

Troubling Considerations About Christian Zionism - Part 1

I am a Palestinian Christian.

The most pressing question about Christian Zionism for me is not its theological predictions about the end times, prophecy or the Second Coming.

The Bible makes clear that no one knows the exact time for the fulfillment of these prophecies, except the Father (Mark 13:32).

Christian church history has been full of those who made wrong predictions about the end times and the Second Coming, starting with St. Paul himself, through Martin Luther and up to Hal Lindsay.

The troubling thing for me is the expressly stated view that Christian teaching requires Christians today to take specific political positions regarding Zionism, the modern state of Israel, and its conflict with Arabs and Palestinians.

Being a Palestinian Christian myself, I am obviously concerned by this, because I recognize that God has sovereignty over all aspects of my life, and that my faith should take precedence over my political or national concerns.

Christ said, "My Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36) and resisted the Zealots of his time who tried to coerce him into taking political power.

So, I expect that his teachings for political behavior would consist of such general teachings as justice, peacefulness and love of neighbor (and enemies) rather than unqualified support for one political faction, or state (including one's own) regardless of its behavior.

And since I believe that God's commandments to Christians should be the same whether they happen to be U.S. citizens, Palestinians or of whatever other

nationality or racial or ethnic group, I would like for you to put yourself in my shoes and think on how any political statements you make would impact me, your Christian brother, and my people.

And whether you really think it would be normative for us to follow such political views as the Christian biblical position.

Zionism is a political movement seeking to establish a Jewish state in biblical Palestine.

Because Christian Zionists claim that support for this movement and this state is biblically mandated for Christians, this clearly raises serious existential issues for me.

I'll share four considerations here, and five more in a second column to follow.

1. I believe I am a child of God and that he loves me.

This is what the Bible teaches. The New Testament, in particular teaches that "God so loved the world [including Palestinians] that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

The New Testament also teaches that God's love and salvation is no longer limited to Jews.

"To his own he came, but his own received him not, therefore to all those who received him he gave the power to be children of God, that is those who believed in him" (John 1:11).

Peter elaborates, speaking of Gentiles like us who became Christians that we "who were once not a people, are now the people of God" (1 Peter 2:10), and "heirs and inheritors of the promises" (Galatians 3:25).

I realize such verses have been used in the past to disparage the Jewish people

and justify the evil sins of anti-Semitism, but I am not speaking here for displacement theology because God still loves the Jewish people. He just loves others as well, including myself, and all gentile Christians.

These verses do however, pronounce the end of any tribal or exclusive claims to God and his salvation.

2. Jesus brought about a new understanding of the “people of God” that is inclusive and broad, and which includes both Jews and gentiles who believe in Jesus.

We are warned as Christians, (who have been “grafted into the vine,” Romans 11:17) not to get too arrogant, yet Jesus had no room for Jewish particularism and favoritism.

Jesus infuriated his listeners by bringing to their attention Old Testament examples of God working with gentiles as well as the Jews (Luke 4:25-27).

Both Jesus and the early church were clear that God is “no respecter of persons” (Romans 2:11; Acts 10:34), and that any appeal to privilege and exclusivity (“we are children of Abraham”) was met with Jesus’ saying God can create out of these stones children for Abraham. (Mathew 3:9).

Christian Zionism seems to want to push that tribal view of “chosenness,” which Jesus resisted, back into the forefront and claim rights - including political rights and land rights to Jews and the state of Israel based on their ethnicity - rather than their spirituality or moral behavior.

I see this as running contrary not only to the verses I quoted, but to the whole thrust of the New Covenant.

3. It is clear from the story of the Samaritan woman at the well that Jesus not only revised the view of “chosen people” and peoplehood, but also rejected the narrow geographic understanding of the “Holy Land” stating that God is spirit and those who worship him need not pray in Jerusalem or Samaria, but rather “in spirit and

in truth” (John 4:23-24).

In this sense, Christians are liberated from land-centered temple worship as they were liberated from the need of animal sacrifice. Are we to try and bring these concepts back as Christians?

4. The Zionist movement is a political movement that has worked to create a Jewish state by bringing in Jews from all over the world and pushing out (and keeping out) most of my people.

In no other way could they demographically create a Jewish-populated and dominated state.

To this day, they refuse me and my people the “Right of Return” because they argue that Israel cannot be a Jewish state, and Zionism cannot be fulfilled if they allow the local indigenous non-Jewish population to remain and return and live in the land.

Is this what Christians, including myself, should be supporting? Was I required, as a Christian, to evacuate and leave the land to the new Jewish immigrants?

Should I tell my relatives, who are now living as refugees, to abandon their hopes of returning and forget their heritage and ancestry because that is a biblical requirement?

Should I tell my cousin, a minister of a Baptist church in East Jerusalem, to stop his tortured struggle to maintain a visitor’s visa or to smuggle his congregants from Bethlehem into Jerusalem every Sunday, and accept the fact that as Christian non-Jews, they have no “right” to be in Jerusalem or Israel at all, as their very presence is inimical to Zionism?

Should I tell all Palestinians that their very nationalism is inimical to God’s plans and they should try to negate their very identity, as it is in conflict with God’s plans and promises?

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Editor's note: This is the first of a two-part series. Part two is available [here](#).