



An Introduction to Christian Zionism: Understanding and Opposing Unjust Theology

from United Methodists for Kairos Response (UMKR)*

What do we believe?

First, these are some essential beliefs and values that underlie UMKR's approach to this subject.

We believe in a God who's essence is Love. (1 John 4: 8 and 16)

We believe that in God's eyes, all people are of sacred worth and equally deserving of God's love and justice and of our compassion and solidarity. As in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), every person is my neighbor, and we share responsibility for one another. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King expressed: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." [Letter from Birmingham Jail](#)

We believe that all people are entitled to enjoy the same human rights, and those rights must be upheld and defended universally, regardless of religion or race. No religious tenets or scriptures can supersede our universal human rights.

Opposing injustice and defending the oppressed are always the right thing to do. When we do that, we are not practicing bigotry or injustice, even if the oppressors we are exposing historically have been victims of injustice themselves. In other words, opposing the State of Israel's treatment of Palestinians is necessary, and it is not antisemitism.

Our work of defending human rights must never devolve into animosity toward the violators of those rights. As the Palestinian Christians teach us in the Kairos Palestine document, in speaking of economic activism for Palestinian liberation: "*We understand this to integrate the logic of peaceful resistance. These advocacy campaigns must be carried out with courage, openly sincerely proclaiming that their object is not revenge but rather to put an end to the existing evil, liberating both the*

perpetrators and the victims of injustice." They also ask the global church this crucial question: "Are you able to help us get our freedom back? For this is the only way you can help the two peoples attain justice, peace, security and love."

What is the problem?

Christian Zionism is a politically focused theology embraced by millions of Christians in the United States and around the world. It teaches unquestioning loyalty to and support for the State of Israel and condones the ethnic cleansing and oppression of the indigenous people of Palestine.

In the US, Christian Zionists comprise the largest portion of the Israel Lobby, a combination of organizations that advocate very effectively with leaders in the US government. As a powerful voting block with well-funded lobbyists, Christian Zionists exert a great deal of influence over the foreign policy of the US regarding Israel/Palestine, helping to perpetuate the violence and deepen the quagmire of injustice and suffering.

It is vital for Christians to understand the biblical and moral pitfalls of Christian Zionism, to be able to answer God's call to be justice-seekers and peacemakers and repair some of the harm being done in the name of Christianity.

What is Christian Zionism?

Christian Zionism teaches that the secular state of Israel is a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, and that fulfillment began when European Jews started moving to Palestine in the 1800's, continuing through the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. Christian Zionists believe that modern Israel is a continuation of ancient Israel in the Hebrew Scriptures and it is the responsibility of Christians to support the state of Israel in all its policies and practices.

Whose land is it?

Although the conflict in Palestine/Israel is often described as a religious war and a centuries old conflict, in fact it is a modern day phenomenon, dating from the late 1800s, and it has always been most of all about land.

In Ezekiel 36:22-24, 32, we read: "O, Israel...I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land." Christian Zionists believe that this and other promises made to Abraham and his descendants in the Hebrew Scriptures mean that God gave them the "promised land" in perpetuity. Christian Zionists' unquestioning support for the modern day State of Israel rests on that belief.

However, when we look at the context of these scriptures, we see that the promise of land is always dependent on the Israelites keeping the conditions of the they had with God. Justice is a key element for those will be occupying that land: "Justice and only justice you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you." (Deuteronomy 16:20)

The Israelites were not promised that they would keep or live on the land forever. On the contrary, in Deuteronomy 28:58, 63 we read: "If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God....Just as it pleased the Lord to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess." There are dozens of similar passages in the Hebrew Scriptures that make clear the land is held on condition of the Israelites obedience to God's laws and the teachings of God's prophets.

Regardless of how one interprets specific bible passages, there are some **essential lessons** to be gained from Judeo-Christian scripture. There is also a **contemporary perspective** that we must bring to our understanding of scripture.

The essential message of the Hebrew and Christian Testaments regarding land is that the earth is God's creation and belongs to God. Humans are part of God's creation, not the owners of it; we are caretakers or stewards on God's behalf. We should not allow land to become an object of idolatry or greed. Land is not an end in itself. Land for our communities is a blessing that allows us to fulfill God's will and establish a just and loving society. Land is not to be coveted, and its blessings are to be enjoyed in humility and gratitude, not with a belief in one's exceptionalism.

Regarding the idea of a "chosen people," Zionists and Christian Zionists put a lot of emphasis on the concept of the ancient Israelites being God's chosen people. The essential lesson we see throughout the Bible is that God's people are those who live by God's precepts and maintain a just and compassionate society as God commands throughout both testaments.

Our contemporary perspective on these issues is built on our understanding of democratic values and practices for a diverse community. We know that to function as a peaceful and humane world community, humanity requires shared values and laws that transcend any specific religion and that cannot be abrogated by any religion's book of scripture, no matter how certain some may be of the divine nature of that text. The people of the world cannot stand by and allow blatant injustice and

suffering to be perpetrated against any community because another people's scriptures tell them they have the right to commit those crimes.

The imperative of justice in the Bible: what does it look like?

Justice is one of most important and unavoidable subjects throughout the Hebrew and Christian Testaments. It is presented as a core attribute of God. Hundreds of verses call for humans to act justly, particularly by protecting the vulnerable and seeking fairness for all people.

"Doing justice" is at the heart of living a righteous life. Doing justice requires compassion, generosity of heart, and a respect for every human being, believing that all persons possess equal dignity and worth.

The Bible calls us to advocate for those who are oppressed, afflicted, and needing our help. "The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern." (Proverbs 29:7) Micah 6:8 tells us that "the Lord requires of you that you do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God." Isaiah says we should "learn to do good, seek justice, do good to the oppressed, plead for the fatherless, plead for the widows." (Isaiah 1:17) Psalm 82:2 asks: "How long will you judge unjustly, and be partial to the wicked? Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and the needy."

What does it mean for us to "pursue justice" or "do justice"? In Zechariah, we read, "Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another."

Lest we think these commandments were only meant to apply to and benefit Jewish Israelites, dozens of biblical passages command ancient Israel to care for and treat as equals all others who share the land with them. Leviticus 19:34 reads: "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God." Ezekiel tells us, speaking of the land: "You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel." (Ezekiel 47:22)

Followers of Jesus Christ will want to remember his announcement of his ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and

recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4: 18-19)

In the Christian Testament, we see everywhere the message of God's universal love and we learn the two great commandments that are also in the Hebrew Scriptures, the second being to love our neighbor as ourself. Jesus teaches in the Parable of the Good Samaritan that we are not to think of our neighbors as just those who live next to us or think like us or pray like us. Our neighbors are those who need our help and compassion, and that would be all human beings.

We also learn throughout the Bible that God's justice is restorative, bringing healing and reparation to victims of injustice.

What is happening in Palestine/Israel today?

Over 70 years after the horrors of ethnic cleansing that Palestinians faced when the State of Israel was created in their homeland by military force, today Palestinians continue to suffer great injustice in their daily lives.

Israel's illegal military occupation of the West Bank, which has continued since 1967, has caused the demolition of tens of thousands of homes, widespread destruction of agriculture, and massive confiscation of Palestinian lands for illegal colonization of the Palestinian people's only remaining land. Communities are denied freedom of movement by hundreds of checkpoints and the illegal Separation wall, making any semblance of a normal life impossible. Palestinian children grow up in fear of military detention and imprisonment. Palestinians are subjected to extreme water deprivation, while the illegal settlers living nearby have abundant water supplies. Armed Israeli settlers attack and terrorize their Palestinian neighbors on a daily basis. Thousands of additional homes are built each year as these illegal colonies expand and the entire villages are destroyed as the ethnic cleansing of Palestine continues.

Throughout the occupied territories and within its own borders also, Israel has established a brutal apartheid regime, according to the world's and Israel's major human rights organizations. Palestinian citizens within Israel live as second class citizens, with over 60 laws that codify their inequality, including the Nation-State law, also known as the Apartheid Law. Palestinians comprise 20% or more of Israel's citizens and are subjected to increasing violence and bigotry throughout the country since the onset of the current war.

Now the people of Gaza are undergoing one of the most horrific examples of genocidal warfare the world has seen, with the ample assistance of the United States and other world powers and the ineffectual efforts of others to oppose it.

Christian Zionists, who populate such organizations as CUFI (Christians United for Israel) in the millions, have considerable influence in the U.S. government, and they fully endorse Israel's current policies and aggressions. They encourage Congress and the White House to continue arming Israel's military assaults and daily brutal oppression of Palestinians throughout the region.

***Acknowledgement**

UMKR thanks United Methodists in the Iowa Annual Conference for their permission to material from the report they prepared for their conference:

https://www.iaumc.org/files/fileslibrary/communications_lizwinders/*2023/ac2023/ac2023+report+2022+opposition+to+unjust+theology+regarding+the+holy+land.pdf

Questions for discussion:

Some parts of Christian Zionist theology, in diluted forms, exist in most Christian denominations and in the minds and hearts of many Christians.

Reflect on your own exposure to these ideas:

- Have you heard modern day Israel compared to the ancient Israelites of the Hebrew Testament?
- Have you heard that Christians should always support Israel? Perhaps that thought is accompanied by the partial quote of a verse from Genesis chapter 3: "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse."
- What other ideas about the modern state of Israel have you grown up with or heard in church circles?

Discuss the difference between the modern State of Israel and the ancient Israelites.

- How aware are you of the theme of justice in the Bible? What verses come to mind? How important a subject was it for the prophets of the Hebrew Testament? How important is it for God's people today?

Questions in the resource listed in our Recommended Resources: "Understanding the Promised Land in the Bible" –

- Does faithfulness to God imply the oppression of another?
- Does God favor and extend promises to a particular people? If so, who exists on the other/underside of that promise?
- "In what ways do Bible stories invite us to think creatively about borders and land?"
- How might we begin to shape a Christian ethic or theology that extends *beyond* borders?

What then shall we do? Next steps for United Methodists

For yourself

- See the resources below to learn more on this subject.
- See our website Education section to learn about Palestine/Israel and the crucial justices issues that United Methodists need to know.
<https://www.kairosresponse.org/education.html>

- Subscribe to UMKR news and action to be connected to the church-wide movement:
https://umkr.salsalabs.org/umkr_subscribe/index.html

In your congregation

- Consider how you can begin helping your church community learn what is happening today in Palestine/Israel, the recent history of the region, and about the problems with Christian Zionism.
 - See this article by UMKR organizer Pat Minor, "Bringing the truth about Palestine into my church community:" **[will be on the website]**
 - See the resource in our Recommended Resources about starting a conversation on Christian Zionism at your church.
 - Use this document from UMKR and the resources below as a basis for study and discussion in a group at your church about Christian Zionism.
 - For a more general discussion about Palestine/Israel, see Recommended books on our website: https://www.kairosresponse.org/education_books.html
There are many books by Palestinian Christians and others that would be excellent for a church discussion group.
- If you would like a bulletin insert, a flyer or another resource for your congregation, on basic subjects about Palestine/Israel or for a specific class or book discussion at your church, contact us at UMKR. We probably can provide that for you.

In your conference

- Find out if there is a social justice committee or task force focused specifically on Palestine/Israel or including that in their work. Get in touch and support their efforts. If there isn't one in your conference, consider forming one yourself. Get in touch with UMKR to discuss that: info@kairosresponse.org
- Submit a resolution to your annual conference and organize for its adoption. See UMKR's resolution "Opposition to Unjust Theology Regarding the Holy Land"

Read and download it on this page:

https://www.kairosresponse.org/resolutions_2023.html

See also UMKR's guidelines for bringing a resolution to annual conference:

[\[find what we wrote for organizing webinar a couple of years ago\]](#)

There are other campaigns you can support and many ideas for action at our website:

https://www.kairosresponse.org/take_action_home.html

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

UMKR resolution on Christian Zionism: "Opposition to Unjust Theology Regarding the Holy Land" https://www.kairosresponse.org/resolutions_2023.html

The Kairos Palestine Document and study materials

https://www.kairosresponse.org/kairos_palestine-1.html

WEBSITE: www.christianzionism.org

Who Owns the Holy Land:

<https://www.christianzionism.org/faq-who-owns-holy-land>

Who are God's "chosen people" today?

<https://www.christianzionism.org/faq-who-chosen-today>

Does God bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse Israel?

<https://www.christianzionism.org/faq-blessing-cursing>

The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism

<https://hcef.org/1694-the-jerusalem-declaration-on-christian-zionism/>

BOOK: Christ in the Rubble: Faith, the Bible, and the Genocide in Gaza

by Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac

<https://www.eerdmans.com/9780802885548/christ-in-the-rubble/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Christ-Rubble-Faith-Bible-Genocide/dp/0802885543>

Munther Isaac's sermon in December 2023, "Christ in the Rubble: A Liturgy of Lament"

https://www.kairosresponse.org/advent_christmas_sermons.html

WEBINAR: Munther Isaac: Confronting Christian Zionism and Empowering Advocates for Palestinian Liberation

<https://www.fosna.org/videos/v/zjznj9yl6kz9ad2tmw6fjcn6cwp4c3?rq=Christian%20Zionism>

Overcoming Christian Zionism in the Quest for Justice

by Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek

PDF file from FOSNA, \$1

<https://www.fosna.org/fosnabookstore/p/overcoming-christian-zionism-in-the-quest-for-justice-by-rev-dr-naim-ateek-pdf>

BOOK: Challenging Christian Zionism: Theology, Politics, and the Israel-Palestine Conflict

Edited by Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis, and Maurine Tobin

<https://www.amazon.com/Challenging-Christian-Zionism-Theology-Israel-Palestine/dp/1901764427>

An Ethical Critique of Christian Zionism

by Rev. Munib Younan

<https://learn.elca.org/jle/an-ethical-critique-of-christian-zionism/>

Understanding the Promised Land of the Bible

by Jennifer Maidrand

<https://christiansforsocialaction.org/resource/understanding-the-promised-land-of-the-bible/>

About this author

<https://www.unitedseminary.edu/faculty/jennifer-maidrand/>

Confronting Christian Zionism: Statement from Justice in Palestine and Israel Community, Alliance of Baptists

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/10WSdqYXkRd0RNH7Qwl13bjLTycxpKoEX/view>

Factsheet on Christian Zionism

Religion Media Centre

(Basic informational resource that does neither promotes nor opposes Christian Zionism)

<https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/factsheet-christian-zionism/>

BOOK: Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

With glossary, study guide, and guidelines for respectful discussion

By Walter Brueggemann

<https://www.amazon.com/Chosen-Reading-Bible-Israeli-Palestinian-Conflict/dp/066426154X>

Teach-In Tool for a Conversation about Christian Zionism at Church

(Link found at FOSNA website)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1i4Y4qFvf0ohZ1jhL726Kj-Xh5fyWZrQQuFGIleURLSU/edit?tab=t.o>

FOSNA's Guide to Difficult Conversations about Christian Zionism

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/605b9c30759b851bb093a7b1/t/673bcab18f6bb9019284dc2b/1731971764594/FOSNAs+Guide+to+Difficult+Conversations+about+Christian+Zionism+%284%29.pdf>

FILMS

These are full-length documentaries. The first provides a powerful grounding in the current situation in Palestine/Israel, the second brings us a valuable focus on the Christians of Palestine their history and their struggle, and the third is about Christian Zionism.

The Law and the Prophets (1 hr, 54 min)

The trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xEU5bqM8dE>

The film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_kF35lgF4o

The Stones Cry Out: The Story of Palestinian Christians (55 min)

The film's website: <http://www.thestonescryoutmovie.com/>

Available to watch for a small fee on Amazon Prime and Apple TV

With God on Our Side (1 hr, 21 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NahTjAsDThs&t=1s>