

Abstract

Whenever scholars explain the belief system behind Christian Zionism, many scholars cite a complex theological worldview called premillennial dispensationalism. According to this theology, Jews must return to their homeland of Israel for the second coming of Jesus to happen. While this worldview certainly plays a role in Christian Zionist activism, there is another overlooked belief system which impacts this political movement: the prosperity gospel. Since the rise of charismatic Christians into political activism in the 1980s, Christian Zionism has become less about speeding up the end times and more about blessing Israel to gain God's favor. This project has two goals: 1) to argue that Christian Zionism is a political movement and 2) to show how the prosperity gospel has impacted American policy toward Israel via Christian Zionism.

Blessed Politics: Christian Zionism, the Prosperity Gospel, and American Policy toward Israel

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Preface

Before I came to Mount Holyoke, a Wellesley alumna told me to never bring up the Israel-Palestine issue at a Seven Sister College. So, fascinated with controversial issues, I wrote a thesis about it. Since supporting Israel can be such a sensitive issue, I can see how some of my claims might be offensive. My intent is not to demonize or dismiss Christian Zionists or evangelicals, nor generalize their beliefs. Part of my interest in embarking on this project was coming across Zionists as a young politico. Hailing from culturally Catholic circles in Arizona (which did not discuss Israel) and interested in the Holocaust and the Middle East, I was fascinated with why everyone in the Northeast except for me knew what the Israel-Palestine conflict was. As a freshman in College, I started learning more about the issue. Along the way, I befriended many Zionists and even worked for Nikki Haley, who holds Christian Zionist beliefs. I give these personal details to say that I know how genuine Christian Zionists are. The people whom I write about have intimately intertwined the darker sides of Zionism with Judaism and Christianity. In addition, I have spent many Shabbat dinners and holidays with the Orthodox Jewish community of Brookline, Massachusetts. These Jews have welcomed me, a Catholic, into their homes. Because of their generous hospitality, I have a deep affection for the Jewish community and believe that some of the causes Christian Zionists have taken up (such as combating antisemitism) are noble.

Instead, like any scholar, I want to understand how a particular strand of thinking has influenced Christian Zionist activism. Since learning about this movement as a freshman, I have been eager to read as much about it as I can. I am curious to know how the prosperity gospel has possibly played a role in American foreign policy towards the state of Israel. If anything, I hope

to show that beliefs matter. They have the power to impact politics. Even though church attendance has been slipping in the past decades, devout evangelical Christians see this age of secularism as the time to get involved, and ultimately, their activism has impacts for the rest of the country and even the world. I look forward to telling that story in the coming pages.

Introduction

It was a beautiful spring day in Jerusalem. The world had its eyes on this historic city, not only because May 14, 2018 marked the 70th anniversary of the establishment of Israel, but also because the United States made an unprecedented move. It moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.



Fig 1.1: Pastor John Hagee, founder of Christians United for Israel, gave a prayer at the Opening of the US Embassy in Jerusalem. Hagee Ministries, “Pastor John Hagee Delivers Benediction at Opening of US Embassy in Jerusalem, Israel.” May 14, 2018. Online benediction, 2:23. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-9XM-q8cdg>.

This was a bold move by the United States. The decision went against decades of official American policy. It infuriated Palestinians. Most European governments boycotted the opening ceremony. In the Israel-Palestine conflict, the question of whom Jerusalem belongs to has been heavily contested. Both Palestinians and Israelis claim the city as their capital. Palestinians wanted to divide Jerusalem and make East Jerusalem the capital of a future Palestinian state; Israelis wanted the entirety of Jerusalem. The status of the city was a source of division for

decades. World leaders refrained from recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of either nation, fearing that it could cause more tensions in the conflict. However, the U.S. became an exception. Moving the U.S. embassy recognized Jerusalem as the official capital of Israel. It told the world that the United States was no longer even pretending to be a neutral party in the conflict. Instead, it was on Israel's side.

To celebrate the move, the embassy hosted an opening ceremony. Although the opening was not a religious event, the Trump Administration invited a megachurch pastor from San Antonio, Texas. John Hagee, the president of Christians United for Israel (CUFI), a pro-Israel Christian lobbying organization, made an appearance. He offered a closing prayer, proclaiming Israel's triumph with the move:

Let the word go forth from Jerusalem today that Israel lives. Shout it from the housetops that Israel lives. Let every Islamic terrorist hear this message: Israel lives. Let it be heard in the halls of the United Nations that Israel lives. Let it echo down the marble halls of the presidential palace in Iran that Israel lives. Let it be known to all men that Israel lives because he that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.¹

Using language from the New King James Version translation of the Bible, Hagee expressed his enthusiasm for the embassy move. It meant victory for Israel. Because the United States moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, Israel won against the United Nations and Iran—both enemies of the Jewish nation-state. It won because of the United States, which went

¹ Hagee Ministries, "Pastor John Hagee Delivers Benediction at Opening of US Embassy in Jerusalem, Israel," YouTube Video, 3:05, May 14, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-9XM-q8cdg>.

against all criticism to side with its Middle East ally. This meant Israel was blessed, and so was the United States. Why? Simple—because the United States blessed Israel. And God blesses those who bless Israel.

Christian Zionism

Although former President Donald J. Trump acknowledged that moving the embassy was risky, he did it anyway. In his own words, it was “for the evangelicals.” By “evangelicals,” Trump referred to a specific subset of politically active conservative evangelicals: Christian Zionists.

Christian Zionism has many definitions. For this thesis, I will consider the following definitions. Robert Smith, a historian of political theology, defines the movement as “political action, informed by specifically Christian commitments, to promote or preserve Jewish control over the geographic area now comprising Israel and Palestine.”² Stephen Spector, another critical expert, defines it as “Christians whose faith, often in concert with other convictions, emotions, and experiences, leads them to support the modern state of Israel as the Jewish homeland.”³ Another religion scholar, Faydra Shapiro offers a more expansive definition to the discourse. She writes:

Christian Zionism is a general label for a specific orientation and emphasis within evangelicalism that ascribes vital theological, and often eschatological, importance to the Jews living in Israel. Christian Zionists are distinguished from

² Robert O. Smith, *More Desired than Our Own Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.

³ Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

evangelicals more broadly by their two intense and intertwined emphases: Israel and the Jews...Christian Zionists see their Zionism and focus on the Jews simply as a logical extension of their evangelical commitment to God and His Word. In their reading of the Bible, God has decreed a special role and status for the Jews sealed in an eternal covenant, together with a promise to restore them to their land. Thus, Christian Zionists see their own solidarity with the Jews and the modern nation of Israel to be paying homage to the God of Israel.⁴

If Zionism is the movement that seeks to secure and defend a nation-state for the Jewish people, then Christian Zionism is the evangelical embrace of that nationalism.⁵ As religion scholar Sean Durbin notes, it rests on the following characteristics: 1) “practical and political support for the creation (before 1948) and expansion (after 1948) of the modern state of Israel,” and 2) specific truth claims that believe God has a special plan for Israel.⁶

Before Trump considered moving the Embassy, his administration received an estimated 135,000 emails from members of Christians United for Israel (CUFI).⁷ All of these messages asked President Trump to move the United States Embassy to Jerusalem. To the outsider, this

⁴ Faydra L. Shapiro, “‘Thank You Israel, for Support America’: The Transnational Flow of Christian Zionist Resources,” *Identities* 19, no. 5 (2012): 617.

⁵ My definition of Zionism comes from Rebecca Moore, *A Blessing to Each Other: A New Account of Jewish and Christian Relations* (Chestnut Ridge, PA: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2021), xvii.

⁶ Sean Durbin, “Christian Zionism in the United States, 1930–2020,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, September 23, 2023, <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-1205>. Accessed December 23, 2023.

⁷ Times of Israel Staff, “Top pro-Israel evangelical leader sees ‘wellspring’ of support for Jewish state.” *The Times of Israel*, May 14, 2018. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/top-pro-israel-evangelical-leader-sees-wellspring-of-support-for-jewish-state/>.

campaign seemed quite perplexing: what exactly motivates conservative evangelicals who have no personal connection to the Middle East to enthusiastically support Israel?

Most spectators claim that it has to do with a belief system called premillennial dispensationalism, the subject of Chapter 1. They say that evangelical Christians are staunch supporters of Israel to fulfill biblical prophecy, speed up the second coming of Jesus, and convert the Jews. Once all of this is completed, a millennium, or thousand-year reign of peace, will ensue. While dispensationalism certainly popularized Israel as an evangelical political interest, the end of the world is not the only strand of thought. To conflate Christian Zionism with merely dispensationalism would be a mistake. Not all evangelical Christians support Israel to bring in the end times. In fact, the majority do not.⁸ While dispensationalism matters in certain schools of evangelical political thought (and most Christian Zionist beliefs trace back to it), a complex set of convictions impel Christian Zionists and ultimately lead them and, eventually, the United States to support Israel. In Chapter 1, I will list those different reasons for why evangelicals support Israel.

The Prosperity Gospel

There is one overlooked reason motivating Christian Zionists. It has to do with a simple promise in the Bible. In the words of John Hagee, it is not a “nursery rhyme,” but rather “the law of God.”⁹ It is the interpretation of Genesis 12:3—a promise of prosperity. The verse reads: “Now the Lord had said to Abram, ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make

⁸ Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism*, 23.

⁹ Hagee Ministries, “Pastor John Hagee - ‘The War Against the Jews,’” YouTube Video, 23:29, June 5, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5kDWdUL6eg>.

your name great; and you shall be a blessing. *I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*”¹⁰ This verse is a main motivator of Christian Zionism. When I interviewed several former Christian Zionists, they emphasized how important this verse was in mobilizing evangelicals to participate in pro-Israel activities. According to a literalist evangelical exegesis (an explanation of scripture), God blesses those who bless Israel, and curses those who curse Israel. Some evangelicals will argue that the United States of America needs to side with Israel to receive divine blessings. They go as far as crediting American exceptionalism and victory over Islamic enemies to supporting Israel. In recent years, a uniquely American theology has been behind this exegesis: the prosperity gospel.

An offshoot of Pentecostal theology, the prosperity gospel is a belief that God will grant genuine believers health and wealth if they have enough faith. For example, if you spend every Sunday in the pews, give money to the church, or read your Bible consistently, you will get that raise, overcome cancer, or score that perfect spouse. Although the idea that religious devotion can bring improvement is nothing novel in Christianity, there are two distinct claims of the prosperity gospel. The first is that all believers are *entitled* to prosperity because it is God’s will for them. The second is that verbalizing a desire (referred to as “positive confessions”) and acts of faith can materialize health and prosperity into believers’ lives.¹¹ As an American-born theology, it exists as a combination of New Thought, an American gospel of individualism, and Pentecostalism. It appeals to the highly personalized goals of wealth, career success, and

¹⁰ Genesis 12:1-3, NKJV. I cite this translation since the New King James Version is the translation used by John Hagee.

¹¹ Tony Tian-Ren Lin, *Prosperity Gospel Latinos and their American Dream* (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 10.

wellness that dominate our culture. Sometimes, it is interpreted to mean God bestows material blessings to entire nations—including Israel and the United States.¹²

Usually, the prosperity gospel is not political. Politics is focused on community; the prosperity gospel is focused on hyper-individualism. The average prosperity preacher does not delve into the details of what is happening on Capitol Hill. Most of the time, they encourage their congregants (most of whom belong to working classes) to become more devout so that they can have more opportunities. However, as historian Kate Bowler points out, there are subsets of adherents who are political and overlap with politically active conservative Christians.¹³ The ones who belong in this intersection are all Christian Zionists. These men include John Hagee, Benny Hinn (an Israeli-born televangelist), Rod Parsley (an Ohio-based megachurch pastor), and Kenneth Copeland (one of the most famous prosperity preachers in the country).¹⁴ Similar to liberation theology—a Catholic movement in Latin America which emphasized political activism towards liberating the poor from capitalism—the prosperity gospel is concerned with ending suffering. However, unlike the activism of liberation theology, the main concern of the prosperity gospel is elitism and individualism. As a result, the prosperity gospel leans to the right politically (as most conservative American Christians do).¹⁵

¹² Daniel Hummel, “The New Christian Zionism,” *First Things*, June 2017. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2017/06/the-new-christian-zionism>.

¹³ Kate Bowler, “Blessed,” by Peter Slen. *C-Span 2 Book TV*, C-Span, March 18, 2014. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?318386-3/blessed>.

¹⁴ See Kate Bowler, “Victory” in *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 178-225.

¹⁵ For a more detailed explanation of the differences between the prosperity gospel and liberation theology, see Geoffrey Grogan, “Liberation and Prosperity Theologies.” Accessed January 8, 2024. https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/sbet/09-2_118.pdf.

In addition, what makes the prosperity gospel more political in some settings is its combination with dispensationalism. Dispensationalism is a way of viewing history. It uses biblical events to make sense of current events and predict future ones. To the dispensational Christian Zionist, history revolves around the Middle East and is narrated as the relentless fulfillment of biblical prophecies. Ultimately, these prophecies are in pursuit of Israel and the Jews, with whom God has some unfinished business.¹⁶ This theory of history is not merely religious but political. It struggles for control over the definition and meaning of current events and history.

By looking at history, dispensationalism—combined with the prosperity gospel—concludes that siding with Israel and the Jews will allow Christians to gain God’s favor. Dennis Prager, the founder of Prager University and a Jewish political activist with ties to Christian nationalists, speaks for Christian Zionists:

...Christians believe [...] God blesses those who treat the Jews decently and curse those who seek to harm the Jews. You don’t have to be a believer in the God of Abraham or the Bible to accept this proposition. All the Jews’ ancient enemies disappeared from history. And look at what happened to Spain after it expelled its Jews in 1492. One of the greatest powers of the world became largely irrelevant to history within a couple of generations. As for Germans, the perpetrators of the Holocaust, they endured a staggering amount of death and suffering as a result of their support for the greatest Jew hater in history; and their country was divided in

¹⁶ For more on the political aspect of dispensationalism, see Susan Harding, “Imagining the Last Days: The Politics of Apocalyptic Language,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 48, no. 3 (1994): 14–44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3824183>.

half for the next half-century. Likewise, the countries today that most curse the Jews—Arabs and other Muslim countries—are among the most benighted countries in the world. If they were to devote to building their countries the money and energy they devote to attempting to destroy Israel, they would be in far better condition morally, socially, economically and politically.¹⁷

Prager’s description of Jewish history captures the logic of some evangelicals. By examining different historical events related to the Jewish people, evangelicals believe that if nations go against the people of Israel, then God will punish them. Therefore, they—along with their Christian nations—should get involved in Zionism to dodge God’s curses. If countries can prosper by blessing Israel, then how does one “bless” Israel? Through donations and activism. Propelled by Genesis 12:3, evangelical Christians will join organizations that combat antisemitism, fundraise for and donate to Jewish charities, buy Israeli products, invest in Israel, travel and tour the Holy Land, fund Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and support plans to transfer Palestinians to neighboring Arab states.¹⁸ By doing so, they treat Israel as an insurance policy. They hope that by siding with the nation of Israel, they will receive divine blessings, whether individually or collectively in the formation of material wealth, health, exorcisms, and/or protection from natural disasters or political enemies.

Consider the average evangelical. He may be from the rural Bible belt. He grew up mainly around people of his own race. As a result, he has never met a Jew, an Israeli, or a

¹⁷ Dennis Prager, “Why Christians Support Israel,” *National Review*, March 6, 2018. <https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/03/why-christians-support-israel/>.

¹⁸ Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 12.

Palestinian. He has no personal connection to the Middle East. Yet, he attends a church that perhaps flies an Israeli flag and warns of the evilness of Iran and Islam. He saves up the little money he has to visit the Holy Land. He sends money to support West Bank settlements, despite barely having any income to spend on groceries or to pay the bills or gets involved with efforts countering antisemitism. He votes for pro-Israel politicians and criticizes those who are more critical of the Jewish state.

Why is that? Why would a white evangelical from Texas, for instance, who has no personal connection to the Middle East, be such a staunch supporter of the state of Israel? Why would he spend months of his life, saving up to attend a trip to the Holy Land? And why would he, despite not having any disposable income, pour money into West Bank settlements, hoping in return for some sort of salvation? Or perhaps, why would he feel a sense of pride whenever the Israeli government wins, believing that God is on its side? Also, how did prosperity evangelicals get here? How did it become a force powerful enough to influence American politics? I intend to answer these questions in my thesis.

What is an evangelical?

Throughout this thesis, I will mention a range of American Protestants: evangelical, fundamentalist, mainline Protestant, Pentecostal, and charismatic. Some of these terms seem as if they were all describing a general conservative Christian, and many people even use the terms interchangeably (especially fundamentalist and evangelical). However, each of these terms describe different camps of evangelicalism and Protestantism, although there are some overlaps. Knowing the difference between these different terms is important to understand the history of Christian support for and activism towards the state of Israel.

The distinctions between these ranges of American Protestantism erupted during the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the early twentieth century. Fundamentalists were militantly against modernists, who believed that the Christian faith could be updated to accommodate new intellectual discoveries. Now considered as liberal Christians, modernists embraced Darwinism, higher biblical criticism, spiritualities from other religions, and social justice. Today, they mainly make up the mainline Protestant denominations, such as the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Episcopal Church, and the United Methodist Church.¹⁹ When I refer to mainline Protestants, I usually refer to more modernist or “liberal” Christians, even though critics of modernism rather than modernist Christians themselves use the term “modernist.”

The term “fundamentalist” is usually used to describe conservative Christians. However, not all conservative Christians are fundamentalists. The term came from a series of pamphlets called *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* from 1910 to 1915. These pamphlets sought to establish the fundamentals of Christianity, criticizing higher Biblical criticism, Russellism (which later became Jehovah’s Witnesses), Mormonism, Eddyism (better known as Christian Science), Modern Spiritualism, Roman Catholicism, and evolution.²⁰ They also defended a literal interpretation of the Bible, as well as the divinity and virgin-birth of Jesus.²¹ Many

¹⁹ For more on modernism, see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, ed. 2. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 102-8.

²⁰ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, ed. 2. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 120.

²¹ Allan J. Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008), 26-27

fundamentalists embraced dispensationalism. Yet, as I will show in Chapter 2, they did not get involved in pro-Israel activism right away.²²

The term “evangelical” is notoriously hard to define. The more that scholars study it, the more it gets confusing; “evangelical” means different things to different people. Religion historian George Marsden once defined it as “anyone who likes Billy Graham.” However, when Graham was asked what an evangelical was, he responded that he would like to know that answer too.²³ The definition that scholars tend to gravitate towards is known as the “Bebbington quadrilateral.” It defines evangelicals with the four following characteristics: biblicism (a high regard for the Bible), crucicentrism (an emphasis of Jesus’ death on the cross), conversionism (a belief that all of us need to convert to evangelical Christianity and become more like Christ), and activism (the belief that everyone needs to hear the Gospel).²⁴ While this definition still has some controversy amongst scholars, the Bebbington quadrilateral is generally the most accepted definition of evangelicalism.²⁵

“Pentecostal” and “charismatic” are often used interchangeably. A Pentecostal is someone who emphasizes the Holy Spirit in their life. Emerging in the Midwest and at the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in the early 1900s, Pentecostalism is characterized by an emotional worship and gifts of the Holy Spirit (such as speaking in tongues and divine healing). On the other hand, charismatic is used to describe Christians or movements that have picked up

²² For more about fundamentalism, see Marden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 118-23.

²³ Tim Alberta, *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2023), 10.

²⁴ See David W. Bebbington, *The Evangelical Quadrilateral: Characterizing the British Gospel Movement* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021).

²⁵ For more on the boundaries of evangelicalism, fundamentalism, and modernism, see Jon R. Stone, “On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition” (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 7-13, 43-49.

or acquired characteristics of Pentecostal Christianity. Consider John Hagee, for example, whom I will discuss throughout this thesis. He is not necessarily Pentecostal; his church does not belong to an official Pentecostal denomination. However, he comes from a Pentecostal background. Therefore, he is not considered Pentecostal but “charismatic.”²⁶ With these distinctions in mind, I can now proceed to the theory.

Christian Zionism: A Political Movement?

What does the prosperity gospel and Christian Zionism have to do with politics? Political scientists tend to overlook religion. A study published in the journal *PS: Political Science & Politics* revealed that of the 20 leading journals in political science, only 1.34 percent of the articles published had religion as the main topic. Even then, of the small minority of articles that were on religious issues, most of them did not focus on links with American Christianity and politics. Instead, when they did discuss religion, they discussed either links to violence and terrorism or Islam. Furthermore, out of the eight major subfields of political science, only two-thirds of the articles on religion fell under one: political behavior.²⁷

As a student of political science, I find this study concerning. Political movements are movements that attempt to change government policy or social values. We should not disregard religion in politics, especially as evangelicals grow politically powerful in American right-wing circles. For instance, consider the Religious Right. According to political scientist Michael Lienesch, the Religious Right is an alliance of conservative preachers who work with politicians

²⁶ For more on the differences between Pentecostals and charismatics, see Jonathan Calvillo, “Global Pentecostal Movement” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, ed. David Snow, Donatella della Porta, Bert Klendermans, and Doug McAdam (Hoboken: Wiley, 2022).

²⁷ Scott Jaschik, “Religion, Ignored,” *Inside Higher Ed*, January 12, 2012. Accessed April 26, 2024. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/01/13/study-finds-political-scientists-ignore-religion>.

as allies of the right-wing of the Republican party.²⁸ There is a reason that this movement is not merely regarded as religious. Like the feminist movement, it seeks to influence social values and gain political power. It has been engaged with political activities and responsible for political consequences. Its leaders have led political organizations, such as Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority, Pat Robertson and his Christian Coalition, and more recently, John Hagee and his Christians United for Israel. Acting as a public interest group, it mobilizes voters—most notably putting Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump into the oval office and thwarting the passing of the Equal Rights Amendment. Its leaders consider themselves as political activists and appear at political campaigns, political caucuses, and party conventions.

It is also important to ask: what makes a movement political? To answer this question, I plan to analyze Christian Zionism with the political process theory. According to this theory, there are five aspects that make a movement political: framing processes, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities, along with protest cycles and contentious repertoires.²⁹

Framing processes are carried out by leaders of an organization. They allow the movement to articulate the existing problems, explain why change is necessary, describe what

²⁸ Michael Lienesch, “Right-Wing Religion: Christian Conservatism as a Political Movement,” *Political Science Quarterly* 97, no. 3 (1982): 408. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2149992>. For readers interested in learning more about the activities of the Religious Right, see Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Kristin Kobes DuMez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020); Randall Balmer, *Bad Faith: Race and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021); and Julie Ingersoll, *Building God’s Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstructionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²⁹ See Neal Caren, “Political Process Theory,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* ed. George Ritzer (Blackwell Publishing, 2007) and Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, “Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes—toward a synthetic, comparative perspective on social movements,” in *Comparative perspectives on social movements: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings*, ed. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

changes are desired, and how someone can achieve them. They foster the ideology needed to understand the world and motivate members to act.³⁰ In Chapter 1, I will explain the worldview, theology, and language that motivates Christian Zionists to act. Although in this thesis I argue that the prosperity gospel has been influencing Christian Zionism, I do not want to oversimplify the movement. Zionism is a nationalism; people embrace different nationalisms for different reasons, not just to bring in the end times or score blessings. Therefore, I will highlight an array of reasons evangelicals support Israel.

Mobilizing structures are already existing organizations that are present among the community and want change. They serve as platforms for a social movement by providing membership, leadership, and communication and social networks to the emerging movement.³¹ Examples of such structures include churches, nonprofit organizations, and schools. In Chapter 2, I will show how what I will call prosperity Zionism emerged as a product of previous ecumenical and political movements. Protestant support for Israel transferred from liberal mainline Protestants after World War II to evangelicals during the rise of the Religious Right in the 1970s, and lastly to charismatic evangelicals after the fall of the Moral Majority. Once charismatic evangelicals entered the political scene, the prosperity gospel became a defining aspect of Christian Zionist thought.

³⁰ Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, "Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes—toward a synthetic, comparative perspective on social movements," in *Comparative perspectives on social movements: political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings*, ed. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5-6.

³¹ *Ibid*, 3-4.

Political opportunities occur when intervention and change within the existing political system can happen. These occur when the political system experiences vulnerabilities.³² Such vulnerabilities can arise for a variety of reasons. In the case of prosperity Zionism, these vulnerabilities brewed during the Obama Administration and then erupted when Donald J. Trump became president of the United States in 2016. Heavily influenced by the Protestant clergyman Norman Vincent Peale (who gave rise to a non-charismatic version of the prosperity gospel), Trump courted and surrounded himself with prosperity Christians. He listened to evangelicals, granting them their policy wishes. In Chapter 3, I will explore Christian Zionists' impact on foreign policy and their alliances with several high-profile politicians.

In Chapter 4, I will analyze Christian Zionism using the last two aspects of political process theory: protest cycles and contentious repertoires. Protest cycles occur when protests are in a heightened state. They express ideological frames connected to the framing process. As a result, protests seek to strengthen solidarity within the movement, to raise awareness about their issues among the public, and to help recruit new members.³³ During the Jericho Marches of 2020 and 2021 and the March for Israel in 2023, Christian Zionists expressed their solidarity with the Jewish people by appropriating their symbols and participating in those marches. Lastly, contentious repertoires are how a movement makes itself known. Usually, these include strikes, protests, and petitions.³⁴ I will show that through protests, billboards, and prayer vigils, Christian Zionists have expressed their messages to the broader public.

³² McAdam, "Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes—toward a synthetic, comparative perspective on social movements," 2-3.

³³ Caren, "Political Process Theory."

³⁴ Ibid.

As I will show in the upcoming pages, the political process theory applies to Christian Zionism. It has influenced government policy, with the Iran Nuclear Deal and the embassy move to Jerusalem. It has influenced ordinary evangelical Christians and even politicians to elevate and exalt a particular country in the Middle East. Associated with dispensationalism and the prosperity gospel (which are both ideologies), a charismatic form of evangelical Christianity has been built on top of other movements and their connections, both religious and political.

On Separation of Church and State

Atheists and liberals hostile to faith-based activism (especially on right-wing activism) tend to cite separation of church and state as the constitutional reason why religious activists should stay out of the public square. However, the way that most Americans think of separation of church and state is a myth, popularized by liberal Protestants who saw their brand of Christianity as neutral and the rise of Catholicism as a threat.³⁵ The American concept of secularism as enshrined in the First Amendment is not for the church to stay out of politics. Rather, it is for the state to stay out of the affairs of any church, and for the church not to be able to impose a theocracy.

Nowhere in the Constitution do the words “separation of church and state” appear. When critics discuss a constitutional requirement to separate church and state, they refer to the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment. It reads: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.” Over the years, there have been many legal interpretations of this clause. To explain its history would take another thesis. What I can mention here is that

³⁵ See Philip Hamburger, “Separation of Church and State: A Theologically Liberal, Anti-Catholic, and American Principle” University of Chicago Law Occasional Paper, no. 42 (2002). https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&context=occasional_papers.

originally, the Establishment Clause had two intentions: 1) banning the state from forcing its citizens to adhere to a national church and 2) keeping the government out of church affairs. It protected citizens from the state who wanted to impose a specific set of religious convictions (such as the one in England during the English Reformation). Because of the Establishment Clause, the state could not establish an official religion or support a specific religion.³⁶ The Constitution has nothing to say about religious groups engaging with politics.

One popular notion of separation of church and state comes from a letter written in 1802 by Thomas Jefferson to a group of Baptists in Danbury, Connecticut. Many think of Jefferson's letter, in which he called for a "wall of separation between the church and state," as defining the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. However, it was a political statement intended to reassure Baptist constituents that Jefferson, a deist whose presidency was seen as a threat to the religious culture of America, was not against religion. Rather, he believed that separation of church and state assured individuals of their inalienable right of following their conscience, which, according to Jefferson, could be exercised freely and fully up to the point of breaching the peace or avoiding social duties.³⁷ He did not mention anything about religion remaining out of the public square.

The United States has a rich history of political activism rooted in religious conviction. Arguably, there is nothing more American than bringing religion into the public square. Religion—especially Protestant Christianity—has played a significant role in American public life. Prior to the 1950s, it was common for mainline Protestants to run for office to advocate for their

³⁶ See John Witte, Jr., Joel A. Nichols, and Richard W. Garnett, *Religion and the American Constitutional Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

³⁷ Witte, Jr., *Religion and the American Constitutional Experiment*, 82.

church's stances.³⁸ Most American social reform movements, such as abolitionism, women's suffrage, Prohibition, and the labor movement, had their roots in revivalist evangelicalism. American missionaries also took American ideals of democracy and capitalism over to other countries, eventually spawning peace movements and anticommunism abroad.³⁹

Considering the history of religious activism in America, the activism of the Religious Right and Christian Zionists is nothing new or unconstitutional. What is unique about Christian Zionism is a group of Christians elevating a foreign country and treating it like an insurance policy. While some Christians have made recent efforts to encourage other Christians to embrace other nationalisms (such as Armenian nationalism), no other effort has matched the prowess of Zionism.⁴⁰

Christian Zionism is a subsection of politically active conservative Christians. It seeks to influence politics and public policy towards Israel with their specific interpretations of the Bible. Historically, dispensationalism has been the main theological force mobilizing evangelicals to support Israel. However, as I will argue in Chapter 2, since the fall of the traditional Religious Right and the rise of the charismatic Right, a combination of dispensationalism and prosperity gospel teachings have influenced Christian Zionist thought. As a result, Christians have been propelled to support Israel for a type of prosperity.

³⁸ See Gene Zubovich, *Before the Religious Right: Liberal Protestants, Human Rights, and the Polarization of the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).

³⁹ Julie Ingersoll, *Building God's Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstructionism*, 7.

⁴⁰ For more about evangelicals and Armenian nationalism, see Lila Rose, interview with Simone Rizkallah, *The Lila Rose Podcast*, podcast audio, September 5, 2023, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-lila-rose-podcast/id1460036160?i=1000626794327>. On January 14, 2024, I checked to see if the Philos Project's Save Armenia Project was still live. They discarded the project during the winter of 2023.

Chapter 1: Evangelical Motives

Political movements need to provide reasons for collective action. They must explain what the problem is, make people feel aggrieved, optimistic, or both, and convince ordinary people why they should join the cause. Otherwise, no political movement can exist. These reasons are called framing processes, and Christian Zionism provides an abundance of them. While many scholars claim that speeding up the end times is the main goal of Christian Zionists, the truth is that the movement is more complicated than that. In this chapter, I will discuss some of those goals.

Eschatological Motives

Dispensationalism

Premillennial dispensationalism is a complex theology. Introduced to the United States by an Irish Brethren preacher named John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), dispensationalism covers a wide range of ideas. Yet, there are main tenets of it that have greatly influenced Christian Zionism. To put it simply, dispensationalism is a way of viewing history. It divides all human history by seven distinct periods of time, or “dispensations.” In each dispensation, God has a way of testing his people.¹ In the fifth dispensation, God gave the Jewish people Jesus. He wanted the Jewish people to accept Jesus as the Christ. However, the Jews went against God’s plan and rejected him. Yet, God was not done with his people; He still wanted the Jews to accept Jesus as

¹ Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 20.

their messiah. So, to give the Jews a second chance for salvation, He closed the fifth dispensation with the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.²

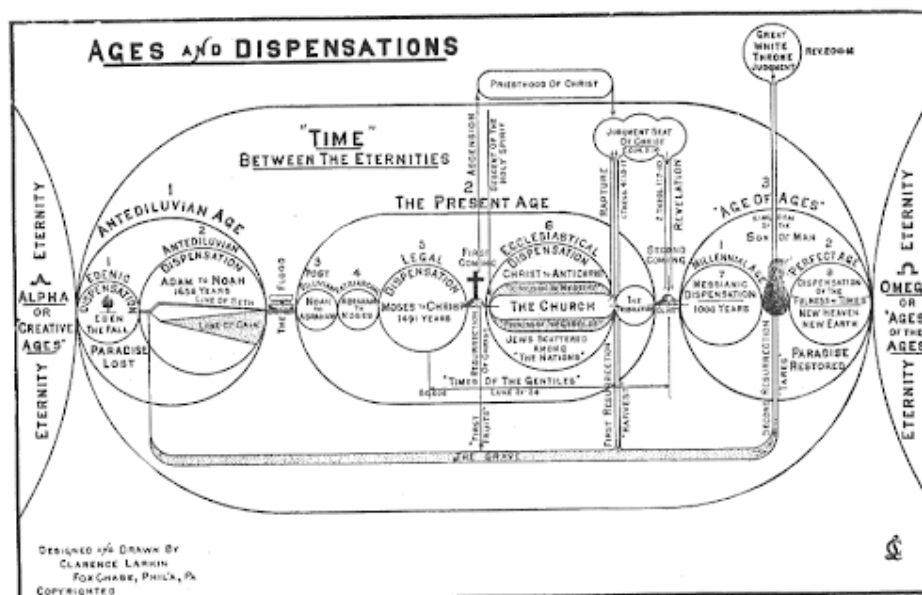


Figure 2.1: In the early twentieth century, Clarence Larkins Charts were designed for Baptist pastors to teach dispensationalism from the pulpit. This chart lays out the different dispensations of salvation history. Clarence Larkins, circa. 1910, *Ages and Dispensations*, Clarence Larkins Charts, http://clarenceLarkincharts.com/Clarence_Larkin_2.html.

Per this teaching, all of us are now in the sixth dispensation. During this time, there are two important groups of people: Jews (Israel) and anyone who has genuinely accepted Jesus Christ as their savior (the church). According to dispensationalists, God has two separate divine plans for these two groups—a concept theologians call “dual covenant theology.” This belief states that God’s promise with the Jewish people is still valid; the coming of the Messiah two thousand years ago did not end that promise (significant for reasons I will explain below).³ So, biblical passages and prophecies that reference Israel do not apply to Christians figuratively as

² Sean Durbin, *Righteous Gentiles: Religion, Identity, and Myth in John Hagee’s Christians United for Israel*, 30.

³ Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism*, 62.

they have traditionally. Instead, they still apply to ethnic Jews and the geographic area of Israel and Palestine. As a result, the plan for Israel included the Jews returning to the land of Palestine and being a worldwide blessing to the nations.⁴ This is one reason why dispensational evangelicals value the modern state of Israel so much: without the existence of Israel, the second coming of Jesus cannot happen.

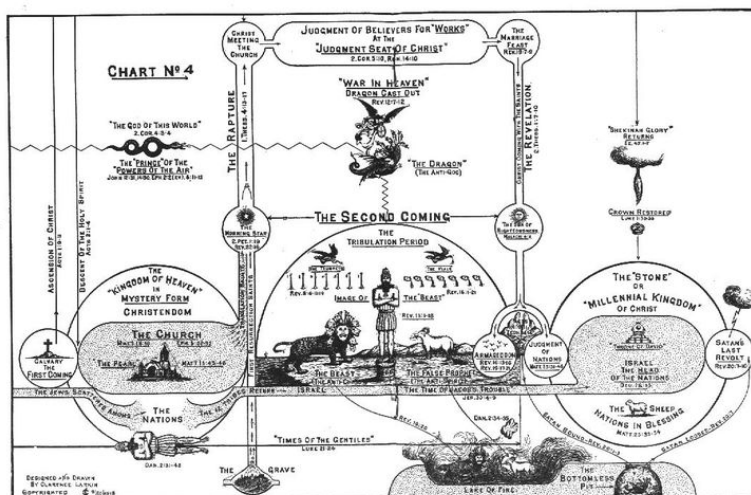


Figure 2.2: A Clarence Larkin chart that explains the Second Coming of Jesus. Larkins, Clarence. Circa. 1910. *Ages and Dispensations*. Clarence Larkins Charts, http://clarenceclarkincharts.com/Clarence_Larkin_1.html.

Before the second coming of Jesus can happen, there are certain bible prophecies that need to occur. First, Jews need to establish a new nation in Palestine; this event happened in 1948 when Israel gained its independence. Second, Israel must gain control of Jerusalem; during the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel did just that. Finally, the third temple needs to be rebuilt in Jerusalem; this has not happened, especially since the Dome of the Rock in the Temple Mount resides in the old location of the second temple.⁵ Dispensationalists debate when the third temple

⁴ Steven Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism*, 14-15.

⁵ Rebecca Moore. *A Blessing to Each Other: A New Account of Jewish and Christian Relations* (Chestnut Ridge, PA: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2021), 194.

will be rebuilt. Some say that it will be before the Great Tribulation—a time of horrible suffering before the second coming of Jesus. Others say it will happen during the Tribulation, or even after.⁶ However, one event is crucial before Jesus comes back: the secret rapture.

For the church, God's plan was for their time to end with the secret rapture. Another important theological innovation of dispensationalism, the rapture is a prophetic belief that Jesus will take his true believers out of the world to meet Jesus in the air.⁷ Once the secret rapture occurs, the church's time on earth will end. No one knows which hour this rapture will happen; it could happen at any moment—while I write this thesis, when you see your loved ones tonight, or perhaps at the end of this sentence! However, according to dispensationalists, it will happen only after the Jews return to the land of Israel and take total control of Jerusalem, and once Christ raptures his Christians, they will no longer reside on the earth. They will have disappeared to heaven; only hypocrites, non-believers (which include Roman Catholics and mainline Protestants), and the people of Israel will be left behind.⁸ A child could come home from school to an empty home, realizing that his parents have gone up to heaven and that he will face the Great Tribulation. This moment will close the sixth dispensation, complete God's plan for Israel and the church, and start the seventh dispensation: the end of the world.

At the beginning of this time, the Great Tribulation will begin. This will be a horrible time. For seven years, God will carry out his wrath on unbelievers, which will cause the world to descend into chaos. Because Christians are no longer on earth to guide people morally, evil will

⁶ Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 87.

⁷ Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018),

⁸ George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 52-4.

reign. The Antichrist—an unjust, global dictator of Jewish descent—will come to rule the world. He will pervert governments and global organizations for his own ends, which will ultimately bring destruction onto humanity. Plagues, geopolitical manipulations, and wars will devastate the world. It will seem that Israel has almost been destroyed.⁹ However, in the dispensational imagination, there is hope.

The hope lies at the battle of Armageddon, which is a battle against God and all the forces of evil. At the climax of the seven years, forces from the north, south, east, and west will come against Israel to destroy God’s people and take over the world. As they descend onto Armageddon—a valley located in Megiddo, Israel—all the raptured Christians, led by Jesus Christ himself, will break through the clouds and defeat these armies of demonically influenced powers. Then, Christ will cast the Antichrist and his followers into a lake of fire, judge the nations of the world, and bind Satan and throw him into a bottomless pit so that he can no longer deceive the nations. Afterwards, Jesus will restore the throne of David, and a thousand-year reign of uninterrupted peace will immediately ensue.¹⁰

The assumption of this belief system is that Jews would establish their own state. Without a Jewish state, there would be no Antichrist, no period of judgment, no battle of Armageddon, and thus no Second Coming of Jesus. Darby spread these ideas during his tours to the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, they did not gain much following until the early twentieth century.¹¹ During this time, evangelical fundamentalism emerged as a social movement. Dispensationalism became a part of that movement through prophecy

⁹ Timothy Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend*, 25.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See Daniel Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism: How the Evangelical Battles over the End Times Shaped a Nation* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2023).

conferences and the publication of a series of pamphlets on doctrinal issues known as *The Fundamentals*.¹² Another popularizer of dispensationalism was Cyrus Ingerson Scofield. Scofield took Darby's ideas and codified them into his *Scofield Reference Bible*, which was first published in 1909. Through this Bible, large swaths of Americans were introduced to dispensationalism.¹³ In more recent years, Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) and Tim LaHayes' *Left Behind* series (1995) introduced dispensationalism into the mainstream.

While I researched the relationship between dispensationalism and Christian Zionism, I came across many spectators who claimed that dispensationalism was synonymous with Christian Zionism. For instance, traditionalist Catholic commentator Taylor Marshall said in a podcast episode, "Christian Zionism is dispensationalism, dispensationalism is Christian Zionism. It's the same theology, it's the same thing."¹⁴ Although scholars debate the extent to which dispensationalism continues to influence modern Christian Zionism, conflating Christian Zionism as the same thing as dispensationalism is an oversimplification. Christian Zionism is not a monolith. It is a complex movement, made up of all sorts of Christians with all sorts of motives. Just because a Christian who happens to be a Zionist or discusses the "tribulation" or the second coming of Jesus does not make them a dispensationalist. Those terms are common Christian concepts.¹⁵ Although dispensationalism certainly plays a key role, not all evangelicals support Israel to bring in the end times. There are other reasons why evangelicals support Israel.

¹² Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); and Crawford Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500-2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 92.

¹³ George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 119.

¹⁴ Taylor Marshall, Dr. Taylor Marshall Podcast, podcast audio, November 3, 2023, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/dr-taylor-marshall-podcast/id689871918?i=1000633627704>.

¹⁵ Daniel Hummel, PhD (Historian, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Zoom interview with Dr. Hummel, November 16, 2023.

Conversion of the Jews

Another misconception about Christian Zionism is evangelicals' motive to proselytize. The main criticism is that evangelicals only care about Israel to convert the Jews to Christianity. To understand this idea, I must discuss the role of Jews in the seventh dispensation.

During the Great Tribulation, the Antichrist will arise in Jerusalem, command respect, and enchant some Jews. Meanwhile, other Jews will become his enemies by preaching the message of evangelicalism to other Jews. Eventually, the Antichrist will show his true intentions and inflict a reign of terror. Jews (except for those who accept the Christian message) will be slaughtered from wars, plagues, and disasters. This tragedy will continue until Jesus returns at the end of the Great Tribulation and defeats the Antichrist at the Battle of Armageddon. During this time, Jews will face either two fates: 1) die from the devastations of the Great Tribulation or the Battle of Armageddon, or 2) convert once Jesus comes back.¹⁶ Either way, Judaism ceases to exist.

Certainly, there are evangelicals who want to convert Jews. Yet, they do not have to wait for the end times to do so. While most mainline Protestants and Catholics have given up missionary efforts to promote reconciliation after the Holocaust, evangelicals lead hundreds of missions, including Jews for Jesus, Chosen People Ministries, and One for Israel. However, this is not out of the ordinary for evangelicals. As activists, the main tenet of their faith is to spread the "good news." However, it is not just to Jews. They want to spread the evangelical faith to nones, atheists, agnostics, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Roman Catholics, mainline Protestants

¹⁶ Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde. *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2004), 134-5.

and Orthodox Christians—every possible religious group. And yes, there are evangelicals who support Israel to speed up the second coming of Jesus with the hope that the Jews will accept Jesus as their Messiah. Some believe that by evangelizing them now, Jews can be spared from the horrors of the Great Tribulation.¹⁷ However, this is a minority position. For most evangelicals, converting the Jews is not the main motivating reason they support Israel.

During my research, I interviewed those at the forefront of evangelizing Jews: Messianic Jews. Colloquially referred to as “Jews for Jesus” after their leading missionary organization in San Francisco, Messianic Judaism is a very niche sect of evangelical Christianity. It consists of Jews and, depending on how inclusive the congregation is, Gentiles who observe Jewish laws and customs, such as the Saturday Sabbath, refraining from pork and shellfish, and celebrating holidays like Sukkot and Passover. Yet, they embrace Jesus—whom they call “Yeshua”—as the promised Jewish messiah. Since they identify as Jewish, some Messianic Jews do not consider themselves Christian Zionists, which they consider a non-Jewish movement.¹⁸ However, most of them are premillennial dispensationalists, Zionists, and *very* knowledgeable about Jewish-Christian relations. For these reasons, I sought out some Messianic Jews for their perspectives.

During the summer of 2023, I interviewed two Messianic rabbis in my home state of Arizona for this project. I wanted to understand why they supported Israel. While I talked to them about their support, they wanted me to make it clear that converting the Jews was not the case for their support. It is a main criticism of Christian Zionism and many pro-Israel

¹⁷ Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series*, 149.

¹⁸ Mitch Forman (Vice President, U.S. Ministries for Chosen People Ministries), Zoom interview with Rabbi Forman, December 6, 2023.

evangelicals were displeased with that claim.¹⁹ The evangelicals whom I interviewed and believed in some form of conversion of the Jews framed it as a symptom of the Second Coming rather than the end goal: the presence of Jesus would be so obvious; Jews could not deny that he was their Lord and Savior.

Even if converting the Jews is a goal of evangelicals, there are few evangelicals who are solely motivated by this reason. Although it gets the most media attention, it is important to note that the media tends to gravitate towards the more extreme views.

Theological Reasoning of Anti- and Philo-Semitism

Remorse



Figure 2.3: Calvary Chapel Chino Hills in southern California hosts Concerned Women for America President, Penny Nance, for a pro-Israel prayer vigil on November 29, 2023. Concerned Women for America Communications Team, “Penny Nance Speaks at Chino Hills Stand with Israel Prayer Event.” Concerned Women for America Legislative Action Committee, December 3, 2023, <https://concernedwomen.org/penny-nance-speaks-at-chino-hills-stand-with-israel-prayer-event/>.

¹⁹ Tim Hyslip and Stan Meyer (Rabbis, Congregation Baruch Hashem), discussion with Tim Hyslip and Stan Meyer, Glendale, AZ, June 2, 2023.

On November 29, 2023, Penny Nance—the president of the evangelical women’s lobbying organization Concerned Women for America—gave a speech about Israel at Calvary Chapel Chino Hills. Considering the history of Evangelical-Jewish relations, this choice was significant. First, converts of the Jesus People movement, which introduced young, disenchanted hippies of the 1960s and 1970s to Christian Zionism, attended Calvary Chapel churches.²⁰ Second, the Calvary Chapel movement is an extension of the latter rain movement, the subject of Chapter 2.²¹ While this quasi-denomination does not promote the prosperity gospel, Calvary Chapel hosting a prayer vigil for Israel resembles the legacy of charismatics advocating for the state of Israel.

In her speech, Nance lamented about the Holocaust:

The question that is tugging at my heart and nagging at my heart: if I had been alive, between the years of 1938 and 1945, if I were in Nazi occupied Europe, what would have I done?²²

No conversation about Christian Zionism is complete without any mention of replacement theology. Formally known as “supersessionism,” replacement theology in short claims that the Christian Church has replaced Jews as the people of God. All of the covenants in the Torah or

²⁰ Matthew D. Taylor, PhD (Senior Scholar and Protestant Scholar, Institute for Islamic, Christian, Jewish Studies), phone call with Dr. Taylor, March 13, 2024. The Jesus People movement (JPM) was a significant countercultural evangelical movement that started on the West Coast. Characterized by “Jesus Freaks” and charismatic spirituality, the JPM is responsible for many modern religious movements, including Messianic Judaism and Prosperity Zionism. For more on the history of the Jesus People movement, see Larry Eskridge, *God’s Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²¹ Matthew D. Taylor, PhD (Senior Scholar and Protestant Scholar, Institute for Islamic, Christian, Jewish Studies), phone call with Dr. Taylor, March 13, 2024.

²² Concerned Women for America, “Penny Nance Speaks at Calvary Chapel Chino Hills Stand with Israel Event.” Vimeo, 12:00, December 1, 2023, <https://vimeo.com/890460245>.

the Christian Old Testament no longer apply to the Jewish people; rather, they have been replaced by a Christian one.²³ Many evangelicals claim that this doctrine encouraged Christian antisemitism. They say that from the Crusades, the Inquisition, and Eastern European pogroms, replacement theology was at the root of degrading, persecuting, and murdering the Jews. A central teaching of the doctrine was that the Jews were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Since Jews killed Christ, they committed the worst imaginable crime and deserved to be punished for it.²⁴

Even when the Enlightenment secularized Europe, replacement theology persisted. Although Nazism was not a Christian ideology, there is evidence that Christians had some responsibility for the genocide of European Jews. Because Christianity was the dominant culture of Europe, centuries of Christian antisemitism prepared many Europeans to embrace Nazi antisemitism. For most of them, Nazism was merely a new variant of an old and familiar theme.²⁵

Because evangelicals believe that Christians were responsible for the Holocaust, many of them feel guilty for past antisemitic incidents. Before any conversation about Israel begins, evangelicals will usually first condemn replacement theology. In a podcast episode about the Israel-Hamas conflict in October 2023, Penny Nance stated her rejection of the old doctrine

²³ For an introduction to evangelical views on supersessionism, see Michael J. Vlach, "Various Forms of Replacement Theology," *The Master's Seminary* 20, no. 1 (2009): 57-69. I got my definition of supersessionism from Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, "Towards an Anti-Supersessionist Theology: Race, Whiteness, and Covenant," *Religions* 13, no. 129.

²⁴ For a more detailed discussion on Replacement Theology from an evangelical activist's point of view, see David Brog, "The Rise of Replacement Theology" in *Standing with Israel: Why Christians Support the Jewish State* (Lake Mary: FrontLine, 2006), pp. 17-41. David Brog is not an evangelical but rather a Jew who was on the board of Christians United for Israel.

²⁵ David Brog, "The Rise of Replacement Theology" in *Standing with Israel: Why Christians Support the Jewish State*, 29.

before interviewing her guest.²⁶ Christian Zionists feel the need to make amends to the Jewish people. Those amends include supporting the state of Israel. That way, if antisemitism ever gained traction in the United States, Jews would have a safe place to migrate to.

Affection

During the summer of 2023, I attended a messianic service in Phoenix, Arizona. I wanted to familiarize myself with the groups that I would interview for this project. When the service was over, I struck up a conversation with one of the Gentile congregants. I asked her how she got interested in Messianic Judaism, considering how niche of a religious movement it is.

She placed her hand over her heart; her face beamed. “I just have a love for God’s people!”

Some evangelicals have an attraction to Jews and Judaism. The idea is that without Judaism, Christianity would not exist. Jesus was born a Jew and died a Jew; early Christians were a Jewish sect. Without the Jewish people, Christianity would not have its Bible, the patriarchs, the prophets, the Messiah, the twelve disciples, and the apostles. Because of these gifts, evangelicals feel indebted to Israel.

This reason alone changed the course of the Six Day War. President Lyndon B. Johnson was known for his work in assisting the Jews during his career in public service. In 1938, Johnson’s “Operation Texas” established a refuge in Texas for European Jews fleeing Nazi

²⁶ Penny Young Nance, “Why Should Christians Stand with Israel? With Luke Moon of the Philos Project,” Women for America, October 25, 2023. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/women-for-america/id1486849155?i=1000632606545>. Concerned Women for America is an evangelical women’s policy organization based in Alexandria, Virginia. Founded by Beverly LaHaye (wife of Tim LaHaye, a lead organizer of the Religious Right), the organization consists of mainly evangelical and some Catholic activists who lobby for various evangelical interests on the local and national level.

Germany.²⁷ His motives came from his devout Christadelphian background. An even tinier sect of Christianity with less than 100,000 members worldwide, Christadelphians are known for their commitment to the Jewish people. They understand Israel and the Jewish people as special to God. According to their understanding of eschatology, the return of the Jews to the land of Palestine and the establishment of the Jewish state signaled Christ's second coming. So, they believed that the Jews must return to the land of Israel and help them fulfill biblical prophecy. Because of this reasoning, Christadelphians engage in philanthropy that benefits the Jewish people.²⁸

Lyndon B. Johnson's Christadelphian family and community raised him with the conviction that the Jewish people were God's chosen people. His Aunt Sister Jessie Johnson Hatcher and his grandparents were especially influential in his life. Although they did not directly raise Johnson, they always reminded Johnson when they were around, "Watch the Jews. Take care of them anyway you can. They're God's chosen people."²⁹ In addition, his grandfather, Sam Johnson, taught young Lyndon Christadelphian views regarding Jews. As one author described it, LBJ "was raised in a pro-Jewish household...he was fed pro-Zionist propaganda along with his Pabulum and milk."³⁰ When LBJ grew up, he did not become a

²⁷ "How Christadelphian love of Israel impacted the outcome of Israel's Six Day War," *Bible Prophecy & Current Events: Reflections on Current Events & Modern History*, November 19, 2015. <https://prophecyandnews.com/2015/11/19/how-a-christadelphian-mum-impacted-the-outcome-of-israels-six-day-war/>.

²⁸ James Smallwood, "Operation Texas: Lyndon B. Johnson, The Jewish Question and the Nazi Holocaust," *East Texas Historical Journal* 47, no. 1 (2009): 4. <https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2560&context=ethj>.

²⁹ "How Christadelphian love of Israel impacted the outcome of Israel's Six Day War," *Bible Prophecy & Current Events: Reflections on Current Events & Modern History*, November 19, 2015. <https://prophecyandnews.com/2015/11/19/how-a-christadelphian-mum-impacted-the-outcome-of-israels-six-day-war/>.

³⁰ James Smallwood, "Operation Texas: Lyndon B. Johnson, The Jewish Question and the Nazi Holocaust," *East Texas Historical Journal* 47, no. 1 (2009): 4.

Christadelphian. However, he internalized his family's views on the Jews. As his grandfather told him, "...take care of the Jews, 'God's Chosen People.' Consider them your friends and help them in every way you can."³¹

LBJ did just that when he became President of the United States. On May 14, 1967, four years into Johnson's administration, Israel was celebrating its Independence Day when its government received the news that Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser sent troops into the Sinai Desert. Egyptians were ready for an upcoming war, and Syria and Jordan were also ready if Israel attacked Egypt.³² Two days later, on May 16, the Egyptians expelled the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), the UN peacekeeping force installed after the Suez war, to leave the Sinai Desert. The UNEF left, leaving Israel and Egypt without a buffer and escalating tensions.³³ Fearful that Israeli troops would gather on the Egyptian border, Nasser closed the Straits of Tiran. This blockade prevented Israeli vessels and any ships from transporting military equipment to Israel through the Gulf of Aqaba. Considering how important the Straits of Tiran was for trade, Israel saw Nasser's move as an act of war.

Israelis feared for their lives. With the Holocaust occurring two decades earlier, more than a quarter of the population had either survived the horrors of the Holocaust or had close relatives who died during the Nazi genocide. With Arab enemies seeking to destroy the young Jewish state, there was fear that another Holocaust would happen. Many believed that Israel was going to lose this war. The United Nation was powerless to prevent an Arab attack, and Europe

³¹ Ibid.

³² Efraim Karsh, "The Six-Day War: An Inevitable Conflict." Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep04623>.

³³ Ibid.

took little interest in increasing military intervention in the area. Israel was also up against powerful Arab militaries. The Arab states had 2,500 tanks, 957 warplanes, and 240,000 deployed troops; Israel had 800 tanks, 300 warplanes, and 100,000 deployed troops—much less than its Arab counterparts.³⁴

However, Israel did not lose the war. In fact, quite the opposite. As if by some divine intervention, Israel secured an astonishing victory within six days. In a preemptive attack on June 5, Israel destroyed the air forces of all the neighboring Arab nations within hours. During the next three days, Israel won the Golan Heights from Syria, the Sinai from Egypt, and Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) and Jerusalem's Old City and holy sites from Jordan. After destroying 90 percent of Egypt's air force (the most powerful in the Middle East), Israel became the region's preeminent military power.³⁵ Both religious and secular groups considered the Six Day War as miraculous, and in part, it was because of the work of Lyndon B. Johnson.

Because of Jessie Johnson Hatcher, President Johnson developed a strong loyalty to Israel. Two weeks prior to the Six Day War, LBJ disregarded advice from both the U.S. State Department and the Pentagon. He secretly authorized the supply of military hardware to Israel by air, even though there was an embargo on weapons shipments to the Middle East.³⁶ On January 7, 1968, seven months after the war, LBJ toasted Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol. He said:

³⁴ “How Christadelphian love of Israel impacted the outcome of Israel’s Six Day War,” *Bible Prophecy & Current Events: Reflections on Current Events & Modern History*, November 19, 2015.

³⁵ Reuven Firestone, *Holy War in Judaism: The Rise and Fall of a Controversial Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 249-250.

³⁶ “How Christadelphian love of Israel impacted the outcome of Israel’s Six Day War,” *Bible Prophecy & Current Events: Reflections on Current Events & Modern History*, November 19, 2015.

Welcome to our family table. All Americans and all Israelis know...that none...can ever live by bread alone. One of your ancestors said it for all men almost 2,000 years ago...for peace it is written, ‘pursue it’. That is our intention in the Middle East...to pursue peace. If we are wise, if we are fortunate, if we work together—perhaps our Nation and all nations may know the joys of that promise God once made about the children of Israel: ‘I will make a covenant of peace with them...it shall be an everlasting covenant.’³⁷

Michael Oren, an Israeli Ambassador to the United States who wrote about the influence of Johnson’s grandfather and aunt, contends that it was Johnson’s philosemitism that emboldened him to support Israel.³⁸ Without LBJ’s Christadelphian background, Israel might have ceased to exist.

Political Motives

Shared Moral Values

Amongst pro-Israel Americans, one of the most cited motives is shared moral values. Whether Republican, Democrat, or Independent, most American supporters of Israel cite this motive. Even though most evangelicals disagree with the Israeli government on issues such as abortion or LGBT rights, they nevertheless see Israel as the lone liberal democracy in the Middle East. Like most Americans, they argue that the United States, being a great liberal democracy itself, should stand with Israel.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

However, the difference between Christian Zionist thought and general American thought is the idea of the United States being a Judeo-Christian nation. By moral values, evangelicals tend to mean “Judeo-Christian” values. A concept applied to Jews, Israelis, and Middle Eastern politics in the 1950s, “Judeo-Christian” became a term to describe a tri-faith America of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews.³⁹ As sociologist Will Herberg argued in his famous 1955 book *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (which described religion sociology in the United States at that time), Americans saw those three religions as “diverse, but equally legitimate, equally American expressions of an overall American religion standing for essentially the same ‘moral ideals’ and ‘spiritual values.’”⁴⁰

“Judeo-Christian” was commonly used in the 1930s in response to fascism and antisemitism. Organizations such as Father Charles Coughlin’s Christian Front, the Christian American Crusade, Christian Aryan Syndicate, Christian Mobilizers, and Christian Party and publications like the *Christian Defender* and *Christian Free Press* all used the term “Christian” to identify their positions.⁴¹ To distance themselves from such views, academics and social critics began labeling themselves as “Judeo-Christian.” For the first time in 1941, the left-leaning *Protestant Digest* described itself in its handbook, *Protestants Answer Anti-Semitism*, as “a periodical serving the democratic ideal which is implicit in the Judeo-Christian tradition.”⁴²

³⁹ Michelle Mart, “The ‘Christianization’ of Israel and Jews in 1950s America.” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 14, no. 1 (2004): 112. <https://doi.org/10.1525/rac.2004.14.1.109>.

⁴⁰ Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955, 1960) in Michelle Mart, “The ‘Christianization’ of Israel and Jews in 1950s America.” 112.

⁴¹ Mark Silk, “Notes on the Judeo-Christian Tradition in America.” *American Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1984): 66. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2712839>.

⁴² Beatrice Jenney, ed., *Protestants Answer Anti-Semitism* (New York: The Protestant Digest, 1941), inside front cover. In Mark Silk, “Notes on the Judeo-Christian Tradition in America,” *American Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1984): 66. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2712839>.

Using this Judeo-Christian idea, many evangelicals claim that the United States and Israel are both examples of Judeo-Christian civilizations. Having what they perceive as a common history and set of values, they argue that the two countries have the same spiritual heritage and thus share a special partnership.⁴³ Therefore, the United States and Israel need to stick together in times of turmoil to preserve Western civilization.

Protection of the Holy Sites

Another reason is protecting the holy sites. In a Fox News interview in October 2023, Hagee mentioned this reason. Conservative broadcaster Mark Levin asked Hagee what would happen to holy sites if Israel ceased to exist. He replied that those sites would disappear.⁴⁴ On an Instagram post on March 14, 2023, founder and president of Turning Point USA Charlie Kirk (who is a devout charismatic) posted a photo of him and his wife in Jerusalem. In the description, he wrote why he cared about Israel: “If Israel were to fall to the Arab world, we would have limited, if not zero access to our most precious holy sites.”⁴⁵

By holy sites, evangelicals do not mean the Church of Holy Sepulchre. The Church is not even on Hagee’s itinerary on his tours to Israel, even though it is one of the holiest sites in Christianity.⁴⁶ Most likely, some evangelicals skip the Church of the Holy Sepulchre since it belongs to Catholic and Orthodox Christians, who in the minds of some (but not all), are

⁴³ See Samuel Goldman, “The God of the Armies of Israel: Zionism and Judeo-Christian Civilization.” In *God’s Country: Christian Zionism in America*, 125–46. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv16t6mmg.11>.

⁴⁴ Fox News, “‘THEY HATE US’: Pastor Hagee warns Iran would be ‘delighted’ to attack US,” YouTube Video, 2:45, October 22, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrQ3b0Fntd4>.

⁴⁵ Charlie Kirk (@charliekirk1776), We have been asked repeatedly this week — Charlie, why do you care about Israel?, October 14, 2023, https://www.instagram.com/charliekirk1776/p/CyY__ZkPPPb/.

⁴⁶ See Hagee Ministries, *Celebrating Israel’s 75 Years of Statehood: Nov. 6-16, 2023* (Frosch Travel Israel, 2023), 3-5. https://jhm-cms.images.sardius.media/media/ycklhahh/israel2023_new.pdf.

unbiblical and not even Christian. Rather, as “Bible-only” iconoclastic Christians, they mean the sites where Jesus walked, such as the Sea of Galilee, the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Mount of Beatitudes, and the Western Wall (even though the Western Wall is Jewish).⁴⁷

Convinced that Arabs want to annihilate Israel, some Christians fear for the survival of their beloved sites. Although no Arab would ever dare to destroy the Temple Mount, which stands in the Old City of Jerusalem and is viewed as sacred in Islamic belief, that fact has not stopped some Christian Zionists from expressing concern about the future of the holy sites in Israel.

The Prosperity Gospel

Out of all these reasons, however, there is an overlooked reason motivating evangelicals to support Israel: prosperity. For the rest of this thesis, I will argue that evangelicals treat Israel as an insurance policy to secure blessings in their lives and for the nation.

When people think about the prosperity gospel, all sorts of stereotypes come to mind. They usually think of charismatic, predatory pastors. Figures such as Joel Osteen, T.D. Jakes, Kenneth Copeland, and Paula White-Cain best represent the movement. They live lavish lifestyles owning Ferraris, wearing the latest Gucci, residing in multi-million-dollar mansions, and flying in private jets—far from the simple carpenter ways of Jesus of Nazareth. They preach to their packed megachurches on Sundays that if they give money to their church, they too can have that same lifestyle. Their congregants—usually coming from an uneducated, working-class background—eagerly sign a check. Despite not having enough money to afford groceries or pay

⁴⁷ Ibid.

the bills, they sign away a substantial portion of their income. Certainly, some of these stereotypes are true (especially about the pastors), but only to a certain extent. Most people who attend a prosperity church or consume its messages are not interested in owning a Ferrari. Some do, but mainly, they seek to find reassurance and encouragement.

“The material thing is the easiest thing to caricature,” said Dr. Tony Tian-Ren Lin, a scholar on the prosperity gospel, “and we live in a world where complicated things have to be simplified. When you simplify things, you caricature and stereotype them. The stereotype has always been that they just want a new car or more money. But who doesn’t? Where in America are you going to go where someone says, ‘I don’t want a raise, thank you?’. It’s in our culture. Even if you make fun of prosperity gospel Christians, you adhere to some form of the prosperity gospel by the fact you are American.”⁴⁸

As I wrote this thesis, many people asked me: do you believe in the prosperity gospel? My answer: no, I do not. As a philosophy major who has studied suffering, I have many issues with the prosperity gospel. Yet, I understand the appeal. All of us go through hard times, and all of us want to get out. While some may turn to alternative medicine, reiki, essential oils, positive thinking, crystals, or self-help books, some people turn to megachurch pastors for consolation. The prosperity gospel is a theodicy, an explanation for the problem of evil. It tries to make sense of the suffering we face. Those who follow prosperity teachings feel defeated as they work jobs they hate or try to make ends meet. Prosperity preachers offer a message of hope. They offer similar advice as a good therapist would, except in a Christian context. “God is not a ‘get by’

⁴⁸ Tony Tian-Ren Lin (Program Director, Leadership Development Initiative at Trinity Church Wall Street), Zoom interview with Dr. Lin, January 12, 2024.

God,” says Joel Osteen, “but a bountiful God. I’m not saying life won’t be hard, but God is there in hard times. You wouldn’t be alive if God didn’t have something amazing in store for you.”⁴⁹ Encouraging messages such as these encourage large tithes. And sometimes, those tithes go to causes supporting Israel.

Many Americans want nothing to do with the prosperity gospel. No one labels themselves as a “prosperity preacher” or admits that they follow the prosperity gospel. Since the financial and sex scandals of Jimmy Bakker—the first televangelist who popularized the theology during the 1970s and 1980s—many associate the prosperity gospel with corruption. However, its popularity among preachers and congregants has been spreading across the globe. Many who espouse its beliefs have no clue that they hold prosperity views. But whether people are aware, that has and will continue to have major geopolitical implications—especially when it comes to Israel.

To understand the political aspects of the prosperity gospel, it is important to know that there are two strands: hard prosperity and soft prosperity. As Kate Bowler in her history of the prosperity gospel, *Blessed*, writes, “Hard prosperity judges people’s faith by their immediate blessings.”⁵⁰ This type of prosperity is what gets the most attention in the media. It preaches: if you love God, you will get that perfect spouse. If you donate 10 percent of your income to the church, you will own that car. In Latin America, some pastors tie support for Israel with hard prosperity. For instance, René Terra Nova, a Brazilian pastor, said at the International Christian

⁴⁹ As quoted in Joe Hoover, S.J., “God or grift? Positivity or prosperity? I finally get what Joel Osteen is selling,” *America Magazine*, July 7, 2023. <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2023/07/07/joel-osteen-prosperity-245622>.

⁵⁰ Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7-8.

Embassy in 2012 that God will bless your health or wealth in the next 90 days if Christians give money to Israel.⁵¹ However, in North America, prosperity promises like that are rare.

Evangelicals who cited Genesis 12:3 in the 1930s and 1940s never meant a material blessing.⁵²

Rather, they meant finding a soft prosperity, a type more about finding peace and spiritual renewal. This type of prosperity is more common amongst American Christian Zionists.

At the heart of prosperity Zionism is the most cited verse amongst Christian Zionists: Genesis 12:3. Speaking to Abram, God promises, “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” With this verse, Christian Zionists have a roadmap to get on God’s side: bless the state of Israel, else risk being cursed. For Christian Zionists, this roadmap is not just a suggestion but the will of God. As John Hagee likes to constantly remind his congregation, “it is God’s will for you to prosper.” If Genesis 12:3 promises blessings, then what do those blessings look like? As I have studied and listened to hours of sermons, speeches, and other content, I have diagnosed two strands of prosperity on a national scale in Christian Zionist thinking. Other scholars I have come across, such as Steven Fink, share my suspicions.⁵³ They include the following: 1) preserving American exceptionalism and 2) victory over Islamic enemies.

⁵¹ Daniel Hummel, PhD (Historian, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Zoom interview with Dr. Hummel, November 16, 2023.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ See Steven Fink, “Fear Under Construction: Islamophobia Within American Christian Zionism,” *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (2014): 26–43. <https://doi.org/10.13169/islastudj.2.1.0026>.

American Exceptionalism

In 2023, Hagee in a sermon said: “Remember the words of God almighty: I will curse those who curse you. That includes America.”⁵⁴ According to evangelicals, the United States has become morally depraved. What was once a Christian country has strayed away from its original intent. Gay marriage is legal. Crime rate is at an all-time high. Abortion is legal. Divorce rates have spiked. School prayer is no longer required. Socialism is rampant. Yet, the reason why the United States remains a great country is because it supports Israel. Thus, our solution to making America great again is by becoming more pro-Israel.⁵⁵

According to Mitch Forman, Vice President for U.S. Ministries at Chosen People Ministries, the Christians whom he interacted with Christians who interpreted Genesis 12:3 to mean that God has found favor with the United States. Since the United States has treated the Jewish people well for the most part, a lot of Christian Zionists would say that there has been a blessing for their community.

When we talked, he agreed that the blessing on America could be coordinating with Zionists’ stance on Israel. He mentioned that American politics, right or left, up until very recently, has always been very pro-Israel since 1948. He would guess that a lot of people believe, based on Genesis 12:3, that if they stand with Israel, America will continue to be blessed, and if they turn away from Israel, then that might be the demise of America’s greatness.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Hagee Ministries, “Pastor John Hagee - ‘The War Against the Jews,’” YouTube Video, 22:32, June 5, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5kDWdUL6eg>.

⁵⁵ Daniel Hummel, PhD (Historian, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Zoom interview with Dr. Hummel, November 16, 2023. Hummel explained the stance to me.

⁵⁶ Mitch Forman (Vice President, U.S. Ministries for Chosen People Ministries), Zoom interview with Rabbi Forman, December 6, 2023. Rabbi Forman asked not to be recorded, so did my best to summarize his stance.

Victory over Islam

The prosperity gospel emphasizes victory. It expects that with the right faith, God will secure victory against adversaries. Prior to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Christian Zionists saw the main enemy against Israel and the United States as communists. As most militant Christians during the Cold War viewed it, communism was a godless force that posed a threat against America. The most famous evangelist of the twentieth century Billy Graham said, “Communism is a religion that is inspired, directed and motivated by the Devil himself who had declared war against God almighty.”⁵⁷ Some even associated the Palestinians with communism after Yasser Arafat turned to the Soviet Union to fund the bankrupt Palestine Liberation Organization.⁵⁸ However, since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, evangelicals have replaced communism with Islam as the main enemy against the United States and Israel. They believe that Israel’s enemy is the Arabs and Islam.⁵⁹ By Arabs and Islam, they usually mean Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, and al-Qaeda. Other Christian Zionists echo similar sentiments. John Hagee in a Fox News interview about Hamas’ attacks during October 2023 said, “[Iran] hates us to the core and would be delighted to [attack the United States like Israel].”⁶⁰ Why do they view Arabs and Islam this way? For three main reasons.

First, evangelicals see Islam as a religion of violence. As Hagee said in 2007, “Islam not only *condones* violence; it *commands* it. A tree is known by its fruit, and the fruit produced by

⁵⁷ As quoted in Kristin Kobes DuMez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020). 26.

⁵⁸ David Crump (retired Professor, Calvin University), phone call with Dr. Crump, November 3, 2023.

⁵⁹ Mitch Forman (Vice President, U.S. Ministries for Chosen People Ministries), Zoom interview with Rabbi Forman, December 6, 2023.

⁶⁰ Fox News, “‘THEY HATE US’: Pastor Hagee warns Iran would be ‘delighted’ to attack US.”

Islam is fourteen hundred years of violence and bloodshed around the world.”⁶¹ Although Islam is often known as a “religion of peace,” most Christian Zionists condemn that title. For instance, *The Berean Call*, a dispensational newsletter, claimed Islam as a religion of “‘peace and tolerance’ is the most popular lie in the world today.”⁶² Walid Shoebat, the most extreme Christian Zionist who holds militant anti-Islam sentiments, concurs. In 2010, he wrote, “Imagine how I feel as a former Muslim to hear some ignorant Western commentator tell me that Islam means ‘peace.’ Yeah, and someday a unicorn riding on a cotton candy rainbow will come and take us all to Michael’s Jackson’s Neverland where we will all live together in unity.”⁶³

Second, evangelicals are convinced that Muslims seek out world domination. Citing the concept of jihad (the type that calls for a violent offensive campaign), evangelicals believe that Muslims want to convert every single person in every nation to Islam. Chuck Missler, a Christian Zionist who leads evangelical tours of the Holy Land, states, “The intractable goal of Islam is the subjugation of the entire world. It intrepidly aspires to the forceful elimination of all non-Muslims.”⁶⁴ Hagee also shares a similar view. He claims that the Quran mandates Muslim nations to fight any non-Muslim nation to advance Muslim global dominance.⁶⁵ According to Christian Zionist leaders, Muslims commit all sorts of atrocities for the cause of world

⁶¹ Steven Fink. “Fear Under Construction: Islamophobia Within American Christian Zionism,” *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (2014): 33. <https://doi.org/10.13169/islastudj.2.1.0026>.

⁶² Dave Hunt, “Islam’s Peace,” *thebereancall.org*, *The Berean Call*, March 1, 2003, <https://www.thebereancall.org/content/islam-s-peace>.

⁶³ Steven Fink, “Fear Under Construction: Islamophobia Within American Christian Zionism,” 33.

⁶⁴ Chuck Missler, *Prophecy 20/20: Bringing the Future into Focus through the Lens of Scripture* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 147.

⁶⁵ John Hagee, *Jerusalem Countdown: A Warning to the World* (Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine, 2006), 36.

domination. As Missler proclaims, “The Western mind cannot grasp the ethic that *anything* that advances the cause of Islam is to be extolled: murders, lies, deceit, etc.”⁶⁶

Third, Christian Zionists emphasize that Arabs and Muslims are committed to Israel’s annihilation. While secular pro-Israel Americans would agree with this sentiment to a certain extent, the difference between the average American and a Christian Zionist is religious. They argue that Muslims want to destroy Israel because the credibility of the Quran would be undermined if Israel continued to exist. Hagee writes, “Islam believes that the prophet Muhammad taught absolute truth—that it is [Allah’s] will for them to rule the earth. Therefore, if Islam does not defeat Israel, Muhammad and the Quran were wrong—and that’s absolutely unthinkable. Therefore, they must defeat Israel...If Israel survives, then Islamic theology is not true.”⁶⁷ Shoebat holds a similar view. He concludes that Muslims believe that if Israel is not destroyed, then “Allah is not God.”⁶⁸ However, some do not even cite theological reasons. Some will refer to Hamas’ charter, which calls for the destruction of Israel. As President of Concerned Women for America Penny Nance said, “...the goal of Hamas and terrorist [organizations] and Iran is there to be Holocaust 2.0. There’s no question.”⁶⁹ Either way, Christian Zionists are convinced: Muslims want to destroy Israel.

According to Christian Zionists, not only do Arabs and Muslims want the annihilation of Israel, but they also want to destroy the United States of America. This belief entered the evangelical mainstream after Bridges for Peace—an educational organization dedicated to

⁶⁶ Chuck Missler, *Prophecy 20/20: Bringing the Future into Focus through the Lens of Scripture*, 149.

⁶⁷ John Hagee, *Jerusalem Countdown: A Warning to the World* (Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine, 2006), 35.

⁶⁸ Walid Shoebat and Joel Richardson, *God’s War on Terror: Islam, Prophecy, and the Bible* (Newton, PA: Top Executive Media, 2010), 2nd edition, 38.

⁶⁹ Concerned Women for America, “Penny Nance Speaks at Calvary Chapel Chino Hills Stand with Israel Event,” Vimeo, 15:05, December 1, 2023, <https://vimeo.com/890460245>.

building relationships between Christians and Jews—reported in 2006 a Hamas leader’s threat: “We will rule the nations. By Allah’s will, the USA will be conquered. Israel will be conquered...Just as the Jew ran from Gaza, the Americans will run from Iraq and Afghanistan.”⁷⁰ This Hamas member remarked that this would not occur by peaceful means but by the sword and the gun. A year later, in May 2007, Bridges quoted the acting speaker of the Palestinian Authority’s Legislative Council who declared that Jews and Americans were “cowards who are eager for life, while we are eager for death for the sake of Allah.”⁷¹ This statement confirmed Christian Zionists’ fear of Muslims and the Palestinians in general.

Also, after 9/11, several “ex-Muslim terrorists” toured the evangelical world to give tales of what the Islamic threat entailed. These “ex-terrorists” included Walid Shoebat, Ergun and Emir Caner, and Kamel Saleem. They exaggerated their upbringings, claiming to have personal experience with joining Islamic terrorist organizations and encouraged anti-Muslim sentiments.⁷² Although plenty of evangelicals and bloggers outside of evangelical circles have debunked their claims, the messages of these proclaimed “ex-terrorists” continue to have a following.

Conclusion

The first component of a political movement is its framing processes. Movements need to explain what the problem is to motivate their activists. As I showed in this chapter, Christian Zionism provides plenty of framing processes. They tell their adherents that they need to support Israel not just to speed up the second coming of Jesus, convert the Jews, reconcile for the

⁷⁰ Steven Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). 60.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 60.

⁷² See Kristin Kobes DuMez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 220-227.

Holocaust, express their gratitude, side with their spiritual ally, or protect the holy sites, but to prosper. While some evangelicals may seek individual blessings, they also hope to secure blessings for the United States, whether that is preserving it as a great country or ensuring Israel and the United States has victory over its Islamic enemies.

In the past, Christian Zionists did not necessarily support Israel to gain blessings. This prosperity gospel line of thinking is quite new. As I will show in the next chapter, the prosperity gospel only entered the mainstream recently. When charismatic Christians became more prominent figures in the public square in the 1980s, Christian Zionism became less about dispensationalism and more about securing blessings.

Chapter 2: The Rise of Prosperity Zionism

The second component of political process theory is mobilizing structures. These are existing organizations—such as churches, communities, or social networks—that want change. They allow movements to mobilize by providing membership, leadership, and networks.¹ In this chapter, I will explain the history of prosperity Zionism, showing how it developed from previous ecumenical and political movements.

The history of American Christian Zionism has its origins in a variety of movements, such as Jewish restorationism by Protestant missionaries in the Middle East, Victorian interest in Bible prophecy, and the import of dispensationalism to the United States in the 19th century. However, as a grassroots movement, Christian Zionism began in 1948, with the establishment of the state of Israel.

The Establishment of Israel

After the Scopes trial, dispensationalists stepped back from “worldly” politics. They avoided the public square for two main reasons. First, the influence of the secret rapture made fundamentalists more focused on evangelizing individuals than politics. As premillennialists, dispensationalists felt no need to get involved. To them, it was pointless to make the world a better place; Jesus was going to come back soon and make it all better anyways. So instead of engaging with politics, dispensationalists sat back and watched current events unfold,

¹ Doug McAdam, “Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes—toward a synthetic, comparative perspective on social movements,” 3-4.

interpreting them with an eschatological framework from afar.² Second, fundamentalists were mortified by the Scopes Trial. Failing to defend creationism, they retreated from the public square and focused on affairs that concerned their communities.³

However, contrary to common narratives, fundamentalists still participated in organized activism after Scopes. Within their Christian communities, they opposed evolution and international engagements, promoted free markets, preached against social ills such as sex trafficking and prostitution, resisted racial desegregation, and supported Zionism.⁴ When it came to Zionist organizing, fundamentalists fell into two stands. The first was vehemently antisemitic, which did not support Zionism in any way recognizable to Christians today. This camp saw Israel as a fulfillment of Israel but did not support Zionism since it was the creation of secular Jews.⁵ The second supported Zionism. Best represented by Daniel Pulling, editor of a magazine called *Christian Herald*, who helped organize the pro-Israel American Christian Palestine Committee. Pulling was an exception, however. Within this camp of fundamentalists, the most consistent activity was not political organizing. Instead, they mainly used Israel and Zionism to establish that their way of interpreting scripture was superior.⁶

Thus, when David Ben Gurion announced Israel's Independence on May 14, 1948, fundamentalists rejoiced. The establishment confirmed that the Bible was inerrant and that they

² See Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³ See Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 61-82.

⁴ Daniel Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism: How the Evangelical Battle over the End Times Shaped a Nation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2023), 214.

⁵ Daniel Hummel. PhD (Historian, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Zoom interview with Dr. Hummel, February 13, 2024.

⁶ Ibid.

had cultural authority over modernists. In other words, fundamentalists were right, and modernists were wrong. Many gave the event a prophetic significance. Louis T. Talbot, the President of Biola University in Los Angeles, claimed on a radio show, “this could be the beginning of that train of events which will not end until the Lord Jesus Christ Himself returns and steps up the everlasting Kingdom which shall never be thrown down.”⁷ Talbot’s colleague William Orr was also thrilled about the news. He believed that the establishment of Israel fulfilled prophecy and proved the veracity of the Bible: “There isn’t the slightest doubt but that the emergence of the Nation of Israel among the family of nations is the greatest piece of prophetic news that we have had in the twentieth century. Perhaps its most important significance lies in the fact that it is indisputable evidence of God’s hand moving in the affairs of man.”⁸

Once Israel was established, Christian Zionism became a grassroots movement. Their grassroots activism manifested into two strands: missionary and cultural. With an increased sense of hope in 1948, premillennial dispensationalists flocked to Israel to evangelize Jews. For instance, the Southern Baptist Convention (some of whom were dispensationalists) arrived in Israel between 1948 and 1955. After facing much pushback from Israelis and experiencing failed missionary efforts, however, Baptists incorporated Zionism into their theology. They claimed that their mission was not so much about evangelizing Jews but strengthening the state of Israel.⁹

⁷ Sean Durbin, "Christian Zionism in the United States, 1930–2020," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. September 23, 2023. Accessed December 19, 2023. <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-1205>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Daniel Hummel, PhD (Historian, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Zoom interview with Dr. Hummel, February 13, 2024.

The cultural stand came when the concept of “Judeo-Christianity” was employed during the 1950s and 1960s. With this concept, evangelicals argued that the United States, being a Christian nation, and Israel, being a Jewish nation, were the pillars of Western civilization. Thus, they were the inheritors of a “Judeo-Christian” heritage dating back to the times of the Christian Old Testament. Due to the anxieties of the Cold War, evangelicals further claimed that Israel was a natural ally of the United States and an enemy of communism and Arab nationalism. Although dispensationalists were not the first to employ this argument, they were the first to use it as a theological argument. Thus, as a result, dispensationalists warmed evangelicals up to the state of Israel in an unprecedented way.¹⁰

Despite their grassroots activism, evangelicals did not take political action until after 1967. Evangelicals were confident that Israel fulfilled Biblical prophecy. Yet, to propel them into action, there was one prophecy waiting to be fulfilled: Israel needed to have rule over the Temple Mount in East Jerusalem. Without Israel’s control over that area, a new Temple could not be rebuilt.¹¹ Thus, evangelicals were not as confident that the millennium was nearby. However, all of that changed once the Six-Day War happened.

The Emergence of the Prosperity Gospel

As secular Zionists imagined a Jewish homeland in the late 19th century, a new theology was budding. Like the general Christian Zionist movement, the prosperity gospel has its roots in various belief systems and movements. Yet, one defining religious movement greatly shaped the current version: the New Thought movement. New Thought beliefs claim, in short, that the mind

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Sean Durbin, *Righteous Gentiles*, 36.

has power to change and determine reality. Largely preoccupied with the promise of obtaining healing, New Thought innovated popular American religion as it swept New England in the late 19th century. As an offshoot of Christian Science, it generalized the belief that people shape their worlds by their thinking.¹² The movement made the ground ripe for Pentecostalism, which emerged in 1906 and emphasized the capabilities of humans with the help of the Holy Spirit. While Pentecostals were skeptical about the metaphysics of New Thought, its ministers walked a fine line between traditional Pentecostal theology and New Thought beliefs. One of those ministers combined the two theologies: E.W. Kenyon (1867-1948). An early Pentecostal evangelist, Kenyon rejected a “religion of healthy mindedness.” Instead, he claimed that Christians could use divine principles to unlock God’s “treasury of blessings.” One of the defining theologies he preached was faith cure—the belief that anyone can overcome illness by cultivating faith. With this belief, Kenyon and other Pentecostal preachers sowed the seeds for a later prosperity gospel.¹³

Around this time, Pentecostals began adopting a victorious eschatological outlook. The “Latter Rain” (or the “New Order of the Latter Rain”) movement was especially influential in Pentecostalism. First sweeping the Canadian prairies in 1948 (within a few months of the founding of Israel) and then spreading to the United States, this revivalist movement was based on verses such as Joel 2, which refers to the rainy season between October and May in ancient Israel.¹⁴ The autumn rains were the former rains, and the spring rains were the latter rains. Fond

¹² Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ The King James Version translation of Joel 2:23 reads: “Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.” Other translations, such as the New King James Version and the New International Version, refer to the rains as autumn and spring rains.

of this image, the latter rain movement believed that the early church at Pentecost was the former rain and Pentecostalism was the end-times downpour of God.¹⁵

The Latter Rain movement’s eschatology—a rejection of dispensationalism—is integral in understanding its similarity with the prosperity gospel and dispensationalism. It states that before the second coming of Jesus, God would manifest his presence and power amongst Christians. In other words, if Christians had faith and agreed with God’s Word (being the Bible), then God would give them the power to banish sickness, defeat death, and create life, health, wellness, prosperity, and abundance. It was characterized by the belief that the Church would be victorious over the world and usher in God’s kingdom.¹⁶

As for the prosperity gospel and dispensationalism, there are two similar connections. The first is the type of people it attracts. Dispensationalism is what religion scholars refer to as a “millennial movement”—a movement that promises a radical change in society. It is like the prosperity gospel in that it sells hope. Those who tend to struggle with doubt tend to gravitate towards millennial movements as they search for reassurance.¹⁷ Another similarity is the way they read the Bible. Both share a literal hermeneutic. So, if the Bible reads that God will bless those who bless Israel, then both dispensationalism and the prosperity gospel will conclude that God will bless those who bless Israel.

¹⁵ Matthew D. Taylor, PhD (Senior Scholar and Protestant Scholar, Institute for Islamic, Christian, Jewish Studies), Zoom call with Dr. Taylor, April 16, 2024.

¹⁶ Michael J. McClymond, “Prosperity Already and Not Yet: An Eschatological Interpretation of the Health-and-Wealth Emphasis in the North American Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement,” in *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World Without End*, edited by Peter Althouse and Robby Waddell, 1st ed., 293–312. The Lutterworth Press, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1cgf9h5.18>.

¹⁷ Bill Kostlevy, PhD (retired director and archivist, Church of the Brethren Library and Historical Archives), phone call with Dr. Kostlevy, January 12, 2024.

However, it was not dispensationalists, Pentecostals, or charismatics who first literally blessed Israel. Instead, it was a new ecumenical movement that was emerging—one that would lay the early seeds for later Christian Zionists to reach out to the people of Israel.

Catholics and Mainline Protestants Pave the Way

Before David Ben-Gurion announced Israel's independence in 1948, Christians were already forging a relationship with Jews. However, these Christians were not dispensationalists. Rather, they were mainline Protestants and Catholics.

Two main motives encouraged mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics to reach out to Jews. First, there were the horrors of the Holocaust. Even if Nazism had developed into an ideology that became hostile to Christianity, many Christians in Germany still supported the Nazi regime. This fact created a sense that Christians had a moral obligation to investigate why Christianity was used to propagate Nazi ideals.¹⁸ Second, both Christian groups realized that racial antisemitism was simply wrong. Catholics concluded that it contradicted their own sacramental theology, for instance. Racial antisemitism claims that a Jew cannot stop being a Jew. So, if a Jew gets baptized, then he always remains a Jew and thus is racially inferior to Gentiles. This racist logic undermines the sacrament of Baptism, which makes everyone one in Christ.¹⁹ Thus, there was no way for a Catholic to be an anti-Semite and adhere to sacramental theology. In Protestantism, there were similar ideas; a Christian could not racialize people and

¹⁸ Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, PhD (Director, Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College), Zoom interview with Prof. Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, February 16, 2024.

¹⁹ Ibid.

say no person is inferior to another. The test case was the converted Jew; the converted Jew must be treated equally as a Gentile convert, yet racial antisemitism does not permit that.²⁰

For these reasons, before and during the Second World War, Jews and Christians in the West collaborated to fight racial antisemitism. For instance, the Church of England established the Council of Christians and Jews in 1942 in response to the Nazi persecution of Jews. In the United States, there were significant Catholic Cardinals, such as Cardinal Cushing of Boston, involved in reaching out to Jews.²¹ Most significantly, in the summer of 1947, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews gathered in central Switzerland at the Seelisberg Conference. The aim of this conference was to fight the roots of antisemitism which persisted after the fall of Nazism.²² For the Roman Catholic Church, this Conference gave way to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), which in 1965 approved *Nostra Aetate*, the papal decree that opened Catholic-Jewish relations.

However, these Christians were not necessarily Zionists. All their efforts were more about combating antisemitism theologically than advocating for Zionism. While they were open to Zionism as a solution to the problem of antisemitism, the question of Zionism was set aside to deal with more pressing issues of Church teaching. Especially for Catholics, there was some hesitancy about embracing Zionism. If they endorsed the movement, it might have caused them to lose allies who were needed to deal with racial antisemitism.²³ In addition, the Vatican withheld from recognizing the state of Israel until 1994 to avoid alienating Palestinian

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Catholics.²⁴ Although the Roman Catholic Church was hesitant about Zionism, there were mainline Protestants who embraced the movement and organized in support of Israel.

During the 1930s and 1940s, the American Christian Palestine Committee (ACPC) represented Christian support for Zionism. Heavily dominated by mainline Protestants, the ACPC advocated for two stances: the “international curatorship” of the holy places while leaving the Old City and Bethlehem under international supervision, and acceptance of the annexation of the “New City” of Jerusalem to the state of Israel.²⁵ Their initiatives were so successful, they nudged many Christians into supporting politicians who brought about the creation of a Jewish state.²⁶

Mainline Protestants and Catholics saw their activism more as a humanitarian issue rather than a biblical issue. Unlike dispensationalists, mainline Protestants and Catholics did not have a theology on the land. Israel was spiritualized (many referred to it as “the Holy Land” or “the Land where Jesus walked”), but the idea of Jerusalem being important moved towards the idea of “heavenly Jerusalem” that would return someday.²⁷ Because of the fundamentalist-modernist debate, there was not a strong biblicism in mainline Protestantism. The idea of literal bible prophecies needing to be fulfilled was not active. Also, Catholics and mainline Protestants had a strong community in the land of Israel. There were Palestinian Catholics and mainline Protestants. So, their own community was impacted by the Israel-Palestine conflict. These

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes towards Israel* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 162.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, PhD (Director, Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College), Zoom interview with Prof. Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, February 16, 2024.

reasons explain why mainline Protestants eventually distanced themselves from Israel and Zionism after 1967.

Although activism amongst mainline Protestants and Catholics was not explicitly about Zionism, these Christians built the framework for later Christian Zionists. Because they reached out to Jews in the 1930s and 1940s, Christian Zionists built on those networks and techniques to interact with the Israeli government in the decades to come.

The Victorious Six-Day War

No one expected Israel to win the Six-Day War, let alone gain as much power as it did. As a result, the Christian world split over Zionism after 1967. On one hand, mainline Protestant support fell for the state of Israel for four reasons. The first was that their pews started emptying during this period, for reasons unrelated to Israel and Palestine. The second was that Israel became a more contentious issue. It was no longer viewed as a humanitarian issue as it was during the 1940s and 1950s. Instead, as the Settler movement became successful, many now saw Israel as an occupier. The third was that many mainline Protestants, such as Martin Marty, who were once Zionists began to question their Zionism. Lastly, fundamentalist evangelicals started emerging as a Zionist movement.²⁸

Dispensationalists could not believe it when Israel won the Six-Day War. Prophecy was fulfilled; Israel had control over the Temple Mount in East Jerusalem, which signified the imminent second coming of Jesus. Giddy over Israel's victory, evangelicals started engaging more with Israel. Through prophetic speculation, tours of Israel, and practical and cultural

²⁸ Daniel Hummel, PhD (Historian, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Zoom interview with Dr. Hummel, November 16, 2023.

politics, Israel occupied a central space in many evangelical circles.²⁹ At this point in history, American Christian political support for Israel shifted from mainline Protestantism to dispensationalists.

Although dispensationalists were ecstatic about the Six-Day War, they did not immediately turn into political activists. It took the work of one man to transform them from passive observers into political activists: G. Douglas Young. A major dispensationalist of his time, Young had developed connections with the Israeli Foreign Ministry since the early 1960s.³⁰ Convinced that liberal mainline Protestants were anti-Israel, that the media did not accurately portray the Arab-Israeli conflict, and most American evangelicals were unmotivated in materially supporting Israel, Young established the American Institute of Holy Land Studies in West Jerusalem in 1956. Supported by Israeli officials, the Institute's goal was to encourage political engagement with Israel. It grappled with the question of what an evangelical Zionist looked like and the relationship between Israelis and evangelicals. Attracting many Christian Zionists in the 1970s and 1980s, who came to study the Bible, historical geography, archaeology, Hebrew, and Middle Eastern culture and religion, the Institute created a new generation of politically active Christian Zionists, whom the majority of during the 1970s and 1980s all had ties to the Institute.³¹ It became the place where dispensationalists distanced themselves from the

²⁹ Sean Durbin, *Righteous Gentiles*, 37.

³⁰ Sean Durbin, "Christian Zionism in the United States, 1930–2020," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. September 23, 2023. Accessed December 19, 2023. <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-1205>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

supersessionist theology of mainline Protestants and Catholics, allowing a rise of a new interfaith dialogue between Israelis and evangelicals.³²

An example of Young's importance in the Christian Zionist movement occurred with the Jerusalem Conference on Biblical Prophecy in 1971. He organized this conference to strengthen evangelical ties with the state of Israel. Nearly fifteen hundred evangelicals from over thirty countries attended the conference. According to historian Daniel Hummel, the conference "provided an outstanding window into the divisions among evangelicals and the place of Christian Zionism in American evangelicalism in the early 1970s."³³ Different from most evangelicals, Young's activism was not focused on proselytizing Israeli Jews. Instead, using context methods that Zionist mainline Protestants used prior, he combined his prophetic beliefs about Jews and Israel and emphasized interfaith relations. During his career, Young brought together evangelicals and Jews, forming what he saw as an interfaith movement.

In 1976, Young established Bridges for Peace, which is still active today. Throughout the early 21st century, Bridges for Peace has published literature, lobbied governments, and supported Jews making *aliyah* to Israel.³⁴ In 1977, a breakthrough in Christian Zionism occurred when Young and fourteen other evangelical leaders published a full-page in the New York Times lamenting "Evangelicals' Concern for Israel." The ad criticized the policies of Jimmy Carter's administration towards Israel and expressed a distinctly evangelical understanding of Jews' relationship to the land.³⁵

³² Daniel Hummel, PhD (Historian, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Zoom interview with Dr. Hummel, February 13, 2024.

³³ Sean Durbin, "Christian Zionism in the United States, 1930–2020," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, September 20, 2023. Accessed 19 Feb. 2024.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Thanks to Young's political work, Christian Zionism was provided with a template from which it developed. As the end of the decade progressed, many began to see a brand-new movement emerge: the Religious Right, which gave a bigger platform for Christian Zionists in the public square.

The Rise of the Religious Right

In the 1970s, a coalition of fundamentalists, Orthodox Jews, Mormons, and conservative Catholics and evangelicals emerged to battle the culture wars. This coalition came to be known as the Religious Right, and many factors contributed to its rise. There were economic policies, the Second Vatican Council, the Sexual Revolution, the increasing liberalization of mainline Protestant churches, and a series of Supreme Court cases which ruled against evangelical interests, for instance.³⁶ Contrary to popular belief, which says evangelicals became involved in political activism after *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, they did not get involved in the anti-abortion movement at its inception. Most evangelicals and fundamentalists saw abortion as a "Catholic issue" and thus were indifferent or even hostile to it.³⁷ Their main catalyst into political activism happened when the Internal Revenue Services revoked tax exempt status for private Christian schools that practiced segregation.

Green v. Connally (1971) captured the attention of evangelical leaders. The IRS began sending questionnaires to Christian "segregation academies," including Jerry Falwell's own school in Lynchburg, Virginia, which asked about their racial policies. It infuriated plenty of evangelicals. "In some states," Falwell complained, "It's easier to open a massage parlor than a

³⁶ See Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³⁷ Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics*, 98, 105.

Christian school.”³⁸ One school became the last straw for evangelicals. In 1976, after a series of warnings since 1970, the IRS officially rescinded the tax-exempt status of Bob Jones University—a fundamentalist college that unapologetically discriminated against African Americans.³⁹ This issue alerted many fundamentalist schools. No longer could they remain isolated from the world; the world was interfering in the affairs of evangelical institutions.

Paul Weyrich—a conservative political strategist and one of the founders of the Heritage Foundation—saw an opportunity for a new conservative political movement. Since the decades following World War II, evangelicals had been drifting toward the Republican Party. However, their political activism was static. Weyrich believed that if he could get evangelicals into the public square, then he could create a solid voting bloc that would easily gather behind conservative causes. Although Weyrich tried persuading evangelicals to rally behind different issues (including abortion), he failed. It was not until *Green v. Connally* when Falwell and Weyrich teamed up to argue that segregation was a matter of religious freedom and blame the Democratic president for the IRS actions against segregated schools (even though Nixon mandated the policy).⁴⁰ This became the start of a politically involved evangelical Christianity.

This new politically involved bloc of evangelicals had no single leader. Yet, one man became the cultural icon for the re-engagement of fundamentalists: Jerry Falwell. In 1979, he launched the Moral Majority, which sought to register conservative Christians and mobilize them against “secular humanism” and society’s moral decay. With the Moral Majority, Falwell held

³⁸ See Randall Balmer, “The Real Origins of the Religious Right.” *Politico Magazine*, May 27, 2014. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/religious-right-real-origins-107133/>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid. For a more detailed analysis of the rise of the Religious Right and race, see Randall Balmer, *Bad Faith: Race and the Rise of the Religious Right*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021.

rallies, recruited pastors, and gave politically charged sermons denouncing abortion, the ERA, homosexuality, drugs, pornography, and “secular humanism.” By 1980, he claimed that the Moral Majority had chapters in forty-seven states and had registered 4 million voters. Republican politicians and TV talk show hosts courted him and his base, finding him worthy of praise. By then, Falwell became the figurehead of the Christian Right. The name of his organization became the name to describe the movement.⁴¹

As for premillennial dispensationalists, what got them involved in political activism? The irony of dispensationalist activists was that they felt no urge to get involved in politics; Jesus was going to come back soon and make the world a better place anyways. Yet, when the Religious Right emerged into the public square, premillennial dispensationalists became political activists. How so?

One main motive was theological. During the 1970s, Tim LaHaye coined the “humanist tribulation,” which encouraged dispensationalists to act. The “humanist tribulation” replaced communism with humanism as the ideological threat for fundamentalists and evangelicals and captured the belief that humanism was taking over American institutions. While dispensationalists were not the only ones talking about the humanist tribulation (Billy Graham and Francis Schaffer—a pseudo-intellectual Presbyterian preacher—both talked about it), it was Tim LaHaye and Jerry Falwell who used it to propel political activism. The idea was that right before the rapture happened, there would be another tribulation. Humanists would take over American institutions, including the media, culture, education, and government, and Christians

⁴¹ Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, 294.

would have to face that reality. If Christians wanted to protect the church until the rapture happens, then Christians needed to fight back in those institutions.⁴²

The Israeli and Christian Right

The Religious Right's interest in international affairs is nothing new. For instance, there are some segments of the Christian Right who have been fascinated with Russia. As Putin branded himself as a protector of "traditional values" and Russian Christians, some American Christians began to believe that Russia is an icon of traditional Christian values.⁴³ However, until Tucker Carlson's interview with Putin, that base had not gained much power.⁴⁴ Even then, there were no diplomatic relations established between Christians and Russia with that interview. This relationship is different from Christian Zionists, whose relationship with the Israeli Right made them an integral force in American foreign policy.

When mainline Protestants became more critical of Israel after the Six-Day War, the Israeli-Jewish perspective on Christian support reorientated. Initially, the Israeli Labour Party was the most eager to side with evangelical Christians. For instance, Golda Meir wanted to cultivate a relationship with Billy Graham.⁴⁵ However, at first, most Israeli Jews wanted to work with mainline Protestants and Catholics. They thought they were the major power players in the

⁴² Daniel Hummel, PhD (Historian, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Zoom interview with Dr. Hummel, February 13, 2024.

⁴³ See Cody Mello-Klein, "Christian nationalists are enamored with Putin, even if they oppose Russia, new research from Northeastern professor says." *Northeastern Global News*, March 8, 2023, <https://news.northeastern.edu/2023/03/08/christian-nationalists-putin-russia/>; and Isobel Cockerell, "Russia spent years courting the Christian right. With the war in Ukraine, has the alliance faltered?" *Coda*, February 21, 2023, <https://www.codastory.com/disinformation/traditional-values/kristina-stoeckl-russia-traditional-values/>.

⁴⁴ See Jayson Casper, "Tucker Carlson Interviewed Putin. Ukraine's Evangelicals Explain More." *Christianity Today*, February 9, 2024, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2024/february-web-only/tucker-putin-interview-russia-ukraine-war-christian-leader.html>.

⁴⁵ Daniel Hummel, PhD (Historian, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Zoom interview with Dr. Hummel, February 13, 2024.

Christian world. Yet, when mainline Protestants and Catholics exhibited their criticism for the state of Israel after 1967, Israeli Jews started looking for other Christian allies and found evangelicals, who believed Israel could do no wrong as God's chosen nation.⁴⁶

The Israeli Right grew especially interested in the Christian Right when Menachem Begin became prime minister in 1977. The election of Begin, whose government was pro-Settler, and the expansion of settlements in the West Bank (or as the Likud party called it, "historic Judea and Samaria") confirmed dispensationalists' sense that prophecy was unfolding and the rapture was near.⁴⁷ Also, Falwell showed interest in supporting Settlers when fundamentalist Jews began believing in a divine right to settle lands captured during the Six-Day War, a movement known as Gush Emunim. Like adherents of Gush Emunim, he believed that God ordained the West Bank to Israel and thus could build settlements there.⁴⁸ Aware of Falwell's stance, the Israeli right became interested in Falwell, especially since he was a gateway to a network of pastors. Going back to the 1950s, Israelis liked to look out for key pastors in networks (such as denominations) who would become a reference for a much bigger network of pastors for support.⁴⁹ For the Israeli Right, that pastor was a separatist Baptist from Lynchburg, Virginia and a major architect of the Religious Right: Jerry Falwell.

Shortly after the Six-Day war, Falwell visited Israel. For Falwell, this trip was the catalyst of his conversion to Zionism. While the Moral Majority mainly focused on returning to "traditional Christian values" in America, the Moral Majority and its newly engaged

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Sean Durbin, *Righteous Gentiles*, 41.

⁴⁸ Daniel Hummel, PhD (Historian, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Zoom interview with Dr. Hummel, February 13, 2024.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

fundamentalist bloc also helped to classify support for Israel as a domestic issue. Falwell said of Christians' relationship to Israel: "The Jews are returning to their land in unbelief. They are spiritually blind and desperate in need of their Messiah and Savior. Yet, they are God's people, and in the world today Bible-believing Christians in America are the best friends the nation of Israel has. We must remain so."⁵⁰

After Menachem Begin's pro-settler government won in 1977, Begin and Falwell developed a close relationship. The two men met in Jerusalem during one of Falwell's trips to the Holy Land. Both leaders recognized the benefits that they could reap by having a close relationship, and both seemed to admire each other personally. Since their first meeting, Begin and Falwell met frequently in Israel and in the United States.⁵¹ One of the most cited aspects of Begin and Falwell's relationship is the Jabotinsky Medal. In 1980, Begin awarded Falwell the Jabotinsky Medal for his support of Israel. While this award signifies a relationship with the two men, the medal was not that prestigious. Begin gave it to anyone whom he wanted to elevate.⁵²

Under Begin, Christian Zionism became a crucial aspect of Israel's diplomatic relationship with the United States. During Ronald Reagan's Presidency, the Prime Minister's office in Jerusalem, the Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C., and AIPAC all had representatives to build and develop relationships with evangelicals sympathetic to the Knesset's project.⁵³

⁵⁰ Jerry Falwell, *Listen America!* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1981), 107.

⁵¹ Joe L. Kincheloe and George Staley, "The Menachem Begin-Jerry Falwell Connection: A Revolution in Fundamentalism." *Journal of Thought* 17, no. 2 (1982): 35–39. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42588966>.

⁵² Daniel Hummel, PhD (Historian, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Zoom interview with Dr. Hummel, February 13, 2024.

⁵³ Sean Durbin, *Righteous Gentiles*, 41.

Pentecostals Come to Power

The Religious Right eventually imploded for four reasons. First, fundamentalists saw the Religious Right as an opportunity to evangelize and convert Catholics and Mormons, causing internal conflict.⁵⁴ Second, Jimmy Swaggart marked the fall of the Religious Right in 1988 when a prostitution scandal erupted, which destroyed his funding network and led to his defrocking by the Assemblies of God. Third, the sex and financial scandals of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker wracked the Religious Right, especially when Falwell assumed leadership of their network, Praise The Lord, a year later. Fourth, Falwell declined as a political activist in 1989 when he stepped down as the head of the Moral Majority, which lost much support.⁵⁵ While the Moral Majority disbanded in the late 1980s, it established evangelicals, amongst other faith-adhering activists, as conservative political activists in the American public square.

As Falwell's political prowess fell, charismatic and Pentecostal Christians immediately began to replace the void that the Religious Right left behind. Pat Robertson, a charismatic Southern Baptist televangelist, launched the Christian Coalition in 1987. Headed by the young conservative activist Ralph Reed, the coalition mobilized Christian voters and focused on lobbying mainly at the state level. It enlisted members of other Christian right groups and partnered with Catholic anti-abortion organizations and Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum. It was so successful, in some states, it either split the local Republican party or took over the state's GOP.⁵⁶ Although the Moral Majority had passed from the scene, the Christian Coalition became such a force that every Republican candidate for president had to appeal to it.

⁵⁴ See Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics*.

⁵⁵ Daniel Hummel, *Covenant Brothers*, 192.

⁵⁶ Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, 367.

The Christian Coalition and Pat Robertson’s presidential campaign in 1988 marked the official rise of Pentecostals and charismatic Christians into Zionist activism. Robertson, with his blend of Southern and charismatic values, was a staunch Zionist. “The survival of the Jewish people is a miracle of God,” Robertson said in an undated speech about Israel. “The return of the Jewish people to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a miracle of God. The remarkable victories of Jewish armies against overwhelming odds in successive battles in 1948, and 1967, and 1973 are clearly miracles of God. The technological marvels of Israeli industry, the military prowess, the bounty of Israeli agriculture, the fruits and flowers and abundance of the land are a testimony to God’s watchful care over this new nation and the genius of this people... We believe that God has a plan for [Israel] which He intends to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth.”⁵⁷ As a dispensationalist, he believed that the developments of the modern world—such as the establishment of Israel and the Jewish annexation of Jerusalem in 1967—were fulfillments of biblical prophecy.⁵⁸ From this point in history, Christian Zionism became defined in large part by a charismatic strand of Christianity.

This new charismatic strand of the Christian Right innovated Christian Zionist lobbying in two ways. First, it imagined Israel as a battleground for spiritual warfare. As the future site of Jesus’s reign, the Middle East became a spiritual terrain divided between God’s domain and the “principalities and powers” of darkness (Ephesians 6:12). The Holy Spirit provided gifts—such as prayer, missions, tithing, and prophesying—to Christians to fight against Satan and his evil

⁵⁷ “Why Evangelical Christians Support Israel,” *The Official Site of Pat Robertson*, <https://www.patrobertson.com/Speeches/IsraelLauder.asp>. Accessed February 18, 2024.

⁵⁸ David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Pat Robertson: A Personal, Religious, and Political Portrait* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1987), 145.

forces.⁵⁹ Second, it introduced the prosperity gospel into dispensationalist thought, primarily but not exclusively with the reading of Genesis 12:3. With this verse (“I will bless those who bless [Israel], and curse those who curse you”), they connected American destiny and flourishing with the nation of Israel—something never done before in the history of Christianity.⁶⁰ This exegesis was introduced by a crucial activist in Christian Zionism: John Hagee.

John Hagee and Christians United for Israel

John Hagee was not the first to combine aspects of the prosperity gospel with dispensationalism. Others before him had done so. Oral Roberts, the famous televangelist responsible for giving the rise to the prosperity gospel after World War II, was a dispensationalist and a staunch supporter of Israel. The ministry of Kathryn Kuhlman, an early female televangelist, inspired later prosperity Zionists, such as Benny Hinn, to get involved in ministry.⁶¹ However, John Hagee was the first to use the combination of the two theologies as a selling point to mobilize Christian Zionists.

It is well-known that John Hagee is a prosperity preacher. Since the 2000s, he published a series of books advocating for the prosperity gospel, including *Mastering Your Money* (2003), *The Seven Secrets: Unlocking Genuine Greatness* (2004), a study bible entitled *God’s Keys to Personal Success* (2004), and *Life Lessons to Live By: 52 Weeks of God’s Keys to Personal*

⁵⁹ Daniel Hummel. *Covenant Brothers*. 194.

⁶⁰ Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, PhD (Director, Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College), Zoom interview with Prof. Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, February 16, 2024. Prior to dispensationalism, Christian theologians interpreted the blessing in Genesis 12:3 to be the ministry of Jesus Christ. Christians would come to bless the world by spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

⁶¹ Daniel Hummel, PhD (Historian, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Zoom interview with Dr. Hummel, February 13, 2024.

Success (2005). He explicitly preaches prosperity theology in his sermons. For example, in a 2023 sermon titled “The War against the Jews,” John Hagee announced to his congregation:

[God] put his son on that cross to give you joy that is unspeakable and full of Glory. The son went to the Cross to give you Divine Healing for every sickness and disease on planet Earth. He went to the cross to give you hope and power and confidence in the Darkest hours of your life. He went there to give you prosperity that the world didn’t give and the world cannot take it away.⁶²

As for support for Israel, Hagee’s sermons online are peppered with advertisements for CUFI, calling for congregants to donate to Israel so that they can secure their blessings. “When you bless the Jewish people, you open the door of supernatural blessings in your life,” says Matthew Hagee, son of John Hagee.⁶³

Contemporary Christian Zionism is indebted to John Hagee. Born in 1940 in Baytown, Texas, Hagee is a megachurch pastor in San Antonio. During the 1980s, Hagee built a media empire around his Cornerstone Church. His first entrance into Christian Zionism occurred in 1982 with his Night to Honor Israel event, which expressed solidarity of evangelicals with the state of Israel. From this event came an international movement of churches who also hosted similar events. Thus, in the 1980s, Hagee became known as the man who founded the Night to Honor Israel events, which grabbed the attention of the Israeli government.

⁶² Hagee Ministries, “Pastor John Hagee - ‘The War Against the Jews,’” YouTube Video, 9:00, June 5, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5kDWdUL6eg>.

⁶³ Hagee Ministries, “The Signs of His Coming,” YouTube Video, 12:16, July 5, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWbtXVpfm-4&list=PLjbgav9KBUnDUMlJgRu_WNFh5-imZqR7Z&index=2

By the 1990s, Hagee became a part of a network of politically active, conservative Southern ministers, but he was not yet notable. He became famous when he published a series of eschatological books in the 1990s. By the end of the decade, prominent Israeli politicians, such as Benjamin Netanyahu, knew Hagee for his books. Then in 2005, John Hagee claims that Netanyahu asked him if he could create an organization that would speak for pro-Israel Christians. He recounted the story at a 2012 “Night to Honor Israel” in Jerusalem:

In November 2005, after I had spoken with Members of the Knesset, Prime Minister Netanyahu asked me a question that changed the course of Christianity in America. He asked me, he said: “Pastor, do you think the Christians of America could unify in their support of Israel?” I gave him an honest answer: “I don’t know.” The result? In February of 2006, I called together 400 of America’s leading evangelicals, [and] we founded Christians United for Israel. Five months later, three thousand plus went to Washington, DC for the first time to meet the members of US Congress on behalf of Israel. Mr. Prime Minister, six months later, I have the answer to your question: Yes, Christians can unify in America in support of Israel.

Christians United for Israel has more than one million registered members and is growing by the day. We are unified that Israel has the right to exist, that Israel has the right to defend itself, that Israel has the right to secure her borders, and the 1967 borders are not those borders. A recent poll reflects that 71 percent of Americans support Israel. Ladies and gentlemen, Ancient Israel had Moses lead them out of Egyptian bondage, Israel’s golden age had King David who

conquered the Jebusites and made Jerusalem the eternal and undivided capital of Israel. At a time when Iran's nuclear ambitions are an existential threat to Israel, Israel has a champion capable to meet the challenge.⁶⁴

This story has not been verified; it is only what John Hagee claims. While Netanyahu might have catalyzed CUFI, what matters is that CUFI is here. CUFI continues to be here, and as I will show in the next chapter, CUFI and other Christian Zionist organizations are continuing to mobilize.

Conclusion

Prosperity Zionism did not emerge out of the blue. Using tactics, frameworks and networks from previous ecumenical and political movements, prosperity Zionism emerged when the Religious Right imploded in the 1980s. As charismatics and Pentecostals immediately replaced the void that the Religious Right left behind, Christian Zionism became less about speeding up the end times and more about gaining God's blessings. This belief came into the mainstream of Christian Zionism because of John Hagee, who combined the prosperity gospel and dispensationalism as a selling point to mobilize evangelical activists. As I will show in the next chapter, prosperity Zionists became a powerful base in American foreign policy during the Trump Administration.

⁶⁴ Sean Durbin, *Righteous Gentiles*, 56-7.

Chapter 3: The Armageddon Lobby

The third component of a political movement is political opportunities. This aspect includes opportunities a movement receives for intervention and change within the existing political system.¹ During the Obama and Trump administrations, the prosperity gospel and the “Armageddon Lobby”—the original nickname for the Christian Zionist lobby—more broadly was never more politically active. In this chapter, I will show the political opportunities prosperity Zionism received during this time by offering a survey of the policies and politicians affiliated with the movement.

Policy Initiatives

The Iran Nuclear Deal

Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the United States and Iran have had an embittered relationship. Khomeini dubbed the United States as the “Great Satan”—the tempter who tried straying Iran away from its Islamic culture. On the other hand, the United States became disappointed about losing a staunch ally in the Middle East. What was once a strong alliance had soured into resentment and bitterness.

Amidst a tense relationship, the Obama administration attempted to chart a new policy toward Iran. Concerned that the Islamic Republic would declare war on its enemies, President Obama presented and sealed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015. Better known as the Iran Nuclear Deal, the JCPOA was designed to prevent the Iranian government

¹ Doug McAdam, “Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes—toward a synthetic, comparative perspective on social movements,” 2-3.

from obtaining nuclear weapons. In the deal, Iran agreed to halt its nuclear program and open its facilities to internal inspections in exchange for billions of dollars. The hope was to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons and thereby reduce the prospects of war between Iran and its regional rivals, including Saudi Arabia and Israel.² However, Christian Zionists hoped otherwise.

Like most Americans since 1979, many evangelicals viewed Iran as the embodiment of a radical Islamic threat. According to their worldview, Judeo-Christian civilization—being the United States and Israel—was against “radical Islam.” For this reason, Washington could not trust Tehran. The Iranian government was intrinsically, religiously, and sometimes even demonically devoted to the destruction of both Israel and the United States. To prove this point, Christian Zionists often pointed to the anti-American sentiment of the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini. He frequently denounced the United States as the “Great Satan” and Israel as the “Little Satan.” Christian Zionists also pointed to Iran and its allies’ struggle against American and Israeli interests in the Middle East. From the seizure of American hostages in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, to Hezbollah’s 1983 bombing of U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, to proxy struggles in Iraq, Yemen and Syria, Iran was no enemy to negotiate with. Instead, for Christian Zionists, it was an enemy to confront.³

Although prosperity Zionists did not have any immediate legislative successes, evangelicals mobilized heavily during the Obama administration’s two terms. One of their successes at the grassroots level included portraying Obama as an enemy of Israel. Because of

² Council on Foreign Relations, “What is the Iran Nuclear Deal?” *Council on Foreign Relations*, Accessed February 26, 2024. <https://www.zotero.org/galle221/search/iran/titleCreatorYear/items/Z7IINDQU/item-details>.

³ Walker Robins, “The withdrawal from the Iran deal signals a new power player in Washington.” *Washington Post*, October 28, 2021, Accessed March 1, 2024. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2018/05/08/the-withdrawal-from-the-iran-deal-signals-a-new-power-player-in-washington-christian-zionists/>.

the birther conspiracy, many Christian Zionists believed that Obama was a Muslim born outside of the United States. This belief was propagated by the Republican Party of Tennessee, who published a press release headlined “Anti-Semites for Obama” (Trump would come to promote this conspiracy later during the 2016 election). It included a photo of Obama visiting Kenya, near the border of Somalia. He wore what the release described as “Muslim garb” (it was traditional Somali clothing) and argued that if “Barack *Hussein* Obama” became president, Israel’s security would be endangered. Although Obama was a practicing Christian born in Hawaii, the press release insisted that since Obama was a Muslim, he clearly was opposed to Israel.⁴ Hagee also described Obama as an enemy of Israel. At an annual Zionist Organization of America dinner in New York, Hagee called him “one of the most antisemitic presidents in the history of the United States of America,” accusing him of “trying to break” the U.S.–Israel relationship.⁵ Scandalized by Obama’s outreach to the Muslim world, Christian Zionists argued that he was putting Israel in existential danger and thereby inviting divine punishment on the United States.⁶

The height of Christian Zionist mobilizing came in 2015, when Obama sealed the Iran Nuclear Deal. Founded two years prior to Obama’s electoral victory, CUFI grew to over 2 million members by 2015 and worked to put political pressure on the administration. When the debate around the deal was especially heated in 2015, CUFI created the CUFI Action Fund. The Fund is a 501(c)(4) organization, which is the IRS designation for tax-exempt groups that could lobby for legislation to further their social welfare program. If they were not directly

⁴ Melani McAlister, “A Virtual Muslim Is Something to Be,” *American Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2010): 222.

⁵ JTA, “ADL Slams CUFI Founder Hagee for Calling Obama anti-Semitic.” *Haaretz*, November 25, 2024, Accessed February 29, 2024. <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/2014-11-25/ty-article/adl-slams-hagee-over-obama-remarks/0000017f-eb39-d0f7-a9ff-effd3e3a0000>.

⁶ Sean Durbin, “Christian Zionism in the United States, 1930–2020,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, September 23, 2023. Accessed December 19, 2023.

participating in partisan politics, 501(c)(4) organizations could get politically involved to improve the well-being of society.⁷ In other words, by establishing the Action Fund, CUFI was trying to improve the United States by supporting Israel. It sought to bless Israel and the United States by securing 67 votes in the Senate and thus ending the Iran Nuclear Deal.⁸

By opposing the Iran Nuclear Deal, Christian Zionists emphasized the United States and Israel's special relationship against their Islamic enemies. Gary Bauer, a 2000 presidential candidate and Secretary of Education, led CUFI Action Fund. In a comment to Jewish News Service about the Iran Nuclear Deal, Bauer noted the United States' special relationship with Israel: "Even though it's Christians United for Israel, really at the end of the day it is about the United States too... Israel and the United States are two pillars of Western civilization, and that civilization is under attack."⁹ In an official statement about the establishment of their Action Fund, CUFI promised to bless Israel by lobbying on Capitol Hill: "Millions of Christian Zionists across the country are incensed at the Obama Administration's treatment of Israel and we will make our voices heard both in the halls of Congress and at the ballot box. The days of appeasing Israel's enemies and undermining the U.S.–Israel alliance are over."¹⁰

⁷ "501(c)(4)," *Ballotpedia*, [https://ballotpedia.org/501\(c\)\(4\)](https://ballotpedia.org/501(c)(4)). Accessed April 29, 2024.

⁸ "After Obama's Betrayal of the Jewish State, Christians Gathered in D.C. To Fight Back," *Christians United for Israel*, Accessed February 29, 2024. <https://cufi.org/issue/after-obamas-betrayal-of-the-jewish-state-christians-gathered-in-d-c-to-fight-back/>.

⁹ Jacob Kamaras, "CUFI on the Hill: Christian Zionist group ramps up DC office amid Iran deal." *Jewish News Service*, July 16, 2015, Accessed March 5, 2024. <https://www.jns.org/cufi-on-the-hill-christian-zionist-group-ramps-up-dc-office-amid-iran-deal/>.

¹⁰ "After Obama's Betrayal of the Jewish State, Christians Gathered in D.C. To Fight Back," *Christians United for Israel*, Accessed February 29, 2024. <https://cufi.org/issue/after-obamas-betrayal-of-the-jewish-state-christians-gathered-in-d-c-to-fight-back/>.

Although prosperity Zionists organized politically because of the Iran Nuclear Deal, they did not secure their wishes under the Obama administration. It was not until Donald J. Trump became president when charismatic Zionists had a profound effect on American foreign policy.

At a glance, the Trump-evangelical alliance is quite baffling. How could 81 percent of evangelicals who value morality and good character staunchly support such an uncouth man? An abundance of literature has been penned to make sense of it.¹¹ For our discussion on Christian Zionism, there are some explanations to consider. One explanation is that Trump appealed to Christian nationalism and convinced evangelical voters that he would defend America's Christian heritage. He might have had a poor character, but he was a King Cyrus: a flawed outsider who would lead America out of its morally depraved culture.¹² Another explanation is that the way the Obama administration was framed: its policies were destroying America's Christian heritage.¹³ The belief that Obama was secretly a Muslim who was anti-Israel and anti-Christian created the rhetorical conditions to make it seem as if his opponent was working on God's behalf. A third explanation focuses on Trump's own religious background.

Donald Trump grew up with the prosperity gospel. As a child, Trump was taken by his parents to the services of Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1993). Known as "God's salesman," Peale blended Christianity, self-esteem, and popular psychology, playing an important role in the

¹¹ See Kristin Kobes DuMez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020) and John Fea, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to the Threat to American Democracy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018).

¹² Tara Isabella Burton, "The biblical story the Christian right uses to defend Trump," *Vox News*, March 5, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/3/5/16796892/trump-cyrus-christian-right-bible-cbn-evangelical-propaganda>.

¹³ Sean Durbin, "Christian Zionism in the United States, 1930–2020," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, September 23, 2023. Accessed December 19, 2023.

rise of the prosperity gospel for the American elite. His messages pitched religious beliefs as a path to wealth and prosperity and urged Americans to find religious solutions to individual and national problems.¹⁴ Trump appreciated his sermons. “I still remember [Peale’s] sermons,” Trump said at the Iowa Family Leadership Summit in July 2015. “You could listen to him all day long. And when you left the church, you were disappointed it was over. He was the greatest guy.”¹⁵ Even when Trump grew up, he considered Peale as one of his greatest influences and maintained a relationship with the minister. Peale officiated at Trump’s first two weddings, at Manhattan’s Marble Collegiate church, where he preached for over 50 years. When Peale died in 1993, Trump spoke at his funeral, where he credited Peale’s sermons with inspiring him, as a young 22-year-old in 1968, to consider running for president.¹⁶

There are other connections with Donald Trump and the prosperity gospel. As John Fea, one of the first historians to explain why evangelicals supported Trump, wrote:

Prosperity preachers dress well, have large followings, make effective use of television and the Internet to spread their message, and, as we have seen with Paula White, know how to market themselves. They carry themselves in a professional way and lead their organizations with an entrepreneurial spirit. They

¹⁴ See Christopher Lane, *Surge of Piety: Norman Vincent Peale and the Remaking of American Religious Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

¹⁵ Gwenda Blair, “How Norman Vincent Peale Taught Donald Trump to Worship Himself,” *Politico Magazine*, October 6, 2015, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/10/donald-trump-2016-norman-vincent-peale-213220/>.

¹⁶ Todd Blodgett, “Trump’s refusal to concede fits perfectly with the positive-thinking philosophy he learned from Norman Vincent Peale,” *Des Moines Register*, November 19, 2020, Accessed April 29, 2024. <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/opinion/columnists/iowa-view/2020/11/19/trump-after-losing-adheres-norman-vincent-peale-positive-thinking/6341449002/>.

seem like the kind of people that Trump would not only immediately like, but the kind he would love to have with him in *The Apprentice* boardroom.¹⁷

While most evangelicals are unaware of Trump's background, it offers a reason why Trump surrounded himself with prosperity preachers in the White House, hired Paula White-Cain (a prominent prosperity preacher) as his spiritual advisor, and listened to evangelicals during his time as President: they shared his vision for victory. As Trump continues to deny election results, get away with scandals, and run for president in the 2024 election, Trump would have not liked a form of Christianity that emphasizes sacrifice, sin, or suffering. He would have liked a message that assured him of victory, making him a perfect match for the prosperity gospel and its adherents.

In 2018, Trump withdrew the United States from the Iran Nuclear Deal and reimposed sanctions against Iran. While other international leaders lobbied Trump vigorously to support the deal, their efforts were of no use. At a meeting, French President Emmanuel Macron left convinced that Trump withdrew from the JCPOA not for international reasons, but domestic ones.¹⁸ Those domestic reasons were Christian Zionists.

Two main Christian Zionist lobbying organizations were behind this decision: American Christian Leaders for Israel and CUFI. Since the negotiation around the JCPOA began, these two organizations persistently called for its renegotiation or reversal.¹⁹ “The greatest threat facing

¹⁷ John Fea, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to the Threat to American Democracy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 37.

¹⁸ Walker Robins, “The withdrawal from the Iran deal signals a new power player in Washington,” *Washington Post*, October 28, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2018/05/08/the-withdrawal-from-the-iran-deal-signals-a-new-power-player-in-washington-christian-zionists/>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

both Israel and America today is Iran’s radical regime that repeatedly and publicly vows to ‘wipe Israel off the map’ and then attack America,” wrote American Christian Leaders for Israel in a 2015 petition statement on Iran. “President Obama is negotiating with Iran and reports indicate the United States and its partners are willing to make significant and worrisome concessions for the sake of a deal.” Among the signers of this petition were Kenneth Copeland, a prominent prosperity preacher, and Gary Bauer, a conservative Baptist activist.²⁰ When details of the Iran Nuclear Deal surfaced in 2015, 5,000 CUFI activists went to D.C. to lobby against it. CUFI also led the grassroots effort in the deal’s opposition by sending tens of thousands of emails to Capitol Hill, running newspaper ads across the country, and organizing members to meet with their local and national Members of Congress.²¹

In 2018, Christian Zionists rejoiced at the news of Trump’s reversal of U.S. policy. “The United States, Middle East, Israel, and importantly, the Iranian people, are better off for those sanctions and CUFI is proud to stand by a president who stands against harmful foreign entities and for the oppressed,” recorded an official CUFI statement.²² Reimposing sanctions meant victory for the United States and Israel, the pillars of Judeo-Christian civilization. “Until Iran abandons its illicit activities, they will not have a seat at the international table,” stated Hagee. “The Mullahs of Tehran are the enemies of all freedom loving people in the world, including the people of Iran. They must be stopped.”²³

²⁰ “Iran Statement,” *American Christian Leaders for Israel*, Accessed March 12, 2024.
<https://aclforisrael.com/iran-statement/>.

²¹ “Reimposition of Sanctions on Iran,” *Christians United for Israel*, Accessed March 12, 2024.
<https://cufi.org/issue/reimpositionsanctionsoniran/>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

The Embassy Move to Jerusalem

Under the Trump Administration, the embassy's move to Jerusalem was the most successful initiative of Christian Zionists. Since the founding of Israel, the embassy in Israel has been in Tel Aviv. The move came 23 years after the passage of the Jerusalem Embassy Act of October 23, 1995, which had intended to move the embassy to Jerusalem by May 31, 1999. However, the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations had all deferred the move. When Trump came into office, he initiated the move. At a rally held at an airport in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, Trump admitted the reason why: for the evangelicals.²⁴

Christian Zionists pushed for the embassy move to Jerusalem in two main ways. The first was through email campaigns. The Trump administration received 135,000 emails from CUFI members.²⁵ Similarly, My Faith Votes, a grassroots organization chaired by Mike Huckabee (former governor of Arkansas and a devout Christian Zionist), launched a similar email campaign. The second way involved direct lobbying of the President. Trump had conservative Christian advisors who pressed the case in regular meetings at the White House.²⁶ One of those advisors was Paula White-Cain, Trump's spiritual advisor. A prosperity preacher, Cain worked with Trump's son-in-law and senior advisor Jared Kushner, U.S. ambassador to Israel David

²⁴ Toi Staff and Agencies, "Trump says he moved US embassy to Jerusalem 'for the evangelicals,'" *The Times of Israel*, August 18, 2020, Accessed March 6, 2024. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-says-he-moved-us-embassy-to-jerusalem-for-the-evangelicals/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CAnd%20we%20moved%20the%20capital,%E2%80%9CThat's%20for%20the%20evangelicals.%E2%80%9D>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ James Oliphant and John Whitesides, "Push by evangelicals helped set stage for Trump decision on Jerusalem." *Reuters*, December 12, 2017, Accessed March 4, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN1E105G/>.

Friedman and Special Representatives for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt and Avi Berkowitz to move the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.²⁷

There were many reasons why Christian Zionists wanted the U.S. to move its embassy to Jerusalem. First, it acknowledged that Israel had sovereignty over the land it captured during the Six-Day War. It quashed the possibility that East Jerusalem could ever belong to a Palestinian state. From a dispensational perspective, Israel needed to have control over all of Jerusalem, especially the area of the Temple Mount. Second, it was a sign that the United States would perpetually be on the side of Israel. Lance Wallnau, an evangelical associated with the New Apostolic Reformation, summarizes the prosperity position:

On December 6th, 2017, [...] the President shocked the world and declared that the United States would be moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This decision validates the right of Israel to exist as a nation-state with its historic capital in Jerusalem.

Dispersed among nations until 1947, having survived the Nazi purge that took 6 million lives, the Jewish people miraculously regathered and formed as a struggling nation-state. As Israel celebrated its 70th anniversary (1947-2017) Donald Trump (this modern-day Cyrus) made the announcement that shook the spirit realm, just like Cyrus of old did in fulfilling a 70-year prophecy in his time, delivered by Jeremiah who foretold 70 years captivity for his people in Babylon.

²⁷ Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman, "Trump's faith advisor: Christians must learn from Jews, not convert them," *The Jerusalem Post*, June 15, 2023, <https://www.jpost.com/christianworld/article-746372>.

The captivity was ended by King Cyrus decree that the Jews to return back to Jerusalem.

This bold U.S. announcement triggered shock waves that provoked a United Nations backlash. Suddenly, every nation was required to take a stand and vote either for or against the right of Israel to exist. A new era of history has begun where nations are entering “the valley of decision” and the issue involves Israel. Despite fierce opposition from America’s allies: European and Arab world leaders alike, (including Britain, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and even the Pope) said that President Trump was recklessly challenging a delicate status quo. The very U.N. that legitimized the existence of Israel in 1947 now voted to keep it from its final legitimization as a sovereign nation.²⁸

By comparing Trump to King Cyrus (the biblical figure who led the Jews out of exile), Wallanu considered Trump as a savior for both the United States and Israel. Since the United States moved the embassy to Jerusalem, other nations had to decide whether they would side with Israel. Yet, as Zechariah 12 predicted, all those nations would go against Israel.²⁹ This decision would usher a new age, a time of prosperity for both Israel and the United States.

²⁸ André Gagné, *American Evangelicals for Trump: Dominion, Spiritual Warfare, and the End Times* (New York: Routledge, 2024), 16.

²⁹ Zechariah 12:3 NKJV reads: “And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it.”

The Politicians

Plenty of prominent politicians support Christian Zionism. These politicians include former Congresswoman Michelle Bachmann, House Speaker Mike Johnson, former Governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee, Congresswoman Lauren Boebert, and Senators Tom Cotton and Ted Cruz, amongst others. Yet, since I am arguing that the prosperity gospel's influence on Christian Zionism was at its peak during the Trump Administration, I want to highlight the alliance Christian Zionists had with three of Trump's cabinet members: Nikki Haley, Mike Pompeo, and Mike Pence.

Nikki Haley

Former governor of South Carolina and U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley has a strong pro-Israel record. According to Charisma News, a news source associated with the New Apostolic Reformation, Haley has "blessed" Israel in seven ways. First, at the United Nations, she opposed Resolution 2334, which claimed that Israel occupied the Palestinian territories since 1967. Second, she got the U.S. out of the U.N. Human Rights Council since it showed "bias against Israel and a willingness to allow notorious human rights abusers as members." Ron Cantor, a messianic Jew and Zionist, swooned about these achievements in his article:

The world is a safer place because of you. ISIS has lost all of their territory. Iran is reeling economically because the U.S. pulled out of the lopsided Iran nuke deal.

We might even work out a deal with North Korea. You represented our position to the U.N. with eloquence and clarity. You are a rock star!³⁰

Charisma News noted the correlation between Nikki Haley's leadership and other Zionist successes. Those successes included the U.S. embassy move to Jerusalem and the passing of the Taylor Force Act (which cut funding to the Palestinian Authority).³¹ Other accolades included more personal decisions, such as telling the Christian Broadcasting Network that the Western Wall belonged to Israel. "As a Christian, [Nikki Haley] said that it is [her] faith in Jesus that guides [her] support of Israel," Ron Cantor wrote. "[She] even went to the Western Wall to pray, as an exclamation point...[She] rightly called the U.N. the 'global epicenter of antisemitism.'"³²

"[Haley has] credit in [her] heavenly account. Genesis 12:3 says that God would bless the one who blesses Abraham (and His descendants). Blessing is surely coming [Haley's] way, as God will always keep His word!"³³

Haley has a strong relationship with the Christian Zionist lobby. In 2018, John Hagee presented Haley with CUFI's Defender of Israel award. During this ceremony, someone in the crowd yelled: "Haley 2024!"³⁴ In return, Haley has given Hagee some political opportunities. In her advocacy group's book, *American Strength: Conservative Solutions Worth Fighting For*, Hagee wrote a chapter about why every American should support Israel. "I know that we are

³⁰ Ron Cantor, "Messianic Jew: 7 Ways Nikki Haley Blessed Israel," *Charisma News*, October 10, 2018, Accessed March 4, 2024. <https://www.charismanews.com/opinion/standing-with-israel/73572-messianic-jew-7-ways-nikki-haley-blessed-israel>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Charles Homans, "Nikki Haley's Past Stance on Israel Could Be Key to Her Campaign's Future," *New York Times*, October 15, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/15/us/politics/nikki-haley-israel-trump.html>.

blessed through His Chosen People,” he wrote. “And as an American, I have witnessed the blessing of blessing Israel and am grateful for it.”³⁵

Mike Pence

Like Haley, Mike Pence has a strong relationship with the Christian Zionist world. As a devout evangelical, the former Vice President has expressed his support for the state of Israel. “Like all of you,” Pence said to a CUFI crowd, “my passion for Israel springs from my Christian faith.”³⁶ Pence has also espoused dispensationalist views, saying that “though Israel was built by human hands, it is impossible not to sense that just beneath its history lies the hands of heaven.”³⁷

Pence has a close relationship with John Hagee. On January 22, 2023, Mike Pence visited Cornerstone Church in Texas to talk about the Iran Nuclear Deal and other Trump administration accomplishments regarding the Middle East. “I couldn’t be prouder to have been Vice President in an administration that isolated Iran as never before,” he said. “We not only got out of the Iran Nuclear Deal but by unleashing our armed forces, we took down the ISIS caliphate and their leader.”³⁸ He then mentioned his dispensational understanding of Israel. “When I spoke before the Knesset shortly after the president of the United States announced that we were moving the American Embassy to Jerusalem, the capital of Israel—I said that we stand with Israel because her

³⁵ John Hagee, “Why Every American Should Stand With Israel,” *Stand for America*, Accessed March 12, 2024. <https://americanstrengthstandforamerica.com/foreign/why-every-american-should-stand-with-israel/>.

³⁶ “Mike Pence to CUFI: I Support Israel Because I Am A Christian,” *Christians United for Israel*, Accessed March 12, 2024. <https://cufi.org/issue/mike-pence-to-cufi-i-support-israel-because-i-am-a-christian/>.

³⁷ Karin Laub, “Palestinian Christians slam Pence’s pro-Israel faith,” *AP News*, January 22, 2018. <https://apnews.com/article/818ce5fbc4114be39758afe033b1c5e2>.

³⁸ Omri Nahmias, “US should ‘end nuclear negotiations with Iran, never re-enter deal,” *The Jerusalem Post*, January 23, 2023, <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-729388>.

cause is our cause, and we stand with Israel because in so many ways, the very existence of Israel, the rebirth of the Jewish state of Israel is evidence that the promises of God are true.”³⁹

Mike Pompeo

Mike Pompeo is a favorite among Christian Zionists. Originally a Congressman from Kansas’ 4th district, Pompeo is a devout evangelical Presbyterian. He has expressed his belief in the rapture. “We will continue to fight these battles,” he said at a rally in 2015, because there is a “never-ending struggle” until “the rapture.”⁴⁰ He also claimed that God sent Trump to save the Jews from Iran, comparing him to the biblical Esther. “President Trump right now has been sort of raised for such a time as this, just like Queen Esther, to help save the Jewish people from an Iranian menace.”⁴¹ Aside from his personal beliefs, Pompeo has a record of being pro-Israel. He advocated both for the withdrawal of the Iran Nuclear Deal and the moving of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem.⁴²

When the Nuclear deal negotiations were at their peak, Christian Zionist organizations, such as CUFI and American Christian Leaders for Israel, had called for Pompeo’s appointment to the Trump administration. On April 23, 2018, CUFI launched a campaign in support of his nomination as Secretary of State. “At the core of the campaign are action alerts distributed to all 4 million CUFI members,” wrote an official CUFI statement. “The action alerts ask CUFI members to call and email their senators and express support for Pompeo. Within 24 hours of

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Edward Wong, “The Rapture and the Real World: Mike Pompeo Blends Beliefs and Policy,” *New York Times*, March 30, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/us/politics/pompeo-christian-policy.html>.

⁴¹ André Gagné, *American Evangelicals for Trump: Dominion, Spiritual Warfare, and the End Times*, 14.

⁴² Edward Wong, “The Rapture and the Real World: Mike Pompeo Blends Beliefs and Policy,” *New York Times*, March 30, 2019.

distribution, the initial action alert generated more than 20,000 emails to senators.”⁴³ Eventually, Pompeo became Secretary of State under the Trump Administration, making the campaign successful.

Conclusion

Christian Zionism has greatly impacted American foreign policy. Although the Armageddon Lobby did not achieve any immediate successes during the Obama Administration, it mobilized heavily in time to have major successes during the Trump Administration. Trump, who listened to evangelicals during his time as president, granted their wishes by withdrawing from the Iran Nuclear Deal and moving the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. In addition to the President of the United States, Christian Zionists have found support from other high-profile allies, including Nikki Haley, Mike Pompeo, and Mike Pence. These politicians either advanced the Christian Zionist agenda or espoused Christian Zionist beliefs, ultimately giving Christian Zionism a prestigious platform at the United Nations and in the White House.

⁴³ “CUFI Launches Effort in Support of Pompeo Nomination.” *Christians United for Israel*, April 23, 2018, Accessed March 1, 2024. <https://cufi.org/press-releases/cufi-launches-effort-in-support-of-pompeo-nomination/>.

Chapter 4: On God's Side

The last components of a political movement are protest cycles and contentious repertoires. Protest cycles occur when protests are in heightened state. They express the views of a political movement and allow allies to show their solidarity with a movement.¹ On the other hand, contentious repertoires are the ways in which a movement makes its claims. Usually, these include, but are not limited to, strikes, protests, and petitions.² In short, the last two components of a political movement answer: how does a political movement make itself known?³ While there are many ways that Christian Zionism expresses itself, I want to highlight in this chapter the protests and campaigns Christian Zionists have organized in recent history.

The Protests

The Jericho Marches

After Donald J. Trump lost his election in 2020, many Christians protested for what they believed was an unfair election. In their minds, Donald Trump was the rightful winner, but the election was stolen, and some Christians felt called by God to mobilize “saints and patriots” and march for the election results to overturn. These marches were known as the Jericho Marches. Seen as a reenactment of a biblical battle in Joshua 6 (when the Israelites marched until the corrupt walled city of Jericho tumbled down), the Jericho Marches were heavily attended. Its

¹ Neal Caren, “Political Process Theory,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* ed. George Ritzer (Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

700,000 attendees included Christian leaders (mostly from the New Apostolic Reformation and some Catholic Christian nationalist ones) and spiritual warriors parading around government buildings, blowing shofars (musical ram horns meant for Jewish religious rituals), zealously praying, and anticipating for the official elections results to miraculously overturn. These marches happened at many swing-state in between the months of November 2020 and January 2021.⁴

While Christians mainly attended these marches, the Jericho Marches had a Jewish bent to them. At the Jericho March on the National Mall in Washington, DC, on December 12, 2020, shofar vendor Robert Weinger called Donald Trump “a savior to Israel.”⁵ On January 6th, 2021—the day of the Insurrection—some of the marchers who attended Trump’s “Stop the Steal” rally and then walked over to the National Mall to the Capitol flew the Israeli flag. Numerous protesters also blew shofars, and one woman wore a red tallit, a Jewish prayer shawl.⁶



Figure 3.1: A woman on the left wears a red tallit as she blows a shofar at the Jericho March on January 6, 2021. Lloyd Wolf, “Q&A: Lloyd Wolf, a Jewish photographer who captured photos

⁴ Paul Strand, “Jericho Marchers Praying the Walls of Corruption Will Come Tumbling Down,” *Christian Broadcasting Network*, 25 November 2020, <https://www2.cbn.com/news/us/jericho-marchers-praying-walls-corruption-will-come-tumbling-down>.

⁵ Matthew D. Taylor, “The New Apostolic Reformation–Messianic Judaism Interface and the Capitol Insurrection,” 6. When I wrote this chapter, this draft was unpublished. Dr. Taylor was generous enough to share this with me.

⁶ Ibid.

of the Capitol mob,” *The Jewish News of Northern California*, January 14, 2021. <https://jweekly.com/2021/01/14/qa-lloyd-wolf-a-jewish-photographer-who-captured-photos-of-the-capitol-mob/>.

These appropriated symbols show how Christians at the Jericho Marches intertwined Israel and the United States together. They perceived that a victory for the United States was also a victory for Israel. Trump was seen as the “chosen one”—the King Cyrus who would restore America to its original intention as a Christian nation.⁷ If he failed to win the election, then both the United States and Israel would be cursed. As a peaceful transfer of power took place, there was a sense that something spiritual was obstructing victory, and Christians had an obligation to fend off this spirit with prayer. They hoped for the election to be overturned, not only so the United States could prosper, but so could the state of Israel.

The March for Israel

The March for Israel on November 14, 2023 was one of the largest gatherings of Zionists in American history. With over 290,000 attendees in person and 250,000 attending via live stream, Zionists from across the country gathered at the National Mall in Washington DC in response to the 2023 Israel-Hamas war. The March had three objectives: to show support for Israel, call for the release of hostages taken by Hamas on October 7, and to promote efforts combating antisemitism.⁸

At the March for Israel, several high-profile speakers came to speak. One of those speakers included House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Southern Baptist representing the scarlet red

⁷ André Gagné, *American Evangelicals for Trump: Dominion, Spiritual Warfare, and the End Times*, 11-14.

⁸ Erik Ortiz, Julia Ainsley and Corky Siemaszko, “Throng gather for March for Israel rally at D.C.’s National Mall to condemn antisemitism,” *NBC News*, November 14, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/march-israel-rally-condemn-rising-antisemitism-dcs-national-mall-rcna124506>.

state of Louisiana. As a deeply committed evangelical, he expressed his support for Israel. He echoed the sentiment that the war between Israel and Hamas was a spiritual battle: “As Prime Minister Netanyahu says so well: this is a fight between good and evil, between light and darkness, between civilization and barbarism.”⁹



Figure 3.2: John Hagee speaks at the March for Israel on November 14, 2023. Noam Galai, “Divisive Megachurch pastor draws criticism for role at March for Israel,” *NBC News*, November 15, 2023. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/divisive-pastor-john-hagee-criticism-role-march-israel-rcna125346>.

One familiar face showed up at the March for Israel. John Hagee came as a guest speaker. This time, he predicted that Hamas would be cursed for not blessing the Jewish nation:

Now look at history. From Pharaoh to Hamon to Hitler, all of these antisemitic cowards are remembered only for their failed attempt to destroy God’s chosen people. And Hamas is going to suffer the same fate. To Israel’s enemies, making threats against Israel is nothing more than a self-fulfilling prophecy about yourself. When you speak of Israel passing away with a sudden storm, you’re

⁹ Speaker Mike Johnson, “Speaker Johnson’s Remarks at the ‘March for Israel’ Rally in Washington DC.” YouTube video, 1:36, November 14, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNV00dpzf2o>.

only speaking of your own demise. Where are the Nations that have persecuted the Jewish people? They are historic footnotes in the bone yard of human history. Where is Israel and the Jewish people that despite the efforts of Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah to destroy the Jewish Nation? Israel lives! Israel lives! Israel lives!¹⁰

In his speech, Hagee assured that all the Zionists in attendance were on God's side. By showing their solidarity with the Jewish nation, Zionists were the ones blessing Israel, whereas Hamas and its allies were the ones cursing the nation. Hagee gave this a prophetic significance: Zionists would live on, while Hamas would cease to exist. In other words, Zionists would be blessed, and its enemies would be cursed.

The Campaigns

You Are Not Alone Campaign

After October 7, 2023—when the Israel-Hamas War started—CUFI expanded its pro-Israel campaign to raise money and proclaim solidarity for the state of Israel and Jewish communities. They announced their “You Are Not Alone” campaign, which expanded from Times Square to several states, including Alabama, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, and Texas.¹¹ This campaign mainly consisted of billboards, which showcased the

¹⁰ OfficialCUFI, “Pastor John Hagee speaks at the March for Israel.” YouTube Video, 3:57. November 14, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sqi7VgaJgZo>.

¹¹ “CUFI Expands Pro-Israel Campaign to Raise Funds & Build Solidarity,” *Christians United for Israel*, December 6, 2023. <https://cufi.org/press-releases/cufi-expands-pro-israel-campaign-to-raise-funds-build-solidarity/>. Accessed April 30, 2024.

devastations of the war on the Israeli side and pictures of hostages taken by Hamas. Within a month, this campaign raised over \$2.65 million for Israeli charities.¹²



Figure 3.3: A Christians United for Israel billboard displayed in Times Square in October 2023. Jacob Kornbluh (@jacobkornbluh), “Christians United for Israel (CUFI) paid for a Times Square billboard to maintain awareness of the Oct. 7 massacre and raise money for emergency relief campaign,” X, October 25, 2023, 10:39am, <https://twitter.com/jacobkornbluh/status/1717189043690017154>.

Aside from billboards, Christian Zionists also participated in grassroots activism. They hosted fundraisers, created posters in their local communities, penned sermons about the importance of Israel, and sold yard signs and unity pins showing an American flag together with the Israeli flag for \$2. The goal of most of these initiatives was to provide material support for Israel.¹³ The prosperity gospel promises that if a Christian commits certain acts of faith, they will receive prosperity in their life. By pouring money into the state of Israel, making art, and preaching about the significance of Israel, these Christians sought to align themselves with God’s will, hoping to secure blessings in their life and for the nation.

¹² Cathryn J. Prince, “A sizeable US demographic, many Evangelicals are sending money and manpower to Israel,” *The Times of Israel*, November 12, 2023. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/a-sizeable-us-demographic-many-evangelicals-are-sending-money-and-manpower-to-israel/>.

¹³ Ibid.

Prayer Vigils

Psalms 122:6 reads: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘*May they prosper who love you.*’”¹⁴ Similar to Genesis 12:3, Christian Zionists will take this verse literally and host vigils to pray for the peace of Jerusalem so they can prosper. A clear example of this verse taken literally occurred on college campuses after the Israel-Hamas War started in October 2023.

Before students at Columbia, Yale, Emerson, Northwestern, University of Texas at Austin, University of Southern California, University of California–Los Angeles, and University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, among others, encamped on their college campuses in solidarity with Palestine in the spring of 2024, Christian campuses across the country organized prayer vigils to express their solidarity with the state of Israel in the fall of 2023. One of these campuses was Liberty University—a major evangelical university founded by Jerry Falwell in Lynchburg, Virginia.



Figure 3.4: Students at Liberty University gather to pray for Israel. Christian Shields, “Students join Liberty University leaders at prayer vigil for Israel,” *Liberty University*, November 15,

¹⁴ Psalms 122:6 NKJV.

2023. <https://www.liberty.edu/news/2023/11/15/students-join-liberty-university-leaders-at-prayer-vigil-for-israel/>.

Hundreds of students, staff and faculty at Liberty University gathered on campus on November 15, 2023, to stand in solidarity with the state of Israel. Throughout the vigil, the community of Liberty prayed for peace, justice, and conversion for the state of Israel.¹⁵ “The modern-day nation of Israel is the reminder of God’s promise to Abraham to make Israel a great nation that would bless the entire world,” said Scott Hicks, Provost of Liberty, in a press release.¹⁶

Other college campuses hosted prayer vigils for Israel. For example, in collaboration with the evangelical women’s lobbying organization Concerned Women for America, students at Texas A&M, Clemson University, Baylor University, Georgia Tech, the University of Alabama, Grove City College, Grand Canyon University, and the College of the Ozarks also organized vigils.¹⁷ All of these students came together as an evangelical community to show their love for the state of Israel, because as the Bible promises, those who love Israel will prosper.

Conclusion

Christian Zionists have made themselves known to the public. Like any other political movement, they have protested, marched, and organized other grassroots efforts to promote their

¹⁵ Christian Shields, “Students join Liberty University leaders at prayer vigil for Israel,” *Liberty University*, November 15, 2023. <https://www.liberty.edu/news/2023/11/15/students-join-liberty-university-leaders-at-prayer-vigil-for-israel/>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Concerned Women for America Communications Team, “Young Women for America Stands with Israel on College Campuses,” *Concerned Women for America*, November 16, 2023. https://concernedwomen.org/young-women-for-america-stands-with-israel-on-college-campuses/?omnisendContactID=5ffcacb04572ea474636077d&utm_campaign=campaign%3A+Copy+of%3A+Copy+of%3A+Copy+of%3A+Antisemitism+Erupts+on+College+Campuses+Across+America+%28662c00bd9e54c4659d02fd6%29&utm_medium=email&utm_source=omnisend.

cause. Because they believe that God commands them to side with the state of Israel, they boldly proclaim their support through marching, fundraising, paying for billboards, and prayer. Some of them appropriate Jewish symbols, while others use their Christian identity to show that they are not only on Israel's side but God's side. As the Israel-Hamas War continues, evangelicals will only continue to express their support for the state of Israel. After all, as Psalms 122:6 instructs them, those who show love for Jerusalem will prosper.

Conclusion: Blessing Israel

This project had two goals. The first was to prove that Christian Zionism is a political movement. Throughout this thesis, I have shown that Christian Zionism meets the criteria of a political movement. According to the political process theory, a movement is political when it has five components: framing processes, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities, along with protest cycles and contentious repertoires. Each chapter was dedicated to each component, explaining how Christian Zionism has manifested the different aspects of the theory.

In Chapter 1, I showed how Christian Zionism frames its problems. While I listed some of the many reasons why evangelicals get involved to support the state of Israel, there was one reason I was interested in exploring: to secure blessings. As “Bible-only” Christians, evangelicals will only follow what the Bible explicitly says. One of the verses Christian Zionists take literally is Genesis 12:3, which reads in reference to Israel: “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you.” Because of this verse, evangelicals will dedicate themselves to pro-Israel activism, believing that God has commanded them to do so. The theology behind that interpretation is not just dispensationalism but the prosperity gospel: the belief that you will get blessings if you do certain acts of faith.

In Chapter 2, I narrated the history of what I coined as “prosperity Zionism,” showing that the movement is a product of various networks that wanted change. The modern version of Christian Zionism was initially a grassroots movement once the state of Israel was established. While evangelicals and dispensationalists flocked to Israel to evangelize and recognized the Jewish nation as a pillar of Western civilization, dispensationalists did not get immediately

involved with Zionist activity. It took G. Douglas Young's American Institute of Holy Land Studies, the Six-Day War, Tim LaHaye's "humanist tribulation," and the rise of the Religious Right to confirm dispensationalists as political activists. Then once an activist bloc of charismatic Christians entered the public square in the 1980s, allowing for the eventual rise of John Hagee and Christians United for Israel, the prosperity gospel became officially a part of Christian Zionism.

In Chapter 3, I analyzed the political opportunities prosperity Zionism received. The global stage saw its direct impact on American foreign policy when Trump moved the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and pulled out of the Iran Nuclear Deal. Behind these decisions were evangelicals, who heavily lobbied the Administration. Aside from having the ears of the President of the United States, Christian Zionists had other high-profile allies, such as Nikki Haley, Mike Pompeo, and Mike Pence. In addition to the president, these politicians gave a prestigious platform for Christian Zionists.

In Chapter 4, I discussed ways that Christian Zionism makes itself known to the public. At the Jericho Marches, Christians appropriated Jewish symbols to show that it was on the side of Israel. At the March for Israel, House Speaker Mike Johnson characterized the Israel-Hamas War as a fight between good and evil, while Hagee assured Zionists that its enemies would be cursed. Aside from claiming that they were on God's side at protests, Christian Zionists further expressed their solidarity with their "You Are Not Alone" campaign and prayer vigils on college campuses across the country.

In conclusion, Christian Zionism is not just a religious movement. Considering the networks and resources the movement has, Christian Zionism is inherently political. It consists

of evangelicals who see it as a divine commandment to advocate for the state of Israel. It has real world implications, withdrawing the United States and moving the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Especially as the fate of U.S.–Israel relations becomes more contentious, political scientists should take this movement into consideration. For as long as Israel exists, this movement will continue to advocate for the state of Israel. Yet, who will take on the face of Christian Zionism is another story. There are two groups to look out for: conservative Catholics and the New Apostolic Reformation.

Catholic Zionism?

Interestingly, it is not just conservative evangelicals who are blessing Israel. Since the 1980s, evangelicals have transformed the American Catholic Church, making its activists more similar to evangelicals than Catholics. We have seen this understudied phenomenon for two reasons. First, a political alliance of evangelicals and Catholics during the 1980s gave rise to a culturally and politically active movement of conservative Catholics.¹ Second, there has been an understudied movement of evangelicals converting to the Catholic Church to accumulate greater political power.² This specific alliance has caused Catholics who describe themselves as “conservative” to adopt more evangelical beliefs without realizing it. As a result, some conservative Catholics are becoming more open to Zionist positions.

After the October 7th attacks, we saw conservative Catholics displaying Zionist activity. For instance, Franciscan University of Steubenville—a “passionately Catholic” school in Ohio

¹ See Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016) and Allan J. Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008).

² Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, PhD (Director, Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College), Zoom interview with Prof. Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, February 16, 2024. Rev. Joslyn-Siemiatkoski did not give me a detailed analysis of this movement. He only agreed with my suspicions.

known for being conservative—announced a new initiative after the attacks that they believe would foster Christian-Jewish relations. The University would immediately accept and transfer any Jewish student who felt unsafe for being Jewish on their campus. This announcement came at a conference focused on the future of Christian-Jewish relations, which was co-hosted by the Philos Project, a Christian Zionist organization.³

While the Catholic Church teaching leaves room to disagree about the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the 1965 papal encyclical *Nostra Aetate* officially called for warmer Catholic-Jewish relations and rejected supersessionism, there is nothing distinctly Catholic about Steubenville’s initiative. When I discussed this initiative with Rev. Dr. Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatoski, an Episcopal priest and director of the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College (a Catholic university), he agreed with my assessment.

“How do I say this charitably?” he said about Steubenville. “As a former evangelical, those are Catholics being informed by an evangelical worldview.”⁴

As evangelicals and Catholics continue to collaborate politically, American Roman Catholics—united with evangelicals under the label of “conservative”—will most likely adopt more Zionist sentiments. Only time will tell if conservative Catholics emerge as a political bloc for Zionism.

³ Matt Lebovic, “US Catholic universities offer campuses as a refuge for ‘harassed’ Jewish students,” *The Times of Israel*, November 6, 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-catholic-universities-offer-campus-as-refuge-for-harassed-jewish-students/>.

⁴ Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, PhD (Director, Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College), Zoom interview with Prof. Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, February 16, 2024.

The New Apostolic Reformation: The New Face of Christian Zionism?

One of the fastest growing charismatic movements in American religion to date is the New Apostolic Reformation. Considered an offshoot of evangelicalism and a major influence of Christian Trumpism, the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) was born in the 1990s at Fuller Theological Seminary in Los Angeles. The founder of the movement, C. Peter Wagner called it “the most important transformation of Protestantism since the 16th century Reformation.” The NAR is difficult to define. For the sake of clarity, however, I will offer the nation’s leading expert on the NAR Matthew D. Taylor’s definition: “the New Apostolic Reformation is both an ideological movement rooted in the thought of C. Peter Wagner and a set of leadership networks that Wagner oversaw beginning in 1999.”⁵ Made up of tight pastor networks, the NAR has plenty of repackaged ideas, including latter rain theology. As dispensational activism becomes more of a thing of the past, this group most likely will assume the leadership of Christian Zionism, especially as John Hagee gets older.

“When Hagee dies, you will see other charismatic leaders stepping forward,” said Dr. Matthew D. Taylor, the nation’s leading expert on the NAR. “You will definitely see even more polarization of these apostolic and prophetic leadership paradigms in Christian Zionism. They have already influenced and become central to many of the Christian Zionist networks.”⁶

Christian Zionism has become a charismatic movement. As evangelicals make the charismatic case that they must side with the state of Israel to secure blessings, charismatic

⁵ Matthew D. Taylor, “The New Apostolic Reformation–Messianic Judaism Interface and the Capitol Insurrection,” 18. This draft has yet to be published. It is in the author’s possession.

⁶ Matthew D. Taylor, PhD (Senior Scholar and Protestant Scholar, Institute for Islamic, Christian, Jewish Studies), phone call with Dr. Taylor, March 13, 2024.

leaders will only be encouraged to get involved in Zionist activity. Like conservative Catholics, only time will tell if the NAR becomes more politically powerful in Christian Zionist circles.

The Future of Christian Zionism

The second goal of my thesis was to show how a distinct American theology has been mobilizing Christian Zionists. As a student with a profound interest in the intersection of religious ideas and politics, I wanted to see if I was right to assume that the prosperity gospel was motivating Christian Zionists. Yet, it did not take me long to realize that this project was something more than exploring my own interests.

When school started in the fall, I interviewed a minister who evangelizes Christian nationalists. As I wrapped up the interview, he said something to me that has stuck with me since.

“Thank you.”

I was taken aback. His words were so simple, yet so sincere. I had never received such a genuine thank you for a project before. Although I would never consider myself as an activist, it was that moment that I realized that my research was so much more than doing an independent study or graduating with honors in the politics department at Mount Holyoke. I was doing my part to expose an abuse of scripture in American politics, especially as a base of evangelicals continue to grow more politically powerful.

Prosperity Zionism is not going anywhere. While I write this conclusion, Israel and Hamas continue to fight; politicians, campus administrators, and public figures debate the definition of antisemitism; and students across the country continue during finals to organize for Palestine. As long as Israel remains relevant in geopolitics, and conservative evangelicals

continue to mobilize politically, we will see prosperity Zionism persist. The reason for this support is not so much about dispensationalism, as the media likes to claim. Contrary to popular belief, dispensationalism and Christian Zionism are not synonymous. To say so would oversimplify the movement.

Although some evangelicals have claimed that the Israel-Hamas War is a sign of Christ's imminent return, that is only some evangelicals, not all. Even *the Times of Israel*, a right-wing news source that covers Israel, claimed that the roots of evangelical support is mainly based on a certain post-Holocaust "blessings theology"—the idea that God will "bless those who bless you" and "curse those who curse you."⁷ To anyone who has read this thesis entirely, my wish is that you realize that this is not just some "blessings theology." Protestants traditionally believe that sinners obtain spiritual blessings through the undeserved merit of Christ's death; faith, not political activism, saves you. Yet, in Christian Zionism, political activism for Israel is an outlet for rewards and evidence that a Christian has genuine faith. This "blessings theology" is not just some call for humanitarian action. Rather, as evangelicals seek to gain something out of supporting Israel, "blessings theology" is a polite synonym for the prosperity gospel.

However, claiming that a certain base of evangelicals follows a stigmatized theology will not do any good. Worst case scenario, it could breed resentment on both sides. As scholars of political science, it is our duty to merely understand what is going on so that we can bring peace to the world. While Genesis 12:3 might promise for the prosperity of those who advocate for the

⁷ Cathryn J. Prince, "A sizeable US demographic, many Evangelicals are sending money and manpower to Israel," *The Times of Israel*, November 12, 2023. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/a-sizeable-us-demographic-many-evangelicals-are-sending-money-and-manpower-to-israel/>.

state of Israel, Christ had a different promise for a certain type of activist. As Matthew 5:9 says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.”

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