with the German emperor in 1898. In 1901, Herzl was received for the first time by the Sultan of Turkey. In this meeting, the Sultan refused to give Palestine to the Zionists and said, "I prefer being penetrated by iron to seeing Palestine lost."<sup>7</sup> Herzl convened six Zionist Congresses between 1897 and 1902. Through these Congresses, Herzl established the Jewish National Fund and a movement newspaper, using these as tools for Zionist activism.

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<sup>5</sup> Vital, *The Origins of Zionism*, 70.

<sup>6</sup> David Ben-Gurion, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Theodor Herzl," accessed August 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Theodor-Herzl>.

<sup>7</sup>Gurion, "Theodor Herzl."

Herzl, the journalist, became the founder of modern political Zionism, but he wasn't the first one to develop the idea of a Jewish restoration to Palestine. Still, he went farther than all those before him. His plans and strategy were set forth in his very important book, *Der Judenstaat*, (*The Jewish State*), published in 1896. In this book, he told the world that there would be no solution to the Jewish problem in Europe until a Jewish state was restored: further, he recommended two possible homelands for Jews: Argentina or Palestine. Later, through his visits to the British Government, Jews were offered a region in Uganda, East Africa. At the sixth Zionist Congress (1903), Herzl accepted the Uganda Program as a temporary refuge for Jews who were suffering in Russia. However, at the same time he insisted on Palestine, saying, "The name of Palestine is very attractive for our people."<sup>8</sup> To popularize his view, Herzl used religious phrases like "Chosen People" and "Restoration to the Promise Land" and "Next Year in Jerusalem,"<sup>9</sup> even though most Zionist leaders weren't religious. At the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905, the Uganda program was finally rejected. Herzl died one year before this Congress, in 1904.<sup>10</sup>

Herzl realized that Jews were struggling all over Europe and discerned that the reason was not because of Western or Eastern Europe, or because of democratic or autocratic rule, nor because of enlightened or unenlightened community: he thought that race was the main problem and the solution would be to find a place where all European Jews could have a national homeland. Herzl saw the need for a Jewish state to save the Jewish communities from the aggression they experienced in Christian nations. When

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Prior, الكتاب المقدس والاستعمار (The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique) (Cairo: El Shorouk International, 2006), 142.

<sup>9</sup>Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, 139.

<sup>10</sup>Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, 143.

Herzl published *The Jewish State*, which focused on the restoration of Israel and the ingathering of the exiles as a humanitarian approach, the majority of religious Jews rejected him and his ideas.

Herzl, in the beginning of his movement, was a European secular thinker and dreamed of a Jewish homeland regardless of whether it would be in Palestine or Argentina.<sup>11</sup> However, later Herzl was influenced by Hechler's theology, which combines political Zionism with Christian theology. Therefore, it is very important to understand why Hechler is so essential for the Zionism movement and for Christian Zionism as well.

#### William I. Hechler (1845-1936), the First Christian Zionist in Britain

William Henry Hechler was the bridge between secular Jewish Zionism and Christian dispensational theology, as he linked politics with theology regarding the Jewish Problem.” Hechler was born on 1 October, 1845, in Benares, India. His missionary father, Dietrich, was ordained in the Church of England. After marrying Catherine Palmer, they went to India as missionaries. Hechler's mother died there, and when his father also became very sick, the family returned to England. William Hechler was raised in an English orphanage. Later, he became an Anglican priest and a chaplain to the British Embassy in Vienna.

Hechler was highly excited by Herzl's book, and arranged to meet him.<sup>12</sup> On 10 March, 1896, Herzl wrote these words about Hechler in his diary:

The Rev William H. Hechler, chaplain to the British Embassy in Vienna, called on me. A likable, sensitive man with the long grey beard of a prophet, he waxed enthusiastic over my solution. He, too, regards my movement as a “prophetic

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<sup>11</sup> Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, 147.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Charles Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism, 1891-1948*, (Routledge: U.K., 1998), 11.

crisis”—one he foretold two years ago. For he had calculated in accordance with a prophecy dating from Omar’s reign (637-638) that after 42 prophetic months, that is, 1,260 years, Palestine would be restored to the Jews. This would make it 1897-1898.

When he read my book, [*Der Judenstaat, (The Jewish State)*], he immediately hurried to Ambassador Monson and told him: “The for-ordained movement is here!” He wants to place my movement to be a “Biblical” one, even though I proceed rationally in all points. He wants to tract the hands of some German princes... [H]e knows the German Kaiser and thinks he can get me an audience.<sup>13</sup>

Herzl wrote *The Jewish State* in 1895, while William Hechler wrote *The Restoration of the Jews to Palestine according to Prophecy* in 1893.<sup>14</sup> Hechler became a supporter of Zionism and encouraged Herzl to think and believe that Christians could play a very important role in accomplishing his agenda. Indeed, this is what happened. When Hechler talked with politicians, he would explain about the suffering of the Jews and talk about the need to try to help fulfill God’s promise for a Jewish restoration in Palestine.

Hechler was instrumental in casting the land of Palestine as the “Promised Land” solution to the problem of wide-spread anti-Semitic sentiments. It was the relationship between Herzl and Hechler that created Zionism: Herzl’s secular and scientific touch, and Hechler’s spiritual grace. Hechler lived 30 years after Herzl’s death, and continued to be a faithful advocate of his ideas. Hechler wasn’t just a Christian minister who believed in dispensational theology; he also had access to many rulers and politicians who were the decision makers.

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen Sizer, الصهيونيون المسيحيون والطريق إلى هرمجدون (Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?), (Beirut: Arab Group for Christian-Muslim Dialogue, 2004), 36.

<sup>14</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 35.

### Henri Dunant (1828-1910)

The term “Christian Zionism” first appears to have been used by Theodor Herzl to describe the ideas of Henri Dunant, who was born on May 8, 1828, born Jean-Henri Dunant.<sup>15</sup> He was a Swiss humanitarian, the founder of the Red Cross (which has since become the Red Cross and Red Crescent), and the founder of the World’s Young Men’s Christian Association. He shared the first Nobel Prize of Peace with Frederic Passy in 1901, which was awarded for his work in promoting interest in improving the treatment of prisoners of war, the ending of slavery, and the creation of international adjudication. As a humanitarian, he also worked for the establishment of a Jewish homeland and founded the Palestine Colonization Society in London in 1875. At the first Zionism Congress, Herzl praised Dunant, calling him “The first Christian Zionist from the Gentiles.”<sup>16</sup> We can see through Dunant the early support of some Christian humanitarians who were inspired by concern for human rights and not dispensation theology.

### **British Theological and Political Roles**

Between the first Zionist Congress in 1897 and the Balfour Declaration in 1917, the British Empire was the only hope for the Zionist agenda. Many in Britain were interested in Jews returning to the Promised Land because theologians like Edward Irving and John Darby promoted dispensational theology, while British politicians like Shaftesbury, Arthur Balfour, and David Lloyd George were important figures in the Balfour Declaration of 1917. It is very important to be aware of the theology and politics

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 19.

<sup>16</sup>Editors, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Jean-Henri Dunant,” accessed August 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henri-Dunant>.

that were behind the creation of the Balfour Declaration, including the following important persons and events.

#### Edward Irving (1792-1834)

Edward Irving was a Scottish clergyman who had entered the University of Edinburgh at the age of thirteen and graduated with an M.A. in 1809. In 1822, he accepted a call to pastor the large Chalcedonian Chapel in London, with over 1,000 members. He also became famous as the cofounder of The Society for the Investigation of Prophecy.<sup>17</sup> In this role, he taught two main ideas: first, that Christ would return; and second, that there would be a secret rapture before the rise of the anti-Christ. This view wasn't Irving's, but one that he had taken from "a young Scottish girl named Margaret MacDonald who first saw it during an ecstatic revelation."<sup>18</sup> We also know that Irving followed the writings of Lacunza, a Spanish ex-Jesuit who had directed him to Millenarianism, and that Irving had joined the Albury Circle, which stressed the signs of Christ's Second Coming.<sup>19</sup> Although these teachings weren't original to him, it was Irving who popularized these views, thus becoming an important pillar of dispensational theology. From this we can deduce that Darby, who is known as the father of Dispensationalism, received his ideas of Pre-tribulation rapture from Edward Irving.

#### John Nelson Darby (1808-1882)

John Nelson Darby was an Anglo-Irish clergyman who was involved in some of the first meetings of what became the Plymouth Brethren. He was the founder of their

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<sup>17</sup> E. E. Beauregard, "Irving, Edward," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 660.

<sup>18</sup> Steve Wohlberg, *End Time Delusions: The Rapture, the Antichrist, Israel, and the End of the World* (Destiny Image, Inc., 2005), 127.

<sup>19</sup> Beauregard, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 660.

doctrine of “Dispensationalist Premillennialism,” and for this reason he is considered to be the father of modern dispensationalism. Darby was educated at Westminster School and Trinity College in Dublin, and he was ordained as an Anglican clergyman in Ireland. In 1828, he organized a group of Christians in Dublin to study the Bible and to meet for prayer and a weekly communion service. In 1838, Darby left for Switzerland and France to spread his ideas, and formed Plymouth Brethren congregations on the continent. He did not return to England until 1845. His return split the Plymouth Brethren in England in two. The first group was known as the Darbyites, or Exclusive Brethren, and the second as the Bethesda or Open Brethren.<sup>20</sup> Darby also visited Germany, Canada and the United States six times from 1859-1874, preaching in all major cities, and also sent his missionaries to Palestine.<sup>21</sup>

Darby defended his literalist dispensational hermeneutics on two grounds. First he claimed others had not studied the scriptures correctly:

The covenant is a word common in the language of a large class of Christian Professors...but in its development and detail, as to its unfolded principles, much obscurity appears to me to have arisen from a want of simple attention to Scripture.<sup>22</sup>

Second, Darby insisted that his own interpretation, (over against those who believed there was no millennium), was correct because the Lord had revealed it to him by special revelation.

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<sup>20</sup> W. J. Whalen, “Darby, John Nelson,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 647.

<sup>21</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 61.

## Dispensationalism

The doctrines of dispensationalism are based on the King James Version of 2 Timothy 2:15, where Paul calls upon Timothy to “be a workman...rightly dividing the word of truth.” Dispensationalism seeks to address what many see as opposing theologies between the Old and New Testament. The name itself came from the way these scholars divide biblical history according to a series of “Biblical dispensations.”

### The Seven Dispensations:

- 1 Innocence (Gen 1:1-3:7): before Adam’s fall.
- 2 Conscience (Gen 3:8-8:22): from Adam to Noah.
- 3 Government (Gen 9:1-11:32): Noah to Abraham
- 4 Patriarchal Rule (Gen 12:1-Exod 19:25): Abraham to Moses
- 5 Mosaic Law (Exod 20:1-Acts 2:4): Moses to Christ’s Ascension
- 6 Grace (Acts 2:4-Rev 20:3): the current church
- 7 Millennial Kingdom (Rev 20:4-6), a literal earthly 1,000 year reign that will soon come.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, they teach that there are five dividing ages:

- 1 The age of the Gentile Nations (Gen 1-11): from Adam to Abraham’s call.
- 2 The age of Israel (Gen 12-Acts 1): from Abraham’s call to Pentecost in Acts 2.
- 3 The age of the Church (Acts 2-Rev 2): from Pentecost to the end of the age of the church.
- 4 The age of Missions (Rev 6-9): during a future seven-year Tribulation of Israel
- 5 The age of the Millennial Kingdom (Rev 20:4-6): a literal earthly kingdom for 1,000 years. This age will start with the temple being re-built and animal sacrifices and other Old Testament rituals re-instituted.

One of the most important theological concepts in Dispensationalism is the doctrine of progressive revelation. Dispensationalists also teach that there are two covenants, Law and Grace, and two peoples, Israel and the Church. Furthermore, Christian Zionism believes that God has never abandoned Israel, and that God works through two agents on earth, the Church and Israel. They also interpret many biblical

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<sup>23</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 63, 65.

references to Israel as predictions of the modern State of Israel, which was established in 1948. According to their understanding, God will complete his end-time plans through Israel, and the nationhood of Israel is a precondition of Christ's return. Thus, the modern State of Israel must be defended by every means possible. This leads to unquestioning support on theoretically biblical grounds of everything the modern Israeli government wants or attempts.

In this growing movement, we see the progression from theory to application; from theological thought to political action. In the first part, we looked at the important theologians who established Dispensationalism as a legitimate method of interpreting the Bible literally. This school of thought spread and became popular in many churches. Many children were taught the stories of the Bible from this perspective and after they matured, continued to assume that this was THE only biblical view. Thus, in many countries and through many generations, there have been Christian politicians and men and women working in very sensitive and responsible positions who have made decisions affecting not just groups of people, but whole nations, and perhaps the whole world.

Next, we need to focus on those politicians who played major roles in the Zionist movements which fought for the establishment of the State of Israel.

#### Shaftesbury (1801-1885)

Anthony Ashley Cooper, seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, was born on April 28, 1801, into an aristocratic family. He was educated at Harrow and Christ Church, Oxford, and

later entered Parliament in 1826. He succeeded his father as Earl in 1851, took an interest in foreign missions, and was president of several religious societies in London.<sup>24</sup>

He based his life on a literal acceptance of the Bible. He always called the Jews “God’s ancient people” and he worked hard to restore the Jews to Palestine according to prophetic Scripture. Lord Shaftesbury never had a shadow of a doubt that the Jews were to return to their own land, and he persuaded Lord Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary, to take active steps to bring the Jews to Palestine.<sup>25</sup> Lord Shaftesbury became president of the Palestine Exploration Fund. He declared in his opening address:

Let us not delay to send out the best agents...to search the length and breadth of Palestine, to survey the land, and if possible to go over every corner of it, drain it, measure it, and if you will, prepare it for the return of its ancient possessors, for I believe that the time cannot be far off before that great event will come to pass.<sup>26</sup>

It was Shaftesbury who said, “a people with no country for a country with no people.” In 1839, he published an article titled “The State and the Restoration of Jews” where he argued, “The Jews must be encouraged to return to Palestine in yet greater numbers and become once more the husbandman of the Judea and Galilee.”<sup>27</sup> Writing 57 years before the Zionist thinkers Max Nordau, Israel Zangwill, and Theodor Herzl, his views gained acceptance among British journalists, clergy and politicians.

Shaftesbury was a Christian Zionist, and like Hechler, he encouraged the government of his Christian state to bring about the Jewish State of Israel. He was persuaded that this Jewish Restoration would have a good result for all, including the Ottoman Empire.

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<sup>24</sup>Haley, K.H.D., *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Anthony Ashley Cooper,” accessed August 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anthony-Ashley-Cooper-1st-earl-of-Shaftesbury>.

<sup>25</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 57.

<sup>26</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 59.

<sup>27</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 63,65.

We can also see how Shaftesbury was a staunch Christian Zionist through his words about the man who worked as Vice-Consul at Jerusalem. Shaftesbury took note of Vice-Consul Young's departure for the Holy Land, writing,

Took leave this mourning of Young, who has just been appointed her Majesty's Vice-Consul at Jerusalem! What a wonderful event it is! The ancient city of the people of God is about to resume its place among the nations, and England is the first of the Gentile kingdoms that ceases to tread her down.<sup>28</sup>

Arthur Balfour (1848-1930)

Arthur Balfour was born in Whittingehame, England, and was the eldest son of James Maitland Balfour. His father was a Member of Parliament. Arthur was educated in Trinity College, Cambridge (1866-1869). In 1874, he was elected Conservative Member of Parliament until 1885, and in the spring of 1878 became private secretary to his uncle Lord Salisbury. Balfour divided his time between the political arena and the academy. In 1886, he became Secretary for Scotland, and was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1902 until 1905.

Balfour had been raised in a strong Christian home. His love for the Jews originated in the training in the Old Testament that he received from his mother. He wrote a book on Christian philosophy and theology, and his interest in Jewish restoration "was biblical rather than imperial."<sup>29</sup>

Lord Arthur Balfour had regular meetings with Chaim Weitzmann, a Jewish professor of chemistry at Manchester University, and with David Lloyd George, the Prime Minister of Britain. Christian Zionists consider that he was an instrument for

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<sup>28</sup> Merkley, *Politics of Christian Zionism*, 41.

<sup>29</sup> Merkley, *Politics of Christian Zionism*, 41.

carrying out “the Divine Purpose” for the important role he played in history. When he was the Foreign Secretary, he authored the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which was the main pillar for the establishment of a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine.

In this Declaration, we can see the development within Christian Zionism from only believing in something, to doing something. There were many people before Balfour who believed in Jewish restoration, but for them, it was just a hope. Balfour went further, by making this hope real and turning theory into reality.

### The Balfour Declaration of 1917

The high point of the British role was to create the Jewish state through the restoration of the Jews to Palestine. This declaration was issued in November 2, 1917, and was addressed to Lord Rothschild as follows:

His Majesty’s Government views with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and we will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of the object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.<sup>30</sup>

The British government, under David Lloyd George, issued the Balfour Declaration, which gave the support of his government for the “establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”<sup>31</sup> The militant Zionists did not like the phrase “a national home” because they wanted “a national state.” However, they used the status of “national home” as a first step that would later force the American and European Jews to demand statehood. The Palestinians and Arab nations rejected the declaration

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<sup>30</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism* (Arabic), 38.

<sup>31</sup> Blanche E. C. Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour: First Earl of Balfour, 1848- 1906* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1937), 324.

altogether. Balfour, as a traditional, imperial colonialist, thought it was his divine right to control the fate of other peoples and lands. Many decades later, Margaret Thatcher had this to say about such politics: “British foreign policy is at its worst when it is engaged in giving away other people’s territory.”<sup>32</sup> We must note, however, that the Balfour Declaration was the result of other strategic and military reasons of the past of the British Empire. However, in this thesis we are focusing on its relationship to the development of Christian Zionism.

#### David Lloyd George 1863-1945:

David Lloyd George, who led his country to victory in World War I, was born in Manchester in 1863. His father died about two years after his birth, leaving the family in poor circumstances.<sup>33</sup> He was British prime minister (1916-1922) when the Balfour Declaration was issued, and he and Balfour were life-long friends. Unlike Balfour, George had mixed feeling about Jews. Occasionally he would make remarks, such as “There were a good many Jews they could well spare,” while other times he would show sensitivity to what he called the “Jewish mystique.” He admitted once that growing up in Wales he had learned more about the history of the Jews in Old Testament readings than he had learned about his own people. He loved those stories, including the prophecies about restoring the Jews to the Holy Land. He also related to Jews because, he said, he, too, belonged to a small nation (Wales).

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<sup>32</sup> Farid Hourani, *Olinda’s Dream: Palestine & Lebanon Remembered*, (Philadelphia: Xlibirs Corporation, 2001), 183.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Norman William Blake and Baron Blake, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “David Lloyd George,” Accessed August 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/David-Lloyd-George>.

Eventually, George came to be very similar to Shaftesbury in his thinking about the Jewish issue. He called himself a Zionist, and once said that he was converted to Zionism because of Chaim Weizmann: “Acetone converted me to Zionism.”<sup>34</sup> He said this because Weizmann invented artificial acetone which, among other things, is the chief ingredient in gunpowder, and helped the British government to mass produce gunpowder for WWI.

The bottom line for British politicians was not just sympathy with people based on religious ideas, but also because Jews in Palestine would be the safeguard for the British Empire in its struggle with the Ottoman Empire. They were concerned about the security of the Empire in the Middle East and the interest became bigger since oil was discovered in that region. All Europeans believed there was no future for any civilization without energy, and a great source of energy supplies in fossil fuels are in this region. Jews in Palestine could therefore solve the Jewish problem in Europe and also save the future of the British Empire in the region.

### **American Theological and Political Roles**

America took on a new role in the broader world and the Middle East after the collapse of British power in the Middle East and British decolonization after World War II. Before World War I and II, America was present in the Middle East mainly through missionaries and merchants, but after World War I they started to be involved in Europe. Americans started to exercise domination in the Middle East after World War II, when European empires were weakening. Once oil was discovered in 1920, the Americans became more interested in Middle East and started multinational oil companies. The

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<sup>34</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism* (Arabic), 37.

American economy grew quickly after the War and relied on Middle Eastern oil. The main interest for American policy in the Middle East has become very visible and clear since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and the relationship between American Christians and Zionism is essential to understanding modern American policies.

The main connection between the Americans and the Zionists is that they both were settlers. The American newspaper *The New York Times*, described the Zionist “Pioneers” as a modern-day version of America’s “brave and religiously pious settlers.” On June 11, 1922 it stated,

These immigrants to Palestine are indeed the Jewish Puritans, they are building the new Judea even as the Puritans built New England, and like the followers of Daniel Boone who opened the West for American settlers while facing the dangers of Indian warfare, in the process the Jews are bringing prosperity and happiness in Palestine.<sup>35</sup>

William Blackstone (1841-1935)

William Eugene Blackstone was John Nelson Darby’s disciple, an influential evangelist, financier and benefactor. He wrote a book in 1887, *Jesus is Coming*, which was translated to 36 languages by 1927, in which he insisted that the Jews have the right to Palestinian land based of prophecies in the Bible.<sup>36</sup>

In 1890, he headed the first conference between Jews and Christians in Chicago, entitled “The Past, Present and Future of Israel.” In this conference, Reform rabbis in Chicago declared that they had no desire to return to Palestine. This was a very big surprise to Blackstone. Rabbi Emil Hirsh said “We modern Jews do not wish to be

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<sup>35</sup> Lawrence Davidson, “*Christian Zionism and American Foreign Policy: Paving the Road to Hell in Palestine.*” Logosjournal, winter 2005, accessed March 2016  
[http://www.logosjournal.com/issue\\_4.1/davidson.htm](http://www.logosjournal.com/issue_4.1/davidson.htm).

<sup>36</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 70.

restored to Palestine...the country wherein we live is our Palestine...we will not go back to form a nationality of our own.”<sup>37</sup>

In March of 1891, Sizer says Blackstone “presented a petition to U.S. President Benjamin Harrison calling for reinstatement of the Jews to Palestine. Among the signatories were Cardinal Gibbons, John D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan and more than 413 other leading Americans.”<sup>38</sup> The petition did not cause the American government to take any action; however, the petition became famous as the Blackstone Memorial:

Why not give Palestine back to them [the Jews] again? According to God’s distribution of nations, it is their home, an inalienable possession from which they were expelled by force. Under their cultivation, it was a remarkably fruitful land, sustaining millions of Israelites, who industriously tilled its hillsides and valleys. They were agriculturalists and producers as well as a nation of great commercial importance—the centre of civilization and religion. Why shall not the powers which under the treaty of Berlin, in 1878, gave Bulgaria to Bulgarians and Serbia to the Serbians now give Palestine back to Jews?<sup>39</sup>

Blackstone was publicly honored at a large Zionist meeting held in Los Angeles on 27 January, 1918. During this event, he delivered an extraordinary testimony and called for their repentance and conversion. Describing the source of his Zionist conviction, he told them,

I am, and for over thirty years have been, an ardent advocate of Zionism. This is because I believe that true Zionism is founded on the plan, purpose, and fiat of the everlasting and omnipotent God, as prophetically recorded in His Holy Word, the Bible.

[There are] only three courses open to every Jew...The first is to become a true Christian, accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, which brings not only forgiveness and regeneration, but ensures escape from the unequalled time of tribulation which is coming upon all the earth.

Second—become a true Zionist and thus hold fast to the ancient hopes of the fathers, and the assured deliverance of Israel, through the coming of their

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<sup>37</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 72.

<sup>38</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 72.

<sup>39</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 73.

Messiah, and complete national restoration and permanent settlement in the land which God has given them. It is true that this leads through unequaled sorrows, as prophesied notably by Jeremiah.

[Third—there is the way of] the assimilation. They are the Jews who will be not either Christians or Zionists. They wish to remain in the various nations enjoying their social, political, and commercial advantages.

Oh, my Jewish friends, which of these paths shall be yours? God says that you are dear unto Him. He has put an overwhelming love in my heart for you all, and therefore I have spoken thus plainly. Study this wonderful Word of God...and see how plainly God Himself has revealed Israel's pathway unto the perfect day.<sup>40</sup>

By this speech, it is very clear that Blackstone was using a dispensational understanding of the Bible. Even if you didn't know about Blackstone as a person or a theologian, just reading this speech would demonstrate that he was a major Christian Zionist in America.

#### Cyrus Scofield (1843-1921)

Cyrus Ingerson Scofield was born in Lenawee County, Michigan. He was an American theologian, minister and writer. In 1883, Schofield was ordained as a Congregationalist minister and in 1888 he authored the pamphlet *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*.<sup>41</sup> He became the premiere leader in dispensational premillennialism when his *Scofield Reference Bible* was published in 1918 by Oxford University Press.<sup>42</sup> It quickly became the most influential statement of dispensational premillennialism.

Scofield, like Darby, believed that between creation and the final judgment there were seven distinct eras of God's dispensations. Scofield was a very conservative Protestant. He prepared an edition of the King James Version of the Bible in which he

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<sup>40</sup> Merkley, *Politics of Christian Zionism*, 61.

<sup>41</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism* (Arabic), 45.

applied Darby's eschatology. This version provided an outline of premillennial dispensationalism, and his extensive footnotes, among other things, emphasized the present and future role of Israel in world history.<sup>43</sup>

Through the Scofield Bible, premillennialism became influential among fundamentalist Christians in the United States. Grace Halsell writes:

Scofield said that Christ cannot return to earth until certain events occur: the Jews must return to Palestine, gain control of Jerusalem and rebuild a temple, and then we all must engage in the final, great battle called Armageddon. Estimates vary, but most students of Armageddon theology agree that as a result of these relatively recent interpretations of biblical scripture, 10 to 40 million Americans believe Palestine is God's chosen land for the Jews.<sup>44</sup>

The Scofield Bible became the most popular reference Bible in the U.S. and thus affected all life with its dispensationalist views. With this historical foundation of teaching and political action, a new generation of Christian Americans have been working in political ways to achieve their mission and their world view.

#### Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924)

Thomas Woodrow Wilson was born in Staunton, Virginia, as the third of four children, to Reverend Dr. Joseph Ruggles Wilson. His father defended slavery and set up a Sunday school for slaves, and was also one of the founders of the Southern Presbyterian Church, PCUS, after the split from the Northern Presbyterians in 1861. Wilson lived in the South Carolina State capital city where his father was professor at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Scofield notes from Zechariah, 971-975, and Revelation 19, 372-374, Scofield, 1969 ed.

<sup>44</sup> Halsell, Grace, "Special Report: Israeli Extremists and Christian Fundamentalists: The Alliance," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, December 1988, accessed March 2016, <http://www.wrmea.com/backissues/1288/8812031.htm>.

<sup>45</sup> David Henry Burton, *Taft, Wilson, and World Order.* (Fairleigh Dickson: Univ Press, 2003), 48.

Wilson himself was a devout Presbyterian and a leading intellectual of the Progressive era. He served as president of Princeton University, and then became the reform governor of New Jersey in 1910. He was elected President as a Democrat in 1912 and was the 28th President of the United States.<sup>46</sup>

Wilson gave his support for the Balfour Declaration in 1917, and in 1922 Congress passed a decision affirming support for “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”<sup>47</sup> Wilson gave his agreement, but did so confidentially, gaining domestic points by his neutrality, and balancing the strategic costs as much as possible. This uncomfortable compromise was a precedent of much American behavior still to come on this issue.

Wilson was very concerned for human rights, so it is unlikely that he was biased toward the Jews. Likewise, he was very hesitant to give a response to the British request for American support. Thus, Wilson’s decision to support a national home for the Jewish people was only a political move. Thus, he was not a Christian Zionist theologically or politically.

Louis Dembitz Brandeis was an American litigator of the Supreme Court Justice. He helped lead the American Zionist movement, and from 1914 to 1918 was the leader of the American Zionists. He brought his influence into the Wilson administration to bear in the negotiation leading up to the Balfour Declaration. On September 3, 1917, President Wilson was asked by the British government for his opinion about the suitability of issuing a declaration of kindness with the Zionist movement. He replied that the time was

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<sup>46</sup> Cathal J. Nohlan, *“Ethics and Statecraft: the Moral Dimension of International Affairs.”* (Praeger/Greenwood, 2004), 121.

<sup>47</sup> Vaughan P. Shannon, *Balancing Act: US Foreign Policy and the Arab-Israel Conflict*, (London: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2003), 33.

not mature. One month later, on October 6, 1917, he was asked again. This time, the President fully agreed that the British should issue such a declaration. Brandeis spoke to Wilson some time during the month between the two British requests, and was probably responsible for the President's change in attitude.<sup>48</sup>

### Harry Truman (1884-1972)

“This is the man who helped create the State of Israel”<sup>49</sup>

Harry S. Truman was the thirty-third President of the United States (1945-1953). During his term, there was a strong Jewish lobby pressing President Truman to recognize the necessity for a state of Israel:

[on] 12 May it had seemed obvious that Truman would have to choose between honoring his [earlier] pledge to the Jews (given through Chaim Weizmann) or losing his Secretary of State [George Marshall], with all the awful consequences that would follow. Marshall conveyed to the President his assurance that he would make public opposition to his decision.

In the years of retirement Truman frequently insisted that the most infuriating moments of his presidency were those when he had to fight off the persistence of Zionists. Those people spoke to him as if their cause was the only cause in the world. And as those suffering gave the right to speak to him as though the office of the president of the United States meant nothing to them. No other visitors ever pounded on his desk!<sup>50</sup>

In November 1953, a few months after leaving the presidency of the United States, Truman visited the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and there he identified himself as Cyrus: “I am Cyrus. I am Cyrus.”<sup>51</sup> By this name, we can be sure

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<sup>48</sup>Richard Ned Lebow, “Woodrow Wilson and the Balfour Declaration,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec. 1968), 501-523.

<sup>49</sup>Paul Charles Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel: The Heirs of Cyrus* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 1.

<sup>50</sup>Merkley, *Politics of Christian Zionism*, 9.

<sup>51</sup>Merkley, *American Presidents*, 2

that his help for Israel was a result of his biblical faith; and that he had been taught in Sunday school about the restoration of the Jews to Israel. Historically, Cyrus “the great” was the Persian king who overthrew the Babylonian Empire and who later encouraged the Jews, who had been held captive in Babylon for seventy years, to return to Jerusalem.

Thus, everyone who can play good role to help the State of Israel can be the New Cyrus! Christian Zionists believe that it was God that moved Arthur Lord Balfour to propose the Balfour Declaration and Woodrow Wilson to sign it. Christian Dispensationalism served as an ideological framework to serve the needs of the Jewish people and the political needs of the West.

CHAPTER TWO  
THE PERSPECTIVE OF AMERICAN CHRISTIAN ZIONISM ON ISRAEL AND THE  
PALESTINIAN CONFLICT (1948-1967): FROM THE SIX-DAY WAR TO THE  
PRESENT

The Arab world and Arab Christians started to be aware of western or American Evangelical Christian Zionism after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. I became interested in this movement when I realized my Presbyterian denomination in Egypt was putting the focus on word *Presbyterian* and not *Evangelical*. After the attacks on September 11, 2001, the word “evangelical” in the Muslim world became defined as those who hate Muslims and Islam. Most Protestant churches in the Middle East used the word “evangelical” as part of their title because this was not a problem before. Now we are living in a world post-September 11, 2001, where we need better and more clearly to define ourselves as Arab Christians. Our challenge as Presbyterians or Christians in Egypt is not as bad as those who live under occupation, like the Palestinian Christians in Palestine. In this chapter, I will focus on how some American Evangelical leaders understood the Six-Day War (1967) and how this event fit into their theological and political agenda.

I will also show how the American Evangelical Christian Zionist perspective dealt with dispensational theology, and how it is related to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the capture of Jerusalem, and the West Bank in 1967. The Israeli army having significant success against Arab neighbors was seen as a significant fulfillment of biblical

prophecy by Christian Zionists, and we can see the relationship between the theological interpretation and the political action. After the occupation of Jerusalem and the West Bank in 1967, Scofield Bible released a new edition. The Scofield Bible was originally published in the same year as the Balfour Declaration of 1917.

### **American Christian Zionism**

The 1967 Six-Day War manifested a significant defining moment for evangelical Christian interests in Israel and Zionism. In the Six-Day War, most Christian Zionist dreams became true because Israel captured the Holy City (Jerusalem), Sinai, and the Golan Heights. This war encouraged the Christian Zionists to speak and to believe that the Promised Land was not just a theological theory, but physical reality. For example, Jerry Falwell did not begin to speak about modern-day Israel until after Israel's 1967 military victory. In 1967, Billy Graham's father-in-law, Nelson Bell, wrote "that for the first time in more than 2,000 years Jerusalem is now completely in the hands of the Jews gives a student of the Bible a thrill and a renewed faith in the accuracy and validity of the Bible."<sup>1</sup> The leaders in this theological and political movement saw the hand of God in the Israeli expansion into the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and they interpreted these events as a big step toward the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Sizer says, "Christian Zionists have since been energized to do what they can to move prophecy forward."<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen Sizer, "*Christian Zionism: The New Heresy that Sways America, Political Agenda of Christian Zionism*", Wake-Up-America, accessed August 2016, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article12516.htm>.

<sup>2</sup>Lawrence Davidson, "*Christian Zionism and American Foreign Policy: Paving the Road to Hell in Palestine.*", *Logosjournal*, winter 2005. Accessed March 2016, [http://www.logosjournal.com/issue\\_4.1/davidson.htm](http://www.logosjournal.com/issue_4.1/davidson.htm).

essence, they support the biblical and political Israel in the name of Christ, regardless of the existence of anybody else.

Hal Lindsey, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and John Hagee were the leading figures of the Christian Right in the 1980's and 1990's. They combined political conservatism with Christian Zionism. Let us now look at some of these modern Christian Zionists, and how they have contributed a consolidated ideology supporting the policies of modern Israel and conservative Christian Americans and politicians.

#### Hal Lindsey (1929 - )

Hal Lindsey is the father and the prophet of Christian Zionism. Born in 1929 in Houston, Texas, he dropped out of the University of Houston to serve in the Korean War. A graduate of the Dallas Theological Seminary who now lives in Palm Springs, California, Lindsey is a famous Christian Zionist dispensationalist author and the most influential Christian Zionist of the 20th century, having been described by *Time Magazine* as 'The Jeremiah for this Generation,' and by his own publishers as 'the father of the Modern-Day Bible Prophecy Movement.'<sup>3</sup> Lindsey writes about prophecy, with at least eighteen books dealing directly or indirectly with the End Times.

In 1970, three years after the Six-Day War, a small religious publishing house released a small book of biblical prophecy that would soon transform the cultural and religious landscape of the decade. Lindsey's exegesis of the relationship between the biblical prophecies of Armageddon and contemporary political events was titled *The Late Great Planet Earth*, and has been described by the *New York Times* as the best-selling

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<sup>3</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 93.

book in the world.<sup>4</sup> In this book, Lindsey confidently asserted that the world was collapsing and that the forces of evil which manifested in godless Communism and militant Islam were the real enemies of Israel. He described in detail the events leading to the great battle at Megiddo between the massive Russian, Chinese and African armies that would attempt, but fail, to destroy Israel. According to Lindsey, the Battle of Armageddon will only hurry the return of Jesus Christ as the King of the Jews who will rule over the other nations from the Jewish temple which will be rebuilt on the site of the destroyed Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. He said, "Jerusalem will be the spiritual centre of the entire world...all people of the earth will come annually to worship Jesus who will rule there."<sup>5</sup>

The new State of Israel will be plagued by a certain pattern of events which has been clearly forecasted. Shortly after the restoration of the Jews in the land of Israel, an incredible enemy will arise to its "uttermost north." The enemy will be composed of one great nation which will gather around it a number of allies. It is this "Northern Confederacy" that is destined to plunge the world into its final great war which Christ will return to end.<sup>6</sup>

Lindsey had predicted in his book that the Rapture would come in 1988, according to Jesus' words about the coming of the Son of Man in Mark 9:1: one generation or 40 years after the creation of the state of Israel.<sup>7</sup> This failed prophecy has not appeared to damage his reputation. He has extended his Armageddon deadline to 2007, 40 years after Israel seized control of Old Jerusalem during the Six-Day War. He himself called his work "politically incorrect, prophetically correct" on the TBN

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<sup>4</sup> Colin Chapman, *Whose Holy City: Jerusalem and the Israel-Palestinian Conflict* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2004), 112.

<sup>5</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 95.

<sup>6</sup> Hal Lindsey, *the Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 59.

<sup>7</sup> Chapman, *Whose Holy City*, 114.

Network.<sup>8</sup> In March 2015, Lindsey urged all Christian in the US to support Israel and not to allow president Obama to seek the two-state solution, stating, "no more dividing the land. Interestingly, that has been God's position all along. In Joel 3:2, the Lord speaks of judging those nations who 'have divided up My land.'"

Michael Prior was an Irish priest who served in Jerusalem and wrote numerous articles and books about the Middle East. He and another writer Rev. Dr. Donald E. Wagner point out that Hal Lindsey became so powerful that he is like the consultant on Middle Eastern affairs for the U.S. Hal Lindsey in fact became a consultant on Middle Eastern affairs to both the Pentagon and the Israeli Government.<sup>9</sup> We can see here very good example of the marriage between theology, politics, and how a religious leader like Lindsey was powerful in affecting U.S. policy in the Middle East.

#### Jerry Falwell (1933 - 2007)

A second very important Christian Zionist is Jerry Falwell, who was born in 1933 in Lynchburg, Virginia. An evangelical pastor and televangelist, Falwell was the pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church and the founder of Liberty University, which sponsors the Liberty Broadcasting Network TV channel. In his early ministry, Falwell avoided politics. In 1964, he wrote these words:

Believing the Bible as I do, I would find it impossible to stop preaching the pure saving gospel of Jesus Christ and begin doing anything else, including fighting communism, or participating in civil rights reform. Preachers are not called to be politicians but to be soul winners. Nowhere are we commissioned to reform the externals.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Author Lindsey, Christian Network Reconcile, accessed February 2016, <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/feb/10/local/me-beliefs10>.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Prior, *Christian Zionism* (London & New York: Routledge: 1999), 143.

<sup>10</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 90.

Jerry Falwell did not begin to speak about modern-day Israel until after Israel's 1967 military victory. After this, Falwell changed completely. He entered into politics and became a passionate supporter of the State of Israel. The surprising Israeli victory made a big impression, not only on Falwell, but on many Americans. In 1967, the United States was also caught in the Vietnam War. Many felt a sense of defeat, helplessness, and discouragement. Americans were forcefully made aware of their diminished authority, their inability to police the world.<sup>11</sup>

Many Americans, including Falwell, turned a worshipful glance toward Israel, which they viewed as militarily strong and unshakeable. They gave their generous agreement to the Israeli takeover of Arab lands because they professed this conquest as powerful and righteous. Muscular Christians such as Falwell credited Israeli General Moshe Dayan with this victory over Arab forces and termed him the Miracle Man of the Age; the Pentagon invited him to Vietnam to tell us how to win the war.<sup>12</sup>

In 1978, the Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, invited Jerry Falwell for his first official visit to Israel, and a year later, his government gave Falwell the gift of a Lear Jet.<sup>13</sup> In 1979, Falwell founded the Moral Majority association, a political action group composed of conservative, fundamentalist Christians. This organization was against abortion and homosexuality. Falwell added support for the State of Israel to this organization's mandate, saying, "We support the state of Israel and the Jewish people everywhere..."<sup>14</sup> In 1976, when Jimmy Carter was elected as the "born-again" president, Christian fundamentalists in America were discovering their political voice and drawing

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<sup>11</sup> Grace Halsell, النبوة والسياسة (Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War) (Cairo: Jamaaet El Daawa El Eslamia, 1990), 86.

<sup>12</sup> Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics*, 86.

<sup>13</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 90.

<sup>14</sup> Rebecca L. Stein and Ted Swedenburg, *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005), 295

on the support of the evangelical right in the U.S. At the same time in Israel, in 1977, Menachem Begin and the Likud Party came to power.<sup>15</sup>

In 1981, Falwell said, “to stand against Israel is to stand against God. We believe that history and Scripture prove that God deals with nations in relation to how they deal with Israel. [Citing part of Genesis 27:29...] ‘Those who curse you [Israel] will be cursed, and those who bless you will be blessed.’”<sup>16</sup>

When Israel bombed Iraq’s nuclear plant in 1981, Begin phoned Falwell before he called President Reagan. He also asked Falwell to “explain to the Christian public the reasons for the bombing.”<sup>17</sup> During the 1982 Israel invasion of Lebanon and the massacres in Sabra and Shatilla, Falwell defended Israel’s actions.<sup>18</sup>

In February 1983, he encouraged the growth of Jewish settlements near the Palestinian town of Nablus. Falwell declared that “God had been good to America because America had been good to Jews.”<sup>19</sup>

On February 6, 1985, the Israeli Embassy at Washington, D.C., organized a prayer breakfast for Christian Zionists where Benjamin Netanyahu discussed how “a sense of history, poetry and morality imbued the Christian Zionists who, more than a century ago, began to write, plan and organize for Israel’s restoration.” Present were Jerry Falwell, and Alonzo Short, a member of the board of Promise Keepers, an international conservative Christian organization for men, for whom a core value is to mobilize the church in the world to stand and to support Jews and especially the State of Israel.

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<sup>15</sup>Stein, *Palestine*, 86.

<sup>16</sup>Bible, New International Version.

<sup>17</sup>Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics*, 86.

<sup>18</sup>Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 90.

<sup>19</sup>Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics*, 144.

Michael Little, president of the Christian Broadcasting Network, and Pat Robertson were also present.<sup>20</sup>

In March 2002, Israel responded to the Netanya suicide-bombing (a city in the Northern Centre District of Israel) by invading the West Bank, besieging Jenen (a Palestinian city in the northern West Bank). President George W. Bush ordered Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to withdraw his forces from Palestinian areas, issuing a strong message to Sharon: “Withdraw! Withdraw your troops immediately!”<sup>21</sup> After this, most Christian Zionists began to work closely with pro-Israel groups, who used their media resources, made tens of thousands of telephone calls, and sent e-mails and letters to President Bush urging him to refrain from pressuring Sharon and to allow Israel to finish its job. Falwell told the CBS news program *60 Minutes* that after the incident, Israel could count on Bush to “do the right thing for Israel every time.” Then, in June 2003, he stated “The Bible Belt is Israel’s safety net in the US.”<sup>22</sup>

#### Pat Robertson (1930 - )

Marion Gordon “Pat” Robertson is another evangelical pastor-politician who supports Christian Zionism. Born in 1930, he is a televangelist, a supporter of the Republican Party, and a Southern Baptist espousing Charismatic theology. He was the host of *The 700 Club*, a popular TV program broadcasted in the US and around the world. Pat Robertson stated that, “During the Six-Day War [June 1967] . . . the Jewish forces . . .

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<sup>20</sup> B. A. Robinson, “*Christian Zionism: Christian support for the state of Israel: the politics and theology of Armageddon.*,” *Religious Tolerance*, 2004-October-30, accessed February 2016, [http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr\\_isra.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_isra.htm).

<sup>21</sup> Donald Wagner, “*A Heavenly Match: Bush and the Christian Zionists, Part 1,*” *Information Clearing House*, accessed February 2016, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article4960.htm>.

<sup>22</sup>Wagner, *A Heavenly Match*.

recaptured the Old City of East Jerusalem, for the first time since Nebuchadnezzar [sic] had invaded Israel (or Judah) in 586 B.C.”<sup>23</sup> Robertson understood this war as the fulfillment of Jesus’ words in Luke, stating,

Students of Bible prophecy know the words of Jesus Christ that are expressed in the twenty-first chapter of Luke’s Gospel where Jesus said that Jerusalem would be ‘trodden under foot of the Gentiles’ until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. Christian Bible scholars have looked for centuries for that fulfillment, and in June of 1967 it took place literally.”<sup>24</sup>

Robertson, founder of many organizations, is the president of the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), and established the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) in 1960. It was, and remains, the most influential Christian satellite-TV network in the world, and can now be seen in 180 countries, broadcasted in 71 languages. “In 2002 he received the State of Israel Friendship Award from the Zionist Organization of America for his consistent support for a Greater Israel.”<sup>25</sup> On January 5, 2006, on his program *The 700 Club*, Robertson talked about the sickness of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as possible revenge from God against Sharon’s policy, stating, “He was dividing God’s land” to give more land to the Palestinians. He also claimed the same reason for Yitzhak Rabin’s 1995 assassination. After the statement about Sharon, Israel responded on January 11, 2006, by announcing that Pat Robertson would be not involved in the project to build a Christian tourist attraction and pilgrimage site near the Sea of Galilee known as the Christian Heritage Center. On 12 January, Robertson sent a letter to Sharon’s son Omri, apologizing for his comments and the Israeli Tourism Ministry

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<sup>23</sup>Sizer, *Christian Zionism* (Arabic), 95.

<sup>24</sup>Wagner, *A Heavenly Match*.

<sup>25</sup>“Pat Robertson.” *Why War.com*, accessed February 2007, [http://www.why-war.com/encyclopedia/people/Pat\\_Robertson/](http://www.why-war.com/encyclopedia/people/Pat_Robertson/).

diplomatically commented, “Israel respects Rev. Pat Robertson and accepts his apology, which reflects his true friendship and support for the state of Israel.”<sup>26</sup>

#### John Hagee (1940 - )

John Hagee is the Pastor of the Cornerstone Church, a megachurch with 18,000 active members in San Antonio, Texas. He is known for his fundraising campaign for the state of Israel through Christian United for Israel (CUFI). In 1977, Hagee claimed the funds would be used to help resettle Jews from the Soviet Union in the West Bank and Jerusalem, stating, “We feel like the coming of Soviet Jews to Israel is a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy.”<sup>27</sup> When asked if he realized that support of Likud’s policies and the increase in Jewish settlements were at cross-purpose with U.S. policy, Hagee answered, “I am a Bible scholar and theologian, and from my perspective the law of God transcends the laws of the United States government and the U.S. State Department.”<sup>28</sup>

He blessed the Jewish conquest of the territories of their enemies. While quoting the Bible, Hagee stated that God gave the land of “Greater Israel,” (a vast swathe of land stretching from the river of Egypt all the way to the river Euphrates in Iraq), to the Jews’ descendants of Isaac, forever. When he was asked about how to deal with people already in the land he suggested that people living in those territories, millions of Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, have no right to live there unless they accept to live under Jewish rule.<sup>29</sup> Hagee was very clear about the value of Jerusalem for Jews and Christians when

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<sup>26</sup>Mary Snow and Shira Medding, “Robertson apologizes to Sharon’s son,” CNN.com, Friday, January 13, 2006, accessed February 2007, <http://www.cnn.com/2006/US/01/12/robertson.apology/>.

<sup>27</sup>Donald Wagner, “The Interregnum: Christian Zionism in the Clinton Years, Part 4,” Information Clearing House, accessed 25 February 2007, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article4951.htm>.

<sup>28</sup>Wagner, *The Interregnum*.

<sup>29</sup>“*Jewish Journal: Hagee’s speech backing Israel alarms some.*” (Archive for the ‘Armageddon Politics’ Category), accessed 25 February 2007, <http://www.preteristarchive.com/preblog/?cat=4>.

he replied “Jerusalem the Golden is caught in a supernatural crossfire. We are racing toward the end of time, and Israel lies in the eye of the storm. In Jerusalem, we can find the key to the future of the universe and the hope of all mankind.”<sup>30</sup>

Hagee has been the most accepted person among conservative Christians and Jews for being very clear and aggressive against Arabs in general and Islam in particular. Hagee’s main view on Islam is that it a “triumphalist” religion which is centered on inevitable conflict to defeat Israel in the end. He supported his interpretation of Islam as a religion of violence, with the September 11, 2001 attack as the strongest evidence of real Islam. Hagee warned Christians and Jews about the false claim that Allah is the same name of God: “Do not be confused into thinking that Allah is just another name for the same God worshiped by Christians and Jews.”<sup>31</sup>

Hagee wrote a book after September 11, 2001, *Attack on America*, where he addressed Islam and terrorism as part of the eschatological fulfillment. He spread his message through his megachurch, and as the CEO of Global Mission Evangelism Television, where he reached almost every house around the world through his TV programs. He always refers to Muslims or Arabs as the descendants of Abraham through Ishmael, “the root of the problem,” and Jews as the descendants from Isaac. Hagee warned Christians and Jews not to believe that Islam is a religion of peace because Muslims believe they have to defeat Christians and Jews. “Muslims believe that it is the will of Allah for Islam to rule the world.” Hagee talks about the Arabs or Muslims as if they are stirring the pot, but in reality, they are playing a secondary role or even less.

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<sup>30</sup>Chapman, *Whose Holy City?*, 108.

<sup>31</sup> John Hagee, *The Battle of Jerusalem* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 49.

According to Hagee's theology, Arab countries will translate their hate of Jews by forming a coalition with Russia to attack Israel with a nuclear weapon, as with "Gog and Magog."<sup>32</sup> Yet, after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, it was proven that no weapons of mass destruction existed in Iraq, leaving no Arab country with nuclear weapons.

Besides these prominent Christian leaders, there have been many organizations that have been influential in promoting the Christian Zionist movement. In the last twenty years, there has been a new development in Christian-Jewish relationships. Following the Arab oil embargo in the mid-1970s, countries that maintained an embassy in Jerusalem moved their quarters to Tel Aviv under pressure from the Arab oil states- the embassy of the United States having always been in Tel Aviv. This prompted some Christian Evangelicals from Europe to establish what they call *The International Christian Embassy*. They believe that it is God's divine will for Israel to possess all the land promised to Abraham and his descendants. The embassy exists to encourage support for the state of Israel among Christians.<sup>33</sup>

In the early 1980's, the Israeli Ministry of Tourism engaged evangelical religious leaders for free "familiarization" tours. During that time, hundreds of evangelical pastors received free trips to the Holy Land, the purpose of which was to enable people of even limited influence to experience Israel for themselves and to see they could bring their own tour groups to Israel. The Ministry of Tourism was interested in more than tourist dollars; here was a way of building a solid core of non-Jewish supporters for Israel in the

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<sup>32</sup>Hagee, *Battle of Jerusalem*, 49.

<sup>33</sup>Leslie J. Hoppe, *A Guide to the Lands of the Bible*, (Minnesota: Liturgical Press 1999), 47.

United States by bringing large numbers of evangelicals to hear and see Israel's official story for themselves.<sup>34</sup>

### **International Christian Zionist Organizations**

In addition influential evangelical personalities, a number of organizations have come to the forefront supporting Zionist views. Below I discuss how these organizations are important to make the Zionism theology and to keep Israel safe from any harm by the opponents of the Israeli policy.

#### **International Christian Embassy Jerusalem**

On September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1980, a group of evangelical Christians living in Jerusalem, under the leadership of Dutch theologian and Pastor Jan William van der Hoeven, announced the opening of the *International Christian Embassy Jerusalem*. Ordained in the Armenian evangelical church, van der Hoeven had already been in Israel for seven years and was active in a Charismatic/Pentecostal fellowship in the city. He said that the organization would stand with the Jews in affirming what God had said about Israel's right to rule in Jerusalem.<sup>35</sup>

Israeli leaders have been very clever at defending their case before the Christian world. The government of Israel has given official encouragement to Christian Zionism, allowing the establishment ICEJ in Jerusalem. The main function of the embassy is to enlist international Christian support for Israel. This organization raised funds to help

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<sup>34</sup>Timothy P. Weber, "On the Road to Armageddon." *Beliefnet.com*, accessed February 2016, <http://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/christianity/end-times/on-the-road-to-armageddon.aspx>.

<sup>35</sup>Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitude towards the State of Israel*, (Louisiana: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 171.

finance Jewish immigration to Israel from the former Soviet Union, and has assisted Zionist groups in helping to establish Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

In 1985, the *International Christian Embassy* in Jerusalem hosted the first international Christian Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland. Over 500 people from 27 countries attended.<sup>36</sup> In 1988, ICEJ hosted the second international Christian Zionist Congress, in Jerusalem. In response, the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) insisted that there was no place for Christian Zionism in the Middle East and that it should be repudiated by the universal church because of its very dangerous effect on the Christian faith. MECC, an organization “representing the indigenous and ancient Oriental and Eastern churches, has been highly critical of the activities of the Christian Zionists, and of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, in particular. They assert, for instance, that the ICEJ has aggressively imposed an aberrant expression of the Christian faith and an erroneous interpretation of the Bible which is subservient to the political agenda of the modern State of Israel.”<sup>37</sup>

In 1996, the ICEJ held its third congress in Jerusalem. Delegates accepted a proclamation which confessed that:

- 1 Jesus is the Messiah and will return to Jerusalem.
- 2 God gave the land of Israel to Jewish people. (This includes Gaza, the Golan Heights, Judea, and Samaria.)
- 3 Jerusalem is to remain undivided and the Palestinian people are to be denied a state to live in.

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<sup>36</sup> Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics*, 131.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Sizer, “*An Alternative Theology of the Holy Land: A Critique of Christian Zionism.*” *Church Society.org*, accessed February 2016, [http://archive.churchsociety.org/churchman/documents/cman\\_113\\_2\\_sizer.pdf](http://archive.churchsociety.org/churchman/documents/cman_113_2_sizer.pdf).

4 God will reveal to the Jews the “true nature of the faith of Abraham. They will abandon Judaism and convert to Christianity.”<sup>38</sup>

Concerning the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, Pat Robertson has said, “God is using the ICEJ as a trumpet call to all the nations regarding our biblical mandate to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and to stand with Israel and Jewish people. Truly, God has raised up the International Christian Embassy for such a time as this.”<sup>39</sup>

### **Other Christian Zionist Organizations**

#### Christians for Israel

*Christians for Israel* was established in 1979 in Holland and Jerusalem. The founders of CFI are the Dutch men Karel van Oordt and Pee Koelewijn, who spread the message around the world and now have many branches of CFI in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia Pacific. Since 1985, the CFI has been helping the Jews to emigrate to Israel from the former Soviet Union. This is an international project known as Operation Aliyah. It is more than a humanitarian project—it proclaims a divine calling for the church to assist the Jewish people in their physical return, and restoration to, the land of Israel. This organization focuses on biblical prophecy. They have said that the “Jewish people were scattered throughout the nations according to God’s word, because of their disobedience. Amos prophesied that the return will be of greater magnitude than the exodus from Egypt and will involve all the tribes of Israel.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>B. A. Robinson, “*Christian Zionism: Christian support for the state of Israel: the politics and theology of Armageddon.*” *Religious Tolerance*, accessed February 2016, [http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr\\_isra.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_isra.htm).

<sup>39</sup>International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, “*What others are saying about us,*” accessed February 2016, <https://int.icej.org/>.

<sup>40</sup>Christians for Israel International, Homepage, Accessed August 2016, [http://www.c4israel.org/c4i/about\\_us/history\\_c4i](http://www.c4israel.org/c4i/about_us/history_c4i).

And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God.” (Amos 9:14-15, KJV)

#### Christian Friends of Israeli Communities

On September 13<sup>th</sup>, 1993, the Israelis and Palestinians signed an agreement which is known as the Oslo Accords. According to this treaty, Israel will withdraw from West Bank and Gaza Strip and the Palestinians can start self-government over these territories. Many politicians, and especially religious leaders, saw this treaty as against God’s plan for the Jewish nation, which included the total possessions and occupation of Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC), was established in 1995 as a reaction to the Oslo Accords. They saw it their responsibility to raise awareness around the world about the threat of losing the heartland biblical Israel or at least that this treaty was weakening Israel when they have to come to confront her enemies. CFOIC is one of the many organizations that runs an Adopt-a-Settlement program, and links Israeli settlements with Christian churches and individuals throughout the world. These communities are located in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, which according to the organization is “the heart of Biblical Israel.”<sup>41</sup>

The core belief for CFOIC is to support Israel as God’s people and to remind Christians that Jews gave the Old Testament to Christians, and without it, there would be no gospel. Jews are part of God’s plan; God promised they would return to the land, helping Jews in bringing the second coming of Christ closer. They are also asking their

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<sup>41</sup> Christian Friends of Israeli Communities, Homepage, Accessed August 2016, <http://www.cfoic.com/>.

supporters to help by sending money, by lobbying in Washington D.C., and by bringing Christians to Israel.

### Bridges for Peace

Bridges for Peace (BFP), has as its slogan “Don’t just read about prophecy when you can be part of it.” It was founded in 1976 by G. Douglas Young. Young had worked in Israel since 1950, founding the Israel-American Institute of Biblical Studies in Jerusalem. BFP holds the dispensational view that God’s covenantal promises between the land and his people Israel are everlasting and unconditional. They understand Ephesians 2:14-18 as describing how Jesus broke down the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles by his death and so made the two one.

BFP is playing a very important role with ICEJ to mobilize Christians around the globe to stand and support Israel in every way. Their big program is called *Operation Ezra*, where they provide help to new immigrants with tons of food every day. In 1997, they were rewarded by the Israeli government for their effort to help Israel. BFP has national offices around the globe, for example in the UK, US, Canada, South Africa, Japan, and Brazil.

BFP is putting the focus on bringing Christians and Jews together. Even though this sounds positive, there is no interest in bringing Islam to the table. On their official website, they mention they are providing love and mercy. I wonder why this “love and mercy” can’t extend to other ethnicities or religions. BFP is asking their supporters to help Israelis who gave the Bible to the Christian world. At the same time, they don’t mention anything about Middle Eastern Christians or Palestinian Christians in particular. It seems they are not “Christians” or part of Christianity.

## The American Messianic Fellowship

The American Messianic Fellowship, AMF, was founded by William E. Blackstone in 1887. Blackstone, a Chicago businessman and prophecy writer, started the Chicago Hebrew Mission, which later became the AMF. The purpose of this organization was “to promote the intellectual, social and religious welfare of all nationalities.”<sup>42</sup> The AMF believe that God’s love for the Jewish people is everlasting, (Jeremiah 31:3), and that His promises are eternal. Their goal is to help Christians understand the Jewish faith in terms of God’s commitment to his chosen people.

In 1891, Blackstone asked President Benjamin Harrison to help and to support the Jews to have their homeland in Palestine, because “Palestine is the Jews,” and he cited biblical prophecies to convince the president that it was the right to return to the land from which they were expelled by force. Later Blackstone was disappointed with Herzl and other secular Zionist because they were not interested in Premillennialism ideology. In response, he sent Herzl an Old Testament with marks on the biblical prophecies.

Blackstone organized the first conference between Christians and Jews in Chicago, where he spread his message about his book *Jesus coming*. In his book, he explained that the return of Jesus depends on the Jews returning first to Palestine. On the surface, this movement appeared as working for Jews, but this organization were using and abusing the Jews because they were telling them how to believe, and that they can only understand their religion through the lense of the Christian Zionist perspective.

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<sup>42</sup> “*Bridges of Understanding between Jewish and Christian Communities since 1887.*” AMF International, who we are. Accessed August 2016, <http://www.ifcj.org/who-we-are/history/>.

So far, we have traced the growth of the Zionist and Christian Zionist movements in Europe, England, and the United States and discussed the interplay of politics and theology leading up to, and following the establishment of the State of Israel. In particular, we have noted the impact of the Six-Day War of 1967. Still to be explored is the way these events and movements have impacted the theology of the Palestinian Churches in Palestine.

Christian Zionist leaders are very clear and resolute on standing with the Israeli government in every war and every action the state takes, withholding any critical or ethical judgment. To attract more people to their circle, they used words like “Israeli politics” and “Jews” without distinguishing between the State and the Jewish faith. These leaders are using a militant concept of God in a war against Palestinians and Arabs. They wanted Israel to be the playing field of their game, so they found “the Promised Land” in 1967. As we have seen in this chapter, the Zionist leaders claim the right and the power to tell other Christians how to understand the Bible. Many times their interpretations about the end of times are wrong, but they still use the same theory, and people still believe them.

Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Christian Zionist leaders did not care about others, Arabs in general and Arab Christians in particular. This is a threat coming from these Christian Zionist leaders. They are not theologians we can just agree to disagree with, they are capable financially and politically of mobilizing the whole world toward this destructive, suicidal belief. Christian Zionists like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and John Hagee have been very strong and effective leaders not only in the religious arenas, but also in political life. They stood against any American presidents

who asked Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territories. Most American leaders are concerned and worried about upsetting them because they are mobilizing right wing Christian voters in the U.S. After 9/11, most of these Evangelical leaders used this event to energize people to see Islam as a religion we need to fight. They mixed Islam with terrorism, so the Arab-Israeli conflict could be seen through their agenda as part of an inevitable battle between Muslims and Jews.

In the next chapter, I will show how Arab Christians and especially the Palestinian Christians respond to the Zionism movement based on their understanding of being Palestinians and Christians at the same. As I described in this chapter, Christian Zionism creates a conflict between faith and national identity.

CHAPTER 3  
PALESTINIAN CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY AFTER THE SIX-DAY WAR:  
1967-2010

In this study, we have reviewed the development of the concepts of both Zionism and Christian Zionism. We have seen how Christian Zionism developed out of the theological framework of Dispensationalism. This was then combined with the political motives of British, and then American Christians, to support the modern state of Israel, which was seen as fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. It is clear that the Six-Day War of June 1967 became an important event for their understanding of the unfolding of God's plans. Now we are going to see how Christian Palestinian leaders reacted to the Christian Zionism.

**The Transformation of Palestinian Society during the Twentieth Century**

One day I was presenting in a church in the USA about the history of Arab Christians in the Middle East. Part of my presentation was about Palestinian Christians and one person asked me about if there is anything called a "Pakistani Christian?" (By the way, she was a pastor and she couldn't imagine the word "Christian" and "Palestinian" goes together.) She was very surprised to know that we have ancient churches and protestant churches all over the Arab world. I told this pastor there is something called Palestinian Christians and they exist. The pastor thought this word only related to the ancient biblical stories or that all Palestinians are Muslims. I always joked

with Americans, telling them that Jesus was born in Palestine and not in Texas, but the reality is that many people in the West did not know that or they wanted to ignore our presence as Arab Christians in the Middle East since the birth of Christianity in the Middle East.

Christians in the Middle East were in charge or at least key players in early Christianity because four ancient Christian sees were located there: one in Alexandria (Egypt), Antioch (Turkey/Syria), Jerusalem (Israel/Palestine), Constantinople (Turkey), and the last see in Rome. Now let us move into a brief history on Christianity in Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

### **History of Christianity in Palestine**

Christianity in Palestine has a longer history, than any place else on earth. We need to refresh our memory and remember Acts 2:11, where many Arabs, Egyptians, Libyans and other nationalities were converted to Christianity on Pentecost day. Since I moved to the U.S., many times I have been asked when I converted to Christianity. My answer is “2000 years ago.” Christianity started and developed in the Middle East and spread to the rest of the world. Palestinian Christians see Palestine as not only the place of birth and life their Savior, but also as a place where they live to be witnesses to Christ.

Christianity has a long history in the land of Israel/Palestine, a history of indigenous communities whose fortunes have been linked to many groups like Muslims, Crusaders, Turks and Jews. Palestine has many national communities, including Armenians, Egyptians, Ethiopians, Syrians, Russians and French, who have made their

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<sup>1</sup> W. H. C. Frend , *Christian History: The Rise of Christianity* (Fortress Press: Minnesota, 1984), 338.

way to Palestine. Palestine was once a Christian country and there has been a continuous Christian presence there since the time of Jesus. Arab and other Middle Eastern Christians today are a living link between the present and the earliest Christian churches.<sup>2</sup>

### **Relationship between Eastern and Western Christianity**

Christianity in the East struggled with Western Christianity not only in the recent history, as we see in Christian Zionism, but also in its early history through the Nicene council and the Chalcedonian council of 451 AD. The Christological debate was not only about theology, but included political and geographical conflicts as well. The Eastern Christians were concerned about Roman theology and the political power of the Roman Empire. After Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, the situation became different and the Roman see gained political power over the other Christian sees in Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Constantinople.

Eastern Christianity learned from early on to form their own Christian identity as a reaction to the political power of Christian Rome and the Roman Empire. In the 7th century, Islam became dominant in the Middle East. Some scholars believed the conflict between Western and Eastern Christians prepared the road to facilitate the Arab conquest of the Middle East and was even welcomed in many Christian communities. Arab Christians and Middle East Christians and Muslim rulers made agreements to respect each other and allow Christians to have access to their churches, and at the same time, the Christians pledged loyalty to the Muslim rulers. Later Christians found out they needed to respond to Muslims' questions about the Christian faith. From the 7th to 12th centuries, a

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<sup>2</sup> Mitri Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian* (Fortress Press: Minnesota, USA, 1995) 3-5.

dialogue took place between Muslims and Christian scholars where they were introduced as “the people of the Holy Book.” Many Christians worked very closely with Muslim rulers, where they were able to explain their faith and were well respected for their areas of expertise.<sup>3</sup>

During the time of the Crusades, this dialogue stopped and many Muslims became afraid of Christians in the East. At the same time, Christians in the Middle East were afraid of the reaction of Muslims toward the local Christians. During this time some Christian scholars emphasized the common ground between people of the Holy Books like Christian, Muslims, and Jews.

Christians quoted the Quran on figures like Christ, the Virgin Mary, monks and priests as honored people in the Muslim tradition. Christians and Muslims borrowed from each other. The Muslim rulers showed respect and gave freedom for Christians to worship freely in their churches. But we can't ignore that the pressure on Middle Eastern Christians to define their faith became stronger after the Crusades. Out of this struggle some Middle Eastern theologians developed an Arab Theology where they commit to Arabic as their language as a vehicle to explain Christianity to the Arab Christians and Muslims.<sup>4</sup>

Arab Christians have been a minority for almost 1000 years and they adopted many things as a survival method; they couldn't ignore the need to be understood by the Muslim majority. Christians in the West have experienced the privilege of being the majority, so they can be less aware of the needs of minorities, such as in the case of Jews

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<sup>3</sup> Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 9-10.

in Europe, and then Islam post 9/11. Arab Christians existed as a minority, and therefore Christians in the Middle East have never developed an imperialistic Christianity like that we have seen in Europe and the United States. Most Arab Christians are pacifists, and that has also been the attitude of the Palestinian Christians towards the establishment of the modern Israeli State. One cannot deny that Muslims in some Arab countries have tried to get rid of Christians, especially during the last decades, but in Palestine that does not seem to have been the case. Yet, the change in the composition of ethnic and religious groups has made the Christians fear a new kind of difficulty. Palestinian Christians encountered a new challenge that puts their faith at risk because of how Christian Zionists are defining the Christian Bible.

### **The Response of the Palestinian Churches to New Political Realities**

As we can see from this brief history, Middle Eastern Christians have dealt with many struggles related to their faith. I will talk about how Palestinian Christians have responded to the modern-day Zionist worldview and the State of Israel.

While 1948's Israel existed in a small area, after 1967, Israel took most of the land in Palestine and was now in control of the whole of Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Heights, and Sinai. Most Arabs struggled after 1967 to restore their dignity and deal with the shame of being defeated by Israel. For Palestinians, the struggle was more about where they could find a place to live and have a voice among all these loud voices. Many Christians in Palestine the invasion and occupation made them refugees, living in camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria; this is still going on today.

Many Palestinians fled to different Arab countries where they couldn't hold any official papers or even identity cards. Arab countries justified not giving Palestinians

official papers or equal rights to live as citizens because they wanted them to keep their rights to return to Palestine, otherwise they would not be Palestinians in the future.

### **Zionist Theology and The Palestinian Christian Challenge**

Palestinian Christians were questioning their faith as they encountered this new reality, which was based on Zionist theology, not only in verbal debate, but also in the political and geographical reality on the ground. Palestinian Christians asked these questions: Did God really give our country to the Jewish people? Were the wars of 1948 and 1967 acts of God? Did God actually intervene on behalf of the Zionists? Is God also excited over the devastation caused toward Palestinians and Arabs (both Muslims and Christians)? Are modern secular Jews and Zionists, who created the state of Israel, God's chosen people? Are we on the wrong side of prophecy? Are we wrong to be angry while our friends were so triumphant? Is the Bible, the book that we love so much and the book that revealed God's love to us through Jesus Christ, and the book that we studied since we were children, behind the suffering and the humiliation of our people? All of these conflicting thoughts caused quite a spiritual crisis for Palestinian Christians. But that crisis drove them to study the Bible carefully. Now they are willing to find out for themselves if the current State of Israel is an extension of Biblical Israel.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Need for Palestinian Contextual Theology**

Why do the Palestinian Christians need to do contextual theology? In 2006, I was visiting a close friend in Syria who is pastor of a Protestant (Presbyterian) church. He invited me to preach in his church on Christmas Eve and the first thing he asked was, "Are you going

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<sup>5</sup> Conrad Negron, *Religion: Is it Giving God a Bad Name?* (Lulu.com: North Carolina, 2010), 103.

to use any texts from the Old Testament?” Then he added that his congregation would prefer something from the New Testament. I was surprised, because we do not have this issue in Egypt; Syria is a totally free country. I compared the struggle for the Syrian Christians with the pressure that Palestinian Christians go through. If you are Palestinian, you do not have a country, and you have to live under occupation on a daily basis, so their suffering is not only theoretical or political, it is also a practical and urgent need.

Palestinian Christians are struggling with their identity as to who they are by birth and who they are regarding their commitments to the Christian faith, which includes the Old Testament that is used as a contract to justify the occupation of their land. Some Arab Christians reject the Old Testament totally, and some partially, but the majority saw the Old Testament as part of the Christian faith. There is a challenge to make the Christian faith relevant to their recent struggle with the occupation. Many Arab Christians see the rejection of the Old Testament as a new Marcionism. (This early Church figure, Marcion, rejected the Old Testament.)<sup>6</sup>

After the official recognition of the state of Israel in 1948, many Palestinian Christians witnessed the new political reality related to their personal suffering. They questioned their God about justice, love and reconciliation and later they developed their own theology, “contextual theology,” to make God visible, caring for the Palestinians. We must keep in mind Palestinian contextual theology is an unfinished project.

Contextual theology is a personal and pastoral answer to the Palestinian Christians who are wondering, “Why is God not helping us?” Modern contextual theology needs to address the Palestinian struggle since 1948 and especially after 1967.

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<sup>6</sup> Paul S Rowe, John H.A. Dyck, and Jens Zimmermann, *Christians and the Middle East Conflict* (Routledge: UK, 2014), 154.

When the Christian Zionists in the West saw this war as biblical fulfillment, the Palestinian Christians started to question many theologies through the biblical text. Is the Bible for Palestinian Christians too? Can we read the Old Testament as Palestinians? Is the Bible meant to be God's contract to the state of Israel? Does the Palestinian church have a voice or solution for this dilemma?<sup>7</sup>

Most contextual Palestinian theologians agree that Palestinian Christians are ethnically Arab or at least they didn't see any problem with calling themselves Arabs. Until the 1970's, Palestinian Christians played a very important role through secular organizations, and even politically, some Christians were part of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The role of Palestinian Christians has declined since Islam became a unifying factor in Palestine, and especially when Hamas came on the political scene. The major theological challenge for Palestinian Christians is Christian Zionism because it is the theological justification for the occupation.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Leaders of Palestinian Contextual Theology**

The most important representatives for this theology are Naim Ateek, the Anglican theologian who himself calls his work "liberation theology;" Mitri Raheb, a Lutheran, who gives "the context" the highest priority; Elias Chacoura, a Greek Catholic (or Melkite Christian) who has presented a "narrative theology;" and the Roman Catholic Rafiq Khoury, whose slogan is "the Gospel and culture." We see that the

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<sup>7</sup> Charles P. Lutz and Robert Ora Smith, *Christians and a Land Called Holy* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2006), 77.

<sup>8</sup> Carole Monica Burnett, *Zionism through Christian Lenses* (Wipf and Stock Publishers: California, USA 2013), 176.

Catholics, both Greek and Roman, and the Protestants are the most active in this movement.<sup>9</sup>

### **Father Naim Ateek**

I am going to begin this discussion with Naim Ateek because he is the forerunner of an Arab or Middle Eastern liberation theology. Most of his books and works reflect structured theology. I will use Ateek as the main source because he formed his theology while other leaders were still working on a Palestinian theology. Ateek was impacted by the Roman exercise of “Liberation Theology,” which tried to close the gap between political situations and beliefs. Ateek was attracted to this kind of theology because it helps people to see faith as a liberating factor. The Word of God is important to see God’s reflection in many aspects, even in the midst of our struggle and suffering. Many Christians around the world used the concept of exodus as a pattern for liberation, but in the Palestinian situation it is difficult because this concept is taken literally by the other side of the conflict between Israelis and the Zionists. This is why Ateek likes to use the contextual method in theology as a way to avoid this dilemma. The mission of contextual theology is to reflect what’s going on here and now, and to close the gap between what we have, and what we are now. Ateek admits that nowhere else on our planet do people face a difficult situation like the one that Christian Palestinians are in now.

#### Sabeel’s Organization and Liberation Theology: Father Ateek

Naim Ateek is an Anglican priest and the founder of the Sabeel organization. He is the most famous Christian Palestinian because of his work in Palestinian liberation

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes towards the State of Israel* (McGill-Queen's Press: Ontario, Canada, 2001), 76.

theology. Ateek, in his book *Justice, and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, addresses many issues. One of them is Christian Zionism and the use of the Old Testament. According to Ateek,<sup>10</sup>

Before the creation of the State [of Israel], the Old Testament was considered to be an essential part of Christian Scripture, pointing and witnessing to Jesus. Since the creation of the State of Israel, some Jewish and Christian interpreters have read the Old Testament largely as a Zionist text to such an extent that it has become almost repugnant to Palestinian Christians.

The fundamental question of many Christians, whether uttered or not, is this: How can the Old Testament be the Word of God light of the Palestinian Christians' experience with its use to support Zionism? The main goal of liberation theology is to be a mirror of the Palestinians' daily struggles through checkpoints, removal of land, and other daily suffering of living under occupation.

Rev. Ateek believes that liberation theology needs to be applicable and practical where people can see it. His vision for the Sabeel Organization is to carry his beliefs into ecumenical relationships and interfaith interactions as a way to incarnate the best of the Christian faith in and outside of Christianity.

He argues that three areas must be addressed to be sure we are faithful to God: the political context, the interfaith problem (including the fragmentation of the Christian community, without compromising the mosaic of the community), and the abuse of the Bible. Sabeel produced a 300-page book challenging Christian Zionism, which according to Rev. Ateek, is not only a theological threat, but a heresy.

According to him, "Our Biblical theology digs deeply into the Bible and rejects any notion of a God of war." Rather, he said, like Micah 6:6 "He hath shewed thee, O

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<sup>10</sup> Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, accessed August 2016, <http://sabeel.org/statements>.

man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” And Amos 5:24 “But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream,” ours is the God of Justice.”

Naim Ateek is like many Palestinian Christians who have a story to tell behind their thinking. We cannot separate his theology from his own life story. In his various writings he tells about his childhood. He was born in 1937 in a Christian family in Beisan, which then was a typical Palestinian village with a mixed population of around 6,000 people; Muslims and Christians were living next to each other, and in peace with each other. Two days before the proclamation of the Israeli state in 1948, Israeli soldiers came to the village and forced the Muslims to cross the nearby Jordan River and to take flight into the state of Jordan. The Christians were separated from the Muslims and deported to Nazareth, which was supposed to become a village in the Arab part of the country. Later, Nazareth was captured by the Israelis. In this way Naim Ateek came to live as a Christian Palestinian in Israel, but the family could not move back to or get compensation for their property in Beisan, which now was called by its biblical Hebrew name, Bet Shean, and their house was occupied by Israeli newcomers.<sup>11</sup>

The family found, like many other Palestinian Christians, that the Eastern Orthodox Church to which they originally belonged had let them down and was too passive. Instead, they joined a church which they found more active, the Episcopal or Anglican church. That is the reason why Naim got an Anglican minister's education and a doctorate degree in the States. Later in life, he became a canon at the Anglican St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem. Now he is the leader of the above-mentioned center,

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<sup>11</sup> Na'em Stefan Ateek, *Justice, and only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 7-16.

Sabeel, an ecumenical center for liberation theology and for justice. The title of the book in question, *Justice and only Justice*, is a quotation from Deuteronomy 16:20. The Christian God, who is believed to be a savior and a liberator, seems from the Palestinian Christian's' point of view to have revealed himself as partial and discriminating: "How can the Old Testament be the Word of God in light of the Palestinian Christians' experience with its use to support Zionism?" A Palestinian Christian cannot, in Ateek's opinion, accept the Old Testament's understanding of God in full. God's acts in history have to be seen in the light of what we know about God through Christ; if you don't read it that way, the whole Christian Bible cannot be the Bible for the Palestinian Christians. One of the keys to the understanding of the Palestinian contextual theology is the way in which the Bible is read. He takes three Old Testament texts, using the New Testament as a point of reference. The first section is "Naboth and the God of Justice," (1 Kings 21); the second is "The Ecstatic Prophets—A Cautious Warning" about Micah ben Jimla (1 Kings 22). Also, he talks about the Palestinian refugees around the world saying, "as a deer longs for the running streams, so I long for you, my God," (Psalms 42-43). In Ateek's book, the biblical texts and their interpretation are not just proof of what he wants to say or an illustration, but part of the ongoing argumentation: "I have chosen the story about Naboth and his vineyard, because this is an example of a biblical story, where it makes good sense to discuss the keyword justice."<sup>12</sup> This story is about a ruler who twists the law in order to take the land from people, who own it legally. "The death and dispossession of Naboth and his family has been reenacted thousands of times since the

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<sup>12</sup> Ateek, *Justice*, 87.

creation of the State of Israel”<sup>13</sup> and one wonders whether some of the people in Palestine today don’t enjoy the end of this story: “Exact and strict justice was meted out as punishment for the crime.”<sup>14</sup>

Revenge is not part of Naim Ateek’s theology. The message is “God’s uncompromising concern for justice.” The liberation found in the story is like Ahab and Jezebel. This story shows that God is a living God with a long memory. (It is typical for this author to explain an Old Testament text with a New Testament quotation. In this case, he is referring to Gal 6:7: “God is not to be fooled; everyone reaps what he sows.”) God’s right is equality for all; everybody’s life and property is under the protection of God. “Whenever injustice occurred, God intervened to defend the poor, the weak, and defenseless.”<sup>15</sup> But God’s punishment without any compromise has to be read through New Testament glasses, and that is very different from the way in which exegesis normally read the Old Testament. But it is not enough to show the historical distance to the idea “eye for eye, tooth for tooth;” you have to reject the whole idea. Instead of “justice without mercy,” the Christians, and especially the Palestinian Christians, should argue for “justice with mercy.”<sup>16</sup>

The contribution of the contextual Palestinian theologians is that one should not stop claiming justice, but use the idea of justice in a dynamic and creative way in order to obtain peace in the Holy Land. We should not translate the end of the story about

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<sup>13</sup> Ateek, *Justice*, 87.

<sup>14</sup> Ateek, *Justice*, 88.

<sup>15</sup> Ateek, *Justice*, 88.

<sup>16</sup> Ateek, *Justice*, 89.

Naboth's vineyard in a literal way, bringing death over every Ahab and Jezebel, but use the story in its totality to wake, the hope of liberation for all oppressed.

Ateek focuses on Christ as peacemaker and sees all Christians as the tool to carry his message through the ecumenical relationship. There is no place for violence, or nationalist dictators in the kingdom of God according to our biblical understanding. Ateek reminds us about the New Jerusalem being defined as the opposite to Babylon. Christ is the model of nonviolent resistance, Jesus' way to resist even, in his death defeated violence, and avoiding the temptation to revenge.

Sabeel is against all kinds of violence. Sabeel advocates for the city of Jerusalem as the capital for both Israel and Palestine, and that it should be open for all worshipers from every religion and every nation so it can be a symbolic place for reconciliation and repentance. Then one can start the long process of building a new community where everybody can be a part of this new foundation.

### **Palestinian Christians**

Like the rest of the Arab world, the majority of the Palestinians are Muslims, but Christians have existed in Palestine since the beginning of Christianity. Nobody knows for sure, how many Christians are left in the country, and one of reason is that Christians are leaving all the time. Statistics can be presented in many different ways, and often there is a political purpose behind the differences, but today, there are probably around 160, 000.<sup>17</sup> Most Palestinian Christian families belong to an orthodox church, first and foremost the Greek Orthodox. Among the Catholic Churches, the one called the Greek

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<sup>17</sup> CIA, *World Fact Book*, "West Bank, Religions" Accessed August 2016, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/we.html>.

Catholic or the Melkite Church, a Church with an Eastern liturgy in Arabic, but in union with Rome, is the church with the most members. The Roman Catholic Church, or as it is called in this part of the world, the Latin Catholic Church, is smaller than the Greek Catholic church, but it is very visible. Most of the modern churches in the places mentioned in the New Testament, to which the tourists and pilgrims travel, belong to this church and are looked after by the Franciscans.

The orthodox churches are the classic churches in the Holy Land, and the history of the Roman Church also goes way back, except for some centuries after the crusades. From the middle of the 19th century, different Protestant churches have been part of the Christian family in the Holy Land, especially Anglican and the Lutheran churches. These are small, but very visible, because they have a praxis-oriented theology. During the last decades, other churches like the Methodists, Baptists, and Adventists have built churches and established small congregations in Palestine. Consequently, the Palestinian Christians do not worship God in the same place, in the same way, because all the churches are shared. The Churches do not do communion together, and it is difficult to recognize them as Christian family. Still, many of the Christians are active members of peace groups. Protestants all over the Middle East are accused of being foreign or western, because they are not affiliated with the ancient Middle East Christians. Most churches in the Middle East can track their root to the time of Jesus Christ's disciples. Contextual theology is a way to prove that a Protestant perspective belongs to the Christianity like the rest. I think what's going on with Palestinian theology makes Protestantism not a western product, but a local voice for shaping their needs and challenges.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE MAIN THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES FROM THE PALESTINIAN CHRISTIAN CONTEXT: PROBLEMS THAT WILL NEED TO BE ADDRESSED BY PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS

Based upon this study, we have concluded that there are at least three ways Christian Zionism has affected the Palestinian Churches: a) the difficulty in interpreting the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation in relation to the ideas of Dispensationalism, b) the difficulty in the relationships between Palestinian Christians churches, and c) contextual theology closing the gap between Palestinian nationality and the Christian Bible.

#### **Difficulties in Biblical Interpretation**

There are three schools that deal with the Old Testament and New Testament in relation to the ideas of Dispensationalism - The Traditional School, Liberation Theology, Dispensational Theology. These three schools represent the historical ways of approaching the Promised Land and the end times.

#### Three Schools

##### **The Traditional School**

This view is generally held by many Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Christians in the Middle East. This school seeks to give equal value to both the Old and New

Testaments, while holding both in tension with each other. The first covenant with the Jews was canceled, and after Jesus came, the second covenant, which is open for everyone who accepts and turns to Christ. Justin Martyr, at the beginning of the second century, saw the church as the New Israel. According to Henry Chadwick,

Justin wrote a treatise against Marcion that is lost. He insists that the incarnation is the culmination of the creator's plan. Christ as Logos is the agent in creation, manifesting Himself to the Patriarchs, and finally taking of Mary our entire manhood: body, reason, and soul. To the Pauline typology of Adam and Christ, Justin adds the analogy of Eve with Mary, seeing in this "recapitulation" a proof of the unity of Old and New Testament and the continuity of creation and Redemption.<sup>1</sup>

In this view, there is no privilege for the Jewish people after they refused his mission as the crucified and resurrected Savior. Instead of a blessing, they are now living under a curse because at Jesus' trial, "all the people answered 'let his blood be on us and on our children'" (Matt. 27:25).

### **Ateek's School of Liberation Theology**

Father Na'em Ateek was formerly the rector of the Arab-speaking congregation at St. George's Episcopal Cathedral in East Jerusalem, where many Palestinian and Arab Christians have found it almost impossible to use the Hebrew Scriptures as part of their worship, especially with the term "Israel." Father Elias Chacour is another famous Palestinian Christian leader who shares the same struggle with Ateek. Father Elias Chacour, born in 1939, is the Palestinian Archbishop of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church. He is also an author and peace activist who is keen to promote reconciliation between Arabs and Israelis. He has refused to repeat the parts in the mass that quote

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<sup>1</sup> H. Chadwick, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, "St. Justin Martyr" (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 95.

Psalms 137:7-9, 83:1-11 and 58:6-11, begging God to take revenge for his people, saying that even if God were on the side of the Palestinians, he still couldn't accept to see his God doing this with his Jewish brothers and sisters:

Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites  
The day of Jerusalem's fall,  
How they said, "Tear it down! Tear it down!  
Down to its foundations!"  
O daughter of Babylon, you devastator!  
Happy shall they be who pay you back  
What you have done to us!  
Happy shall they be who take your little ones  
and dash them against the rock! (Psalm 137: 7-11, NRSV)

Ateek, in his work *Justice, and only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, has distinguished between three traditions in the Hebrew Scriptures. The first is a tribalistic tradition which sees God as electing the Jews "in an ethnically exclusive way, thus allowing for violent rejection of other peoples in the land."<sup>2</sup> The second is a prophetic tradition that criticizes the first tradition of a tribal God, and depicts God as a God of justice for all people. Ateek writes,

By the eighth century B.C. Amos was able to express a universalist concept of God quite clearly:  
"Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?" says the Lord. "Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Syrians from Kir?" (Amos 9:7)  
This universalist concept began to crystallize during the experience of the Exile after 587 B.C. [However], there was still a continual tension between the old, more pervasive idea of God's exclusiveness, which involved a special and unique relationship to Israel, and the newer, emerging view of God's inclusiveness.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether and Herman J. Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 187.

<sup>3</sup> Na'em Stifan Ateek, *Justice, and only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 92, 93.

The third perspective is the ethical hermeneutic which relates Jews to other people in an ethical, justice-seeking way. This method searches for a more efficient ethical universalism. This model is an attempt by religious Jews to both follow their own religion while accepting people of other faiths and nationalities. The goal is to enable all people to live together in peace.

Ateek, as a Christian, prefers to dialogue between the second and the third options. He believes that there is progress and development of insight in biblical revelation. Even within Scripture, Ateek argues, there are narrow, sinful views that shape our understanding of God into our own image. On the other hand, there are also better insights that call us to a fuller vision of God as Creator and Redeemer of all people. Thus, he says that the tribal tradition must be rejected as bad theology and bad ethics:

To illustrate this point, one can look at the story of the fall of Jericho (Joshua, chapter 6), which includes God's injunction to "utterly destroy all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep and asses, with the edge of the sword." (Josh. 6:21). Is such a passage, which is attributed to God, consistent with how God is revealed in Jesus Christ? If not, we must say that it only reveals a human understanding of God's nature and purpose that was superseded or corrected by the revelation in Christ.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Dispensational School**

This school believes in a literal interpretation, as well as a theological perspective of the "seven dispensations." This view continues to see the Jews as the Chosen People who have a different Covenant with God than does the Church. So, there are two sides: Jews and Church, and two Covenants, one by Law for the Jews, and one by grace for the Christians. Dispensationalists use Romans 9-11 to confirm these ideas.

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<sup>4</sup>Ateek, *Justice*, 83.

I ask then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. (Rom. 11:1, 2, NRSV)

They believe that now is the time for all nations, but that later, God's promise to Israel will be fulfilled:

I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved. (Rom. 11: 25, NRSV)

### **Contextualizing Biblical Interpretation**

What are the problems with these schools that we have discussed? According to the Traditional School, it is good to view all parts of the Bible as equal and holy. They hold to the theory of Shadow and Reality. The Old Testament is Shadow, while the New Testament is the Reality, and there is no contradiction or enmity between the two.<sup>5</sup> They use these verses to support this belief: "Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Col. 2:16-17). But, at the same time, this school is not enough of an answer for Christians in the Middle East who are suffering under the State of Israel. I think this view was enough before Israel became a state in 1948, but it is not enough to answer our needs after all the wars between Arabs and Israel in 1948, 1956, 1967 and in 1973. We need to create a new Biblical theology, such as Ateek's attempt, that is connected with our faith, and also with each country's history, culture and hopes.

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<sup>5</sup> George Sabra, *في سبيل الحوار المسكوني* (Ecumenical Dialogue: Evangelical Theological Articles), (Beirut: Clarion Publishing House, 2001), 48.

Ateek's perspective is very helpful for people who are suffering, especially the Palestinians, who are suffering under an Israeli occupation of their lands. This provides a pastoral response to their injustice. But at the same time, there are two problems. First, it makes some books in the Bible better than others. Some Christians find that this idea of refusing or ignoring parts of Scripture makes our mission of reaching Muslims very difficult. They say that this view of revelation is very weak and not holy enough in comparison with the Qur'ān, which is holy in every letter. However, Muslims have a similar issue which they answer with the concept of "abrogation" or *naskh*. Christians also could embrace Ateek's theological position concerning revelation, and benefit from his concepts of liberation and justice.

Another weakness in the Ateek's view is that he ignores large sections of Scripture. Some people also fear this view because it is very close to the second century heresy of Marcionism. He refused the God of the Old Testament, saying the Old Testament contradicted the God revealed in the New. Finding the two views irreconcilable, he stated that the Old Testament Scriptures were not God's revealed word. Christians today, and Christian Zionists especially, often accuse those who do not interpret the Old Testament according to their literalist viewpoint, of being the "new Marcionists."

However, these very passages which Ateek ignores are the ones which Christian Zionists use exclusively. The Christian Zionist corruption, misunderstanding, and abuse of these chapters goes unchallenged, and allows them to use these passages to confirm the legitimacy of the occupation. We as Christians in general, and especially Middle Eastern Christians, should not allow them to occupy our Old Testament. To date, Ateek's

school is the only one which seeks to relate the political-social issues of the Middle East with a Biblical faith.

Likewise, we have let the dispensationalist interpretation of the book of Revelation scare us away from studying this book. Through resistance and hard work we need to reclaim our Bible. The Dispensational School develops an equality between the Old Testament and the New by keeping rituals in the Old Testament as part of the Second coming, and by keeping the old covenant with the Jewish nation valid. But most Palestinian Christians do not accept this whole theology, but perhaps only partially. These have been called “Pseudo Christian Zionists” by Dr. David Grafton:

[These are people] who do not adhere to the foundations and conclusions of Dispensational Theology leading to a political platform called “Christian Zionism.” [Rather, he sees them as those who] have not been given adequate tools to interpret Scripture in such a way that might help them respond to the questions of biblical historicity and theological motifs that is faithful to the truths of the biblical text.<sup>6</sup>

During the Six-Day War, many Middle Eastern Christian leaders had different perspectives regarding biblical Israel. We might note some of Egyptian Presbyterian pastors like Ibrahim Said’s views about Millennialism. Said believed in a literal Millenium. But at the same time, like most Middle Eastern Protestant of the time, he saw the Jews of the past as being identical with the current Israel. He was dispensational in this point only. He was an Egyptian nationalist who strongly opposed the State of Israel and the ideas of Zionism. From this model, we can see a different view of Dispensationalism from that of the west.

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<sup>6</sup> David D. Grafton, “American Cultural Roots of Christian Zionism,” (unpublished conference paper, Fellowship of Middle East Council of Churches, Amman Jordan, March 31, 2006), 6.

The idea of nationalism was very important for everyone—and especially for Protestants in this period, who were trying to prove that they were not a foreign implant from the West. Further, even if, as an individual, one might have an interest in the Western interpretation of Dispensationalism, it would have been unsafe to express these views. Most Protestant leaders in the Middle East that we studied refused the Dispensational view of a Jewish nation and state in keeping with the wider political view during the war of 1967.

In my view, Dispensationalism must be discarded, biblically, theologically and politically. The belief system supports destruction and war, rather than justice, restoration and peace – and is thus against our Christian values. The Traditional School is not enough. It does not address the geo-political realities of the Middle East. We need to find a new and comprehensive way to read the Old and New Testament to answer the worldview of the Dispensational Zionists. Ateek's approach is by far the best attempt to harmonize our Christian Arab identity with Biblical Christian faith and to refute the Christian Zionist interpretation of scripture and politics.

### **Combating Explicit Racism**

It should be kept in mind that the whole-hearted evangelical support of Israel and Zionism does not come from any love of the Jewish people or pity for their past suffering. Christian Zionists are not friends of Israel simply for altruistic reasons, they have ulterior, selfish motives. Christian Zionism is a destructive racist force in the West and there is similar racism in the Middle East.

After the Six-Day War in 1967, the Presbyterian Egyptian Magazine *El Hoda* published many articles about the State of Israel, because many Christians began to ask

about the relationship between the Biblical Israel and the modern Israeli state. The opening page of the July 1967 edition of the journal started with these verses:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. (Matthew 23:37-38, NIV).

Middle Eastern Christians looked ahead to a future victory over Israel, seeing such Scripture passages as foretelling Israel's eventual destruction. The Holocaust and the dispersion of the Jews was interpreted as God's punishment. In the same magazine, another Egyptian pastor, Rev. Elias Makar, wrote an article about the Jews as a lost people and used all the problems they have faced to support his idea that they will suffer until they turn to Jesus. In the same issue of *El Hoda*, Rev. Dr. Ghobrial Rizkallah wrote an article about how God abandoned Israel. He mentioned Isaiah 5:1-8, Matthew 21:32-46, 23:26-46, and Acts 7:22, 23. Although he was very aware that these verses were talking about Jews during biblical times, he made no distinction between those Jews in the past, and the State of Israel today.

The way these writers interpret Jewish history is anti-Semitic. They are judging them for the crucifixion of Jesus, claiming that their suffering is an expression of revenge for Jesus being crucified by Jews 2,000 years ago. Egyptians are posturing in the same way as Zionists do to all Arabs. Egyptians are wrongly using the term "Jew" as if it is synonymous with "Israeli." Most Jews are not Zionists and we should respect Jews, just as we respect people of all religions.

### **Difficulties in Articulating Middle Eastern Protestant Theology**

Many important individuals of the Protestant Churches all over Middle East are working in large and important evangelical churches. They had different ideas from each

other. Each tried, in their time, to find a third way between Western Dispensationalism and Protestant doctrines, in response to the 1948 and 1967 Wars. Some sided more with the Dispensationalists, while others ended up taking the traditional Protestant view.

But which one of them is representative of an Arab Protestant theology? The theology for Dispensationalism is very clear, but the Protestant Church in the Middle East has nothing so clear within its own denomination. There has been no work done, no attempt to interpret most parts of the book of Revelation, or to address the issues of Dispensationalism. Our theology is often considered boring for our people, and fails to address the issues of daily life or our socio-political Middle East reality.

In our current situation, with the growth and political activism of Christian Zionism, it is vital that the Protestants seek a third way of understanding the Scriptures. If the church refuses to create a new way, then we will lose our mission and our people to Dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism is a belief system that is against humanity, and could end up destroying all civilization. While there will always be deep divisions in theologies, it is perhaps possible to work for a united vision as we stress the value of each and every human being in the sight of God, including those people of the Middle East who are seen as being against God in the final battle of Armageddon

## CONCLUSION

Contextual Palestinian theology is trying to address the concept of the promise land, and covenant, as well as violence in parts of the Old Testament. There is still need for more clarification about many other subjects. One is the plight of the Arab 48, Arabs who live in Israel after 1948 when Israel took Palestinian territories. The most difficult question is, how the Old Testament can be the Word of God in light of Palestinian Christians suffering; to understand how they can reconcile their faith with what is happening to them in their homeland.

Many people thinking the Jewish lobby is the reason for American support to Israel, but the reality is the Christian Zionists are the most powerful source which made Israel the fourth most powerful army in the world. Christian Zionists are the great threat to the existence of the Palestinian Christians now and in the future. Many Christians in the Middle East, and especially in Palestine, are upset with the role that many western Christians take to support Israel. Common things Palestinian wonder are, Why don't our Christian brothers and sisters in America care about what is happening to us? Do they even know we exist? Do they know that their tax dollars paid for the Israeli tanks that destroyed my house and the houses of my neighbors?

It is easy to understand why Palestinian Christians are doubting fair support from U.S. Christians for the conflict when they hear someone famous like the American Evangelist Pat Robertson, who says that Palestinian Christians have no right at all to any part of the Holy Land, even though in many instances it has been land that their ancestors have lived on for generations. Robertson is a Dispensationalist because he doesn't believe

Arabs are descended from Abraham, he reads literally Genesis 15:18-21, interpreting that the Holy Land should belong *exclusively* to the Jews indefinitely.

Christian Zionism is a destructive ideology because it teaches that the promised land for Jews stretches from the Euphrates River to the Nile (Genesis 15:18-21). This includes the land now occupied by Arabs in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. This would mean that all of the Arabs in those countries would have to be forced to leave their homelands. I need not spell out the ramifications of what that would mean. This theology is racist and xenophobic. It demonstrates a fear and a dislike of an entire ethnicity that has caused, and continues to cause, friction between the West and the Middle Eastern nations. Naim Ateek, Mitri Raheb, President Jimmy Carter, denominations in the West such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church in the USA, United Church of Christ, and many other individuals and churches have been working to counteract Dispensationalist efforts and we need to appreciate their work by continuing to develop support for their views in our churches.

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