

Countering the Critics of Christian Zionism

Exploring the main theological viewpoints regarding Israel

It is highly probable that the current terrible war between Israel and Hamas will have caused some Christians to look afresh at their basic attitude towards Israel. There are a number of main differing viewpoints. Let's consider them in turn.

Some regard Israel and the Jewish people as irrelevant to God's purposes (believing that the Church has replaced the Jewish people in God's eyes).

This is commonly termed '*Replacement Theology*'. Though a few significant Bible passages are used to support this argument (Rom 2:28-29; 9:6; Gal 3:16, etc), I believe this view is contrary to Paul's clear teaching in Romans 11:

*"I ask then: did God reject his people? By no means! ... Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved ... as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for **God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.**" (Rom 11: 1, 11, 25-26, 29).*

Paul is clear that we must accept that God has not given up on the Jewish people spiritually. There will be a massive turning to Messiah and we should be praying earnestly for it. I am convinced God has a vital purpose for the Jewish people. They are to be recognised as distinct from Gentile believers, but united with the Gentile Church.

Then there are those Christians who accept Paul's teaching in Romans 11 that God has not given up on the Jewish people but they do not necessarily accept that the land of Israel has any remaining relevance to God's purposes.

They believe that the re-establishment of Israel in 1948 is simply a political 'coincidence'. One example is the well-known American Pastor, John Piper, who says that he does not believe God has rejected ethnic Israel. Hence, he paraphrases Paul as saying in Romans 11:1 "*God has not rejected ethnic Israel because I am an ethnic Israelite, of the tribe of Benjamin.*" But elsewhere Piper says "*a non-covenant-keeping people does not have a divine right to hold the land of promise which was given by covenant.*" So, Piper rejects the idea that the land of Israel still belongs unconditionally to the Jewish people (Ex 19:5; [Dan 9:4-7](#); [Ps 78:54-61](#)), but he accepts that the Jewish people still have an important place in God's future purposes.

I believe this contradicts the overall teaching in both the Old Testament and the New Testament:

*"The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring **forever**" (Gen 13:14-15).*

God confirmed this by bringing Israel back to the land after the exile and the prophets foretold Israel's place as a nation in the End Times. For example, Zechariah prophesies an End Time international attack on Israel which is followed by the return of Jesus to the Mt of Olives (Zech 12:1-3; 14:1-2, 4). Jesus confirmed this when he foretold the second exile (AD 70) and the ultimate restitution of the land to Israel in 1948. He says of the Jewish people "*They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*" (Lk 21:24).

It seems beyond belief to me that the re-establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 by the UN doesn't relate to this prophecy. So, I believe the Jewish people have a right to the land because of God's covenant promises.

Then there are those who go overboard in supporting Israel (extreme Christian Zionists).

I have come across a lot of them over the years, including in my time ministering in Jerusalem. Such people are obsessed by Israel. Israel becomes the be-all and the end-all of eschatological discernment. Israel can do no wrong. I've come across groups of Gentiles who want to become Jewish, including Gentile men getting circumcised and learning to speak Hebrew.

One of the devil's favourite strategies is that if he can't stop us accepting a truth, he encourages us to become extreme about that truth. And that extremism can cause unnecessary division by rejecting other born-again believers who don't accept it. We need to avoid this. There's a biblical necessity to divide over primary issues – credal doctrines and basic morality. But a great many eschatological issues, while highly significant, are not primary.

If we go overboard about Israel, we fail the Jewish people in our prayers. We can become like false prophets by implying all is well with Jewish people and Israel. Israel is far from perfect. 45% of Jewish people in Israel are 'secular' i.e. unbelievers. And many of the remaining 55% of religious Jews are antagonistic towards Christianity. A top priority is to pray for Israelis to turn to Yeshua Ha Mashiach, Jesus, the Messiah. Without trust in Him, no man can be saved (Acts 4:12, 16:31, etc)

We also need to ask the question: How does the Lord view Israel's present military strategy? False prophets in the Old Testament told Jewish people that God would protect them whatever they did, because they were his covenant people. Instead, he sent them into exile.

A fourth view is that Christians need to show love, and, where needful, tough love towards Israel

After all, that's what God does. He is sometimes stern in his love. He has brought judgment on the Jewish people in the past, often through other nations, to encourage repentance. Obviously, showing tough love to Israel is a very sensitive area because of the centuries of Christian antisemitism. But we are being unloving if we avoid constructive criticism and praying accordingly.

Indeed, this should be our approach to the Israel-Gaza war. I support Israel defending itself against Hamas, and realise that it is a very complicated operation in terms of its military strategy. As we all know – though few in the media seem willing to admit – Hamas deliberately uses innocent civilians from Gaza to protect itself and to create bad PR for Israel when they are killed. But, although I am no expert on military matters, it seems to me that Israel has sometimes adopted a strategy which is the 'greater of two evils', with respect to the innocent civilians in Gaza.

I know Hamas can use aid trucks to smuggle arms and supplies to Gaza. That is an outrage. But the blocking of much necessary aid and provisions for innocent Gazans seems to be a greater vice – a terrible evil.

Israel was able to be very precise over killing a very senior Hamas official with a drone strike in Beirut. Surely, they can be similarly precise over attacking other Hamas operatives in Gaza, thus preventing at least a substantial number of innocent Gazans (including children and babies) being killed. Israel keeps saying it is following the international rules on war, including protecting civilians. But huge numbers are being killed.

Praying continually

The situation in Gaza is terrible and we must pray in depth for the suffering, innocent Gazan people. We need to pray against Hamas, which is an evil organisation. We need to pray for those Gazans who support Hamas (most of them indoctrinated from an early age) to change their views.

We also need to see that there is a huge, long-term threat to Israel, not just from Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran, but from a growing number of countries around the world. The war in Gaza is causing an enormous growth in antisemitism and antagonism towards Israel. We need to pray in depth for suffering Israelis, for the hostages, for the Israel Defence Force, for responsible and morally correct military strategies, for protection for the Jewish people and for Israel as a nation. And not least, for Jewish people to turn to Messiah.

We need to pray for God's protection and healing for Israelis during this war. But we also need to pray that Israel will facilitate as much aid as possible reaching the Gazan people. We need to pray that Israel will become far more effective in protecting Gazan civilians and not choose greater rather than lesser evil in its strategy.

God loves Israel. But he also loves the Gazan people. We should, too. We need to pray that Israel will not continue this war too long because of the suffering in Gaza and the huge dangers, antagonism and antisemitism Israel is facing and will face in the future.

Endnote

For other short arguments challenging Christian Zionism, [click here](#).