

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM AND THE PULPIT: RECLAIMING BIBLICAL LANGUAGE IN A
POLITICIZED CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Christian Zionism has developed into a widespread theological and political movement within American Evangelicalism, shaping how many Christians interpret biblical language about Israel, the land, and God's covenant people. Christian Zionism's literal-futurist hermeneutic asserts that Old Testament promises concerning the descendants of Abraham remain unfulfilled. This belief forms a foundation for the support of the modern State of Israel. As a result, Christian Zionism has influenced American Christianity by contributing to interpretive confusion, denying Christ's fulfillment of the Old Testament, and re-orienting Christian hope toward political activity and contemporary geopolitical events rather than Christ's completed work.

This thesis traces the historical development and doctrinal claims of Christian Zionism, evaluates its hermeneutical method from a confessional Lutheran perspective, and demonstrates the theological dangers that arise from it. Recognizing that many modern hearers bring Christian-Zionist assumptions with them into the pew, this study argues that pastors must intentionally clarify biblical language in preaching and teaching. The concluding section offers practical pastoral strategies for addressing Christian Zionism, examines available resources, and proposes concrete methods for reclaiming biblical terminology, guarding congregations from theological confusion, and preserving the clarity of the gospel within today's politicized context.¹

1. Abstract formulated with the assistance of generative AI.

INTRODUCTION

Few topics in modern America generate as much passionate interest as the State of Israel. This Middle East infatuation is nothing new, and it isn't stopping anytime soon. Americans have been nationally concerned about the affairs of the State of Israel since its inception in 1948, "when President Harry Truman became the first world leader to recognize the Jewish state, moments after its creation."² Americans on both sides of the political aisle today still keep close tabs on the situation in Israel and Palestine.³ Nonstop news coverage, political rhetoric, and popular Evangelical teaching have all shaped the public's imagination and perspective. By the time church members sit down to read their Bibles or listen to a sermon, terms like *Israel*, *Jerusalem*, and *Jews* may bring to mind their modern-day counterparts rather than the biblical referents to which they properly point. Because of this confusion, a significant gap can exist between what the preacher intends to say and what the hearer believes is being said.

Underlying much of this communicative disconnect is the widespread influence of Christian Zionism. The Christian Zionist movement seeks to support the modern State of Israel as the direct fulfillment of biblical prophecy and the harbinger of the end times. The most

2. Zachary B. Wolf, "75 Years of US Support for Israel, Briefly Explained," News, *CNN Politics*, 11 October 2023.

3. A 2025 Pew Research Center poll found that 73% of U.S. adults expressed a definite opinion on U.S. policy toward the conflict. Only 27% said they were unsure. Ted Van Green, Steven Shepard, Andy Cerda, Gabriel Borelli, and Jocelyn Kiley, "How Americans View the Israel-Hamas Conflict 2 Years Into the War," *Pew Research Center*, 3 October 2025.

common form of Christian Zionism is tied to premillennialism.⁴ However, not all Christian Zionists embrace the full breadth of dispensationalist eschatology. The broad theological approach of Christian Zionism has an ecumenical undertone that appeals to members of many different denominations.⁵ Vocal politicians focused on foreign policy are eager to capitalize on the variety of perspectives within the Christian camp and draw party lines around the claim that true Bible-believing Christians must support Israel politically.⁶

So, what is the result of the Christian Zionism's influence? It boils down to a grassroots movement of Christians caught up in a political crusade built on faulty theology and fueled by a confusion of terminology and definitions. As a result, biblical terms that carry redemptive significance are transformed into vehicles for political action rather than sources of comfort for souls. When speaking with people who view the Bible through a Christian Zionist lens, pastors may find that their message is misinterpreted, even in confessional Lutheran churches where a dispensational hermeneutic is not taught.

Many faithful pastors are hesitant to speak of politics in the pulpit and have rightly been taught against doing so.⁷ Using the pulpit as a soapbox for "today's issues" rather than pointing

4. John M. Brenner, "American Lutheran Views on Eschatology and How They Related to the American Protestants," paper presented at the Bethany Reformation Lectures, Mankato, 1999, 2, WLS Essay File.

5. Chris Mitchell, "Christian Zionists Counter 'Heresy' Charge, Point to Scriptures Outlining God's Covenant with Jews, Land of Israel," *Christian Broadcasters Network*, 21 November 2025.

6. Speaker of the House Mike Johnson said in a speech in 2024, "I'm going to state something that you all know – at this critical moment, the United States must show unwavering strength and support for Israel...We have to make certain that the entire world understands that Israel is not alone and God is going to bless the nation that blesses Israel," Johnson said. "We understand that that's our role. It's also our biblical admonition. This is something that's an article of faith for us. It also happens to be great foreign policy." Elizabeth Elkind, "Speaker Johnson Says It's U.S.'s 'Biblical Admonition' to Help Israel," *Fox News*, April 15, 2024.

7. The classic homiletics textbook for WELS pastors advises that the preacher avoid politics in the pulpit except in rare circumstances. "Finally, preachers who understand their role as ambassadors for Christ will restrict themselves to subjects Scripture certifies for pulpit proclamation. Their sermons will serve the salvation of souls the Savior shed his blood to redeem ... Nor is the pulpit a forum for economic, social, or political matters except when

to Christ is a gross misuse of the sermon. On the other hand, faithful pastors may unknowingly preach a political message by neglecting to address the subject that politicians and popular preachers are trumpeting. It is not enough to refute Christian Zionism in scholarly commentaries and dogmatics texts. The members of our congregations must hear what the Bible has to say about the topic from the lips of their pastor. Even if laypeople believe and understand biblical eschatology, they may become confused when they hear their pastor using the same words and phrases as the Zionist preacher down the street. This communicative disconnect raises an urgent pastoral question: How can pastors speak clearly about biblical Israel when the hearer's understanding is deeply shaped by modern political interpretations of that very term? This challenge is not only an academic concern; it is evangelical and pastoral as well. If a hearer gives modern political meanings to biblical terminology, the message of Christ may be obscured. Thus, the clarity of the gospel itself is at stake.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it aims to describe and evaluate Christian Zionism by broadly tracing its theological claims and cultural influence. While Christian Zionism is not typically associated with Lutheran theology, its reach is extensive enough that American pastors must understand its details to preach effectively within their cultural context. Second, this paper seeks to equip pastors to communicate biblical language with clarity, particularly in preaching and teaching, by evaluating the existing Lutheran resources that address Christian Zionism and suggesting some new ones. Because biblical words can be used with

scriptural principles are involved and God's people are being misled ... But to offer a treatment of such and similar subjects as standard pulpit fare does an injustice both to God's Word and to God's people. Ambassadors for Christ have something more important to offer as regular fare to the people of God." Joel Gerlach and Richard D. Balge, *Preach the Gospel: A Textbook for Homiletics* (Northwestern, 1982), 3.

different definitions, contexts, and connotations, the pastor must be prepared to define terms in ways that are faithful to the text and resistant to misinterpretation.

It is not the goal of this paper to advocate for or against the modern State of Israel, or to encourage other Christians to do the same. Simply put, the author wishes to warn against the dangers of misusing Scripture to support political agendas, and to encourage pastors to intentionally address the theological claims of Christian Zionism

TRACING THE HISTORY AND CLAIMS OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

The history of Christian Zionism is a tangled web of religious and political influences. Its complexity requires the definition of a few key terms before narrowing the focus. One frequent source of confusion is the blending of the political and religious aspects of Zionism. For the sake of this paper, I will distinguish between the purely political “Zionism” and the religion-based “Christian Zionism”. Zionism is a sociopolitical movement that is largely beyond the scope of this paper. Many academic resources are available that analyze political Zionism from every angle. Besides a short section explaining political Zionism, this paper will focus Christian Zionism—specifically the theological influences of which a pastor should be aware and to which he is uniquely equipped to respond.

A Brief History of Political Zionism

Zionism, also called restorationism, was originally a movement for the establishment of a new Jewish homeland in Palestine. The success of the modern State of Israel is the product and ongoing objective of this movement.⁸ Zionism has no founder, but most scholars recognize Theodor Herzl, an Austrian journalist, as the driving force and figurehead who brought it to the

8. Britannica Editors, “Zionism | Definition, History, Movement, & Ideology | Britannica,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*; Jane Adas, John Mahoney, and Robert Norberg, *Burning Issues: Understanding and Misunderstanding the Middle East, a 40-Year Chronicle* (Americans for Middle East Understanding, 2007), 17; Donald M. Lewis, *A Short History of Christian Zionism: From the Reformation to the Twenty-First Century* (IVP Academic, 2021), 2.

attention of European leaders in 1896.⁹ Interestingly, many early Zionists, Herzl included, did not have a specific location in mind for their proposed Jewish nation.¹⁰ They only wanted their own state where antisemitism would not be an issue.¹¹ In 1917, the British Government voiced official support for the settlement of ethnically Jewish people in the region of Palestine located within the crumbling Ottoman Empire. They did this in the form of the Balfour Declaration.¹² Though Zionist Jewish colonies had been founded as early as 1882, the migration of people began to increase in the 1920s as Jewish settlers bought land from absentee Arab landowners and founded small colonies with the goal of expanding.¹³

Having been given control over the region by the League of Nations in 1920, the British Government put limits on Jewish immigration and property ownership in the White Paper of 1939. In spite of these restrictions, Jewish immigrants would not be denied residency and resorted to illegal immigration. The movement grew in popularity especially during WWII and the Holocaust due to the rising pressure faced by ethnic Jews. In 1947, the UN took formal

9. Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 84–135.

10. “Initially Herzl, who was personally indifferent to religion, had not thought of Palestine as the new state of the Jews. First he considered Argentina; then the Sinai Peninsula and al-Arish; then he asked the British for Cyprus; then asked Portugal for a piece of Mozambique; then asked the Belgians for the Congo; then asked the king of Italy for Tripolitania— only to be rebuffed by the King with the simple reminder that Tripolitania ‘is the home of others!’ Finally the British offered him Uganda. When he proposed this to the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1903, 295 delegates voted in favor, 177 against. The rejectionists wanted Palestine, which, at the time, was part of the Ottoman Empire. Herzl sided with the rejectionists.” Adas, Mahoney, and Norberg, *Burning Issues*, 18.

11. Herzl said, “The Governments of all countries scourged by antisemitism will be keenly interested in assisting us to obtain the sovereignty we want.” Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?*, Rev. ed. (Lion, 1989), 41.

12. The Balfour Declaration was delivered via letter from James Balfour to Lord Rothschild. It reads 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 endeavours 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.” Carl Hermann Voss, *The Palestine Problem Today; Israel and Its Neighbors*, Second Edition. (Beacon, 1954), 10.

13. Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?*, 44–49.

control of the Palestinian region from Britain and adopted the Partition Plan for Palestine which sought an independent Arab State, an independent Jewish State, and the City of Jerusalem to be internationally governed as a separate entity. The Partition Plan was only a recommendation, however, and the region spiraled quickly into civil war as various groups struggled for control of territory. When British administrative control of the region expired on May 14, 1948, a Jewish state under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion was announced and immediately recognized by US President Truman.¹⁴ It would be a mistake to assume that the founding of the State of Israel was an event of religious significance for the Jewish people. From Herzl to David Ben-Gurion, the movement was founded in the ethnic, cultural, and historic pride of the Jewish people without an appeal to religious Judaism.¹⁵ Today, Zionist supporters still utilize political talking points rather than theological arguments.¹⁶

14. Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 586.

15. “It is important to realize that Israel’s secular founders envisioned Israel as a secular state and a secularizing state. As Shalom Goldman has observed, ‘Political Zionism was founded and led by secular Jews, and ... Israel’s ruling elites are to this day secular.’ Israel’s founders wanted a home for Jews, not a homeland for Judaism. As Stanislawski comments, ‘Ben-Gurion and his minions were tied to a view of Jewish history based on the experience of the Jews in Europe, an expectation that once Jews were exposed to ‘modernity,’ they would undergo a fundamental transformation: First, they would shed their antiquated religious views and practices in favor of a new, secular worldview and style of life.’ Thus the 1948 Declaration of Independence made no mention of Israel as the divinely promised land for the Jews, although it closes with the words ‘With trust in Almighty God...’ The founders hoped the Israeli army and the government school system would work together to ensure that religious Jews coming to Israel would become like themselves—*Haskalah* Jews (or Enlightenment-oriented Jews.)” Lewis, *A Short History of Christian Zionism*, 14.

16. Wolf, “75 Years of US Support for Israel, Briefly Explained”; Jake Wallis Simons, “Israel Is Proving It Is Still the Only Democracy in the Middle East,” *The Telegraph*, 29 March 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/03/29/israel-proving-still-democracy-middle-east/>; Robert Jimison, “Israel’s Strikes on Iran Divide Congress, Drawing Praise and Concern,” *The New York Times*, 13 June 2025, § World.

Christian Zionism Contrasted With Political Zionism

What makes Christian Zionism distinct from Zionism is its basis for supporting the State of Israel. While some may prefer a broader definition, Donald Lewis's definition is perhaps most useful. He says, "I define Christian Zionism across time as a Christian movement which holds to the belief that the Jewish people have a biblically mandated claim to their ancient homeland in the Middle East."¹⁷ I prefer this definition because it clearly delineates between those who support the nation of Israel on the basis of Scripture and those who support the nation of Israel for other reasons. This distinction is crucial—Christians who support Israel for political reasons are not Christian Zionists. They are Christians who are also Zionists. A Christian Zionist is someone who believes the modern State of Israel is the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and that Jews have a divinely established right to the land as God's "chosen people."

It is important to be clear on this distinction because the misuse of Scripture is the cause for pastoral concern, not necessarily the political stance itself. Christian Zionism has been largely taken up by Christians who hold to a dispensational eschatology. However, other Christians who are not dispensationalists may also call themselves Christian Zionists due to their restorationist beliefs.¹⁸ "Classical" Christian Zionism is certainly dispensationalist, but the "New" Christian Zionism tends to be postmillennial or amillennial. Leaders within Christian Zionist organizations are quick to brush over these doctrinal differences because they do not want to discourage anyone from joining their cause. Troy Miller, the president of the National Religious Broadcasters organization, makes his appeal this way.

17. Lewis, *A Short History of Christian Zionism*, 3.

18. Gerald McDermott seems to be leading the charge among Christian Zionists who are not Dispensationalists. There are a growing number of Reformed Christians who support Christian Zionism without subscribing to all of the doctrinal conclusions. Gerald R. McDermott, ed., *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel & the Land* (IVP Academic, 2016).

I'm a proud Christian Zionist because I believe that the Jewish people have a homeland; this homeland is called Israel. It was promised to them by God. The Old Testament is full of those promises that are specific about the land and the ethnic Jewish people. And as a Christian, I believe they have the right to govern in their own homeland. That's what Christian Zion is about. And I think every Christian should be clearly able to embrace that.¹⁹

By arguing in such broad terms, Miller avoids the divisive topic of eschatology and attempts to unite all Christians under the same banner. Miller's message leaves no room for opposition. If you are a Christian who believes the Bible, you must support Christian Zionism. Otherwise, you are not actually a Christian at all. This is the most prominent message of Christian Zionism, and what sets it apart from political Zionism.

The Theological Claims of Christian Zionism

Other authors have thoroughly covered this area of study recently, and I refer the reader to their excellent work.²⁰ The exact doctrinal positions of Christian Zionism are difficult to pin down because of the ecumenical nature of the movement. Underlying each doctrinal conclusion is a distinct hermeneutic that ties even conflicting views within Christian Zionism together with a common thread. "Christian Zionism is constructed upon a novel hermeneutic in which all Scripture is interpreted in an ultra-literal sense; the prophetic parts of Scripture are seen as pre-

19. Chris Mitchell, "Christian Zionists Counter 'Heresy' Charge, Point to Scriptures Outlining God's Covenant with Jews, Land of Israel," *Christian Broadcasters Network*, 21 November 2025.

20. Joseph Neuberger's thesis paper, *American Heresy: Christian Zionism and the Christian Response* focuses on the scriptural defense against Christian Zionism. Stephen Sizer's work, *Christian Zionism: Road-Map to Armageddon?* is a thorough treatment as well.

written history; and eschatology fulfilled in the interpreter's generation."²¹ This hermeneutic has been coined "literal futurist" or "ultra-literalist."

Within the literal futurist hermeneutic, words must have one exact meaning throughout the entirety of Scripture. There is no flexibility given for different usages within genres or contexts; instead, "Jerusalem is always Jerusalem, Israel is always Israel, Zion is always Zion.... Prophecies may never be spiritualised, but are always literal."²² The literalistic interpretation of terms goes hand in hand with the idea that Old Testament promises have no endpoint. They are perpetual in nature. There is no progressive revelation of prophecies or continued unfolding and revealing of God's plan. There is no fulfillment or completion of promises, instead they continue on, pile up and overlap.

There is no reason why new promises must override old ones. The prophets do not assume this. They expanded the promised inheritance of God's people beyond the definable boundaries of Canaan to include the whole world, but they nevertheless retained their expectation that Israel would return to the land of Palestine... In other words, with the prophets we find new promises made for the messiah and his worldwide reign, but these new promises do not overrule the earlier promises of a particular land for a particular people.²³

From this perspective, the Old Testament prophecies and promises about the land of Israel, Jerusalem, the law and covenants, etc., are still very much in effect and at work in modern Israel, modern Jerusalem, and the modern Jewish religion. By this hermeneutic, there is no such thing

21. Stephen R Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-Map to Armageddon?*, Repr. (Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 108.

22. C.I. Scofield, Scofield Bible Correspondence Course, (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, n.d.), pp 45–46. Quoted in Sizer, *Roadmap to Armageddon*, 145.

23. Gerald R. McDermott, *Israel Matters: Why Christians Must Think Differently about the People and the Land* (Brazos, 2017), 52–53.

as ultimate fulfillment of the law in Christ. Instead, Jesus becomes the ultimate Jew who promised a future earthly kingdom for Israel.²⁴

Viewing Scripture through the literal futurist lens yields three main arguments for the Christian Zionist. I'll call them the land claim, the covenant people claim, and the restoration claim. I will provide an overview of the scriptural basis of each claim and a response.

The Land Claim – Beginning with Genesis 12

The main claim Christian Zionists make, and the common thread that unites many different branches of the ideology, is that the land of Canaan has been given to Abraham and his descendants forever. In the words of pastor John Hagee, “God, the Owner of all, gave Israel exclusively and eternally to the Jewish people. This is not up for negotiation. It is not based on political trends or media narratives. It’s written in the Word of God, confirmed through prophecy, and sealed in blood covenant.”²⁵ It is common to hear Christian Zionists argue that God has given the Jewish people the “title” to the land. By this logic, even though they did not always possess the land they remain the rightful owners for all time.²⁶

What are Christians to make of this claim? A concise response from Scripture is readily available. In Gen 12:1–3, God called Abraham and promised to bless him and others through him. In Gen 15, God did indeed promise the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants. In

24. “Jesus intended to renew Israel’s national covenant, not found a new religion. He wanted to restore the twelve tribes, which would bring the kingdom of God in and through Israel since salvation was to come through the Jews.” McDermott, *Israel Matters*, 56–68.

25. John Hagee, *Who Owns the Land of Israel?*, Personal Address, <https://www.jhm.org/Pastor-Johns-Weekly-Videos/2025-05-19-Who-Owns-the-Land-of-Israel> (Hagee Ministries, n.d.).

26. McDermott, *Israel Matters*, 51.

later chapters of Genesis, the promise is repeated, further expounded upon, and distinct borders are laid out. The fulfillment of this promise comes after the Israelites finally conquered the land under the leadership of Joshua.

So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the Lord gave all their enemies into their hands. Not one of all the Lord's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled (Josh 21:43–45 NIV).

Besides the clear fulfillment of the promise in Joshua, one should also note the usage of עולם in Gen 17:8. עולם “does not need to mean ‘forever and ever,’ but often refers to a period of unbounded time.”²⁷ The purpose of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants was to use them as his instrument to usher in the Savior of the human race, and thus “all peoples will be blessed by [Abraham and his descendants]” (Gen 12:3). When that purpose was completed, God's covenant promises to them reached completion as well.²⁸

The Covenant People Claim – Romans 11

The designation as God's chosen people is clearly applied to the descendants of Abraham in the Old Testament. But does that title still apply to the Jewish people today? Christian Zionists, influenced by the literal futurist hermeneutic, say yes. They view God's covenant with Israel as a separate and special plan of salvation. It is entirely distinct from God's plan for Gentiles.²⁹ “The

27. Joseph Neuberger, “American Heresy: Christian Zionism and the Scriptural Response” Senior Thesis, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 2023), 22, WLS Essay File.

28. Carl J. Lawrenz, “Reflections Concerning Israel, the Restored Homeland of the Jews” (Milwaukee, 1970), 9, WLS Essay File.

29. Hagee posits that the purpose of Jesus' first coming was to be Savior of the world, and that his second coming will be as ‘Reigning Messiah of Israel’. “He refused to be their reigning Messiah, choosing instead to be the Savior of the World... Jesus rejected to the last detail the role of the Messiah; Jesus rejected the Jewish desire for

dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity.”³⁰ Because the Jewish people are God’s chosen people by blood, they take part in a distinct covenant that names them as special people who have a different plan of salvation than everyone else.³¹

Building on the foundation of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis, Christian Zionists connect the promises given to Abraham’s descendants with Paul’s message in Rom 11. “Did God reject his people? By no means! ... In this way all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:1, 26). Because words must have one definition regardless of context within their hermeneutic, Christian Zionists mark the modern-day State of Israel as the ‘nation’ promised to Abraham in Gen 12 and the ‘Israel’ Paul is talking about.³² Because God has not rejected his people, God’s plan is for a miraculous Jewish conversion in the end times apart from God’s regular means.³³

Him to be their reigning Messiah.” John Hagee, “Final Dawn over Jerusalem,” in *Beginning of the End; Final Dawn over Jerusalem; Day of Deception* (Thomas Nelson, 2000), 97.

30. Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, quoted by Stephen R Sizer, “The Bible and Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon?,” *Transformation* 27.2 (2010): 125.

31. McDermott, *Israel Matters*, 132.

32. The most outspoken modern-day Christian Zionist, Pastor John Hagee, is unabashed in his proclamation. “In 1948 Israel was reborn, and the seed of Abraham returned to the promised land to become one of the world’s most dynamic nations. Replaced? Never. Revived? Yes!” Hagee, “Final Dawn over Jerusalem,” 109; McDermott, *Israel Matters*, 128.

33. Across the spectrum of Christian Zionism, there is agreement that there will be a final conversion of a number of Jews by miraculous means. “Ezekiel predicts that the great Russian invading force will have a supernatural element to it which will cause great numbers of Jews to see the hand of the Lord in it. Through the miraculous sign of the destruction of this enemy who sought to destroy all Jews they come to see the name of their true God and Messiah, Jesus Christ. ... Zechariah predicts that one-third of the Jews alive during this period will be converted to Christ and miraculously preserved.” Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Seventy-sixth printing. (Zondervan, 1980), 156; McDermott, *Israel Matters*, 132–33.

The problem with this understanding is that Paul has just redefined Israel throughout the two chapters prior. He says, “It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children” (Rom 9:6–7). And “whom he prepared in advance for glory—even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea: ‘I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people; and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one’” (Rom 9:23–25). Finally, “For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Rom 10:12–13). Paul repeatedly hammers home the idea that the Israel of which he speaks is not just the descendants of Abraham.

In context, Paul is clearly making the case that the full number of the elect will be saved by faith—regardless of their original status under the old covenant of flesh. God has not rejected his covenant people because the elect within the descendants of Abraham have been and will be saved by faith. Old Testament believers were saved by faith in the promise of the coming Messiah. New Testament believers are saved by faith in the promise of the Messiah who has come. United in Christ, the “chosen covenant people” are those whom God has called children of God by faith in his Son.

The Restoration Claim

The third foundational claim of Christian Zionists is that the promises of restoration given to the exiled remnant of Judah are incomplete and were not fulfilled in the return under Zerubbabel,

Ezra, and Nehemiah.³⁴ C. I. Scofield, writer of the Scofield Reference Bible, is credited with popularizing a “third restoration” under two justifications; “first, that Israel had never taken all the land promised to Abraham, and secondly, that not all the Messianic promises had been fulfilled during the first advent.”³⁵ This third restoration is the beginning of the end times in the Christian Zionist hermeneutic. This ultimately explains the excitement and fervor with which Christian Zionists support the State of Israel. In Hal Lindsey’s famous work, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, he collects prophecies made by various dispensationalist “prophets” and lays out three events that must happen for Christ to return and usher in his earthly 1,000-year reign. “First, the Jewish nation would be reborn in the land of Palestine. Secondly, the Jews would repossess old Jerusalem and the sacred sites. Thirdly, they would rebuild their ancient temple of worship upon its historic site.”³⁶

There is an easy response to the claims that the Bible prophesies a third restoration of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland. Each proof text that dispensationalists cite for this point is “fully satisfied by the fulfillment which they experienced through Israel’s return from the Babylonian Captivity and by its preservation as a nation until the Savior came forth from its midst.”³⁷ There is no mention of a third return of the nation of Israel anywhere in Scripture. A plethora of passages speak about the end times, but a restored nation of Israel residing in Jerusalem with full temple sacrifice is not found among them.³⁸

34. Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 157.

35. Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 154.

36. Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 40.

37. Lawrenz, “Reflections Concerning Israel,” 6.

38. “What shall we then say concerning the phenomenon of this State of Israel as a re-established homeland for the Jews? On the basis of the passages examined, we will have to say: The establishment of Israel is

Christian Zionists trip upon the same interpretive stumbling block that the Pharisees once did. They seek an earthly kingdom of God wherein the fulfillment of prophecy is glorious and powerful by human standards. Many scholars have correctly labeled this a theology of glory. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:20–21). The kingdom of God is not an earthly one, but one where Jesus rules in the hearts of believers by faith.

not based on a special revealed promise or prophecy of God. We must also say: It is not the beginning of the fulfillment of a universal conversion of Jews before the final end, for there is no such prophecy.” Lawrenz, “Reflections Concerning Israel,” 9.

THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

By all statistical accounts, the literal futurist hermeneutic and its accompanying Christian Zionist worldview have had profound effects on American Christianity. In 2005, a Pew Research survey found that “34% of Americans and 63% of white Evangelicals agreed that Israel fulfills biblical prophecy about Jesus’ second coming.”³⁹ A 2016 study by the Pew Research Center found that “42% of the general public and 82% of white Evangelical Protestants agree that Israel was given to the Jewish people by God.”⁴⁰ A survey of 1,000 Evangelicals in 2021 found that 84% of the respondents “supported the notion that the State of Israel is connected to the idea of the Second Coming of Jesus.”⁴¹ The statistics begin to give us a picture of the extent Christian Zionism has

39. Joseph Liu, “American Evangelicals and Israel” (Pew Research Center, 15 April 2005).

40. Michael Lipka, “More White Evangelicals than American Jews Say God Gave Israel to the Jewish People” (Pew Research Center, 3 October 2013).

41. The administrators of this survey which was published in the journal, *Politics and Religion*, asked the Evangelical group many interesting questions about their support of Israel. “As the responses indicate, there is an overwhelming support for the notion that the State of Israel is connected to the idea of the Second Coming of Jesus (83.94%). These data support the literature that emphasizes eschatology as a major motivation of Evangelicals when it comes to Israel. Since pre-millennial dispensation theology expects that Jews would build a Temple for God prior to the events of the Second Coming and eventually convert to Christianity, we also asked respondents to respond to these statements. The results show that Evangelicals are almost evenly divided over these statements. Only about a half of the respondents express support for the statement that ‘building of the Temple is an event that needs to take place in the near future.’ The uncertainty of the respondents regarding the question of the conversion of Jews at the Second Coming, with only about half expressing positive support, is also important to note.

Biblical narrative relates to a covenant made between God and Abraham, thus offering him and his offspring eternal blessings and turning them into chosen people. Since certain Christian readings argue that Jews lost their election by rejecting Jesus as their Messiah, we asked in the survey: ‘Do you believe God’s covenant with the Jewish people is eternal?’ The results show strong support – 72.8% indicated that ‘yes, the covenant remains,’ 5.6% said that ‘no, the covenant has ended,’ 2.7% said that ‘God never had a covenant with the Jews,’ and 18.9% responded with ‘don’t know.’ Similarly, the statement: ‘I support Israel because Jews are God’s chosen people’ generated high levels of agreement – 84% responding in favor (taking into account ‘somewhat agree,’ ‘agree,’ and ‘strongly agree’ responses). We can thus conclude that the majority of Evangelicals do, indeed, reject supersession theology.

influenced the worldview of the average American Christian. In contrast, only 47% of American religious Jews agreed that “Israel was given to the Jewish people by God.”⁴²

The statistical evidence confirms that Christian Zionism is a formidable movement in American Christianity. It is highly probable that people sitting in Lutheran pews have been exposed to and influenced by Christian Zionism as well.

The Appeal of Christian Zionism

One way to understand the appeal of Christian Zionism—and the ultra-literal futurist hermeneutic from which it flows—is to see it as a reaction against the secularizing and theological allegorizing of the 20th century. As liberal theologians began to posit critical theories like Documentary Hypothesis, a figurative six-day creation, and Theistic Evolution, fundamentalist Christians responded by doubling down on a literalistic hermeneutic that took Scripture at its word to a fault. Because Christian Zionism was promoted by the likes of Moody, Scofield, Graham, and Falwell, it spread throughout the spectrum of American Christianity alongside Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism.⁴³ Christian Zionists use the same strategy as Fundamentalism and the Evangelical movement by positioning themselves as the polar opposite

Since the majority of Evangelicals see the Bible as the literal word of God, they express high levels of support to several statements that, although Biblical, have contemporary ramifications. Among them are that Jews are God’s chosen people (84%), and that God made promises to Jews, such as giving the Land of Israel to the Jewish people (90.6%) and making Jerusalem Israel’s capital (62%). According to literal reading, God also promises to bless Gentiles if they would stand by Abraham and his offspring (87.7%).” Motti Inbari, Kirill M. Bumin, and M. Gordon Byrd, “Why Do Evangelicals Support Israel?,” *Politics and Religion* 14.1 (2021): 1–36.

42. Lipka, “More White Evangelicals than American Jews Say God Gave Israel to the Jewish People.”

43. George Marsden, “What Has Become of American Fundamentalism?,” *Modern Reformation*, February 2022.

to theological liberalism.⁴⁴ Christian Zionists commonly characterize their own position as the clear, simple, and biblical interpretation while simultaneously labeling anyone who disagrees with them as unbiblical or even unchristian.⁴⁵ The new Christian who has become convinced of the historicity and veracity of God's Word can easily be swept away by a theology and movement which touts itself as the only Bible-believing option.

Another reason Christian Zionism appeals to the American believer is due to the sinful nature's inclination toward enthusiasm. Enthusiasts strive to feel and see the presence and power of God in their immediate lives outside of God's promised means (Word and Sacrament).⁴⁶

44. "One proponent defined dispensational theology by noting that they "believe what the Bible literally teaches" while their opponents allow for allegorical or spiritual interpretations by which you "can invent any kind of 'interpretation' you want." Mark Hitchcock and Thomas Ice, *The Truth Behind Left Behind: A Biblical View of the End Times* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2004), 163, 67. Quoted by Kaitlyn Schiess, *The Ballot and the Bible: How Scripture Has Been Used and Abused in American Politics and Where We Go from Here*, 1st ed. (Brazos, 2023), 113.

45. "Lindsey begins the book by stacking the deck for his position with confidence: while people might go to lots of places to find truth, in this book, he says, 'let's give God a chance to present His views.' These are not Lindsey's views, apparently, but God's. Lindsey uses this rhetorical tactic throughout: he doesn't present his views as one interpretation of the Bible among other valid options, but he describes his position as God's. Early in the book, he argues that people misunderstood Jesus's mission on earth and the messianic prophecies he fulfilled because people 'didn't bother to do any investigation for themselves.' He draws on what now sound like conspiracy theory tactics: casting doubt on the wisdom of "experts" and encouraging people to "do their own research." He makes repeated reference to "religious leaders" in the Bible who led people astray and religious leaders in the present who "dilute" what God has to say. He also highlights biblical references that say people will be deceived and teach falsehood in the last days. It is an effective rhetorical strategy: now your critics are not just wrong, but their opposition proves the justice of your cause because they are confirming biblical prophecy." Schiess, *The Ballot and the Bible*, 111.

46. "[5] This is all the old devil and old snake, who also turned Adam and Eve into enthusiasts and led them from the external Word of God to "spirituality" and their own presumption—although he even accomplished this by means of other, external words. [6] In the same way, our enthusiasts also condemn the external Word, and yet they themselves do not keep silent. Instead, they fill the world with their chattering and scribbling—as if the Spirit could not come through the Scriptures or the spoken word of the apostles, but the Spirit must come through their own writings and words. Why do they not abstain from their preaching and writing until the Spirit himself comes into the people apart from and in advance of their writings? After all, they boast that the Spirit has come into them without the preaching of the Scriptures. There is no time here to debate these matters more extensively. We have dealt with them sufficiently elsewhere... [9] In short: enthusiasm clings to Adam and his children from the beginning to the end of the world—fed and spread among them as poison by the old dragon. It is the source, power, and might of all the heresies, even that of the papacy and Mohammed.¹⁵¹ [10] Therefore we should and must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament. Everything that boasts of being from the Spirit apart from such a Word and sacrament is of the devil." Luther,

Christian Zionism strives to prove the power and glory of God as he works throughout history—acting in power as he fulfills prophecy and keeps promises even today.⁴⁷ Throughout the history of the movement, countless prophetic messages have been revealed, dates have been set, and final warnings given, only for God’s plan to march on. The imminence of Christian Zionists’ end-times prophecy lends a sense of urgency to their calls for renewed support and activism.

It is interesting to note the attitude of personal responsibility within Christian Zionism. On the one hand, they are zealous in their profession of God’s ongoing activity within his creation.⁴⁸ On the other hand, some of their arguments suggest that God’s plan will not occur unless Christians make it happen— as if God needs our help to enact his will here on earth. ‘We have a role to play, and our support of Israel can hasten the day of Christ’s return.’⁴⁹ This attitude does show a pious zeal for what they perceive to be God’s will. However, they end up speaking where God has not spoken and giving approval to morally questionable actions in God’s name. Lawrenz cautions against this approach: “God has not bidden man to offer himself as God’s ready instrument in carrying out His curse. God will carry it out in His own way and choose His own instruments, employing even the wickedness of men to do so.”⁵⁰

“Smalcald Articles,” in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand (Fortress, 2005), 322–23.

47. “The Word of God says it is God’s will for Jerusalem to be under the exclusive control of the Jewish people until Messiah comes... That’s not my viewpoint, that’s God’s opinion! God doesn’t care what the United Nations thinks.” Pastor John Hagee quoted by Ibrahim Abraham and Roland Boer, “‘God Doesn’t Care’: The Contradictions of Christian Zionism,” *Religion & Theology* 16.1–2 (2009): 9.

48. “God is a God of miracles today, just as he was in biblical times. He continues to work out the gradual redemption of the world.” McDermott, *Israel Matters*, 126.

49. President Harry Truman famously said, “I am Cyrus.” He was comparing his role in the establishment of the State of Israel to Cyrus II of Persia who allowed the remnant to return. Abraham and Boer, “‘God Doesn’t Care,’” 93.

50. Lawrenz, “Reflections Concerning Israel,” 9.

Cultural Reversal: Politics Informing Religion

Christians become influenced by Christian Zionism through the media and politics. In the early days of the Christian Zionist movement, politicians and policy makers were encouraged by religious leaders to put their dispensational beliefs into action by supporting a Jewish state. In the 21st century, the roles have somewhat reversed. Today, the politicians encourage their constituents to buy into Zionism because it's 'the Christian thing to do.'⁵¹ Using Scripture to garner support for a political movement is dangerous at best and deceptive or manipulative at worst. This practice, known colloquially as 'textjacking,' takes a section of Scripture and hijacks it for purposes which are not faithful to the original context.⁵² The misuse of Scripture comes from both parties, though Democratic representatives have distanced themselves from Christian Zionism in recent years.⁵³

51. "I am also thankful for the eternal promises of God, the miracle of the modern State of Israel and the sacred bond that unites us with the Jewish people. With antisemitism on the rise, it is important for Christians to stand up, speak out and resist any effort to divide us from our support of Israel... We are one family, united by faith and bound together by God's unbreakable promises... The Abrahamic covenant is eternal, alive and active, guiding the course of history and shaping the destiny of nations, including our own... We know this covenant lives on because God has proven it with His miracles... As Americans, we share a unique and sacred bond with Israel. Our nation was founded on biblical principles, and our story is intertwined with the story of God's chosen people. For Christians, supporting Israel is not just a political stance, it is a spiritual calling." Heather Johnston, "Why Christians Must Stand with Israel and the Jewish People amid Surging Antisemitism," *Fox News* (Fox News, 24 November 2025), § Opinion; Elkind, "Speaker Johnson Says It's U.S.'s 'Biblical Admonition' to Help Israel."

52. John Blake, "As the 2024 Campaign Heats up, Be Wary of Politicians Who 'Textjack' the Bible," *CNN*, 3 October 2023.

53. Republican Jim Inhofe perfectly represented Christian Zionism when he said, "I believe very strongly that we ought to support Israel; that it has a right to the land, This is the most important reason: Because God said so ... look it up in the book of Genesis... That is God talking. The Bible says that Abram removed his tent and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar before the Lord. Hebron is in the West Bank. It is at this place where God appeared to Abram and said, 'I am giving you this land,' the West Bank. This is not a political battle at all. It is a contest over whether or not the word of God is true."

Democrat Nancy Pelosi before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in May 2005: "As Israel continues to take risks for peace, she will have no friend more steadfast than the United States. In the words of Isaiah, we will make ourselves to Israel 'as hiding places from the winds and shelters from the tempests; as rivers of water in dry places; as shadows of a great rock in a weary land.' The United States will stand with Israel now and forever. Now and forever." Quoted in Abraham and Boer, "'God Doesn't Care,'" 97–98.

The State of Israel is aware of the strong Evangelical support base it has within the United States and utilizes it to their advantage. On American soil, lobbying groups wield considerable influence within the political sphere.⁵⁴ In 2025, Israel ran a multi-million-dollar advertising campaign that specifically targeted U.S. churches and colleges with political messages, hoping to drum up more support from Evangelical Christians.⁵⁵ In the Middle East, Israel welcomes tour groups and offers tailored trips and services to Christian visitors—complete with Christian messaging.⁵⁶ At the same time they combine the aforementioned Christian messaging with distinctive Zionist undertones. “It is the policy of the Israeli government to ensure all tourists and pilgrims visit the three key sites of Yad Vashem, the Wailing Wall and Masada in order to perpetuate a favourable image of Israel, stifle criticism and reinforce their claim to the land.”⁵⁷

There is nothing wrong with the Israeli government leveraging Christian tourism for their economic benefit or with Christians making use of tourism opportunities. However, Christians should be aware of the ulterior motives that may underlie the appeals various groups make to

54. In 2024, AIPAC, the largest pro-Israel lobbying group, supported 361 Republican and Democratic candidates with over \$53 million dollars. “[AIPAC Home Page](#),” *AIPAC Political Action Committee*, n.d.:

55. Justin Lum, “How This \$3.2 Million Israeli Campaign Will Digitally Target Arizona Christians with Anti-Palestinian Ads,” *FOX 10* (FOX 10 Phoenix, 23 October 2025), § Investigation.

56. “This geopiety relating to the ‘Holy Land’ also shows up with the ‘Pilgrim’s Maps’ which are produced by the Israel Ministry of Tourism. These maps are targeted at Christian tourists. Featuring John 10:14’s ‘I am the good shepherd’ on the cover, it features maps of Jesus’ ministry and ancient sites mentioned in the Bible.” But what is most significant about the Pilgrim’s Map is the way it presents the contemporary geopolitical situation. The map does not distinguish between Israeli territory and occupied Palestinian territory. No distinction is made between Israeli ‘cities, towns, or settlements,’ which are given equal status. The basic idea is to present the geopolitical facts as so banal as to not register in the minds of largely American tourists, or rather, pilgrims.” Abraham and Boer, “‘God Doesn’t Care,’” 96.

57. Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 217.

them. All Christians should be on guard against those who seek to use the Bible as a tool for political pandering, no matter the source.

The Doctrinal Dangers of Christian Zionism

Christian Zionism is a political position cloaked in biblical language, but it's also a theology that brings with it a dangerous doctrinal framework. Because its ultra-literal futurist hermeneutic melds ancient Israel and the modern State of Israel, the theological consequences of its influence extend far beyond foreign policy. When its claims are embraced, explicitly or implicitly, the results are not neutral. Christian Zionism affects how Christians understand the Bible's central message, the person and work of Christ, and their future hope. For pastors, these issues are the heart of their concern.

Denial of Christ's Complete Fulfillment

A significant theological consequence of Christian Zionism is its rejection of Christ's fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The New Testament consistently presents Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant and the cornerstone of God's promises to Israel and the world. Christian Zionism, however, considers many major Old Testament prophecies unfulfilled. This approach creates a two-track reading of Scripture: one for the New Testament Church and another for ethnic Israel. If the promises to Israel remain unfulfilled in Christ, then Christ's completed sacrificial work cannot be the telos of the Old Testament. The Christian Zionist hermeneutic undermines the unity and coherence of Scripture and opposes many New Testament interpretations of Old Testament prophecies.

Drawing Attention Away from Christ

The most important reason Christian Zionism is dangerous is that it ultimately draws the focus away from Jesus. Christian Zionists consistently spend valuable time and energy emphasizing ethnicity, land, and prophetic visions, and they encourage their followers to do the same. A quick perusal of the sermons by popular Christian Zionist preachers—as well as pastors serving ordinary local churches—reveals that the vast majority of their messages focus on arguments about Israel and the end times. When Jesus is mentioned, it is often in service to a separate point that has little to do with his saving work. Worse yet, Christian Zionist pastors nullify his saving work and leave it incomplete. “If God intended Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel, why didn’t He authorize Jesus to use supernatural signs to prove He was God’s Anointed One? ... Jesus refused to give a sign... Jesus rejected to the last detail the role of the Messiah in word or deed.”⁵⁸ In contrast to Pastor Hagee and other Christian Zionists, the Bible proclaims Jesus’ work as complete (John 19:30), Jesus as the only mediator (1 Tim 2:5), and the one way of salvation (John 14:6). Christian Zionism detracts from Christ and diminishes his work by robbing God of his glory and limiting his atonement.

Robbing Believers of Gospel Comfort

Finally, Christian Zionism robs believers of the comfort God wants to deliver to his people. Christian Zionism prioritizes end-times events that require human political action and frames them in urgent, emotional terms. This eschatological scheme teaches believers to look for signs in the Middle East for proof of God’s promises rather than to his Word and Sacrament.

58. Hagee, “Final Dawn over Jerusalem,” 102–7.

Consequently, when political events do not unfold as ‘prophesied’ by Christian Zionist pastors, confusion or disillusionment follows. Such misplaced hope derails the believer’s spiritual life. It creates uncertainty about God’s timetable, anxiety over events outside one’s control, and confusion over what God has actually promised. The Bible grounds believers’ ultimate hope in Christ’s completed work and heavenly reign from the right hand of the Father rather than in geopolitical events.

Christian Zionism’s messaging is not neutral or harmless. It leaches into the larger theological framework of believers and reshapes fulfillment, salvation, and eschatology in ways that obscure the gospel and draw attention away from Christ. For these reasons, pastors cannot dismiss Christian Zionism as merely a political issue. Its theological consequences affect how people hear sermons, interpret Scripture, and understand their place in God’s saving plan. Addressing these false teachings is therefore a vital act of pastoral care— guarding the flock from confusion and keeping Christ at the center of proclamation.

COMMUNICATING WITH CLARITY: PASTORAL RESOURCES AND STRATEGIES

Christian Zionism's claims and influence would be concerning enough if they remained only in the realm of academics or politics. But its claims impact Christians and affect the faith and spiritual security of real people. The assumptions, vocabulary, and hermeneutic of Christian Zionism have become embedded in the minds of many American Christians due to its pervasive nature and political influence. As previously mentioned, the statistics show the surprising extent of Christian Zionism's creep into the worldview of American Christianity. The prevalence of Christian Zionism demands a pastoral response: shepherds of Christ's flock must not only preach the truth of Scripture but do it in such a way that anticipates and addresses the misunderstandings their hearers carry with them. Due to its massive influence on American Christianity, Christian Zionism has quietly shaped the public's assumptions about prophecy, the relationship between Israel and the Church, and the meaning of biblical terminology. The result is that confessional Lutheran pastors today preach in a significantly different context than their Lutheran forefathers. Scripture—it's doctrine, and vocabulary—has not changed. But for many listeners, the colloquial meanings attached to that vocabulary have shifted.

The Need for Pastoral Clarity

Pastors may hesitate to address Christian Zionism directly. Some pastors may fear that speaking about Israel or Zionism from the pulpit runs the risk of politicizing the sermon and bringing secular issues into the sanctuary. Others may feel that because Christian Zionism has not

historically been an issue in the Lutheran church it can be safely ignored. Still others may assume that their congregation already understands the biblical meaning of terms such as *Israel*, *Jerusalem*, or *chosen people*, and therefore no further explanation is required. These concerns are understandable and may be valid in some contexts, but one should not overlook the fundamental purpose of the sermon—preaching the gospel *to someone*. Preaching is not a one-sided affair; the message must be received by the hearer. Good communication involves proactively seeking to be understood and intentionally seeking to not be misunderstood. Because pastors preach to people, they must share the gospel message clearly within the context of their local congregation.

Consider how a sermon or Bible study on the Ten Lepers in Luke 17 would be incomplete without explicitly explaining what a ‘leper’ is, the significance of their confinement to the ‘leper colony,’ and why they needed to show themselves to the priest. It is vital that hearers know the context, both historical and cultural, of that account to understand the message. Similarly, Jesus’ metaphor of a yoke in Matthew 11:28–30 may be nonsensical when spoken to an audience with no background in animal-based farm labor.⁵⁹ Pastors are tasked not only with speaking what Scripture says but communicating in such a way that their hearers actually understand God’s message for them.

Communicating clearly is not a new or groundbreaking tactic by any stretch of the imagination. Any seasoned pastor or teacher knows first-hand the importance of using clear and simple language to communicate their message. The craft of a good teacher is the ability to communicate difficult or foreign concepts in clear and simple terms. For that reason, preaching

59. After preaching on Matthew 11:28–30, the writer of this paper received this feedback from a lifelong Lutheran who attended parochial schools: “I never knew that Jesus was talking about the yoke an animal uses to pull a plow. I always thought he was referencing over-easy egg yolks!”

and teaching have been described as bridge building.⁶⁰ Preaching and teaching are the means by which a person proclaims the vital truths of God’s Word to another party—crossing the divide between Scripture and people today. There is translation involved, both from the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek, and from biblical terminology to concepts modern hearers can grasp.

A striking biblical example of sermon bridge building is found in Nehemiah 8. Ezra the priest was in front of the remnant who had returned to Jerusalem from Persia, and he was standing on a wooden stage reading from the Book of the Law. As Ezra read, men from the tribe of Levi taught the people the concepts he was reading about. “They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read” (Neh 8:8).

In a similar way, pastors are called to make the message of Scripture clear. This responsibility becomes especially urgent when cultural or political narratives like Christian Zionism have hijacked biblical terminology and redefined it. Many members arrive at worship already influenced by voices that attach theological significance to the modern State of Israel or interpret current events as the fulfillment of ancient prophecy. If pastors remain silent, these unchallenged assumptions can shape how hearers interpret even the most ordinary biblical terms. The pastor may be preaching a biblical and Christ-centered message, but his message can be lost in translation as the listeners supply their own definitions to the pastor’s words.

For this reason, pastoral clarity is not optional. Clear preaching and teaching protect the central message of Scripture by removing misunderstandings before they obscure the message of

60. Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* (Baker Academic, 2017); John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Eerdmans, 2017).

Christ crucified. Pastors safeguard the gospel when they distinguish between biblical Israel and the modern nation-state bearing the same name. Pastors guard their flock from theological confusion when they explain how Old Testament covenantal promises find fulfillment in Christ rather than in contemporary geopolitical events. Finally, pastors help believers navigate predatory cultural influences by equipping them with a biblical framework that withstands misleading ‘textjacking’ of Bible verses by media personalities.

The best antidote to confusion is proactive, clear, and consistent biblical teaching. Pastors who clearly define terms, explain textual context, and call out the false doctrine of Christian Zionism do not politicize the pulpit. Instead, they reclaim biblical language from competing narratives and refocus it on its proper purpose: proclaiming the saving work of Jesus.

Navigating Shifting Semantics

As previously stated, one of the central challenges pastors face when preaching and teaching about Israel is that some biblical vocabulary has undergone significant semantic shift in the minds of modern hearers. Words are never neutral. Regardless of the speaker’s intent, words carry different meanings with them which are largely dependent upon the hearer.

A Lutheran pastor preaching in a Lutheran church knows exactly what he means when he uses words like *Israel*, *Jew*, *Chosen People*, or *Jerusalem*. Because he is steeped in biblical study, he categorizes those words within a specific historical and biblical semantic domain. Even if he hears those words outside of church, his first thought is likely that they refer to their biblical counterparts. Similarly, the seasoned member will be able to understand the pastor’s usage of these terms in a sermon without issue because he or she knows the biblical definitions. However, for the less biblically educated or the new member, terms like *Israel*, *Jew*, *Chosen People*, or

Jerusalem reside in a modern political semantic domain, and the hearer may assume that the pastor is referring to the modern State of Israel. In this situation, the hearer simply doesn't have the means to place those terms within the correct biblical domain the pastor intends. This problem is compounded when the hearer has been influenced by Christian Zionism.

For example, *Israel* can mean many different things, depending on the context.

- The patriarch Jacob (Gen 32:28, Rom 9:6)
- The twelve tribes (Judg 11:17, Rom 11:7, Hos 11:1)
- The northern ten tribes (2 Sam 2:10, Heb 8:8)
- The southern two tribes (2 Chron 21:2)
- Laity or non-Levites (Neh 11:3)
- The faithful remnant who returned from exile (Ezra 3:11)
- Jesus Christ (Isa 49:3, Hos 11:1)
- The Jewish remnant in the NT era (Isa 49:6, Matt 10:6, Acts 13:16)
- The people of God defined by faith in Christ (Gal 6:16, Romans 9:6)
- The modern-day State of Israel

Due to the many definitions for the term 'Israel' the hearer would greatly benefit from deliberate contextualization of the word. If the pastor does not inform the hearer what he means by 'Israel' in some way, there will likely be a disconnect in his communication.

Whether lack of biblical knowledge or the influence of Christian Zionism has caused the disconnect, pastors can proactively address the problem. To counter this issue, one can either use a qualifier before the term or give the definition of the term immediately after its use. This proactive strategy stops the conflation of terms in its tracks and gives the hearer clarity.

Rev. Dr. Reed Lessing of the LCMS suggests that because Christian Zionists understand the terms *Israelite*, *Hebrew*, *Jew*, and *Israeli* to be synonymous, we should limit the usage of those terms to specific use cases and definitions.

- *Israelite*: An Old Testament believer in Yahweh (the LORD), the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- *Hebrew*: Used by Israelites in the Old Testament to identify themselves to non-Israelites.
- *Jew*: This term indicates an ethnicity and/or an adherent to Judaism (which is not the Christ-centered faith of the Old Testament).
- *Israeli*: A citizen of the 1948 State of Israel, which is not the same as the Israel of the Old Testament. Modern-day Israelis are sometimes called “secular” Jews.⁶¹

The definitions Lessing proposes are interesting to consider. He cautions against referring to believers from Abraham’s line as ‘Jews’ because of modern adherents of rabbinic Judaism who reject Jesus. His caution is fitting considering the difference between modern Judaism and Judaism at the time of Christ. However, it would not be wise to insist on Lessing’s suggestion as the only correct way to use the words *Israelite*, *Hebrew*, or *Jew*. Jesus can be called a ‘Jew’, though it would be wise to explain what that term means biblically. It would be improper to refer to Jesus as a “Palestinian.” Not only was Jesus not ethnically Palestinian, but the region where he lived was named ‘Judea’ by the Roman Empire until the early second century AD. The region was renamed ‘Palestine’ after that.

Another tactic for clarifying terminology in preaching and teaching is to ask questions. Questions are both effective and easily implemented. Questions can be used within the flow of a

61. These bullet points are quoted verbatim from Lessing’s brief. Reed Lessing, “A Bible Study Companion to A Lutheran Response to the ‘Left Behind’ Series” (LCMS, May 2006).

sermon as a rhetorical question, or in a Bible study as a content question. Here are some simple examples.

- When the writer speaks of *Israel* in this passage, what do they mean?
- Is this text referring to the twelve tribes of Israel, the faithful remnant, or the whole people of God in Christ?
- How is *Jerusalem* being used here, as the historical city, a symbol of God's presence, or the heavenly city of God?

By asking questions, the pastor signals to listeners and participants that there are different definitions at play which are important for their understanding. The practice also models proper contextual exegesis that can guide hearers in their personal Bible studies and devotions.

Many pastors already make careful distinctions with a variety of biblical terms and concepts in their teaching. For example, when preaching about the atoning work of Jesus, Lutheran pastors are careful to explain that Jesus paid for the world's sins on the cross and not just the sins of the elect. Because the pastor is aware of the Calvinist error of limited atonement, he makes a point of explaining exactly what Jesus' atonement accomplished. Likewise, because Christian Zionism has exerted considerable influence in American Christianity, we should make similar careful distinctions for the sake of our listeners when using *Israel*, *promised land*, *chosen people*, *Zion*, *Jerusalem*, *Jew* and other words commonly used by Christian Zionists. Remember that Christian Zionism insists on a one-to-one equivalence between biblical terms and their modern counterparts regardless of the context. If pastors do not directly address this semantic shift, they may unintentionally reinforce it.

Ultimately, the goal is not to avoid using biblical words that could have Zionist connotations, nor is it to robotically define every word every single time. Rather, the goal is to help God's people hear biblical terms in their proper biblical context and reclaim those words

from the arsenal of false doctrine. By carefully defining terms according to their intended meaning, pastors restore them to their proper function—pointing to Christ.

Existing Resources for Addressing Christian Zionism Practically

While the theological issues surrounding Christian Zionism have received increasing scholarly attention in recent decades, relatively few resources exist that are aimed specifically at helping pastors address these matters in congregational settings. Most existing Lutheran material is academic—addressing the doctrinal claims of Christian Zionism in a scholarly manner. There is a lack of practical materials that communicate the dangers of Christian Zionism to the layperson or provide pastors with guidance for doing so. In the preaching category, there are multiple locations in the lectionary that pertain to Christian Zionism. In my research, I had hoped to find Lutheran sermons written on these texts to compare to Christian Zionist sermons. However, I was only able to find one sermon example.⁶² The lack of attention given to Christian Zionism in Lutheran pulpits seems to indicate we are not fully aware of its influence.

Here are practical resources that address Christian Zionism which are written by confessional Lutheran authors.

End Times: Jesus is Coming Soon, written by Professor Thomas Nass, is a volume in the People's Bible Teachings series.⁶³ Chapter 17 of the book addresses Dispensationalism which is the basis of Christian Zionism. A ready-made Bible study accompanies the volume, with a

62. Nathan Berg, "Romans: One Word at a Time: Grafted," Sermon (Eastside Lutheran Church, Madison, WI, 30 August 2020).

63. Thomas P. Nass, *End Times: Jesus Is Coming Soon* (Northwestern, 2011). Both the book and accompanying study are available from Northwestern Publishing House. Christian Zionism is addressed in lesson 7 of the study.

specific lesson dedicated to Dispensationalism. The study is well-written and has direct application to Christian Zionism.

The Israel of God, written by Professor John Brug, is an article in *Forward in Christ*—a WELS magazine.⁶⁴ This article directly addresses Christian Zionism in a clear and approachable manner. It is suitable for providing a quick resource to offer members who ask about the relationship between the State of Israel and biblical Israel. This is the only recent confessional Lutheran synodical publication to directly address Christian Zionism.

A Lutheran Response to the “Left Behind” Series was produced by the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations.⁶⁵ It is an official publication refuting Dispensationalism and other false teachings promoted by the “Left Behind” series of books and movies. The accompanying study, written by Dr. Reed Lessing, contains thoughtful discussion questions and helpful information for educating laypeople.

American Heresy: Christian Zionism and the Scriptural Response is a WLS thesis paper written by Pastor Joseph Neuberger.⁶⁶ It contains a helpful chart in the appendix which lists common Christian Zionist claims and the proof texts which refute them. This succinct resource is valuable for explaining the theological issues of Christian Zionism.

Though the confessional Lutheran resources for addressing Christian Zionism are small in number, they are useful. The burden of applying these resources to the parish lies upon the local pastor and his evaluation of how they will be implemented most effectively. The lack of

64. John Brug, “The Israel of God,” *Forward In Christ*, January 2024.

65. Both the report and the accompanying study are available for free on multiple LCMS websites. Christian Zionism is addressed in lessons 3 and 4 of the study. Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *A Lutheran Response to the “Left Behind” Series* (LCMS, April 2004); Reed Lessing, “A Bible Study Companion to A Lutheran Response to the ‘Left Behind’ Series.”

66. Neuberger, “American Heresy.”

resources also presents an opportunity for the creation and sharing of materials that are accessible to the layperson.

Pastoral Suggestions for Addressing Christian Zionism

As Christian Zionism actively influences the way Americans interpret biblical terms, the pastor must intentionally educate his flock. Pastors are called to teach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), which includes topics that may border on political. For this reason, pastors should take proactive steps to address Christian Zionism in their regular preaching, teaching, and conversations.

The first step a pastor should take is to examine the geographic setting and cultural context in which he serves. For example, the American South is a stronghold of Christian Zionism. Areas with a heavy Baptist presence are also prone to Dispensational influence. Performing an internet search for nearby megachurches and perusing their statements of faith is an effective approach. Monitoring local elections helps identify influential Christian Zionists who may hold the attention of church members and visitors. Surveys done by Pew Research and the Census Bureau can offer statistical and geographic data on political and religious influences and affiliations.⁶⁷ Because cable news and online media heavily influence people regardless of their geographic location, it may take personal conversations for pastors to discover their members' perspectives. Once a pastor better understands the context in which he serves, he can

67. Many WELS ministries make use of MissionInsite for planning and outreach strategies. Though some information it produces is fabricated, it can also provide verifiable statistics in other areas. WELS Congregational Services can provide further information and access to this and other resources.

better evaluate how much influence Christian Zionism has in his parish and begin to formulate a plan for addressing it as needed.

As stated earlier, one of the simplest and most effective strategies is defining commonly misunderstood terms as they are used. This can be done with each Scripture reading on Sunday. Many churches already print or speak a brief introduction before each reading to set the context of the selection within the theme of the day and to provide a focal point for the congregation. Ministers can use this brief introduction to define terms that may be misunderstood. Even a simple phrase such as, “In this section, Israel refers to God’s Old Testament people,” can guide the hearer’s understanding and prevent confusion. These short comments model responsible reading of Scripture and gradually retrain hearers to understand Bible passages in their proper theological context.

In many cases, dedicated teaching opportunities are also valid options. Bible classes, men’s groups, BIC, and catechism are all appropriate occasions for even a brief mention of Christian Zionism. Some of the studies in the previous section would serve well for this purpose. The topic of Christian Zionism or dispensationalism could fit well within a topical study on eschatology or Two Kingdoms Theology. Christian Zionism could also be addressed within the study of a book of the Bible like Romans, Galatians, or Revelation. One of the benefits of a classroom setting is that it allows for open questions, something rarely possible in a sermon. Open questions do not have a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. Open questions give members a chance to respond without restriction and help identify the assumptions they bring with them from politics or media. By providing opportunities for deeper learning and discussion of Christian Zionism, pastors honor their responsibility to guard the flock from false teaching and equip the body of Christ.

Preaching also provides opportunities for proactive teaching. Multiple Sundays throughout the 3-year lectionary feature texts suitable for addressing Christian Zionist beliefs.⁶⁸ Most notable would be Epiphany, which is sometimes called “Gentile Christmas.” The texts and theme for Epiphany are especially suited for proclaiming the clear biblical truth that God’s one and only plan of salvation in Jesus is for all nations. A sermon solely dedicated to addressing Christian Zionism is not necessary or always advisable; in most cases a section of the message which shows how the sermon text disproves Christian Zionism is sufficient.

In addition to the pericope, a sermon series on Romans, Genesis, or selected Old Testament texts can present opportunities for clarifying God’s promises to Israel, explaining fulfillment in Christ, and highlighting the unity of Jew and Gentile in the one people of God by faith in Jesus. Preaching these biblical truths need not take a position on foreign policy or cross into political commentary. Rather, the preacher will remain focused on faithful gospel preaching that glorifies Christ as the center of Scripture and the Savior for all people.

The suggestions offered above are not comprehensive solutions to the challenges posed by Christian Zionism. Instead, they illustrate ways in which faithful pastoral teaching can address Christian Zionism practically and realistically. The goal is to proclaim Christ without political distortion and to teach God’s people to interpret Scripture without imposing meaning foreign to the text. Having considered the historical development, theological claims, and spiritual implications of Christian Zionism, we are now prepared to summarize and reflect on the main findings of this study.

68. See the Appendix for a list of applicable texts and their assigned Sundays according to CW21.

CONCLUSION

Christian Zionism continues to shape the way many American Christians interpret Bible passages about Israel and the end times. On the surface, Zionist influences may appear merely political, but the implications of Christian Zionism are deeply theological. The literal-futurist hermeneutic of Christian Zionism obscures the centrality of Christ's sacrifice, limits Christ's fulfillment of the Old Testament, severs the unity of God's people, and robs believers of gospel comfort. For these reasons, pastors cannot treat Christian Zionism as a harmless political position, nor can they assume their hearers will understand biblical vocabulary without intentional clarification.

Rather than avoiding tough topics or assuming these issues are not significant, pastors are called to address them with the tools God has given: faithful preaching and teaching. Addressing Christian Zionism requires deliberate care: defining terms, connecting Old Testament promises to their fulfillment in Christ, and demonstrating from Scripture how God's redemptive plan centers not on a nation-state but on the crucified and risen Messiah. In doing so, pastors preserve gospel clarity, guard their congregations from doctrinal confusion, and proclaim Christ as the fulfillment of all God's promises. He is our hope, our peace, and the Savior for both Jew and Gentile alike.

APPENDIX

Lectionary Location	Text	Content
Lent 2 Year A	Romans 4:1–5, 13–17	Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.
Lent 2 Year A	Genesis 12:1–8	All people on earth will be blessed by Abraham’s seed. Verse 3 is commonly used by Christian Zionists.
Proper 15 Year A	Joshua 21:43–45	God kept his promise to give the Israelites all the land. “Every one was fulfilled.”
Proper 15 Year A	Ephesians 2:13–22	Christ Jesus has made the two groups one. Reconciling them both to God through the cross.
Proper 16 Year A	Romans 10:5–13	There is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all.
Proper 20 Year A	Romans 9:6–16	True Israel is all believers saved by God’s grace through faith.
Epiphany Year A, B, C	Matthew 2:1–12, Isaiah 60:1–6, Ephesians 3:2–12	“Gentile Christmas” Jesus is the savior for all nations.
Epiphany Year B	Romans 11:13–15	Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
Proper 17 Year B	Romans 9:30–10:4	Gentiles have obtained a righteousness by faith.
Proper 28 Year B	Hebrews 9:24–28	Christ was sacrificed once for all. There is no need for temple sacrifice any longer.
Epiphany 5 Year C	Romans 10:12–17	There is no difference between Jew and Gentile.
Lent 5 Year C	Luke 20:9–19	The Parable of the Tenants
Good Friday Year C	Galatians 3:23–29	If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

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