

# Christian Zionism: A Faithful Response

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Dear United Church of Christ sisters and brothers,

Greetings and peace in the name of Jesus Christ!

The 24th General Synod, meeting in Minneapolis in July 2003, affirmed a resolution titled "An Alternative Voice to Christian Zionism." The text of this resolution, included in full in this resource, calls for prayerful study and reflection on the important topic of the conflict in Israel-Palestine and the particular issues raised by differing Christian beliefs.

Members of the United Church of Christ hold a variety of perspectives related to the conflict in Palestine and Israel. These perspectives are influenced by personal history, community relationships, and theological commitments. Christians can and do differ on important matters, and we affirm the ongoing right and responsibility for each member of the United Church of Christ to discern matters related both to religion and public policy as their faith and conscience dictates.

While we may differ in perspective, no one can be in doubt as to the pivotal role these concerns play on the world stage. We believe that the voices of the churches in the United States, while at a geographic distance, have a profound impact on the lives of people around the world, and particularly in this troubled setting which is holy ground for so many. The United Church of Christ has cherished strong relationships with both Jewish and Muslim communities here and abroad. We have maintained deep and historic commitments to Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East, including Palestinians.

The General Synod has made important statements on matters of peace and justice which cannot be ignored in the current circumstance. These statements include commitments which demand of us a thorough and careful examination of our public witness. We are particularly concerned about the influence of Christian Zionism, and that it is not balanced, in the public arena, by a faithful Christian witness which would offer a very different perspective. We, along with partner churches in the United States and around the world, want to present an alternative to Christian Zionism, one which fosters relationship and honors longtime commitments to peace and justice.

I urge you to study the enclosed resources, and those to which it points for further information, and to engage the issues they raise. By praying and reflecting, as well as seeking a more complete perspective on the theology and politics of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, we can better work for Christ's justice and peace, shalom, salaam.

John Thomas  
General Minister and President

*Prepared by the UCC Office of Ecumenical Relations and  
the Global Ministries Middle East and Europe Office.*

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**O**n January 5, 2004 a small group of Israeli Knesset members met with the heads of three conservative Christian organizations to create the Christian Allies Caucus, a manifestation of the close relationship developed between Israel's government and Christian Zionists—conservative evangelicals whose religious vision gives them a stake in the political triumph of the Jewish state.

Malcolm Hedding of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem said on the occasion: "We welcome this initiative as an opportunity to further support Israel by making known to Knesset members the vital work that Christian Zionists do for and on behalf of the state of Israel."

Why do some Christians give such exceptional support to the State of Israel? How have they gained political strength, not just in the United States but in Israel itself? And why are many churches and policy-makers concerned about the growing influence of this theological worldview on current events?

## What is Christian Zionism?

*Christian Zionism* is a theological and social movement that views history as the unfolding of biblical prophecy. Many people casually call themselves "Christian Zionist" without knowing the history or full intent of the movement. What is sometimes meant by this identification is that, as a Christian, the believer does not believe Christianity replaces or devalues Judaism. Frequently it means a Christian firmly supports the need and right of Jews to an independent state. But Christian Zionism has more concrete historical origins and more specific religious and political implications regarding Israel and the role of Jews and Christians in carrying forth biblical prophecy.

### *Background to the Movement*

Christian Zionism developed out of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Protestant *fundamentalism*. Fundamentalists claim to read the Bible literally. Although while agreeing on a specific set of core beliefs, or fundamentals, other conclusions about what fundamentalist groups claim the Bible literally says often vary. Some fundamentalists read the Bible to gain a religious understanding of historical and current events and to predict future events related to the second coming of Christ.

Christian Zionists read the Bible literally to forecast a divinely-willed plan for the end of history that includes, among other events, the return of all diaspora Jews to Jerusalem to reconstitute the biblical nation of Israel. This ingathering of Jews is a condition for the *apocalypse*, the return of Christ that sets the stage for a dramatic scenario of heavenly reign and devastating war that ends with humanity's final judgment and the end of the world.

### *A Unique Biblical Interpretation*

Christian Zionists subscribe to a theology called *dispensationalism*, which asserts that God's will is manifest through several stages of history. Each of these stages or *dispensations* yield a new way in which creation relates to God, and each is defined in successive epochs of scriptural revelation. Dispensationalism was formally systematized by John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), a British minister of the Plymouth Brethren, who recalled Paul's admonition to Timothy that he "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Darby believed that the focus of God's plan was the once and future fulfillment of God's *covenant* with the people of Israel. In this system, the Church, an age of faithful Gentiles, exists as a distinct fifth stage in a parenthetical time after the Old Testament periods of (1) Eden, (2) the flood and Noah, (3) Abraham, and (4) Israel. In some unknown instant, or *rapture*, the (5) Church would be taken up into heaven, followed then by a period of (6) the Spirit, and culminating in (7) the final Millennium, or thousand-year reign of Christ on earth.

Dispensationalist readings of scripture became commonplace among American Protestantism at the turn of the twentieth century due to the popularity of Bible Conferences and Bible Institutes promoting the theological system. The most notable dispensationalist school was the Moody Bible Institute, founded in 1889 by evangelist D.L. Moody, who taught that the Bible was useful as a program for interpreting history and prescribing Christian attitudes and actions toward current events. Dispensationalist instruction matured after World War I as Christians struggled to understand their world of conflict and modern change. Many laypeople found dispensationalist answers at their fingertips with the popularization of the Scofield Reference Bible, first out in 1909. Conservative dispensationalist seminaries were founded to train many of the ministers and evangelists whose

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influence still is felt strongly in denominations and congregations today.

Among the principal dispensationalist seminaries is Dallas Theological Seminary, founded in 1924, which is where the popular biblical futurist Hal Lindsey studied. Hal Lindsey's famous book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, published in 1970, interpreted current events as harbingers of the imminent end-times, and in the process introduced dispensationalist theology to a broad American audience.

## Israel and the Signs of the End-Times in History

Among varying interpretations of the end-times, exponents generally hold to a theology based upon a particular interpretation of the Bible and history. A predominant characteristic of dispensational fundamentalism is its end-time perspective. *Millennialism* is a theological view of the end-times that believes history will culminate in a final thousand year reign of Christ on earth. Knowing this outline of the divine plan, many dispensational believers determine to serve God most faithfully by anticipating, and even advancing the conditions that prepare for Christ to return.

Watching for the signs of the end-times in history has become a hallmark of dispensational or millennial Christianity. Dispensationalists like British politician Arthur Balfour (of the Balfour Declaration) saw the establishment of a modern Israel as a homeland for the Jews as a precursor to Christ's second coming and the tumultuous period of the *apocalypse* that would precede the glorious millennium.

The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 confirmed for many believers that scriptural revelation was being played out as predicted in their particular view of the end-times. Christian Zionists believe the founding of Israel in the "Holy Land" fulfills God's special covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Influenced by certain texts, such as Ezekiel 37-38, Christian Zionism purports to hasten the second coming of Christ by supporting Israeli policies that provide for the expansion of Jews into the biblical lands of Israel, often referred to as *Judea and Samaria*, in order to prepare for the battle that would precede the second coming. Christian Zionist organizations often work to support the immigration of Jews to Israel and rebuilding of the Jewish temple in order to prepare for the apocalypse.

The movement has gained significant political strength in recent decades as its adherents, mainly among conservative U.S. evangelicals, have successfully supported an agenda of American exceptionalism in foreign policy and generally unwavering support for the State of Israel. The increased influence of Christian Zionists in U.S. society, among televangelists and politicians, has strengthened America's "special relationship" with Israel and helped ensure U.S. military and financial patronage. Despite Christian Zionists' appropriation of Israel as part of Christian prophesy, the fervent support of Christian Zionists has been courted by Israeli and Jewish leaders.

Critics of Christian Zionism include citizens wary of its influence among U.S. political leaders as well as traditional Christian bodies doubtful of its proponents' theological or biblical integrity. As the political development of the Middle East, the role of U.S. policy in it, and interfaith and cross-cultural relations between the people of the Middle East and what is perceived as the "Christian" West, all become increasingly important, Christians more broadly should become aware of what Christian Zionism is and what concrete challenges it poses to a faithful witness for global peace, justice and the integrity of creation.

## How did they grow politically strong?

Not all evangelicals are Christian Zionists, but almost all Christian Zionists are evangelical. In a traditional—and global—context, "evangelical" is usually synonymous with "Protestant," and describes a focus on the gospel and its teachings. In today's U.S. context, the term "evangelical" often refers to conservative Christians who emphasize personal conversion and literal reading of scripture. American evangelicals have been a force in U.S. politics since early in our country's history, but were especially influential in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their modern resurgence began in the 1960's but was crystallized during Ronald Reagan's presidency when the Republican Party became most closely associated with evangelicals and other conservative Christians. With strong local influence, an evangelical agenda found access into state legislatures and the U.S. Congress as well, thus augmenting Christian Zionists' influence through the conservative—and specifically evangelical Christian—presence in both the executive and legislative branches.

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Such a resurgence of evangelical presence in government has meant that the possibility for Christian Zionism to impact our country's foreign policy—particularly in the Middle East—is more prevalent. President George W. Bush, while Methodist, is openly conservative regarding his faith and has brought that with him to his administration's domestic and foreign policy platforms, including support for Israel. Part of the evangelicals' success has been due to effective proclamation of identity and values through the media, through which more and more evangelicals reach out. In addition to broadcasting church services, evangelicals have given a special focus to promoting Israel and its claim on the Holy Land.

According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, a significantly higher percentage (though not all) of evangelicals than mainline Protestants and Catholics in the U.S. feel that the modern State of Israel fulfills prophecy on Christ's second coming, and believe that the U.S. should support Israel over the Palestinians.

## **U.S. Support for Israel and the Church's Critique**

The State of Israel receives more American aid than any other country in the world. Annual grants to Israel amount to roughly \$3 billion, a sum that includes both military and economic assistance. The United States contributes more economic aid to Israel than it does to all the countries of Africa combined.

But U.S. support for Israel is not limited to financial aid. In domestic and international political fora, U.S. advocacy of Israel's positions is consistent and seemingly unconditional. In the history of the United Nations Security Council, more than half of U.S.'s roughly 80 vetoes have been on Middle East resolutions, and it has abstained from another 25 votes raising concerns about Israeli policies or actions. Congress routinely passes resolutions supporting Israel, even in contradiction of opinion and decisions of international institutions like the International Court of Justice.

The United States should support the right of Israel to exist in secure and accepted borders. It should also support the same rights for Palestinians. Our government should not support Israel's policies of home demolition, targeted assassinations, curfews, checkpoints, or

separation barriers that affect Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza.

As a church, the United Church of Christ has taken positions advocating for justice in a more peaceful Middle East. In the course of advocating for the justice and the rights of all peoples, the UCC has condemned the violence perpetuated in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The UCC has also criticized Israel for its policies that violate Palestinians' rights and endanger livelihoods as well as lives.

But critique of a nation's policies is not the same as hatred of a people! It is easy—but fallacious—to equate criticism of Israel with anti-Israel, anti-Jewish, or anti-Semitic sentiment. By way of analogy, to criticize U.S. policies is not to be anti-American, nor is it to hate America. Critique of a nation's policy is made to offer opportunities for improvement in a government's approach, not to attack a religious or ethnic group of people. (It is worth noting that both Jews and Arabs are Semitic peoples, descendants of Shem, Noah's son. Hebrew and Arabic, as well as Aramaic, are Semitic languages.)

## **A Different Vision of God's Will for the World**

Christian Zionism is based upon a literal reading of scripture, primarily the Old Testament. Its focus is on the covenant between God and the Israelites promising them the land, and the marking in history of different eras, prophesied by biblical text. It would be facile to accept at face value the assertions Christian Zionism makes--including equating biblical Israel with the modern State of Israel—as it contains significant scriptural flaws. At a most basic level, the covenant between God and Abraham offers land to the Israelites (¶And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.¶ *Genesis 17: 7-9*), but also requires that the Israelites treat their neighbor kindly (¶When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.¶ *Leviticus 19: 33-34*).

Christian Zionist efforts to support charities and Israeli policies dedicated to the gathering of Jews into biblical Israel, in order to prepare for the battle that would precede the second coming,

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ignores a tragically sinister position toward the Jews. At one level, such an approach fails to mention that the Jews who are to be gathered would perish in the final battle since they do not believe in Christ (see 1 *Thessalonians* 4-5). The State of Israel, therefore, should have no interest in supporting such a system as this theology does not actually advocate for the well-being of Israel or the Jews.

Beyond that, and on a deeper level, Christian Zionism denies the loving and merciful nature of God for all of God=s creation, as it is selective in who enjoys God=s favor. There are numerous texts in the Old and New Testaments that affirm God=s justice and God=s requirement that God=s people seek justice, such as the familiar eighth verse of Micah 6. Isaiah also commands justice and spells out consequences for failure, saying “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow... If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” (1: 16-17, 19-20). This message is consistent with Jesus= imperative, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (*Matthew* 22: 37-40).

If we conclude that Christian Zionism is at best a dubious theology, then what alternative do we adopt as we consider the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and indeed the world?

As people of faith bound by a prayerful relationship with God and by our conscience, and as Christians affirming the trinity and the reconciling love of Christ, we are called to seek the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in our reading and interpretation of the Bible. Such an openness to hear the word of God leads us to strive to comprehend the spirit of the word, rather than its historical letter— which can be oppositional and contradictory. We are then called to witness to that understanding in the world.

Through his example and in his profound way, Jesus offered hope for the despondent; healing for the suffering; justice for the oppressed; peace for the conflicted; and love for all—neighbors and

strangers alike. Christ’s ministry offers us an interpretation of scripture that requires following those principles.

The United Church of Christ’s 15<sup>th</sup> General Synod (1985) identified the UCC as a “just peace” church. “Just Peace” is defined in that historic pronouncement as “the interrelation of friendship, justice, and common security from violence.” The pronouncement states that a just peace is grounded in “God’s activity in creation..., covenant relationship..., the reconciling activity of Jesus Christ..., the presence of the Holy Spirit..., the community of reconciliation..., [and] hope.” “Shalom is the vision that pulls all creation toward a time when weapons are swept off the earth and all creatures lie down together without fear; where all have their own fig tree and dwell secure from want. As Christians, we offer this conviction to the world; Peace is possible.” As an earnest alternative to war, the Just Peace pronouncement goes far beyond a minimalist criterion for peace, and asserts a much deeper possibility for relationship—one that is inclusive of all peoples and their rights.

These conclusions are deeply rooted in scripture and offer us a liberating alternative as we consider the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—one mired in injustices and yearning for a peace that honors all people. Among those people are Israeli Jews and Jews around the world, many of whom feel a special affinity to the modern State of Israel. The United Church of Christ has engaged ecumenically with the American Jewish community on many issues, including theological dialogue as well as social issues facing the United States such as civil rights and economic justice. The relationship between the UCC and the Jewish community was addressed by the 16<sup>th</sup> General Synod (1987) by a resolution that acknowledges the common heritage of Christianity and Judaism, recognizes an historic anti-Jewish bias by the church and by society, affirms the continuing covenant between God and the Jewish people, and calls upon the UCC to nurture relationships through dialogue and action. The UCC in many settings therefore continues to value partnership with Jews in a variety of ways, not least of these is upholding the rights of the State of Israel to exist in security and peace with her neighbors.

### **The View of Christians in the Middle East**

Through Common Global Ministries, the UCC is also informed about Christian Zionism and the

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negative effects of its implications on U.S. foreign policy by our relationships with Palestinian and other Middle Eastern Christians. From Algeria to Iran and from Turkey to Sudan, there are roughly 15 million Christians in an otherwise predominantly Muslim region. Our denomination's missionaries have been present in the Middle East for nearly two centuries and, through current partnership with churches and church-related organizations, we are offered the opportunity to understand the complexities of the region through direct lenses while at the same time sharing in the joys and tribulations of Middle Easterners. The Christians of the Middle East are part and parcel of their social, political, and economic milieu and have existed as a faith community in the region for two millennia. They speak the language (Arabic, Persian, or Turkish) of their nations and are essentially indistinguishable from their non-Christian compatriots.

Among Palestinians and through Common Global Ministries, the UCC is in partnership with the YMCA and YWCA of Palestine, the Department of Service for Palestinian Refugees of the Middle East Council of Churches, the Episcopal Diocese's Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza, and the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, among others. These close relationships have brought to life many important ministries of relief and compassion for Palestinians living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza.

The desire of Arab Christians in Palestine and Israel is for a peaceful and non-violent resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and control over Palestinian lives, and for the respect of human and legal rights and democratic self-determination for all. They support and encourage U.S. policy that would achieve a fair two-state solution, creating a free and viable Palestine next to Israel and ensuring security for both people and for the region.

Christian Zionism as a policy not only disregards the rights and personhood of all but Israelis, but also threatens U.S. diplomacy and interests in pursuing a negotiated two-state solution to the conflict. As an ideology that dishonors scripture's greatest admonition to love the neighbor and protect creation, Christian Zionism diminishes Christian relations with Jews around the world, and especially in the Middle East. Perhaps most troubling, Christian Zionism's anticipation of a final, total war centered in the Middle East invites

a perpetuation of conflict in the region and rejects any hope for human reconciliation.

The tragically un-Christian implication of Christian Zionist ideology and its effects on world affairs require that its tenets be refuted and an alternative theology of possibility and promise for all people in the Middle East be articulated, even as we pursue a faithful vision for just peace in the Middle East.

The resolution "An Alternative Voice to Christian Zionism" passed by the 24th General Synod in July 2003 lays the groundwork for developing this theological alternative and calls the United Church of Christ to recommit its efforts to seek peace and reconciliation among Palestinians and Israelis, that the Land we call Holy may indeed be so.

# AN ALTERNATIVE VOICE TO CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

## A Resolution Approved by the 24<sup>th</sup> General Synod of the UCC, July 2003

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WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ has affirmed its support for a secure state of Israel in a previous Synod resolution ["The Israeli-Palestine Conflict" (1987)], and the existence of Israel as a Jewish state is important, and

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ has also condemned anti-Jewish positions in previous resolutions ["Anti-Semitism" (2001), and "Relationship between UCC and the Jewish Community" (1987)], and

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ has affirmed its concern about the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine, and the importance of justice for both Israelis and Palestinians in the resolutions ["Bringing Justice and Peace to the Middle East" (1999); "Jerusalem City of Life" (1997); and "Palestine/Israel" (1997)], and

WHEREAS, as a result of the Israeli settlements, access roads, and military control areas, Palestinians have been constrained in smaller and smaller densely populated, non-contiguous areas, and

WHEREAS, many innocent Israeli and Palestinian civilians have been killed in the struggle for this land, and

WHEREAS, Israel has a very large peace movement that opposes the occupation of Palestine, and

WHEREAS, in polling data, a majority of Israelis express a desire for negotiations with Palestinians, a two-state solution, and evacuation of settlements in the context of a peace accord, and

WHEREAS, the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority have accepted provisions of the Road Map to Peace, and

WHEREAS, Christian Zionism, aligned with the minority Jewish settler group, takes positions on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict that are contrary to the position of the Israeli government and of most Israelis, opposing a two-state solution and supporting transfer of all Arabs out of Palestine, and

WHEREAS, influential members of the current U.S. government endorse Christian Zionist positions as a basis for U. S. foreign policy, and

WHEREAS, the Just Peace Pronouncement that was adopted by the General Synod in 1985, as well as updates and similar proclamations of other

denominations and like-minded groups, has received insufficient publicity within our denomination, in the mass media, and among U. S. government officials;

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the 24th General Synod of the United Church of Christ recognizes the diversity of Biblical perspectives on the question of a Jewish homeland, but affirms that all such perspectives should be grounded in the message of justice and peace taught by Jesus and the biblical prophets, and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ will write a letter to the President of the United States, other leaders in our government, and the leaders of the state of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, informing them that this General Synod asks all parties to agree unconditionally to abide by the Geneva Conventions and to accept the Road Map to Peace as originally proposed, and

LET IT BE FINALLY RESOLVED, that the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ will, in consultation with the appropriate ministries, develop a plan to communicate the theological and political ramifications of Christian Zionism. Elements of this plan should include:

- ❖ Issuing to all churches in the United Church of Christ a pastoral letter on Christian Zionism and the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine and that this letter be available on the UCC website.
- ❖ Informing current government officials of the Christian alternatives to Christian Zionism.
- ❖ Continuing to develop the United Church of Christ educational program about the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine, and include material that enables Christians to respond within a biblical basis to the tenets of Christian Zionism. The objective of this educational program should be that members of the United Church of Christ will be encouraged to become more active on this issue.
- ❖ Cooperating with other denominations and like-minded groups to promote alternatives to Christian Zionism in the mass media.

Considering the human suffering and the political urgency of the on-going conflict, we would hope the first elements of this plan could be implemented by fall 2003.

# An Alternative Voice to Christian Zionism

## Resources on Christian Zionism

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### A Prayer for Middle East Peace and Reconciliation

Gracious God,  
you have promised through your prophets that Jerusalem will be home to many peoples, mother to many nations.  
Hear our prayers that Jerusalem, the city of your visitation, may be for all — Jews, Christians and Muslims — a place to dwell with you and to encounter one another in peace.  
We make this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.  
*Churches for Middle East Peace worship resource*

### Glossary

**Apocalypse**—"from the sky," it refers to Christ's "Second Coming" or return to earth from heaven, but also alludes to the cataclysmic events of world history and "final judgment" of all non-believers that follow.

**Armageddon**—the final battle between the armies of Christ and Satan, fought on the plain of Megiddo in northern Israel. Dispensationalists generally believe Christ's defeat of Satan will begin the millennium of Christ's earthly reign.

**Christian Zionism** – an ideology developed in the nineteenth century from dispensationalists like British politician Arthur Balfour (of the Balfour Declaration) who saw the establishment of a modern Israel as a homeland for the Jews and as a precursor to Christ's second coming. Christian Zionists believe the founding in 1948 of the State of Israel in the "Holy Land" fulfills God's special covenant with Abraham and his descendants and often work to support the immigration of Jews to Israel and rebuilding of the Jewish temple in order to prepare for the apocalypse. The increased influence of Christian Zionists in U.S. society, among televangelists and politicians, has strengthened America's "special relationship" with Israel and helped ensure U.S. military and financial patronage. Despite Christian Zionists' appropriation of Israel as part of Christian prophesy, the fervent support of Christian Zionists has been courted by Israeli and Jewish leaders.

**Covenant**—God's special relationship with the biblical tribes-turned-nation of Israel, whereby according to God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 12; 15) God's people are blessed and protected for their faithfulness and righteousness. Christians variably believe this covenant was either replaced by a new covenant exclusively for Christians, was extended to Christians as inheritors of God's

blessings, or through Christ was made universally available to all who are faithful and righteous.

**Dispensationalism** – a system of biblical interpretation formalized by British minister John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), which asserts that God's will is manifest through several stages or "dispensations" of history, each of which reveals a new way in which creation relates to God. The system provides a religious framework to order historical and current events, as well as anticipate future events.

**Eschatology**—theology of the "end times" or last days of human history, when all humanity will be judged according to individual faithfulness by their faith.

**Fundamentalism**—strict religious adherence. Christian fundamentalists generally agree on core beliefs regarding biblical literalism and Christian exclusivism, but often differ on conclusions about what the Bible literally says about the last days.

**Israel**—Both the name of the biblical nation of Israelites—Hebrew tribes descendant from the patriarch Jacob, and the name of the modern Jewish state. There is disagreement among Israelis and non-Israelis whether or not the modern State of Israel is the religious successor or re-establishment of Biblical Israel.

**Judea and Samaria**—biblical designations for the lands corresponding to the Northern (Samaria) and Southern (Judea) Kingdoms created by the tribes of Israel. Christian and Jewish Zionists who support a "greater Israel"—which includes all of the occupied West Bank—appeal to God's promise to give the land to Abraham's descendants (Gen. 15). Its usage to describe West Bank territories the State of Israel occupies asserts a religious grounding to the political claim to the land.

**Millennialism, or pre-millennialism**—belief in the thousand year reign of peace that follows Christ's return from heaven to defeat Satan. Pre-millennialism expects a deterioration of human history before Christ's return that is biblically forecast and ordained by God (an alternate assertion, post-millennialism, believes Christ will return after a thousand year-period of historical progress).

**Palestine**—both the geographic name of the territory between the eastern Mediterranean shore and the Jordan river that derives from the name of the early Roman province, and the political name of the independent governance and putative State of Palestinian Arabs.

**Rapture** –according to “end-time” predictions based on 1 Thess. 4, the unknown instant when Christ will appear “in the clouds” (the “Second Coming”) to rescue the Church (including resurrected believers) from a seven-year period of Satan’s rule that will bring great earthly “tribulation” (Matt. 24:21, and thought to be described in Rev.). Non-Christians will remain after the rapture to suffer the “tribulation” and “final judgment.”

### Websites

Alternative Voice to Christian Zionism\*,  
[www.loveandjustice.org/AlternateVoice/](http://www.loveandjustice.org/AlternateVoice/)

\* This site is resourced by First Congregational Church of Naperville, IL, sponsor of the GS 24 Resolution.

Challenging Christian Zionism: Christians Committed to Biblical Justice,  
[www.christianzionism.org](http://www.christianzionism.org)

Christian Zionism: A Historical Analysis and Critique, by John Hubers,  
[www.rca.org/images/mission/mideast/christianzionism.pdf](http://www.rca.org/images/mission/mideast/christianzionism.pdf)

Churches for Middle East Peace, [www.cmep.org](http://www.cmep.org)  
Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding,  
[www.emeu.org](http://www.emeu.org)

Global Ministries Middle East and Europe,  
[www.globalministries.org/mee](http://www.globalministries.org/mee)

Middle East Council of Churches,  
[www.mecchurches.org](http://www.mecchurches.org)

Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life: American Evangelicals and Israel,  
<http://pewforum.org/publications/reports/EvangelicalsIsrael.pdf>

Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center,  
[www.sabeel.org](http://www.sabeel.org)

Tikkun Community, [www.tikkun.org](http://www.tikkun.org)

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[www.walktheroadtopeace.org](http://www.walktheroadtopeace.org)

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