

# Christian Zionism's flawed vision of Israel: Marmur

Christian Zionism is marred by the misguided assumption that Judaism ended with the Hebrew Bible.

By: **Dow Marmur** Columnist, Published on Sun Mar 29 2015

My dictionary defines Zionism as “a movement for the re-establishment of a Jewish national homeland and state in Palestine.” This was realized in May 1948 when the State of Israel was established. Many Jews are Zionists and committed to the quest for freedom and sovereignty of their people. But the majority of the world’s Zionists aren’t Jewish.

Early Christians with Zionist sympathies included Lord Balfour, British foreign secretary, and his prime minister, David Lloyd George. In 1917, three years before the League of Nations gave Britain the mandate over Palestine, Balfour wrote to Lord Rothschild, a Jew, that “His Majesty’s Government view 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 this object.” The State of Israel may not have come into being without this Balfour Declaration.

Christian Zionism has also helped to shape America’s widespread support for Israel. Most of the country’s evangelicals are said to be Zionists. They have determined America’s solid commitment to the Jewish state, even now when their president has been challenged by Israel’s prime minister. Without such support, Israel may not be able to exist.

It’s understandable that, in view of anti-Semitism through the ages and into our own days, Jews must have a state where they will always be welcome as citizens, which is what Israel’s Law of Return stipulates. But why do believing Christians support them?

Observers have suspected that behind it is a theology that may love Jews but hate Judaism, because it’s based on a belief that universal redemption can only come about when all the Jews have been gathered in their homeland where they will finally give up their obsolete and erroneous beliefs, and accept Jesus Christ as their saviour.

Of late, however, some have argued that nowadays this may not be the primary motivation of mainstream Christian evangelicals. Their commitment to Israel may be more about being ashamed of what has been done to Jews in the name of Christianity through the ages. Supporting the Jewish state is a way of atoning for the sins of forebears.

This understandable and laudable sentiment is, however, marred by the misguided assumption that Judaism ended with the Hebrew Bible. By deliberately ignoring the rich and varied development of Jewish thought and practice for the last 2,000 years, they have constructed a fictional and irrelevant Judaism that implicitly can only be fulfilled in Christianity.

American Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin has pointed to yet another dimension of this caricature of Judaism: “If you take the Bible literally, then you will also tend to take the biblical map of Israel literally as well. And that means: don’t give up an inch of land — even for peace.”

That’s why evangelicals enthusiastically sympathize with right-wing Zionists who claim that all of the biblical land belongs to the Jewish state. The policies of Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seem to reflect it. Canada’s Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s commitment to Israel may be of the same ilk. Netanyahu’s [victory in the recent elections](#) in Israel is, therefore, likely to be good news for Christian Zionists. It’s less than good news for believing Jews who practice Judaism as it has developed through the ages, always able to adapt itself to changing circumstances in order to remain vibrant and relevant.

The current adaptation of this view to Zionist politics affirms the legitimate needs of Palestinians in their struggle for a state of their own side by side with Israel. Judging by the latest election results, the majority of Israelis don’t share this progressive vision. While evangelical Christian Zionists may be jubilant, this Jewish Zionist is not.

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