

## REPORT ON OPPOSITION TO UNJUST THEOLOGY REGARDING THE HOLY LAND

### Preface

Many Christians have attached Biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of Palestinian human rights. At the 2022 Iowa Annual Conference, a resolution was passed that called for the creation of a task force that would identify the Biblical and theological reasons for opposing Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people and would submit a report with recommendations for action.

### Definition of Christian Zionism

At the outset of this report, it is important to have a clear definition of Christian Zionism. It is this concept that for many Americans, promotes the mistreatment of Palestinians. Christian Zionism merges theology and politics. It teaches that the secular state of Israel is a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Christian Zionism believes this fulfillment of Biblical prophecy began when European Jews started moving to Palestine in the 1800's and continued as Israel became a state in 1948. Christian Zionists believe that modern Israel is a continuation of Biblical Israel and therefore should enjoy special privileges. They declare that it is the responsibility of Christians to support the state of Israel and its policies. (Source: [www.ChristianZionism.org](http://www.ChristianZionism.org))

### Report

This task force examined just two of the many areas in which Christian Zionism claims Israel has privileges. 1) Israel was given to the Jews, and it is therefore mandated by God to be a Jewish state and thus the Jews are to control all the land. 2) Jews are the Chosen Ones and therefore are free to dominate not only the land but also those who inhabit it.

We will look carefully at scriptures that apply to each of these claims and explain why these scriptures help us understand that Christian Zionism is misinterpreting scripture that has been taken out of context.

### The Land

Over the years, scripture has been used to make a point. The State of Israel cites the promise made to Abraham and his ancestors as proof that the land was given unconditionally to Israel in perpetuity. Ezekiel 36:22-24, 32 says, "O, Israel...I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land." (*Note: All scripture references throughout this document are taken from the Holy Bible: From the Ancient Eastern Text: George M. Lamsa's translation from the Aramaic of the Peshitta unless stated otherwise*)

Christian Zionism bases its blind support of the State of Israel on that promise. However, a closer look at the scriptures reveals that the promise is dependent on keeping the Covenant. The Covenant lays out the conditions that must be met to keep the land, and justice is key. In Deuteronomy we read, "Justice and only justice you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you." So, what does it mean to "pursue

justice”? In Zechariah, we read, “Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.” Ezekiel makes it even more plain. Speaking of the land he says, “...You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel.” Even a cursory look at the State of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians shows that they have not kept this Covenant. They have not treated the Palestinians with justice. Illegal settlements take their land, their crops are destroyed, their homes demolished, their movement and access to water restricted. Clearly, the State of Israel is not treating Palestinians as full citizens with the same rights as the Jewish population. The land was given to and is kept by the keeping of the Covenant. Leviticus 20:24-28 makes it quite clear that if Israel violates the Torah, the land will “vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.” (NIV) In fact, Israel has lost the land to foreign empires on more than one occasion. When the people of Israel were exiled to Babylon, most Biblical scholars believe that a new understanding of God’s promises emerged. This new interpretation, this “conditional” Biblical narrative, is that the disobedience of the people brought about loss of the land. Perhaps the most profound lessons to be learned are that the land itself must not be worshipped as a false god and the Israelites’ military wins should not make them so proud, they become arrogant and start to believe in exceptionalism (the idea that one group has exclusive privileges). Land is not the priority in this narrative. Land becomes the means through which the people of God honor God and reflect God’s will for Israel and the nations. They are asked to revere the great commandments: to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength; and to love neighbor as self. Both commandments are found in the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Leviticus 19:18). Torah faithfulness means faith in action regardless of ethnicity, race, or religion when someone is in need. This theology is based on obedience and righteousness, not political exceptionalism. Theologian Walter Brueggemann in his book *Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*, offers this summary: “The land is given unconditionally but is held conditionally” – meaning, the land is given by God, but Israel can lose the land if it violates the Torah.

There is another important lesson in these OT texts. Both the land grant passages, and the conditional passages state clearly or imply that the land belongs to God. In this Biblical perspective, land is never an end unto itself, nor can it become the end game. When one people conquer a land, the land becomes an object of idolatry. Land is always an instrument of the covenant relationship, and it is necessary to build communities where God’s sons and daughters learn to love and honor (and never oppress) one another.

### **Justice vs. Oppression**

Assuming Jews are the “Chosen Ones,” let’s look at how the Old Testament speaks to them about how they must act. Micah 6:8 tells us that “the Lord requires of you that you do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.” Isaiah 17 says we should “learn to do good, seek

justice, do good to the oppressed, plead for the fatherless, plead for the widows.” Psalm 82:2 asks: “How long will you judge unjustly, and be partial to the wicked? Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and the needy.” Palestinians face great injustice in their daily lives suffering home demolitions (an illegal act of collective punishment by international law), detention of children as young as nine for acts such as throwing rocks at tanks, attacks by settlers on farmers, their livestock and crops, lack of free movement by use of the Separation Wall and checkpoints, to name a few. Again, we can clearly see that the State of Israel does treat Palestinians in a way that demonstrates they are not treating them justly as the Old Testament exhorts.

Christian Zionism often excludes certain verses that ask us to love one another by explaining that “others” (Palestinian Christians or Muslims) are not our brothers, our neighbors, or our friends. Luke 10:25-37, however, tells us the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In this parable, a scribe asks Jesus “who is my neighbor?” Two Jews pass by a man who has been attacked and lies at the side of the road. Then, a Samaritan (disliked by Jews) stops to help the man. When Jesus asks the scribe who became this man’s neighbor, the scribe replies, “The one who had compassion on him.” Jesus says to him, you go, also, and do likewise.” Jesus tells us that we are not to think of our neighbors as only those who live next to us or who think like us, or even pray like us. Our neighbors are those who need our help and compassion.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Jesus has many admonitions about the way we should treat each other. As his followers, we must take heed. In Matthew 5:43-48, we are asked to love our enemies and pray for those who curse us. Matthew 22:36-39 tells us that the greatest commandment is to love our God and the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbors as ourselves and that includes Palestinians be they Christian or Muslim. Clearly, we must treat all people with love and compassion.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, our careful examination of scripture has shown that the two claims by Christian Zionists named at the beginning of this report have no basis or merit, that indeed the Israeli State, having violated the Covenant has no legitimate claim to the land, nor do they have freedom to dominate and mistreat Palestinians.

God is constantly calling us to make room for the neighbor (Luke 10:25-27), including the visitor (Leviticus 18:20 and 19:10) and the poor (Amos 5:10-24). God’s call is good news for everyone, including the enemy, who is perhaps our most difficult challenge. Psalm 87 gives us a glimpse of a Jerusalem where not only the Jewish people but also the Philistines, people from Tyre (Lebanon), Cush (Ethiopia), and Babylon (Iraq), all of whom are gentiles, are counted as God’s people. Jesus’ call to reconcile with our enemies is challenging, but not new. Many texts from the prophets present the same challenge.

These are Biblical truths to be lived if we are to be faithful to God and our neighbors. Many believe that the place that is farthest from realizing these truths today is Jerusalem and the Holy

Land, but there are Jews, Christians, and Muslims all around the world who are working toward the day when Jerusalem and all of Israel and Palestine will be shared. It will be a day when every citizen – Jew, Christian, Muslim – will be honored, protected, and able to worship God as each understands God. It may be what the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews had in mind for Abraham as an example of the faith journey:

“By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country, he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ...These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”  
(Hebrews 11:9-10, 39-40 NIV)

Recommendations:

1. Publish this report in the 2023 Pre-Conference Manual
2. Publish this report on the AC website
3. Send report to District Superintendents and have them share with their churches

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For more information, visit these websites.

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

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

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