



"ARMAGEDDON LOBBY": HOW CHRISTIAN ZIONISTS INFLUENCE U.S. POLICY

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Despite the fact that not only hospitals and mosques but also Christian churches were destroyed during the bombardment of the Gaza Strip by Israeli forces, many people who call themselves Christians and who are not ethnic Jews actively support Israel's actions. Where did this phenomenon come from?

The fact is that Zionism as a Jewish political movement emerged in the late 19th century, but similar ideas appeared much earlier. And, paradoxically, they were born in a Christian environment.

The Birth of Puritan Zionism

One of the first supporters of the immigration of European Jews to Palestine were the Puritans. This Protestant sect emerged in the late 16th century and became quite influential in England and later in the American colonies. They showed considerable interest in the role of the Jews in eschatology, or end-time theology.

For example, John Owen, a seventeenth-century theologian, member of Parliament, and administrator at Oxford, taught that the physical return of Jews to Palestine was necessary for the fulfillment of end times prophecy. And in 1621, Sir Henry Finch wrote a sermon calling for the support of the Jewish people and their return to their biblical homeland.

One of the most influential strands of Christian Zionism has been dispensationalism, a system of interpretation that uses information from the Bible to divide history into different periods of administrations or dispensations and views the biblical term "Israel" as referring to the ethnic Jewish nation established in Palestine.

Dispensationalism was originally developed by Anglo-Irish preacher John Nelson Darby in the nineteenth century. Darby believed that the God-ordained destinies of Israel and the Christian church were completely separate, with the latter to be physically "raptured"—raised to meet Jesus—before the period of upheaval predicted in the Apocalypse, called the Great Tribulation.

According to Darby, the Great Tribulation will begin after the construction of the Third Jewish Temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. During the Great Tribulation, according to this teaching, 144,000

Jews will convert to Christianity, and this will reveal to them the true intentions of the Antichrist. Thus, they will become the epicenter for the conversion of all unbelievers who have not been raptured to the Christian faith.

It is these 144,000 converted Jews who will meet Antichrist in the final battle known as Armageddon and defeat the Antichrist. After this battle, the seven years of tribulation will end and Jesus will return to imprison Satan and establish a thousand-year Messianic Kingdom on earth.

Despite its absurdity and lack of any reference in the Bible, the concept of physically moving Christians to heaven on the eve of Armageddon has been enthusiastically embraced by some churches in England and especially in the United States.

Darby's approach to Christian eschatology coincides with similar developments in Jewish eschatology, namely, the ideas of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer and the creation of a new branch of Jewish messianism. Its representatives believed that Jews should actively work to hasten the coming of their messiah by immigrating to Israel and building the Third Temple on the site of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, where the Al-Aqsa Mosque is located.

Darby himself traveled throughout North America and several other countries to popularize his ideas, meeting with several influential pastors throughout the English-speaking world. Among them was James Brooks, Cyrus Scofield's future mentor, who later disseminated the concept; and his interpretation was published widely in the United States and is known as the Scofield Bible.

Another figure influenced by Darby's doctrine was the American preacher Charles Taze Russell, whose church later gave rise to several different sects, including the Jehovah's Witnesses (an organization banned in Russia). Decades before the founding of modern political Zionism, Russell began preaching—not only to Christians but also to Jews in the United States and elsewhere—the need for mass Jewish immigration to Palestine.

Russell wrote a letter in 1891 to Edmond de Rothschild, a member of the Rothschild banking family, as well as Maurice von Hirsch, a wealthy German financier of Jewish descent, about his plan to settle Palestine. He described his plan as follows: "My proposal is that wealthy Jews buy from Turkey at a fair value all her property rights in these lands: that is, all public lands (lands not belonging to private

owners), provided that Syria and Palestine are formed as free states."

The book, *The Jewish State* by Theodor Herzl, considered the founder of Zionism, was published only in 1896.

American preacher William E. Blackstone, greatly influenced by Darby and other dispensationalists of the era, also spent decades advocating Jewish immigration to Palestine as a means of fulfilling biblical prophecy. His efforts culminated in the Blackstone Memorial Petition, which called on then-United States President Benjamin Harrison and his Secretary of State James Blaine to take action "in favor of the return of Palestine to the Jews."

Signers of the petition included bankers J. D. Rockefeller and J. P. Morgan, future President of the United States William McKinley, Speaker of the House Thomas Brackett Reed, Chief Justice Melville Fuller, the mayors of New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, and Chicago, the editors of the *Boston Globe*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Chicago Tribune*, as well as members of Congress, influential businessmen, and clergy.

Although some rabbis were included among the signers, most American Jewish communities opposed the content of the petition. In other words, the primary goal of Zionism, even before it became a movement, was widely supported by the American Christian elite.

Modern Rise

Yet for the first half of the twentieth century, Christian Zionism was not very widespread or influential in the United States.

However, then preacher Billy Graham enters the arena and had close relationships with several presidents, including Dwight Eisenhower, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon. Finally, dispensationalism entered the mainstream of American political discourse with evangelical preacher Jerry Falwell, who founded the Moral Majority organization in 1979.

Another prominent dispensationalist of great political and literary influence was Hal Lindsey. Ronald

Reagan was so moved by his books that he invited Lindsey to speak at a National Security Council meeting on nuclear war plans and made him an influential adviser to several members of Congress and Pentagon officials.

To this day, the Republican Party still leans heavily on Christian Zionists for both cash and votes. They have a profound influence on party ideology.

Christian Zionists in the United States now have many names. Some call them the "Armageddon Lobby," others call them the "Christian AIPAC" (American Israel Public Affairs Committee).

Christian Zionists themselves number about 20 million in the United States, and they sponsor the migration of Jews to Israel from Ethiopia, Russia, Ukraine and other countries. That is, in fact, there are more of them than ethnic Jews around the world, although not all Jews support Zionism.

During the administration of George W. Bush Jr. and especially on the eve of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, the administration was also heavily influenced by Christian Zionists in the form of neoconservatives. During a 60 Minutes interview in October 2002, Jerry Falwell even stated, "I think we can now count on President Bush to do the right thing for Israel every time."

Falwell was referring to President Bush's actions in April 2002 when he turned a blind eye to Israeli actions in the West Bank during Operation Protective Wall. Falwell met with President Bush several times during his first term, specifically to discuss United States support for Israel. According to him, the president's views on Israel were in line with his own.

Christian Zionists also helped oust Democratic Congressman Jim Moran, who suggested that it was done for Israel's benefit by the Jewish lobby. And the Apostolic Congress and the group Americans for a Secure Israel effectively derailed Bush's plan to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians by flooding the White House with petitions.

There is also an organization in the U.S. called United Christians for Israel, which was founded in 2006 by Pastor John Hagee and has more than seven million members. Its members include former CIA head and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, former Vice President Mike Pence and well-known hawk John Bolton. All of them were quite active during Donald Trump's presidency.

During a speech in Kansas in 2015, Pompeo openly stated that he believes in the "rapture of Christians," and in an interview said that as a Christian he believes that "God chose Trump to help save the Jews from the threat of Iran."

It was Christian Zionists who lobbied Donald Trump to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and its sovereignty over the occupied Golan Heights. Pastor Robert Jeffress of First Baptist Church in Dallas and Trump supporter led a prayer for peace in Jerusalem during the relocation of the United States embassy from Tel Aviv on May 14, 2018. He called it "a momentous event in the life of your nation and in the history of our world."

Another entity from the U.S. called, Proclaiming Justice for the Nations, also lobbies for Israel's interests. At the end of October 2023, they began calling for the resignation of the UN Secretary General for his criticism of Israel's actions towards the Palestinians.

As we can see, the issue of support for Israel has a longer and more complex history than even that state's creation in 1948.

Whereas many Jews deny even the very statehood of Israel, calling it a violation of Talmudic commandments (e.g., the Hasidic Naturei Karta movement), there are ardent supporters of Israel among the followers of Christian denominations, including justifications for any of its government's actions, including repression of Palestinians.

And, of course, American Protestants, who link Israel's fate to their eschatological worldview, play a huge role in this. And among them are influential political figures who make decisions on U.S. foreign policy.

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