

Study: American Evangelicals Stand Behind Israel

A recent LifeWay Research study shows that American evangelicals remain among the strongest supporters of the nation of Israel.

Most believe God has plans for that nation, both now and in the future. And many of America's preachers say Christians need to support Israel.

Those are among the findings of a LifeWay study of American attitudes toward Israel and the Bible. As part of the study, researchers conducted two separate surveys of 1,000 Americans, along with a survey of 1,000 senior pastors of Protestant churches.

"No piece of literature has had more impact on American culture than the Bible," said Scott McConnell, vice president of LifeWay Research. "No country is more intertwined with the ancient biblical narrative than Israel, and evangelical Americans see a contemporary connection with the nation."

Researchers found evangelicals see a close tie between God and Israel.

About 7 in 10 (69 percent) say the modern nation of Israel was formed as result of biblical prophecy. A similar number (70 percent) say God has a special relationship with the modern nation of Israel. And nearly three-fourths of evangelicals (73 percent) say events in Israel are part of the prophecies in the Book of Revelation.

While evangelicals remain convinced about a tie between Israel and God's plans, Americans generally are less certain.

Less than half (46 percent) believe the formation of modern

Israel is a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. More than a third (36 percent) disagree, while 17 percent aren't sure.

Americans are split down the middle over whether Jews are God's chosen people as referenced in the Bible, with just under half (46 percent) saying they agree. A similar number (44 percent) disagree, while 10 percent are not sure.

And some Americans think God was closer to ancient Israel than to the modern-day nation.

About two-thirds (64 percent) of Americans say God had a "special relationship with ancient Israel." About 1 in 4 (27 percent) disagrees, while 9 percent are not sure.

In contrast, only 48 percent of Americans say God has a special relationship with modern Israel—fewer than the 53 percent of Americans who believe God has a special relationship with the United States, according to previously released LifeWay research.

About 4 in 10 (39 percent) disagree that God has a special relationship with modern Israel, while 13 percent are not sure.

Evangelicals (70 percent) are much more likely to agree than Americans who don't identify as evangelicals (38 percent).

Overall, nearly half (47 percent) of Americans believe events in Israel are tied to the Book of Revelation. Forty percent disagree, and 13 percent are unsure.

Younger Americans, those 18-24, are less likely (36 percent) to see a tie between Israel and the Book of Revelation than those 45 and older (52 percent).

Women (52 percent) are more likely to agree than men (42 percent). Those with graduate degrees (24 percent) are much less likely to agree events in Israel are part of the prophecies in Revelation than those with a high school degree

or less (55 percent).

Support for Israel

Schooling and prophecy both play a role in how Americans view Israel. When asked whether they support Israel's statehood, 42 percent agree, while 35 percent disagree. One in four (23 percent) is not sure.

Higher levels of education correlate to higher levels of support for Israeli statehood. Those with a graduate degree are most likely to be supporters at 61 percent, followed by those with a bachelor's degree (56 percent), those with some college (43 percent), and those with a high school diploma or less (31 percent).

Slightly more than half of men (51 percent) say they support Israeli statehood, compared to a third (33 percent) of women. Support is also significantly higher among evangelicals (50 percent) than others (39 percent).

Supporters are split on the reasons they back Israel. Sixteen percent say the Bible tells them to, and 9 percent say it's because Israel is important for biblical prophecy.

Some (13 percent) say they support Israel primarily because Israel is America's best friend in the Middle East. Others say it's because Jews needed a refuge after the Holocaust (11 percent) or because Israel is the one and only Jewish homeland (15 percent).

Though the term Zionist is synonymous with believing Jews should have their own state, only eight percent of Americans claim this label. A third (32 percent) of Americans are not sure whether they are Zionist.

Among the most ardent of Israel's supporters are senior pastors of Protestant churches. Most (80 percent) agree "Christians should support Israel." About one in 7 (14

percent) disagrees.

Even though they support Israel, some pastors have their doubts about Israel's military actions. About 4 in 10 (41 percent) agree with the statement, "It is hard to defend Israel's military tactics." Fifty percent disagree, while 9 percent are not sure.

McConnell noted, "It is surprising that evangelicals, who have such a fascination with Israel's biblical connections, are no more likely to have an opinion about Israel's statehood than other Americans."

Bob Smietana is former senior writer for Facts & Trends magazine.

Methodology

The first phone survey of Americans was conducted September 19-28, 2014. The second phone survey of Americans was conducted September 26-October 5, 2014. The calling utilized Random Digit Dialing. Sixty percent of completes were among landlines and 40 percent among cell phones. Maximum quotas and slight weights were used for gender, region, age, ethnicity, and education to more accurately reflect the population. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys. The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.5 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups. Those labeled evangelicals consider themselves "a born again, evangelical, or fundamentalist Christian."

The phone survey of Protestant pastors was conducted September 11-18, 2014. The calling list was a stratified random sample drawn from a list of all Protestant churches. Each interview was conducted with the senior pastor, minister, or priest of the church called. Responses were weighted by region to more accurately reflect the population. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys. The sample provides 95 percent confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.1 percent.

Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

Lifeway Research is a Nashville-based, evangelical research firm that specializes in surveys about faith in culture and matters that affect the church.