

## **Christian Zionism: Misguided Theology = Dangerous Policy**

Christian Zionism—so called because of its belief that the existence of Israel as a Jewish state is divinely mandated—originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century among a few Christian evangelical leaders in Britain and the United States. But the increasing breadth of this movement’s popular support today did not approach critical mass until recent years, and its powerful influence on US policymaking emerged only with the advent of the Trump administration.

In stark terms, Christian Zionism is a flawed theology that has led to seriously misguided policy. Its basic belief is that God’s plan for creation as foretold in Scripture centers on modern Israel. Israel’s birth signals the “end of history”: an imminent time when Jesus will return. Christian Zionists believe literally that God’s covenant with Abraham deeded the land to Jews—and to no one else—in perpetuity and that Christians are obliged to pray and work for Israel, because God said (Genesis 12:3), “I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse.”

In its quest to facilitate Jesus’ second coming, Christian Zionism strangely privileges Judaism and Jewish rights over the religious and political rights of indigenous Palestinian Christians and all others. It also constitutes essentially the theological abandonment, *by Christians*, of an entire segment of Christianity: the very indigenous Palestinian Christians who are our direct physical and spiritual connection to Jesus and the land where he lived. In the judgment of a well-known theologian, the Christian Zionist longing for the “end times” has distorted their theology and their ethics. “Building the kingdom of God has become secondary to building the kingdom of Israel,” he says. The passion for Christ’s second coming “now comes before a passion for justice and fairness. When presented with the remarkable suffering of [five] million Palestinians living under harsh military occupation, Zionists typically stand unmoved. Negotiations that might return land to Palestinian owners are deemed to be against God’s will.”<sup>1</sup>

This is not a sect that can be easily dismissed, and Palestinian Christians are rightly deeply fearful of its impact. John Hagee, the Texas televangelist who founded and leads Christians United For Israel, which claims millions of adherents in the United States, is Christian Zionism’s leading proponent. Hagee has direct access to President Trump, and his organization regularly lobbies Congress on behalf of Israel. Several other prominent evangelical Zionists work closely with Trump administration policymakers in shaping critical administration policy changes—including, but not limited to, Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, both dedicated Christian Zionists.

With such rising Christian Zionist influence in the US, Palestinian Christians, not surprisingly, are deeply concerned that the growth of this evangelical movement will lead before long to the end of Christianity in the land of its birth and, more, to the destruction of the Palestinian people as legitimate inhabitants of their native land. They are pleading for help from the broader Christian Church in reclaiming the gospel of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Gary M. Burge, “Why I’m Not a Christian Zionist,” *The Banner* (December 2019), <https://www.thebanner.org/features/2019/12/why-i-m-not-a-christian-zionist>.