

101

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

By Aidan Orly | April 2024

Introduction

Christian Zionism refers to movements that promote and endorse Jewish nationalism, usually through a Jewish State, based on their interpretation of the Christian Bible. This 101 will focus on a particularly influential faction of Christian Zionism, which builds Christian political power that supports expansionist, authoritarian policies by Israel, and is [justified by beliefs](#) in the Jewish State's role in Christian prophecy. This sector of Christian Zionism comprises several authoritarian movements, which collectively form the [largest political base of support for Israel in the U.S.](#) There are at least [tens of millions](#), but likely hundreds of millions,¹ of followers around the world (not including millions of liberal and secular Christians who endorse Jewish nationalism for other reasons).² Two of the most impactful, cultural examples that demonstrate the reach and influence of Christian Zionism today are the best-selling *Left Behind* book series and movie, and the book *The Late Great Planet Earth*.³

Christian Zionism is part of the domestic and foreign policy of American [Christian Nationalism](#), which intends for the U.S. to be governed according to an exclusionary interpretation of Christian beliefs. Christian Zionism largely:

- Ignores or rejects [Palestinian land claims](#);
- Deploys overt [anti-Muslim](#) action and rhetoric, and supports anti-Muslim policies; conflates and mutually vilifies Arabs and Muslims as enemies, [including](#) Palestinian Christians;
- Fetishizes Jews—known as philosemitism—as temporary foot soldiers to take control of Palestine (a form of antisemitism), while often spreading antisemitic rhetoric and conspiracy theories;
- Believes Muslims, Jews, and non-Christians are ultimately damned.

Christian Zionist leaders maintain strong [alliances](#) with far-right Jewish and Israeli leaders. These Israeli leaders reinforce Christian Zionist anti-Palestinian, anti-Muslim, and anti-Arab agendas and largely ignore Christian Zionist antisemitism with the shared goal of maintaining a strong Jewish-dominated state. Many Christian Zionist leaders are [simultaneously active](#) in anti-LGBTQ, anti-abortion, and other antidemocratic movements, and have ties to corporate, military, and other investors in Israel’s political and economic dominance.

Christian Zionism as a political movement [predates](#) Jewish Zionism.⁴ With roots in the Protestant Reformation, Christian Zionism became embedded in both mainline and evangelical European and American Christianity in the 19th century, largely through Christian fundamentalist movements.⁵ Christian Zionism’s political power surged in the 1970s as leaders capitalized on media technology to popularize 1) The theological [belief](#) that Jewish “ingathering” in the modern State of Israel is a precondition for the Second Coming of Jesus and the End Times,⁶ and 2) [Apply](#) the biblical passage spoken to Abraham, “God will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you” to the modern-day State of Israel.⁷ While these theological interpretations remain prevalent, the multiracial, multiethnic, and multinational Pentecostal and Charismatic streams of Christianity, epitomized by the [New Apostolic Reformation](#) (NAR), have come to [dominate](#) Christian Zionism in the twenty-first century, preaching the active proselytization especially of Jews, (but including Muslims and other non-Christians) to convert to Christianity to usher in End Times scenarios.⁸

Who

These are the sectors of the Right setting the cultural context and organizing Christian Zionism.

Domestic policy organizations

American Christian Zionists have been described as the [backbone](#) for U.S. support of Israel, and [played an outsized role](#) in President Trump's far-right policies on Israel, including moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. The largest Christian Zionist organization in the U.S. by numbers is Christians United for Israel (CUFI), which claims over 10 million members and is headed by one of the most prominent Christian Zionist leaders, John Hagee.⁹ CUFI and other domestic Christian Zionist organizations largely focus on lobbying for a range of far-right foreign policy positions for permanent Israeli occupation and expansionism, including moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, ending the Iran nuclear deal, and cutting funding to UNRWA. CUFI and other domestic Christian Zionist organizations similarly push federal and state governments to adopt the [IHRA Definition of Antisemitism](#) to institutionalize and weaponize a disingenuous definition against progressive movements; [criminalize](#) the nonviolent Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement; develop [education](#) about Israel that largely excludes Palestinian rights; and lead American pastors on [tours](#) of Israel. These policies work to silence dis-

course seeking to hold Israel accountable, redefine antisemitism to fragment progressive social movements, and provide cover for right-wing antisemitism under the guise of "supporting Israel."

International advocacy organizations

International Christian Zionist organizations seek to mobilize Christians to lobby their governments to support Israel's full control over Jerusalem and all of historic Palestine, including the West Bank and Gaza, which international law considers under illegal occupation. Christian Zionism is [growing quickly](#) in the Global South due to the proliferation of Pentecostal and Charismatic communities in those regions.

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) is one of the most instrumental advocacy organizations mobilizing Christian Zionist communities around the globe with [offices and representatives](#) in over 90 countries and a base spanning 170 countries. ICEJ and its affiliates mobilize churches around the world to lobby for unconditional backing of even the most authoritarian, expansionist Israeli policies, and against holding Israel accountable at the UN for illegal settlement building and ethnic cleansing

of Palestinians, including in the wake of October 7th, 2023.¹⁰

Missionary organizations (domestic & international)

A variety of missionary organizations headquartered in the U.S. actively attempt to convert Jews to Christianity, believing Jewish conversion to Christianity will hasten Jesus' Second coming.¹¹ Many organizations like the Israel Ministries, Shelanu TV, One For Israel, Inter-

national House of Prayer-Kansas City (IHOPKC) and its affiliates), and Fellowship for Israel Related Ministries (FIRM) are [connected](#) to the NAR movement and encourage Christians to back Israel's full control over historic Palestine while actively proselytizing Jews. Leaders and organizations that identify themselves as "Messianic Jews" claim to be Jews who believe in Jesus as their Messiah and [enter](#) Israeli and Jewish communities to encourage them to accept Jesus. The Jewish community does not recognize Messianic Jews as Jews.

What

These are common issue areas for Christian Zionists.

Palestinian displacement and full Israeli control of historic Palestine

Leading Christian Zionist organizations endorse and encourage the Israeli government and settler militias to take greater control of all of the area they call "[biblical Israel](#)" which covers the borders of historic Palestine and even present day [Syria](#), [Lebanon](#), and [Egypt](#). This encroachment would entail the further displacement and subjugation of millions of Palestinians, [including](#) Palestinian Christians. These organizations justify their beliefs in the claim that God promised that land to the Jewish people in the Bible, a belief shared by many right-wing Jewish religious Zionists. Christian Zionists [raise millions of dol-](#)

[lars](#) for Israeli West Bank settlements, which are illegal under international law. They also [applauded](#) and [encouraged](#) the Israeli government's collective punishment assault on Gaza in the fall of 2023, while maligning critics as [anti-theetical](#) to God's plans.

Defeating Muslim enemies

A large number of Christian Zionist leaders and organizations are openly [anti-Muslim](#), often conflating states or groups like Iran, Hezbollah, or Hamas with all Muslims, Arabs, and/or Palestinians. They refer to Muslims as associated with, or even led by, Satan against "Judeo-Christian" civilization. White evangelicals, who make up a large pro-

portion of Christian Zionists, are also one of the most [anti-immigrant](#) groups in the U.S. Moreover, Christian Zionist leaders advocate for Israel's full, undivided control of Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount, the third holiest site in Islam, and for Israeli control in all of historic Palestine and even [beyond](#) into Muslim-majority countries. Many leaders welcome and encourage war against Iran. Destabilization and bloodshed in the region is often taken as a sign of the coming End Times.

Redefining antisemitism

Many Christian Zionist organizations today, such as CUFI, in partnership with right-wing Jewish groups, lobby [federal](#), [state](#), and [campus](#) leadership to adopt a definition of antisemitism that includes both valid critique of the State of Israel and penalization of those who partake in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Much of this advocacy comes in the form of support for [enshrining the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance \(IHRA\) definition](#) of antisemitism. The IHRA defines antisemitism to include "denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g. by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor." Not only does this language draw vague lines around what critique of Israel is considered antisemitic, but conflating critique of Israel with

antisemitism effectively equates Jews as a people with the nation-state of Israel, homogenizing Jews into a monolithic body. At the same time, many Christian Zionist leaders actively promote antisemitic tropes and conspiracy theories. By lobbying to define antisemitism to include valid critiques of Israel, Christian Zionists are able to pose as genuine allies of Jewish people while using support for Israel as a shield against accusations of antisemitism.

Relocating Jews to Israel

Many Christian Zionist organizations encourage and aid immigration of Jews to Israel, and support new immigrants' integration in Israel. While these acts are committed under the guise of supporting Jews, Christian Zionist leaders often reinforce the antisemitic trope that Jews' only home is in the State of Israel. They also believe God's hand is behind traumatic global events such as the unrest in [Russia](#), occupation of [Ukraine](#), or unrest in [Ethiopia](#) to expedite Jewish "ingathering." Some Christian groups that support Jewish immigration to Israel actively proselytize in the process. Anyone insufficiently Christian or biblically aligned with their worldview are disposable in the End Times, whether Jews, Muslims, and even Palestinian Christians who challenge their theology.

Christian Zionist tourism

In order to engender unending support for Israel's full control over historic Palestine, Christian Zionist organizations lead pastors, churchgoers, and politicians on multi-day tours of Israel.¹² These excursions visit Christian and Jewish holy sites and often promote the narrative that God intends for Jews to have full control of the land.¹³ The ICEJ hosts a week-long

Sukkot celebration called the "Feast of Tabernacles" that draws thousands of Christians to Jerusalem every year for an 8-day festival. These gatherings are often live-streamed, recorded and marketed to global audiences, meanwhile Palestinians are unable to return or bypass the Israeli border. Many holidays in Israel also coincide with upticks in Israeli violence against Palestinians, an often invisible feature of Christian Zionist tourism.

Find Out More

These articles, films, and webinars will help you build your knowledge further.

To Read Right Now

- **The Jewish Federation is Marching with Christian Antisemites Out of Support for Israel.** Rabbi Jessica Rosenberg and Rev. Allyn Maxfield-Steele, *Mondoweiss*, 2023.
- **Progressive Movements Cannot Afford to Ignore the Role of Christian Zionism in the Dispossession of Palestinians.** Jonathan Brenneman and Aidan Orly, *Political Research Associates*, 2021.
- **End Times Antisemitism: Christian Zionism, Christian Nationalism, and the Threat to Democracy.** Steven Gardiner, *The Public Eye*, 2020.

In Depth

- **The New Christian Zionism and the Jews: A Love-Hate Relationship.** Rachel Tabachnik, *The Public Eye*, 2010.
- **For Many Christian Zionists, Israeli Protesters are a Threat to God's Plan.** Aidan Orly, *Religion Dispatches*, 2023.
- **What's Next for American Christian Zionists?** Colum Lynch, *Foreign Policy*, 2021.
- **The Dispiriting Truth About Why Most Evangelical Christians Support Israel.** Sarah Posner, *MSNBC*, 2023.
- **This is How the Republican Party Became So Strongly Pro-Israel.** Danielle Kurtzleben, *NPR Morning Edition*, 2023.
- **Israel-Hamas is Not a Religious War and this is Not Your Rapture.** Thomas Lecaue, *Religion Dispatches*, 2013.

Become an Expert

- **Taking Evangelical Support for Israel at Face Value is a Terrible Idea: a Response.** Chrissy Stroop, *Religion Dispatches*, 2019.

- **The Pentecostalization of Christian Zionism.** Joseph Williams, *Church History*, 2015.
- **Explaining Christian Zionism to Israelis.** Sarah Posner, *Religion Dispatches*, 2015.

Endnotes

- 1 In comparison, there are just under [16 million Jews](#), and [14 million Palestinians](#) in the world.
- 2 President Joe Biden is an example of a Christian who has a clear self-interest in a strong Jewish State, but his interest regards military and economic interests rather than biblical grounding. Because of the prominence, impact, and confusion around End Times Christian Zionism, this 101 will focus on those movements rather than liberal and secular Christian Zionism.
- 3 *The Late Great Planet Earth*, by Hal Lindsay and C.C. Carlson, was the [best-selling](#) nonfiction book of the 1970s. The *Left Behind* book series, published from 1995 to 2007 by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, has [sold](#) almost 80 million copies, making it one of the best-selling book series in American history, and it also inspired a movie of the same title. Hal Lindsey, and Carole C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970); Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995).
- 4 Jewish people have prayed for “return” to Jerusalem for millennia, but this was largely spiritual in nature, and often with the understanding that only the Messiah could “return” the Jews to the Holy Land. Christians were the first to take political action on behalf of creating a Jewish nation-state in Palestine.
- 5 Puritans in the colonial era imported the idea that Jewish gathering in biblical Israel was divinely intended, and this theology was upheld by prominent leaders of the time such as President John Adams. American Christians began taking political action on this beginning in the 19th century, before Herzl.
- 6 Rachel Tabachnick, “The Christian Right, Reborn,” *Political Research Associates*, March 22, 2013, <https://politicalresearch.org/2013/03/22/spiritual-warriors-with-an-antigay-mission>.
- 7 See Genesis 12:3.
- 8 Leaders of some of the largest Christian Zionist organizations, including John Hagee (Christians United for Israel) and Jurgen Bühler (International Christian Embassy Jerusalem) are part of the Pentecostal/Charismatic stream. Fundamentalist leaders like Jerry Falwell helped grow Christian Zionism in the 1970s and 1980s, forming strong alliances with political leaders including President Reagan. But since then, Christian Zionism has become more dominated by Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in the U.S. and globally and apostolic networks largely through the NAR movement.
- 9 These membership numbers may be based on email subscriptions.
- 10 The Israel Allies Foundation (IAF) is another example of a global Christian Zionist organization. The IAF mobilizes electeds in 53 countries to support and establish Israel Allies Caucuses in their respective governments to further anti-BDS, antisemitism redefinition, and other antidemocratic legislation around Israel.
- 11 Even Jürgen Bühler, head of the ICEJ, which has denied allegations of proselytizing, is a member of the International Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (ICAL), which is connected with the NAR movement and to which conversion of non-Christians is an important agenda.
- 12 Numerous organizations, political leaders, and churches host delegations in Israel. Examples include former Arkansas governor, Mike Huckabee; Jerry Falwell’s son, John Falwell; the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem; Christians United for Israel; and more.
- 13 See *Charisma Magazine* for testimonials by Christian participants on delegations to Israel.