

The Historical Roots of Christian Zionism, its Theological Basis and Political Agenda



This talk by Dr. Stephen Sizer, one of my Facebook friends, is full of insights behind the Zionist movement that has led to so much suffering in the Middle East today. He says there are far more Christians than Jews that support it!

“Stephen Robert Sizer (born 27 July 1953 is a priest in the Church of England. He is banned from serving as a priest until 2030. From 1997 to 2017, he was vicar of Christ Church, Virginia Water, in Surrey. Sizer is known for his opposition to Christian Zionism, which is the basis of his 2004 PhD thesis and the focus of his published works.” – (Quoted from Wikipedia)

I think it was probably Stephen Sizer’s opposition to Christian Zionism that led to the Anglican church to ban him from serving as a priest!

Transcription

We’re going to be looking at the historical roots, theological basis, and political consequences or political agenda of Christian Zionism. I’m going to be major on the political agenda because I think that’s what we are going to be most concerned about. But I’d like to give you a little bit of an introduction to its origins and the basis of its beliefs.

The question is, why is there such a close relationship between the United States and Israel? Why is the United States the target of so much criticism, let’s put it mildly, in much of the Middle East and the wider world? Why is the United States seen as in many ways the enemy of Islam?

Well, the Arab-Israeli conflict has been the longest-running dispute in the hands of the United Nations. It’s been the most frequently debated UN issue. About 60% of UN resolutions have had something to do with Israel or its

interests. It's the most pervasive religious conflict in the world. It brings Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Druze in conflict with each other, and has done so for decades. It is the most dangerous military conflict. We have chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons loose in Israel and Palestine today. And it's the most controversial media story. You don't need me to convince you that. And it's being perpetuated by misguided Christians, and that's why we're here.

Let's give you a definition, and there are a number we could do, but this is a helpful one from Professor Don Wagner in his book, *Anxious for Armageddon*. He says that Christian Zionism is a movement within Protestant Christianity that views the modern State of Israel as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy that's deserving our unconditional economic moral political and Theological support.

Well, where does this movement come from? The roots of Zionism lie in the Puritan movement and the consequences of the Reformation Puritan views of the world included the conviction, that the Jewish people had a place in God's purposes and that they would come to faith in Jesus and be returned to the land of Palestine as a Christian nation.

Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield were leading exponents of this belief that the gospel would triumph against evil in the world and that God's blessings of peace and prosperity were related to the conversion of Israel prior to the return of Christ.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the first proto-Christian Zionist movement was formed. We would call it restorationism. It was called the London Jews' Society founded in 1808 with the purpose of relieving the suffering of Jewish people, particularly in London, in East London, hence, the London Jew's Society. But alongside that was the conviction that it was the destiny of the Church to identify the Jewish community around the world and assist their return to the land.

And so Joseph Wolfe was one of the early missionaries of the London Jews' Society, and he traveled extensively in Asia searching for the Lost Tribes of Israel. He was a little eccentric but you may like to explore that further.

But alongside that, we have leading evangelicals in Britain people like Charles Simeon convinced that the Jewish people would be would be restored to the land but in union with the Church, meaning one people of God made up of Jews and Gentiles. This was the dominant view within evangelicalism in the early 19th century.

Now, several things happened that knocked that aspiration, and the first was the rise of Napoleon and the growth of the French Empire right across Europe from Egypt up to Russia blockading the British seaports and calling himself the King of Kings. He was seen as an antichrist figure. But in 1799, Napoleon was the first world ruler in 2,000 years to promise the Jews a homeland. Napoleon saw the return of the Jews to the land as of strategic significance in his own attempt to control the world, and he thought that a compliant Jewish community back in the land would assist his expansionist plans for the

world. Now, Napoleon was unable to deliver, but his proclamation became the barometer to the extent to which the European atmosphere was charged with messianic expectations. And where Napoleon failed, Britain succeeded.

The movement really began to take hold through a group of Christian politicians and church leaders called the Aubrey Circle. They met in Albury, in Surrey, in the home of Henry Drummond. He was a high sheriff of Surrey. He was an MP, and he called together a group of politicians and senior church leaders to speculate about what was going to happen. Clearly, Napoleon had ruffled the feathers of politicians in Britain and other countries, and this group of church leaders and political leaders were convinced that Britain had a manifest destiny that included controlling the Middle East and returning the Jews to Palestine in the belief that they would assist Britain in its colonial endeavors.

And out of that group, we find some notable individuals. John Nelson Darby was the founder of the Plymouth Brethren, and in his particular theological framework, he saw the Church and Israel as separate peoples. He believed that the Jewish people back in the land would become God's earthly people and that the Church would be raptured to heaven as God's heavenly people. And so he took promises from the Hebrew Scriptures and applied them to the Jews. Passages that related to the Church were seen as separate. Indeed Darby argued that the Church was a parenthesis to God's continuing purposes for Israel.

Now, one of the politicians who took this view seriously was Lord Shaftesbury. Lord Shaftesbury founded a Palestine exploration fund which used British army officers to map Palestine in preparation for the return of the Jews to the land. He helped to plant a bishop, an Anglican bishop, in Jerusalem. It had to be Jewish in the belief that he would be the bishop of the Church among the Jews when they were restored to the land as good Anglicans.

Shaftesbury was very influential in furthering this cause. In 1839 ~ 1840, he was lobbying extensively among other senior British political figures for the return of the Jews to Palestine because it was for the expedient reason that **it furthered and assisted Britain in its colonial plans for the Middle East.** And when Lord Palmerston married Shaftesbury's widowed mother-in-law, he saw this as a providential sign that he had access to Lord Palmerston. He said he's been chosen by God to be an instrument for good to His ancient people to do homage to their inheritance and to recognize their rights without believing their destiny.

Certainly, Shaftesbury thought he knew what that destiny was. And they took out he took out page adverts in the London Times in 1840 calling for the restoration of the Jews and calling upon European leaders to assist in this endeavor.

Indeed Theodore Herzl's phrase, "A land without a people for people without a land" was actually coined by Shaftesbury fifty years earlier when he naively said, "A country without a nation for a nation without a country."

At the first World Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, there were three Christian leaders who were representative of the fledgling Christian Zionist movement. And one of them was William Hechler. He was the Anglican chaplain at the Embassy in Vienna, clearly a strategic location, and he wrote *The Restoration of the Jews to Palestine* two years before Herzl's, *The Jewish State*. In Herzl's own diary, he concedes the assistance and the influence William Hechler had upon his own ideas. In his diary for 1896, the 10th of March, he says, "The Reverend William Hechler, a chaplain of the English Embassy came to see me, a sympathetic gentle fellow with a long gray beard of a prophet. He's enthusiastic about my solution to the Jewish Question. He also considers my movement a prophetic turning point which he had foretold two years before."

Hechler was convinced the Jews would go back to the land in 1897 based on his eccentric reading of Daniel and other books of the Old Testament. But this is the key point I want to make. Herzl admits that William Hechler said, "'We, we Christians, have prepared the ground for you.' Hechler said triumphantly. I take him as a naive visionary. He gives me excellent advice, full of unmistakable genuine goodwill. He's at once clever and mystical, cunning and naive, everything you look for in a good Anglican priest."

Now, Hechler kept his word because Hechler facilitated the opportunities for Herzl and his colleagues to have access to the Grand Duke of Baden, German Kaiser William, and the British political establishment. And it was through that that Herzl, along with Chaim Weizmann, was introduced to leading British politicians. So when the Balfour Declaration was published in October 1917, the reality was that Balfour had actually asked the Zionist movement to prepare the draft. The draft was prepared in July 1917. Balfour was a disciple of this movement. He was convinced that it was Britain's destiny to return the Jews to Palestine.

Zionist Organisation Draft (July 1917)	The Balfour Declaration (October 1917)
<p>'1. His Majesty's Government accepts the principle that Palestine should be reconstituted as the National Home of the Jewish people.</p> <p>2. His Majesty's Government will use its best endeavours to secure the achievement of this object and will discuss the necessary methods and means with the Zionist Organization.'</p>	<p>'His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of that object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done, which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish Communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.'</p>

And you can see the difference between the two versions. Balfour amended the

Jewish draft because he regarded Britain as having the prerogative. So the distinctive difference was that Britain was promising the Jewish people a *home* in Palestine, not Palestine as *the home*. There's a significant difference between the definite article and the absence thereof. And you'll see in the Zionist version, they felt that it was the responsibility of Britain to achieve what they were expecting.

Well, Britain did not deliver on that promise. And the reason for that is because Britain had another agenda. Britain had agreed with the French even before the end of the First World War that they were going to carve up the Middle East between their two empires. This is actually one of the most honest statements by a British politician ever, but it was in a letter so it was never made public until somewhat later. But this is what he said in a letter to Lord Curzon. He said,

"For in Palestine, we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting their wishes of the present inhabitants of that country. Four great powers are committed to Zionism, and Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes of far profound import than the desires or prejudices of the present inhabitants of that ancient land."

And then he said this,

"So far as Palestine is concerned, the powers have made no statement of fact which has not admittedly wrong and no declaration of policy which at least in the letter they haven't always intended to violate."

Duplicity. And that's because we'd agreed with the French we were going to split the Middle East between our two empires. We needed the Zionists to help us achieve an end to the First World War.

Chaim Weizmann was a chemist at Manchester University. David Lord George said he was "Weizmann's proselyte who converted me to Zionism." Weizmann was working on synthetic TNT which he gave to Britain to help defeat the Germans. And Zionism was the payback for that. But when Britain was unable to fulfill the aspirations of the Zionists as well as maintain their promise to the Arabs that their rights would be respected, the plan was Britain's attempt at an exit strategy giving three parts of Palestine to the Jews and three parts to the Arabs. The Arabs had been given half of what they already had. They rejected it. The Jews being offered half of what they didn't have accepted it. And as they say, the rest was history.

I'm not going to go into a lot more detail about the history but I want to bring us up to date and acknowledge that in 1976 in the election of Jimmy Carter, we have the first born-again president, explicitly so, convinced that the return of the Jews to the land was the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. A year later, Menachem Begin was elected and you have this coalition emerging between the Christian Right and the Zionist right brokered by Jerry Falwell. For 50 years between 1967 and 2017, he became the leading advocate within the Christian community on behalf of Israel, promising to mobilize 70 million conservative Christians and 200,000 church leaders for Israel.

When Ronald Reagan was elected when Carter vacillated over the settlement program, I think he used the word Armageddon about eight times in his campaign speeches. He was convinced the end of the world was coming and that what was happening in his lifetime was the fulfillment of prophecy.

George Bush Jr. had a very similar conviction that God was telling him what to do. He was convinced that he would be the one to bring about a resolution of the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis.

But each of them consistently has always taken the Zionist line. Even Barack Obama on his first day in office, attended an AIPAC meeting to reassure the Israel lobby that Israel security was sacrosanct.

And to bring it up to date, your present president is seen by evangelicals as their dream president reuniting Israel and America. Jerry Falwell last week said to try and explain his commitment to the president, "Conservatives and Christians need to stop electing nice guys. They might make great Christian leaders but the US needs street fighters like real Donald Trump at every level of government because the liberal fascists are playing for keeps and many Republican leaders are a bunch of wimps." This is a Christian leader talking rather disrespectfully of your politicians.

Now, the Pew Forum for Religion says that we're dealing with twenty to forty million active members. My point is really here, that Zionism is predominantly a Christian political movement, not a Jewish one. I would argue that nine out of ten Zionists today are Christians. The Unity Coalition for Israel claims to have 40 million active members, and John Hagee has access to over 90 million Christian Americans on a weekly basis. The Pew Forum for Religion found that 25% of American Christians believe it's their responsibility to support Israel. And when you look at white evangelicals, it's over 60%.

Now, there are three different strands. There are the Messianic Christian Zionists whose primary objective, as it was for Charles Simeon and the early restorationists, to assist the sharing of the good news of Jesus with Jewish people, so hence, Jews for Jesus. But on their own website they talked about out-zioning the Zionists. And then we have the problematic ones, I would call them the apocalyptic Christian Zionists. They're the ones that sell the books, and they have a very apocalyptic and destructive view of the future. And then we have pragmatic political Christian Zionists who operate here on the Hill among your politicians and seek to lobby on behalf of Israel. So there are at least three different strands of this movement. It is complex, it is volatile, and I'm going to be majoring on those I regard as the most influential and get to their political agenda.

Very briefly, their theological basis is based on a very literalistic view of the Bible. Every reference in the Bible to Israel has a literal fulfillment, and if it has not yet been fulfilled, then it will be fulfilled. Hence the promises are relating to the extent of the land and the return of the Jews to the land their exclusive claim to Jerusalem and the temple are applied to today almost as if the coming of Jesus was irrelevant, because the promises apply because they have not yet been fulfilled.

On the basis of that, the Jews are regarded as God's chosen people. And when either has a subtle dual covenant theology that says God has two chosen peoples, Israel and the Church, and some parts of the Bible relate to the Jews, and some parts relate to Church. Or, here in the States, dispensationalism argues that the Church will disappear will go to heaven, and the Jewish people will be God's chosen people on earth through the Millennium and on into the future. In fact, Darby argued that never the twain shall meet in eternity, two eternal peoples with a different destiny, Jerusalem their eternal capital, the Temple, they're convinced it's going to be rebuilt, there's a strong antipathy theologically toward Arabs and toward Islam, and this conviction that there will be a final battle, an apocalyptic war in the imminent future in which God will obviously be on the side of the Church in Israel.

Now, we're going to unpack that in my third part of this morning's presentation which looks at their political agenda. And I want to begin by looking at Christian Zionists from a Jewish perspective. Here's a good quote from 2012, from Benjamin Netanyahu. He said this:

"I don't believe that the Jewish state and modern Zionism would have been possible without Christian Zionism. We value our friends and we never forget them, and we think that you have helped establish here a powerful memorial to our friendship and our common ideals."

I think this is the reason why our Zionist friends are so antagonistic toward those who challenge their agenda, because they realize they depend heavily on the Christian Zionist lobby to influence your politicians, and to pay the bills.

John Hagee founded Christians United for Israel, and he has taken over from Jerry Falwell. He's the pastor of Cornerstone, a church in San Antonio Texas, 20,000 members on a weekly basis, and as I said, access to 90 million or more Christian Americans on a weekly basis for radio and TV. He said this recently:

"The sleeping giant of Christian Zionism was awakened. There are 50 million Christians standing up and applauding Israel. Think of our future together, 50 million evangelicals joining in common cause with five million Jewish people in America on the behalf of Israel. It's a match made in heaven.

What is their political agenda? Well, it follows closely their theology, and it begins here in Washington with a strong emphasis on lobbying your senators and congressmen and the White House and the State Department. These are some of the organizations that are active here on the Hill: Christian Friends of Israel, International Christian Embassy, Bridges for Peace, Jerusalem Prayer Team, Christians United for Israel. Over 200 different Christian Zionist organizations were founded since 1980! There is a plethora of these

organizations and they are zealous and diligent in lobbying on behalf of Israel.

Now, I know that over the last 20 or 30 years there have been a blip in that support where your presidents have had cause to reflect upon the relationship. But in my understanding, the last time a US president challenged the lobby was George Bush Senior, and he came under such attack. He said this, and remember this is the President of the United States. He said,

“There are a thousand lobbyists up on the Hill today, lobbying Congress for loan guarantees for Israel, and I am one lonely little guy down here asking Congress to delay the consideration of loan guarantees for 120 days.”

He just was asking for a freeze for three months, but he felt, he may be exaggerating, but he certainly felt isolated. And I suspect every single president you've had will feel the same.

(This transcription is up to 28 minutes of approximately 45 minutes of Dr. Sizer's talk. There's a question and answer session after the talk.)