

Lovers of Zion: A History of Christian Zionism

by Thomas Ice

In the last couple of years the secular community and some in the religious community have woken up to the fact that much of the American Evangelical community is very supportive of the modern state of Israel. Guess what? They do not like it one bit! They see an ever increasing danger and even the possibility that Christian Zionism could bring about World War III.

Genesis 12:3 records God's promise to bless those who bless Abraham and his descendants (i.e., Israel). The Abrahamic covenant is directed to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. It is repeated to them about twenty times in Genesis (12:1-3, 7-9; 13:14-18; 15:1-18; 17:1-27; 22:15-19; 26:2-6, 24-25; 27:28-29, 38-40; 28:1-4, 10-22; 31:3, 11-13; 32:22-32; 35:9-15; 48:3-4, 10-20; 49:1-28; 50:23-25). Although there are multiple features to the Abrahamic Covenant, it always includes the land promises to Israel. Does this promise still stand or has it been changed? If these biblical promises are to be taken literally and still apply to Israel, and not the church, it should not be surprising to anyone that such a view leads one, such as myself, to Christian Zionism. Zionism is simply the belief that the Jewish people have been given the land of Israel by covenant promise to God and have a current right to occupy that land. Christian Zionists are Christians who agree with this belief.

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM UNDER ATTACK

Back in the spring of 1992, *Christianity Today* did a cover story on Christian Zionism. The article "For the Love of Zion" (March 9, 1992; pp. 46-50) reflected a generally negative tone toward Christian Zionists, which is normal for *Christianity Today*. They made the case that evangelical support for Israel is still strong but it has peaked and is declining. Yet, today, over a decade later the consensus appears to be that Christian Zionism is getting stronger, but so are those Christians who oppose it.

In February 2003, the Zionist Organization of America released extensive polling results from the polling firm of John McLaughlin and Associates indicating rising support by Americans of the modern state of Israel as against the Arab Palestinian state. 71% of Americans were opposed to creating a Palestinian state and by almost the same margin Americans oppose any support to the Palestinian Arabs. Much of this current support is surely generated by those who are classified as Christian Zionists.

There have been a number of articles in the media about the alleged dangers of the Christian support for Israel. A widely noted article appeared in the May 23, 2002 issue of the *Wall Street Journal* entitled, "How Israel Became a Favorite Cause of Christian Right." For some, this is horrifying. Jane Lampman of the *Christian Science Monitor* has written "Mixing prophecy and politics," an article about the dangers of Christian Zionism.¹ Evangelical historian Timothy Weber has just released a book entitled *On The Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend*.² He believes our support for Israel is potentially dangerous.³ The Presbyterian Church, USA, passed a resolution in the Summer of 2004 in which they "officially disavow Christian Zionism as a legitimate theological stance."⁴

Over the last few years there have been a number of books and articles that chide those of us who believe that the nation and people of Israel have a positive future detailed in Bible prophecy.⁵ They think that evangelical support for Israel is a bad thing, because, the modern state of Israel is viewed by them as a bad thing, totally

unrelated in any way to Bible prophecy. These naysayers often like to blame J. N. Darby and dispensationalism as the modern source of evangelical views. The truth of the matter is that love for Israel was well entrenched by Bible-believing Christians long before 1830. What is the history of Christian Zionism or the Restorationist movement (as it was known in earlier times) during two thousand years of church history?

THE EARLY CHURCH

While there is some evidence that a few ante-Nicene fathers envisioned the Jews back in the land of Israel, by and large, they did not really look for a restoration of the Jews to the land of Israel, even though premillennialism was widespread. There was a statement or two by some of these early believers that implied a Jewish return to Israel. For example, Irenaeus writing about A.D. 185 expressed this view in the following way:

But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the Temple at Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom.⁶

Carl Ehle has summarized the views on the early church as follows: “What is singularly absent from early millenarian schemes is the motif of the Restoration of Israel, . . . the Church Fathers from the second century on did not encourage any notion of a revival of national Israel.”⁷

Even though the ante-Nicene fathers were predominately premillennial in their understanding of future things, they laid a groundwork that would not only oppose Christian Zionism, but eventually premillennialism as well. Premillennialist Justin Martyr was the first to view “the Christian church as ‘the true spiritual Israel’ (*Dial. 11*)”⁸ around A.D. 160. Justin’s views laid the groundwork for the growing belief that the church had superseded or replaced Israel. “Misunderstanding of it colours the Church’s attitude to Judaism and contributes to anti-Semitism,” notes Peter Richardson.⁹ Further, by the time of Irenaeus, it becomes entrenched in Christian theology that “the bulk of Israel’s Scriptures [are] indecisive for the formation of Christian doctrine.”¹⁰ The details about Israel’s future, especially in the Old Testament are simply not a part of the development of Christian theology. Jeffrey Siker cites this issue as the primary reason for the disinheriting of the Jews within the early Christian church. “The first factor is the diminishing emphasis upon the eschatological dimensions of the Christian faith.”¹¹ Lacking an emphasis upon Israel’s future, it is not surprising that belief in a future restoration of the Jews to their homeland is sparse in the early and medieval church.

THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH

Apart from a few sporadic medieval statements, Christian belief in the restoration of Israel to her land would not surface until “the second generation Protestant reformers.”¹² Normally, support for Christian Zionism appears to go hand-and-hand with belief in millennialism. Some forms of postmillennialism and all kinds of premillennialism make it conducive for its advocates to look for a return of the Jews to Israel. “Inhibitions about millennialism were so pronounced that for the entire time between about 400 and 1050 there is no surviving written product that displays an independent Western millenarian imagination.”¹³ Since millennialism was absent from

the church for about a thousand years it is not surprising that Christian Zionism was not a topic of concern during this time. It should also be remembered that these issues be viewed within the backdrop of a vicious anti-Semitism that governed the thought of the Medieval Church.

Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202) dominated the eschatological beliefs of the middle ages. Even though some think that Joachim could have been of Jewish decent,¹⁴ his thought is typical of the non-Zionist views of the time. “The final conversion of the Jews was a common medieval theme but one of peculiar significance to Joachim,”¹⁵ notes Joachimist scholar Marjorie Reeves. It was popular in medieval eschatology to see a future time in which “Rome was to be the temporal capital of the world, Jerusalem the spiritual.”¹⁶ “The great rulers of Jewish history—Joseph, David, Solomon, Zorobabel—were interpreted in a priestly rather than an imperial sense,”¹⁷ notes Reeves. Thus, while medieval eschatology saw a role for the Jews in the future, it was one of subservience, having been absorbed into the Gentile church. Medieval prophetic thought provided no real distinct future for the Jews as a regathered nation of Israel; certainly little that could be labeled as Zionism.

In spite of the overall trend to the contrary, there is some evidence that a few stray late-medieval voices did see some kind of a future for Israel. An example of one who held to a Jewish restoration is Gerard of Borgo San Donnino (around 1255). He taught that some Jews would be blessed as Jews in the end time and would return to their ancient homeland.¹⁸ John of Rupescissa (ca. 1310–1366) could most likely be viewed as a Christian Zionist. “For him the converted Jews would become God’s new imperial nation and Jerusalem would be completely rebuilt to become the center of the purified faith. For proof he drew on a literal exposition of the Old Testament prophecies which until then had been read by Christian exegetes to apply either to the time of the incarnation or to the heavenly Jerusalem in the beyond.”¹⁹ For the most part, medieval European Christendom remained overwhelmingly anti-Semitic in thought, word and deed, which would not lend itself to seeing a future for the Jews in Israel.

THE REFORMATION

As I have noted, the flourishing of millennialism and a belief in a future return of the Jews to their land often go hand-and-hand. This is evident as the second generation Reformers begin to fade. Thus, to date, I have not been able to find any reformers who supported the restoration of the Jews back to their land in Israel. Such views must await the post-reformation era. “Neither Luther nor Calvin saw a future general conversion of the Jews promised in Scripture; some of their contemporaries, however, notably Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr, who taught at Cambridge and Oxford respectively in the reign of Edward VI, did understand the Bible to teach a future calling of the Jews.”²⁰ It appears that toward the end of the Reformation there was some movement toward a belief in the conversion of the Jews, which would then grow into the belief of a national restoration of the Jews to their land.

Calvin’s successor at Geneva, Theodore Beza, in the 1560s influenced the English and Scots exiles who produced the famed Geneva Bible that the Jews would be converted in the end times, as expressed in a note on Romans 11:15 and 26.²¹ “The first volume in English to expound this conviction at some length was the translation of Peter Martyr’s Commentary upon Romans, published in London in 1568,” says Gruber. “The probability is strong that Martyr’s careful exposition of the eleventh chapter prepared the way for a general adoption amongst the English Puritans on a belief in the future conversion of the Jews.”²² This view was then adopted by such great

Reformation and Puritan theologians as William Perkins, Richard Sibbes, Thomas Goodwin, William Strong, William Bridge, George Gillespie and Robert Baillie, to name but a few.²³

Crawford Gribben tells us:

This latter-day conversion of the Jews to the Christian faith was to become a staple component of subsequent puritan eschatology, but is an expectation absent from the writings of the earlier Reformers. Calvin's understanding was that the passage which appeared to teach the latter-day conversion of the Jews—Romans 9—11—only referred to 'spiritual Israel', not Jews but the elect of all ages, places, and nationalities.²⁴

However, the Reformation in many ways prepared the way for the later rise of Christian Zionist views. "It marked the end of the medieval era and the beginning of the modern time."²⁵ The main gift of the Reformation was that of the Bible in the language of the people. "The reformation opened men's eyes to the Scriptures," notes Gruber. "Its entire thrust was to turn away from the traditions of men which had nullified the Word of God, and to examine the Word itself."²⁶

Gruber declares: "Views which were 'un-Lutheran' and 'un-Calvinistic,' but thoroughly Biblical, began to emerge from the Reformation."²⁷ "Since Wyclif's time," notes Barbara Tuchman, "the New Learning had revived the study of Greek and Hebrew, so long ignored in the Latin-dominated Middle Ages."²⁸ Michael Pragai tells us the following:

The growing importance of the English Bible was a concomitant of the spreading Reformation, and it is true to say that the Reformation would never have taken hold had the Bible not replaced the Pope as the ultimate spiritual authority. With the Bible as its tool, the Reformation returned to the geographic origins of Christianity in Palestine. It thereby gradually diminished the authority of Rome.²⁹

Thus, so it would come to be, that the provision of the Bible in the language of the people would become the greatest spur to the rise of Christian Zionism. The simple provision of the Bible in the native tongue of the people, which gave rise to their incessant reading and familiarization of it, especially the Old Testament, was the greatest soil that yielded a crop of Christian Zionism over time. It was a short step from a near consensus belief in the conversion of the Jews by the end of the Reformation period to the widely held view among post-Reformation Puritans in the restoration of Israel to her covenant land.

THE ENGLISH PROTESTANT ERA

The path that led to the widespread belief in the end-time restoration of the Jews to Israel started with the study of the Bible, first in the original languages, followed by the influence of the newly acquired English translations.³⁰ When both scholars and laymen alike, for the first time in the history of the church, had the text of Scripture (both Old and New Testaments) more readily available, it led to greater study, a more literal interpretation and a greater awareness of the Israel of the Old Testament. This provided the atmosphere in which a major shift occurred in England (also on the

Continent to a lesser degree) from medieval Jew-hatred, which led to the expulsion of all Jews from Britain in 1290, to their invitation under Cromwell to return in 1655. “From such a context and from among this people,” notes Douglas Culver, “now growing more and more intimate with things Jewish, the early millenarian protagonists for the restoration of the Jews to their Palestinian homeland arose.”³¹ However, it would be a tough road to get to the point where belief in a Jewish restoration to their ancient homeland would become so widespread.

It wasn’t just any group of English protestants that provided a fertile soil for Jewish Restorationist doctrines, it was out of the English Puritan movement that this belief sprung. “Starting with the Puritan ascendancy,” notes Tuchman, “the movement among the English for the return of the Jews to Palestine began.”³² Why the Puritan? Puritans were not just dissenters, they were a Protestant sect that valued the Old Testament to an unprecedented degree in their day. Tuchman tells us:

They began to feel for the Old Testament a preference that showed itself in all their sentiments and habits. They paid a respect to the Hebrew language that they refused to the language of their Gospels and of the epistles of Paul. They baptized their children by the names not of Christian saints but of Hebrew patriarchs and warriors. They turned the weekly festival by which the church had from primitive times commemorated the resurrection of her Lord, into the Jewish Sabbath. They sought for precedents to guide their ordinary conduct in the books of Judges and Kings.³³

One of the first Englishman to put forth the view that the Jews should be restored to the land of Israel was a scholar who had taken two degrees from Cambridge named Francis Kett. In 1585 he had published a book entitled *The Glorious and Beautiful Garland of Mans Glorification Containing the Godly Misterie of Heavenly Jerusalem* (one of the shorter titles of the day). While his book primarily dealt with other matters, Kett did have a section in which he mentioned “the notion of Jewish national return to Palestine.”³⁴ This notion, which some think was likely gaining many followers,³⁵ was deemed heretical to the English establishment of the day and Rev. Kett was quickly burned at the stake on January 14, 1589, for expressing such views about the Jews return to their land, an idea he claimed to have received from reading the Bible.³⁶ About the same time as Kett, strict Calvinist, Edmund Bunny (1540–1619) taught the Jewish restoration to Palestine in a couple of books: *The Scepter of Ivday* (1584) and *The Coronation of David* (1588).³⁷

As the 1600s arrived, a flurry of books advocating Jewish restoration to their land began to appear. Thomas Draxe released in 1608 *The Worldes Resurrection: On the general calling of the Jews, A familiar Commentary upon the eleventh Chapter of Saint Paul to the Romaines, according to the sense of Scripture*. Draxe argued for Israel’s restoration based upon his Calvinism and Covenant Theology.³⁸

Two great giants of their era were Thomas Brightman (1552–1607), (likely a Postmillennialist) and Premillennialist Joseph Mede (1586–1638) who both wrote boldly of a future restoration of Israel. Brightman’s work, *Revelation of the Revelation* appeared in 1609 and told “how the Jews will return from the areas North and East of Palestine to Jerusalem and how the Holy Land and the Jewish Christian church will become the centre of a Christian world.”³⁹ Brightman wrote: “What, shall they return to Jerusalem again? There is nothing more certain; the prophets do everywhere confirm it.”⁴⁰ Brightman went so far as to predict that the Jews would be converted to Christ in 1650.⁴¹

Joseph Mede's contribution was released in 1627 in Latin⁴² and in 1642 in English as *The Key of the Revelation*.⁴³ The father of English premillennialism was also an ardent advocate of Jewish restoration to their homeland. Following Mede in many ways, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) also saw the Jews one day returning to Israel. In *An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (1639), he taught that the Jews would be converted to Christ by 1656.⁴⁴ Momentum was certainly building toward widespread acceptance of English belief in Jewish restoration, but a few bumps in the road still lay ahead.

Giles Fletcher (1549–1611), a fellow at King's College, Cambridge and Queen Elizabeth's ambassador to Russia wrote a work advocating Restorationism. Fletcher's book, *Israel Redux: or the Restauration of Israel; or the Restauration of Israel exhibited in two short treatises* (shortened title) was published posthumously by the Puritan divine Samuel Lee in 1677.⁴⁵ Fletcher cites a letter in his book from 1606 as he argues for the return of the Jews to their land.⁴⁶ Fletcher repeatedly taught the "certainty of their return in God's due time."⁴⁷

A key proponent for Israel's future restoration was Henry Finch (1558-1625) who wrote a seminal work on the subject in 1621, called *The World's Resurrection or The Calling of the Jewes. A Present to Judah and the Children of Israel that Ioyned with Him, and to Ioseph (that valiant tribe of Ephraim) and all the House of Israel that Ioyned with Him*.⁴⁸ Finch, at the time of the publication of his book was a member of Parliament and the most highly respected legal scholars in England at the time. "The book had been published for a matter only of weeks when the roof caved in on the author's head," notes Culver. "In the persecution which ensued, Finch lost his reputation, his possessions, his health—all precipitated by his belief in Jewish national restoration."⁴⁹ "Finch's argument may be considered the first genuine plan for Restoration."⁵⁰ Finch taught that the biblical "passages which speak of a return of these people to their own land, their conquest of enemies and their rule of the nations are to be taken literally, not allegorically as of the Church."⁵¹ King James of England was offended by Finch's statement that all nations would become subservient to national Israel at the time of her restoration.⁵² Finch and his publisher were quickly arrested when his book was released by the High Commissioner (a creation of King James), and examined.⁵³ Finch was stripped of his status and possessions and then died a few years latter. "The doctrine of the restoration of the Jews continued to be expounded in England, evolving according to the insight of each exponent, and finally playing a role in Christian Zionistic activities in the latter part of the nineteenth and in the first of the twentieth centuries."⁵⁴

Many Puritans of the seventeenth century taught the restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land.⁵⁵ One of the greatest Puritan theologians in England was John Owen (1616–1683) who wrote, "The Jews shall be gathered from all parts of the earth where they are scattered, and brought home into their homeland."⁵⁶ "From the first quarter of the seventeenth century, belief in a future conversion of the Jews became commonplace among the English Puritans."⁵⁷ Many who believed in the conversion of the Jews also came to believe in Jewish restoration as well. Peter Toon, speaking of Puritans of this era says:

Of course, those who expected the conversion of the Jews added to Romans 11 other proof-texts from the Old and New Testament. Furthermore, a large proportion of those who took "Israel" in Romans 11:25 ff. to speak of Jews, also taught that there would be a restoration of Jews to their ancient homeland in the Near East either after, or at the same time as, their

conversion to Christ.⁵⁸

There was a similar Restorationist movement throughout Europe where the Reformation was strongest, but on a smaller scale. There were a number of Restorationists in Holland during the time of the Puritan movement. Isaac de la Peyrere (1594–1676), who served as the French Ambassador to Denmark, “wrote a book wherein he argued for a restoration of the Jews to Israel without conversion to Christianity.”⁵⁹ In 1655, Paul Felgenhauer, wrote *Good News for Israel* in which he taught that there would be the “permanent return of the Jews to their own country eternally bestowed upon them by God through the unqualified promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”⁶⁰ The Dane, Holger Paulli (1644–1714) “believed wholeheartedly in the Jewish Return to the Holy Land, as a condition for the Second Coming.”⁶¹ He even “lobbied the kings of Denmark, England, and France to go and conquer Palestine from the Ottomans in order that the Jews could regain their nation.”⁶² Frenchman, Marquis de Langallerie (1656–1717), schemed with the Turkish Ambassador in the Hague on a plan defeat the Pope and trade the papal empire for a return of the Jews to the Holy Land. Langallerie was arrested in Hamburg, tried and convicted of high treason and died in prison a year later.⁶³ Other European Restorationists of the era include: Isaac Vossius, Hugo Grotius, Gerhard John Vossius, David Blondel, Vasover Powel, Joseph Eyre, Edward Whitaker, and Charles Jerran.⁶⁴

The mid-1600s witnessed “the sudden explosion of millenarian publications,”⁶⁵ which predisposed the British to also consider the future fate of the Jews in the holy land. James Saddington lists the following seventeenth century English individuals as holding to Restorationist views: John Milton, John Bunyan, Roger Williams, John Sadler and Oliver Cromwell.⁶⁶ “The doctrine of the restoration of the Jews continued to be expounded in England, evolving according to the insight of each exponent,” concludes Ehle, “and finally playing a role in Christian Zionistic activities in the latter part of the nineteenth and in the first of the twentieth centuries.”⁶⁷

COLONIAL AMERICA

Since the American colonies, especially in Puritan New England, were settled primarily by Englishmen who brought with them to the New World many of the same issues and beliefs that were circulating in the motherland, it is not surprising to find many zealous advocates in America for the restoration of the Jews. Perhaps the most influential of the early Puritan ministers in New England was John Cotton, who, following the postmillennialism of Brightman held to the restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land.⁶⁸ According to Ehle, in addition to John Cotton (1584–1652), early Restorationists included: John Davenport (1597–1670), William Hooke (1601–1678), John Eliot (1604–1690), Samuel Willard (1640–1707), and Samuel Sewall (1652–1730).⁶⁹ Ephraim Huit, a Cambridge trained early minister in Windsor, Connecticut believed that the Jews would be regathered to their homeland in 1650.⁷⁰

One of the standout advocates of the restoration doctrine was Increase Mather (1639–1723), the son of Richard and father of Cotton. Increase Mather wrote over 100 books in his life and was a president of Harvard. His first work was *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation*, which went through about a half dozen revisions during his life.⁷¹ His support of the national restoration of Israel to her land in the future was typical of American Colonial Puritans and was generally widespread. Ehle notes the following:

The first salient school of thought in American history that advocated a

national restoration of the Jews to Palestine was resident in the first native-born generation at the close of the seventeenth century in which Increase Mather played a dominate role. The men who held this view were Puritans, . . . From that time on the doctrine of restoration may be said to have become endemic to American culture.⁷²

“It was Increase Mather’s view that this final and greatest reformation of the Christian world would be led by the Jewish people ensuing upon their restoration to the Holy Land.”⁷³

From the earliest times, American Christianity has always tilted toward support of the restoration of national Israel in the Holy Land. American Christians, when compared with Euro-Asian Christianity has always had a philo-Semitic disposition. Thus, it is not surprising that this tradition continues today, especially in dispensational circles.

EARLY AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

With a significant number of English speaking Christians during the last 400 years thoroughly saturated with Jewish restoration theology, it should not be surprising that many such Christians in the last two hundred years have risen up to play key roles in the establishment of the modern state of Israel.

It should not be considered strange that President John Quincy Adams expressed his desire that “the Jews again [were] in Judea, an independent Nation, . . . once restored to an independent government and no longer persecuted.”⁷⁴ President Abraham Lincoln in a meeting with Canadian Christian Zionist, Henry W. Monk, in 1863 said, “Restoring the Jews to their homeland is a noble dream shared by many Americans. He (the Jewish chiropodist of the President) has so many times ‘put me on my feet’ that I would have no objection to giving his countrymen a ‘leg up’.”⁷⁵

NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITISH RESTORATIONISM

The 1800s marks a high point in British premillennialism and a corresponding apex for Christian Zionism. Many contemporary accounts critical of Christian Zionism focus their emphasis upon J. N. Darby and the rise of dispensationalism as the foundation for British Restorationism. As one examines the record, such is not the case. The real advocates of Christian Zionism in Britain were primarily Anglican premillennialists. By the mid-nineteenth century, about half of all Anglican clergy were evangelical premillennialists. Iain Murray said, “some seven hundred ministers of the Establishment were said to believe that Christ’s coming must precede His kingdom upon earth. This was in 1845.”⁷⁶ Murray went on to add that, “the number almost certainly increased in the latter half of the century.”⁷⁷ An example of such clergymen would be J. C. Ryle (1816–1900), who wrote a Pre-Millennian Creed.⁷⁸ The wave of premillennialism is what produced in Britain a crop of Christian Zionists that led to political activism which culminated in the Balfour Declaration.

Anthony Ashley Cooper (1801–1885), later Lord Shaftesbury, is said by Tuchman to have been “the most influential nonpolitical figure, excepting Darwin, of the Victorian age.”⁷⁹ As a strong evangelical Anglican, he is said to have based his life upon a literal acceptance of the Bible and was known as the “Evangelical of Evangelicals.” Shaftesbury was the greatest influence for social legislation in the nineteenth century. He was led into acceptance of premillennialism by Edward Bickersteth, which then gave rise to his views of Jewish Restorationism.⁸⁰ Lord Shaftesbury said concerning his

belief in the second coming, that it “has always been a moving principle in my life, for I see everything going on in the world subordinate to this great event.”⁸¹ Because of his premillennialism, Shaftesbury became greatly involved as Chairman of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews.⁸² Shaftesbury spearheaded a movement that led to “the creation by the Church of England of an Anglican bishopric in Jerusalem, with a converted Jew consecrated as its first bishop.”⁸³

“Oh, pray for the peace of Jerusalem” were the words engraved on a ring that he always wore on his right hand.⁸⁴ Since Lord Shaftesbury believed that the Jews would return to their homeland in conjunction with the second advent, he “never had a shadow of a doubt that the Jews *were* to return to their own land. . . . It was his daily prayer, his daily hope.”⁸⁵ In 1840, Shaftesbury was known for coining a slogan that he would often repeat throughout his life, that the Jews were “a country without nation for a nation without a country.”⁸⁶

Shaftesbury's greatest contribution to the Restoration movement was his attempt to accomplish something in the political realm in order to provoke England to develop a policy in favor of returning the Jews to their homeland. He succeeded in influencing England to adopt that policy, but England failed, at that time to influence the Turks.

In 1838, in an article in the *Quarterly Review*, Shaftesbury put forth the view that Palestine could become a British colony of Jews that “could provide Britain with cotton, silk, herbs, and olive oil.”⁸⁷ Next, Shaftesbury “lobbied Lord Palmerston, the Foreign Secretary, using political, financial and economic arguments to convince him to help the Jews return to Palestine. And Palmerston did so. What was originally the religious beliefs of Christian Zionists became official British policy (for political interests) in Palestine and the Middle East by the 1840s.”⁸⁸ This was primarily the result of Lord Shaftesbury's efforts. However, at the end of the day, Shaftesbury's plan failed, but it succeeded in setting a precedent for putting concrete, political legs on one's religious beliefs. This would yield results at a later time.

Lord Shaftesbury had used his great power of persuasion to sway Henry John Temple Palmerston (1784–1865), to whom he was related by marriage, to the Restorationist position.⁸⁹ Palmerston had a distinguished political career serving in government almost the entire time from 1807 till his death in 1865. He served the British government many years as war secretary, foreign minister and was a popular prime minister for about ten years. Even though Shaftesbury influenced Palmerston to hold to the Restorationist position, it appears that it was a deeply held conviction and not one of mere political expediency. While British foreign secretary in 1840, Palmerston wrote the following letter to his ambassador at Constantinople in his attempt to advocate on behalf of the Jews:

There exists at the present time among the Jews dispersed over Europe, a strong notion that the time is approaching when their nation is to return to Palestine. . . . It would be of manifest importance to the Sultan to encourage the Jews to return and to settle in Palestine because the wealth which they would bring with them would increase the resources of the Sultan's dominions; and the Jewish people, if returning under the sanction and protection and at the invitation of the Sultan, would be a check upon any future evil designs of Mehemet Ali or his successor. . . . I have to instruct Your Excellency strongly to recommend [the Turkish government] to hold out every just encouragement to the Jews of Europe to return to Palestine.⁹⁰

Shaftsbury was not the only one lobbying Palmerston during this time. A wave of premillennialism had hit the Scottish resulting in a growing sentiment toward Jewish Restoration. “In 1839 the Church of Scotland sent Andrew Bonar and Robert Murray M’Cheyne, to report on ‘the Condition of the Jews in their land.’ Their report was widely publicized in Great Britain and it was followed by a ‘Memorandum to Protestant Monarchs of Europe for the restoration of the Jews to Palestine.’ This memorandum was printed verbatim in the *London Times*, including an advertisement by Lord Shaftsbury igniting an enthusiastic campaign by the *Times* for restoration of the Jews.”⁹¹ “Three hundred and twenty citizens of Carlow, Ireland sent a similar memorandum to Palmerston.”⁹²

One time governor of Australia, Colonel George Gawler (1796–1869) was one of the most zealous and influential Restorationist, next to Shaftsbury, in the 1840s.⁹³ “Colonel Gawler was a senior commander at the Battle of Waterloo.”⁹⁴ When he returned to England in 1841 he became a strong advocate of Jewish settlements in the land of Palestine. Gawler’s Restorationism, like most of his day, was sparked by his religious convictions, but he argued for Jewish return to their land upon geopolitical grounds. Gawler stated the following:

[England] urgently needs the shortest and safest lines of communication. . . . Egypt and Syria stand in intimate connection. A foreign hostile power mighty in either would soon endanger British trade . . . and it is now for England to set her hand to the renovation of Syria through the only people whose energies will be extensively and permanently in the work—the real children of the soil, the sons of Israel.⁹⁵

Working with Sir Moses Montefiore (a British Jew) Gawler provided an agricultural strategy for Jewish resettlement of the Holy Land. One of these Montefiore-Gawler projects resulted in “the planting of an orange grove near Jaffa, still existent today and known as Tel Aviv’s ‘Montefiore Quarter.’”⁹⁶

Charles Henry Churchill (1814–1877), an ancestor of Winston Churchill, was a British military officer stationed in Damascus in 1840. “He was a Christian Zionist and he supported the Jews against the non-Zionist Christians of Damascus.”⁹⁷ It was through his efforts that he helped acquit the Jews accused of the infamous charge of blood libel. Col. Churchill was honored a banquet hosted by a grateful Jewish community where he spoke of the “hour of liberation of Israel . . . that was approaching, when the Jewish Nation would once again take its place among the powers of the world.”⁹⁸ In a letter to Jewish philanthropist Sir Moses Montefiore (1784–1885), dated June 14, 1841, Churchill said,

I cannot conceal from you my most anxious desire to see your countrymen endeavor once more to resume their existence as a people. I consider the object to be perfectly obtainable. But two things are indispensably necessary: Firstly that the Jews themselves will take up the matter, universally and unanimously. Secondly that the European powers will aid them in their views.⁹⁹

Churchill continued to live in the Middle East and in 1953 wrote *Mount Lebanon* and “predicted that when Palestine ceased to be part of the Ottoman Empire, it would either become an English colony or an independent state.”¹⁰⁰

British General Charles Warren, also known for his archeological work in Jerusalem, served in Syria on behalf of the Palestine Exploration Fund. In 1875 he wrote *The Land of Promise: or Turkey's Guarantee*.¹⁰¹ Warren proposed that the land be developed with the "avowed intention of gradually introducing the Jews, pure and simple, who would eventually occupy and govern the country." He even speculated that the land could hold "a population of fifteen million."¹⁰²

Laurence Oliphant (1829–1888) was an evangelical "British Protestant, an officer in the British Foreign Service, a writer, world-traveler and an unofficial diplomat."¹⁰³ Oliphant was passionate about the Jewish Restoration to their land that came from his intense religious convictions, which "he tried to conceal them behind arguments based on strategy and politics."¹⁰⁴ In 1880 he published a book, *The Land of Gilead*, "proposing Jewish resettlement, under Turkish sovereignty and British protection, of Palestine east of the Jordan."¹⁰⁵ Even then, he foresaw the agricultural potential and the possibilities of developing the resources of the Dead Sea.

All the fruits of Southern Europe, such as apricots, peaches and plums, here grow to perfection; apples, pears, quinces, thrive well on the more extreme elevation . . . while the quick-growing Eucalyptus could be planted with advantage on the fertile but treeless plains.

The inclusion of the Dead Sea within its limits would furnish a vast source of wealth, by the *exploitation* of its chemical and mineral deposits. . . . The Dead Sea is a mine of unexplored wealth, which only needs the application of capital and enterprise to make it a most lucrative property.¹⁰⁶

There were many other British Restorationists during the nineteenth century that created a momentum that would payoff later in British control of Palestine and the Balfour Declaration. Restorationism found a voice in one of the most popular novelist of the nineteenth century, as George Eliot penned the influential Restorationist novel *Daniel Deronda*.¹⁰⁷ "Among the advocates we may include Lord Lindsay, Lord Shaftsbury, Lord Palmerton, Disraeli, Lord Manchester, Holman Hunt, Sir Charles Warren, Hall Caine and others."¹⁰⁸ Among the nineteenth century British, one observes the "gradual drift from purely religious notion to the political."¹⁰⁹ These two influences, the Bible and the sword (religion and politics), as Tuchman has put it,¹¹⁰ would merge into a powerful team the lead to the Balfour Declaration and the eventual founding of the Jewish state in the twentieth century.

J. N. DARBY AND RESTORATIONISM

There is no doubt that John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) believed in a future for national Israel, which would make him a Restorationist or Christian Zionist in theory.¹¹¹ However, anyone familiar with Darby and the Brethren know that they were not involved politically in any way and their distinctive dispensational views did not penetrate Anglican Evangelicals.¹¹² Yet, a number of critics of Christian Zionism say that Darby is a major source of Christian Zionism. Donald E. Wagner appears to be the biggest culprit in this matter.¹¹³ "If Brightman was the father of Christian Zionism," declares Wagner, "then Darby was its greatest apostle and missionary, the apostle Paul of the movement."¹¹⁴ Wagner continues this theme when he says, "Lord Shaftsbury, was convinced of Darby's teachings."¹¹⁵ Fellow anti-Christian Zionist, Stephen R. Sizer, echoes Wagner's misguided views when he says of Shaftsbury: "He single-handedly

translated the theological positions of Brightman, Henry Finch, and John Nelson Darby into a political strategy."¹¹⁶

I have never found, within the writings of the specialists on Christian Zionism, anyone who makes more than a brief mention of Darby.¹¹⁷ No one includes him among those who could be considered even a quasi-significant Restorationist. In fact, Barbara Tuchman, whose work *Bible and Sword* is considered the most significant and comprehensive treatment of British Christian Zionism does not even mention Darby at all.

When it comes to the alleged influence of Darby upon Lord Shaftsbury, this is most unlikely. One of Shaftsbury's biographers makes it clear that it was Anglican premillennialist, Edward Bickersteth¹¹⁸ (was not even a futurist, but an historicist) who influenced him toward premillennialism. Battiscombe, speaking about the year 1835, says the following:

In that year he first met the man who was to be one of the chief influences in his life, and through that man he in all probability first came in contact with a mode of belief which was to be all-important to his view of religion. The man was Edward Bickersteth, a leading Evangelical; the belief was that curiously explicit teaching about the end of the world and the Last Judgment usually known as Millenarianism.¹¹⁹

Even though Darby was not really a player in British Restorationism, there is no doubt that his dispensationalism, once imported to the United States would eventually become the staple for current Christian Zionism. "Most dispensationalists were satisfied to be mere observers of the Zionist movement," notes Weber. "They watched and analyzed it." Weber notes that American William Blackstone "was one exception to the general pattern." The fact that Blackstone would become one of the first dispensational activists on behalf of Zionism (after the Civil War), proves the main point that dispensationalist, especially Darby, were generally not active in the Jewish Restoration movement until more recent times. Current realities should not cloud a clear view of the past.

RESTORATIONIST ON THE CONTINENT

Even though the English-speaking world led the way when it came to Christian Zionism, there were important contributions from continental Europe. While Napoleon's attempt at Jewish Restoration lacked religious motivation,¹²⁰ there were many Europeans who were smitten with religious Restorationism. "The Enlightenment in 18th century France and Germany, by its very nature of questioning the past" notes Epstein, "questioned the Jews' status as separated from the rest of society because of religious differences."¹²¹ Such a development made the public, free expression of ideas more common. As a result of the new openness some began advocating the return of the Jews to their homeland. The rise of nationalism was another trend of the day. "Nationalism actually initially had an unusual effect on the restorationist movement: it increased Christian support and decreased Jewish support."¹²²

A German Lutheran, C. F. Zimpel, who "described himself as Doctor et Philosophiae, member of the Grand Ducal Saxon Society for Mineralogy and Geognosy at Jena," published pamphlets in the mid-1800s entitled "Israelites in Jerusalem" and "Appeal to all Christendom, as well as to the Jews, for the Liberation of Jerusalem."¹²³ He addressed a number of geographical issues and warned that if the Jews were not

allowed to return to Palestine then it would lead to their persecution and slaughter.¹²⁴ Unfortunately Zimpel proved correct on this prediction.

Frenchman, Charles-Joseph Prince de Ligne (1735–1814) advocated Jewish Restorationism. He called upon the Christians of Europe to lobby the Turkish Sultan so that the Jews could return to their homeland. De Ligne's appeal was used by Napoleon in his efforts to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. "Among those French Restorationists were theologians and authors, but also, increasingly, politicians."¹²⁵ Some of them included Ernest Laharanne, Alexandre Dumas, and Jean-Henri Dunant (1828–1910), who was also the founder of the International Red Cross.¹²⁶

Restoration proposals were put forth by a number of Europeans in the nineteenth century. A Swiss theologian named Samuel Louis Gausson who wrote a book advocating a Jewish return to their land in 1844.¹²⁷ Italian, Benedetto Musolino (1809–1885) wrote a book, after a visit to the Holy Land, in which he argued "that the restoration of the Jews would allow European culture into the Middle East."¹²⁸

TWENTIETH CENTURY BRITISH CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

Even though the momentum of over three hundred years of British Restorationism was beginning to fade, there was enough activity to carry through World War I, which saw England finally gain control of the Holy Land. The early 1900s saw some of the most devout Christian Zionists arise and give birth to the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate for Palestine.

Author James Balfour (1848–1930) was born in Scotland and reared in a strong Christian home, which instilled into him a love for the Jews based upon a biblical interest. Balfour, a life-long bachelor, even wrote a book on Christian philosophy and theology.¹²⁹ Lord Balfour served much of his life within the highest offices of British government, including Prime Minister. His interest in Jewish Restoration "was Biblical rather than imperial."¹³⁰ His sister and biographer said the following:

Balfour's interest in the Jews and their history was lifelong. It originated in the Old Testament training of his mother, and in his Scottish upbringing. As he grew up, his intellectual admiration and sympathy for certain aspects of Jewish philosophy and culture grew also, and the problem of the Jews in the modern world seemed to him of immense importance. He always talked eagerly on this, and I remember in childhood imbibing from him the idea that Christian religion and civilization owes to Judaism an immeasurable debt, shamefully ill repaid.¹³¹

In 1906, a time in which he had just lost the office of Prime Minister of England, Lord Balfour met Dr. Chaim Weizmann, the foremost proponent of early Zionism next to Theodor Herzl. Balfour's sister said, "Balfour for his part told me often about the impression the conversation made on him." "It was from the talk with Weizmann that I saw that the Jewish form of patriotism was unique," noted Lord Balfour. "Their love for their country refused to be satisfied by the Uganda scheme. It was Weizmann's absolute refusal even to look at it which impressed me."¹³²

After many starts and stops, Balfour was finally able to persuade all of the British War Cabinet that the time had come to issue a declaration of British support for Jewish Restoration to their homeland. The declaration is dated November 2, 1917 and was addressed to Lord Rothschild as follows:

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.¹³³

Before the Balfour Declaration was finally issued, much discussion with allies and behind the scene discussion took place. Prime Minister, Lloyd George wanted to make sure that the United States was fully on board before it was issued. President Woodrow Wilson would support it and on October 1918 issued the following statement of acceptance:

I welcome an opportunity to express . . . satisfaction . . . in progress . . . since the Declaration of Mr. Balfour on . . . the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish People, and his promise that the British Government would use its best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of that object . . . all America will be deeply moved by the report [on the founding] of the Hebrew University at Jerusalem with the promise that bears of spiritual rebirth.¹³⁴

The impact of the Balfour Declaration was a tremendous event within the Zionist movement. Since Britain was on the verge of controlling Palestine, it provided a great step on the road to the founding of the nation of Israel in 1948. This great declaration was spearheaded, not just by British geo-political concerns, as important as that was within their thinking, but by Christian sympathies that were formed by biblical beliefs. Lord Balfour does not appear to have been moved by his views of eschatology, although it may have been a factor, "but simply exiles who should be given back, in payment of Christianity's 'immeasurable debt,' their homeland."¹³⁵

David Lloyd George (1863–1945) was British Prime Minister (1916–1922) when the Balfour Declaration was issued. Balfour and Lloyd George were both life-long friends. From Wales, Lloyd George was steeped in the Bible in which he was trained as a youth. This clearly predisposed him to view with favor the Zionist movement. Saddington says:

It was Lloyd George's decision that was primarily responsible for the British launching a large-scale offensive to conquer all of Palestine despite the risks. As a Christian Zionist he was determined to gain control of Palestine without the French to interfere. He also wanted his country to carry out what he regarded as God's work in Palestine.¹³⁶

Lloyd George made a number of statements concerning his biblical upbringing which influenced him throughout his life. "Lloyd George recalled how in his first meeting with Chaim Weizmann in December 1914, place names kept coming into the conversation that were 'more familiar to me than those of the Western front,'" notes Tuchman. "Lord Balfour's biographer says that his interest in Zionism stemmed from his boyhood training in the Old Testament under the guidance of his mother."¹³⁷ On another occasion, when speaking about the Balfour Declaration, Lloyd George said:

It was undoubtedly inspired by natural sympathy, admiration and also by the fact that, as you must remember, we had been trained even more in Hebrew history than in the history of our own country. I could tell you all the kings of Israel. But I doubt whether I could have named half a dozen of the kings of England!¹³⁸

Undoubtedly, God put men like Lord Balfour and Lloyd George into powers of position at this crucial time in history to aid the eventual founding of the modern Jewish state. This appears more clearly when one realizes that there were not many men within British government of that era who held the biblically molded views of Christian Zionism, yet, these were the men who were in power at that time. Christian Zionists William Hechler said, “Lloyd George and Arthur Balfour accepted Zionism for religious and humanistic reasons; they saw it as fulfillment of the Biblical prophecies, not just as something suiting British Imperial interests.”¹³⁹ Tuchman tells us the following:

Lloyd George’s afterthoughts on the motivation of the War Cabinet in issuing the Balfour Declaration have bewitched and bewildered all subsequent accounts of this episode. Unquestionably he doctored the picture. Why he did so is a matter of opinion. My own feeling is that he knew that his own motivation, as well as Balfour’s, was in large part a sentimental (that is, a Biblical) one, but he could not admit it. Hew as writing his Memoirs in the 1930’s when the Palestine trouble was acute, and he could hardly confess to nostalgia for the Old Testament or to a Christian guilty conscience toward the Jews as reasons for an action that had committed Britain to the painful, expensive, and seemingly insoluble problem of the Mandate. So he made himself believe that the Declaration had been really a reward for Weizmann’s acetone process or alternatively, a propagandist gesture to influence American and Bolshevik Jews—an essentially conflicting explanation, neither so simple nor so reasonable as the truth.¹⁴⁰

Irishman, John Henry Patterson (1867–1947) grew up in a conservative Protestant home in which he was intensely taught the Bible throughout his youth. “His familiarity with the Bible, its stories, laws, geography, prophecies and morals, stood him in good stead when his army superiors chose him to take the Zion Mule Corps.”¹⁴¹ The Zion Mule Corps was a Jewish military unit made up of volunteers from Palestine in the British Army during World War I. Lieutenant Colonel Patterson wrote about his experiences in *With the Judeans in the Palestine Campaign*, which he had published in the 1930s.¹⁴² Patterson’s views of Bible prophecy are evident in the following:

Britain’s share towards the fulfillment of prophecy must . . . not be forgotten and the names of Mr. Lloyd George and Sir Arthur Balfour, two men who were raised up to deal justly with Israel, will, I feel sure, live for all time in the hearts and affections of the Jewish people. It is owing to the stimulus given by the Balfour Declaration to the soul of Jewry throughout the world that we are now looking upon the wonderful spectacle unfolding itself before our eyes, of the people of Israel returning to the Land promised to Abraham and his seed forever. In the ages to come it will always redound to the glory of England that it was through her instrumentality that the Jewish people were

enabled to return and establish their National Home in the Promised Land.¹⁴³

As a Christian, Patterson describes the events of his day relating to the Jews as “the fulfillment of prophecy.” There were many others from this era who believed similarly that played some kind of role in seeing that the Jews would return to their homeland, but space prohibits their mention.¹⁴⁴

HERZEL’S NUMBER ONE ADVISOR

The modern Jewish founder of Zionism is recognized to have been Theodor Herzl. His earliest and closest advisor just happened to have been the Christian minister William Hechler (1845–1931) who was a zealous Christian Zionist. Rev. Hechler was a pastor who was born in India of German missionary parents. He attended college in Basel, Switzerland,¹⁴⁵ which is where Herzl was living when he first met him. “Hechler, bilingual in English and German from childhood, . . . was like his father, a member of the Church of England.”¹⁴⁶ He studied theology in London and then in Tübingen, which was the center of the liberal approach to the Scripture. However, “he was not persuaded by the key arguments of the liberals and retained a distinctly creedal, doctrinal, even literalist theology.”¹⁴⁷ This makes sense, since anyone holding to a liberal view of Scripture would not have come to love Israel, as did Hechler.

“Upon recommendation of the British court, he became private tutor to Prince Ludwig, son of Frederick, the Grand Duke of Baden,” says Pragai. “At the time he met the Grand Duke’s nephew, the future Emperor William II of Germany. After the Prince’s premature death, Hechler served in the ministry in England.”¹⁴⁸ “At Hechler’s behest, the Grand Duke built up a massive library of biblical eschatology, biblical history, and archeology. At the Grand Duke’s request, Hechler presented sermons and scholarly papers on these themes before the Court and its visitors.”¹⁴⁹ Hechler was one of the most zealous Christian Zionists of all time. He seemed consumed with the goal of Jewish restoration to their homeland.

In 1882 he had published a book entitled *The Restoration of the Jews to Palestine according to Prophecy*.¹⁵⁰ In 1885, “Hechler was appointed Chaplain to the British Embassy in Vienna.”¹⁵¹ In 1896 Hechler introduces himself to Herzl and thus becomes his most important aid, advisor and advocate. It was said, “William Hechler would prove to be ‘not only the first, but the most constant and the most indefatigable of Herzl’s followers’”.¹⁵² Hechler’s connections in both Germany and England proved helpful to Herzl, as Hechler often arranged meetings for Herzl with the highest officials of each nation. Hechler often told the secular Herzl that what they were doing was “fulfilling prophecy.”¹⁵³ Merkley tells us that Herzl “grew to trust Hechler more and more. Indeed, frequently, for brief but crucial periods, he virtually entrusted the whole Zionist enterprise to William Hechler, and, though Hechler frequently annoyed and embarrassed him, he never failed him.”¹⁵⁴ Herzl said in his diary of Hechler the following:

Of all the people who have been drawn to me by the ‘movement’, the Rev Hechler is the finest and most fanciful . . . He frequently writes me postcards, for no particular reason, telling me that he hasn’t been able to sleep the previous night because Jerusalem came into his mind.¹⁵⁵

What did Hechler mean when he would say that he and Herzl were helping to fulfill prophecy? We get a glimpse from his writings:

Every detail of this remarkable Movement is of interest to us . . . clergy, who stand as watchmen on the spiritual walls of Zion . . .

We are now seeing the stirrings of the bones in Ezechieel's valley: oh! may we soon see the glorious outpourings of spiritual life predicted in Ezechieel 36: The religious element is, according to God's Word, to become the inspiring force, and, I think I can see that it is the religious faith in Zionism, which is now already influencing the whole nation of the Jews. . . . What food for reflection to every thoughtful student of the Bible and of history!

The Jews are beginning to look forward to and believe in the glorious future of their nation when, instead of being a curse, they are once more to become a blessing to all.¹⁵⁶

Hechler was a true friend and supporter of Herzl and was at his side when he died in 1904. Later Hechler wrote, "I was with him at the beginning of his dreams, and I was with him almost at the last moment of his earthly death."¹⁵⁷ Christian Zionist, William Hechler continued to work hard for the cause that almost solely possessed his mind by trying to convince Gentile Christians of the worthiness of this cause. He died in 1931.

BLACKSTONE AND AMERICAN CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

No doubt, one of the most outstanding examples of a Christian Zionist is that of American William E. Blackstone (1841–1935). Blackstone was born in Adams, New York and reared in a pious Methodist home, where he became a Christian at age 11.¹⁵⁸ When he married he moved to Chicago and became a very successful businessman. Even though he was Methodist, he had become motivated by his dispensational view of Bible prophecy to work for the reestablishment of national Israel.

Blackstone, a tireless, self-taught student of Bible and theology, became very interested in what the Bible had to say about Israel. Like many Christians with similar interests, this led to attempts to evangelize Jewish people with the gospel. He founded in 1887 the Chicago Hebrew Mission for the evangelization of the Jews. Blackstone wrote the best-selling book *Jesus Is Coming* in 1908, which sold over a million copies in three editions. "Probably no dispensational Bible teacher of his time had a larger popular audience."¹⁵⁹ Concerning the restoration of the Jews to their homeland, Blackstone said in his book:

But, perhaps, you say: "I don't believe the Israelites are to be restored to Canaan, and Jerusalem rebuilt."

Dear reader! have you read the declarations of God's word about it? Surely nothing is more plainly stated in the Scriptures.¹⁶⁰

He then proceeds to list almost 14 pages of virtually nothing but Scriptural citations supporting his belief. Then he concludes:

We might fill a book with comments upon how Israel shall be restored, but all we have desired to do was to show that it is an incontrovertible fact of prophecy, and that it is intimately connected with our Lord's appearing, and this we trust will have satisfactorily accomplished.¹⁶¹

Even though widely known throughout evangelicalism for a number of things, he is best known for his tireless work on behalf of reestablishing the Jewish nation in Israel. Timothy Weber says of Blackstone and dispensationalism the following:

Most dispensationalists were satisfied to be mere observers of the Zionist movement. They watched and analyzed it. They spoke out in favor of it. But seldom did they become politically involved to promote its goals. There is one exception to the general pattern, however, in the person of William E. Blackstone, one of the most popular dispensational writers of his time.¹⁶²

By 1891, Blackstone the activist had obtained the signatures of 413 prominent Americans and sent this document to President Benjamin Harrison advocating the resettlement of persecuted Jews in Russia to a new homeland in what was then called Palestine.¹⁶³ Part of the petition read as follows:

Why not give Palestine back to them again? According to God's distribution of nation it is their home—an inalienable possession from which they were expelled by force. Under their cultivation it was a remarkably fruitful land, sustaining millions of Israelites, who industriously tilled its hillsides and valleys. They were agriculturists and producers as well as a nation of great commercial importance—the center of civilization and religion. . . .

We believe this is an appropriate time for all nations, and especially the Christian nations of Europe, to show kindness to Israel. A million of exiles, by their terrible suffering are piteously appealing to our sympathy, justice, and humanity. Let us now restore to them the land of which they were so cruelly despoiled by our Roman ancestors.¹⁶⁴

Ehle had the following to say about the signers:

Among the 413 signers listed by their cities—Chicago, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington—were the opinion makers of the day: the editors and/or publishers of the leading newspapers and religious periodicals (at least ninety-three newspapers in all), the mayors of Chicago, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, as well as other officials, leading churchmen and rabbis, outstanding businessmen, and in Washington, Speaker of the House of Representatives, T. B. Reed, Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Robert R. Hitt, and William McKinley, of Ohio, who later became president.¹⁶⁵

Even though it accomplished little politically, Blackstone's petition was said to have had a galvanizing impact upon Americans as a whole. The petition received widespread coverage in newspapers and generated a great amount of discussion and acceptance. It sparked great interest among the Jews as a whole.¹⁶⁶

Blackstone later made a similar appeal to President Woodrow Wilson, a Presbyterian minister's son who became a Christian Zionist, which influenced his acceptance of the Balfour Declaration of 1917.¹⁶⁷ It is not surprising that there is today a forest in Israel named the "Blackstone Forest" in his honor. Neither should it be surprising to learn that "William E. Blackstone, once dubbed the 'father of Zionism' for

his political activities on behalf of the Jews."¹⁶⁸ Like Hechler, Blackstone spent the rest of his life working for his beloved cause until his death in 1935. While he was thrilled with the developments of the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate after World War I, he basically died disappointed that Israel had not yet become a nation. However, that would indeed take place 13 years later.

HARRY TRUMAN AND RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL

President Harry S. Truman (1884–1972) grew up in Missouri in a devout Christian home. When Harry was born his parents were attended a Southern Baptist church which both sets of grandparents help establish in Grandview. "His father, John Anderson Truman was also a strong Baptist. Both his father and mother, Martha, raised him in the conventional Baptist tradition."¹⁶⁹ However, when Harry was six they moved to Independence and they attended the First Presbyterian church at Lexington and Pleasant every Sunday until Harry was 16. When Harry turned 18 and moved to Kansas City, he joined the Baptist church by baptism and remained a Southern Baptist the rest of his life. Truman said, "I'm a Baptist because I think that sect gives the common man the shortest and most direct approach to God."¹⁷⁰

While growing up, Truman read the Bible through twice by age 12 and two more times by the age of 14. "From Sunday School and his own reading of the Bible, he knew many Biblical passages by heart and could quote many Bible verses at random."¹⁷¹ Young Harry was an avid reader and remained so throughout his entire life. The Truman family owned a set of *Great Men and Famous Women*, edited by Charles Francis Horne. "According to Truman's daughter, Margaret, the book Truman preferred most after Horne's biographies was the Bible. There is even an indication that Truman considered entering the ministry for a time."¹⁷² Every indication reveals that Harry and his sister Mary were very active in the church throughout their late teens and early 20s.

What about Truman's Christian beliefs? "Truman had little interest in theological issues, although he had an almost fundamentalist reverence for the Bible."¹⁷³ Blending Truman's great interest in history and the Bible, he once stated the following about the United States:

Divine Providence has played a great part in our history. I have the feeling that God has created us and brought us to our present position of power and strength for some great purpose.

It is not given to us to know fully what that purpose is, but I think we may be sure of one thing, and that is that our country is intended to do all it can, in cooperating with other nations to help created peace and preserve peace in the world. It is given to defend the spiritual values—the moral code—against the vast forces of evil that seek to destroy them.¹⁷⁴

"While premillennial eschatology dominated the Southern Baptist denomination, the church into which Truman was born and to which he returned when he was eighteen," observes Saddington, "Truman never expressed his acceptance of premillennialism. It is even doubtful that he ever adequately understood it."¹⁷⁵ Truman's Christian focus was on the ethics of everyday living and tended to shy away from theological systems. Truman's Christian Zionism was a combination of his attraction to the people of the Bible (the Jews) that grew out of his familiarity of biblical details with humanitarian concern for a persecuted people. "The stories of the Bible," said Truman, "were to me stories about real people, and I felt I knew some of them

better than *actual* people I knew.”¹⁷⁶ His Christian Zionist beliefs were well developed and deeply rooted long before he became President of the United States. Presidential Counsel Clark Clifford described Truman’s

own reading of ancient history and the Bible made him a supporter of the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, even when others who were sympathetic to the plight of the Jews were talking of sending them to places like Brazil. He did not need to be convinced by Zionists. . . . All in all, he believed that the surviving Jews deserved some place that was historically their own. I remember him talking once about the problem of repatriating displaced persons. “Every one else who’s been dragged away from his country has someplace to get back to,” he said. “But the Jews have no place to go.”¹⁷⁷

Truman’s Christian Zionism came into play during two of the greatest decisions that he would have to make during his Presidency: First, how should the U. S. vote on the partition of Israel, which would result in the creation of the new Jewish state, during the United Nations vote in late November of 1947? Second, should the U. S. diplomatically recognize the newly formed nation when David Ben-Gurion declared the birth of Israel on May 14, 1948?

On both issues, virtually all of Truman’s personal advisors, the State Department and the military establishment were opposed to him. Saddington notes:

Truman’s most trusted foreign policy advisers, almost to a man, were dead-set against the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. The president faced the formidable front of General Marshall, Under Secretary of State Robert Lovett, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, Policy Planning Staff’s George Kennan, State Department Counsel Charles Bohlen, and Marshall’s successor as secretary, Dean Acheson. Loy Henderson, director of NEA, who arrived at the State Department just three days after FDR’s death, also opposed the Zionist aims. William Yale, also at the State Department, said that the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine would be “a major blunder in statesmanship.” When Secretary Forrestal reminded the president of the critical need for Saudi Arabian oil in the event of war, Truman said he would handle the situation in light of justice, not oil.¹⁷⁸

Truman dealt with both issues by applying his “the buck stops here” approach with tough, responsible decisions. “Truman instructed the American delegate at the U. N., Herschel Johnson, to announce U. S.’s endorsement of the UNSCOP partition plan on 11 October 1947.”¹⁷⁹ Then, seventeen minutes after David Ben-Gurion’s declaration of the new state of Israel, a cable was sent to Israel and a message went to the press from the White House announcing the following:

This government has been informed that a Jewish State has been proclaimed in Palestine, and recognition has been requested by the provisional government thereof.

The United States recognizes the provisional government as the *de facto* authority of the new State of Israel.¹⁸⁰

Clark Clifford said of President Truman's decisions to favor Israel the following observation:

As a student of the Bible, he believed in the historic justification for a Jewish homeland, and it was a conviction with him that the Balfour Declaration of 1917 constituted a solemn promise that fulfilled the age-old hope and dream of the Jewish people.¹⁸¹

After his presidency, his longtime Jewish friend Eddie Jacobson introduced Truman to a group of professors by saying, "This is the man who helped create the state of Israel," but Truman corrected him: "What do you mean 'helped to create'? I am Cyrus. I am Cyrus."¹⁸² Truman was comparing himself to Cyrus in the Old Testament who enabled the Jews to return to their land in the sixth century B.C. from their 70-year captivity. Perhaps his response indicates that Truman had indeed found the main reason as to why God's providence placed him into the Presidency at the time in which he arrived. In fact, many who have sifted through the data believe that had Franklin Roosevelt remained President, he would not have made the same decisions as those made by the cussing Baptist from Missouri.¹⁸³ It appears to my biblically informed, evangelical mind that God raised-up Harry S. Truman and put him in the White House for the purpose of providing a key human agent through whom He used, as He did Cyrus centuries ago, to restore Israel to her land.

CONCLUSION

God has greatly used many Gentile Christians during the last few hundred years that have prepared the way for Israel's return to their land. God will continue to use believers in the future who believe His prophecies about a national future for His people Israel. Yet, today there are a growing number of voices saying that we are dangerous, heretical, and our influence should be resisted.¹⁸⁴ "The danger isn't going away," declares Gershom Gorenberg. "Not as long as people think they know what God has to do next and where He has to do it, and are terribly impatient for Him to begin."¹⁸⁵ After suggesting elsewhere in his book that dispensational, Christian Zionists could set into motion a self-fulfilling prophecy,¹⁸⁶ Timothy Weber oddly concludes the opposite when he says:

Since the end of the Six-Day War, then, dispensationalists have increasingly moved from observers to participant-observers. They have acted consistently with their convictions about the coming last days in ways that make their prophecies appear to be self-fulfilling. It would be too easy—and completely unwarranted—to conclude that American prophecy believers are responsible for the mess the world is in, that their beliefs have produced the current quagmire in the Middle East. Given the history of the region, the long-standing ethnic and religious hatreds there, and the attempt of many nations, both Western and Arab, to carry out their own purposes in the Holy Land, it is easy to imagine the current impasse even if John Nelson Darby and his views had never existed.¹⁸⁷

With such a conclusion I have to ask, "Why the fear-mongering?"

As demonstrated in this essay, Christian Zionists have not always had it easy. Nevertheless, like those who have gone before us, we will stand on biblical conviction

as we constantly watch for the further outworking of God's historical plan, revolving around His people Israel and His any-moment return. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

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- ⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*: Book V, Chapter 30, Paragraph 4.
- ⁷ Carl F. Ehle, Jr., "Prolegomena to Christian Zionism in America: The Views of Increase Mather and William E. Blackstone Concerning the Doctrine of the Restoration of Israel," Ph.D. Dissertation at New York University, 1977, p. 31.
- ⁸ R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 35.
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- ¹³ Robert E. Lerner, "Millennialism," in John J. Collins, Bernard McGinn, and Stephen J. Stein, editors, *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, 3 Vols. (New York: Continuum, 2000), Vol. 2, p. 356.
- ¹⁴ Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 14.
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- ¹⁷ Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, p. 304.
- ¹⁸ Ehle, "Prolegomena," pp. 41–42.
- ¹⁹ Lerner, "Millennialism," p. 353.
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- ³⁰ See Douglas J. Culver, *Albion and Ariel: British Puritanism and the Birth of Political Zionism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), pp. 51–70.
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- ³² Tuchman, *Bible and Sword*, p. 122.
- ³³ Tuchman, *Bible and Sword*, p. 125.
- ³⁴ Culver, *Albion and Ariel*, p. 73.
- ³⁵ Culver, *Albion and Ariel*, p. 73.
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- ³⁷ Lawrence J. Epstein, *Zion’s Call: Christian Contributions to the Origins and Development of Israel* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), p. 7
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- ⁸⁴ Pragai, *Faith and Fulfillment*, p. 45.
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- ¹⁰⁹ Epstein, *Zion's Call*, p. 26.
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- ¹⁴³ Pragai, *Faith and Fulfillment*, p. 88.
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