

The Truth About Christian Zionism

Is “Christian Zionism” an oxymoron? Worse still, is it a heresy? And whether it is an oxymoron or a heresy, is it a recent creation, dating back no earlier than the 19th century?

Before we answer these questions, let’s first define our terms. If Zionism is the belief that Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people, then Christian Zionism is the belief that the Bible affirms that Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people. It’s that simple.

We can now answer the first question: Is “Christian Zionism” an oxymoron?

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Not at all, since it can easily be demonstrated that:

1. God’s covenant with the patriarchs remains intact, which promised the people of Israel the land of Canaan as a lasting inheritance (Ps. 105:7-11).
2. Jesus the Messiah did not cancel the promises to the patriarchs but rather confirmed them (Rom. 15:8-9).
3. Many of the glorious prophecies of the Old Testament, which include the worldwide regathering of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland along with their national spiritual rejuvenation (Ezek. 36-37), are yet to reach fulfillment.
4. The Sinai Covenant cannot annul the earlier promises given by God to the patriarchs (Gal. 3:17).

That’s why Jesus is returning to Jerusalem rather than to any other location on the planet. And that’s why verses speaking

of His return presuppose that He is returning to a Jewish Jerusalem (Zech. 12; Matt. 23:37-39).

In light of these observations, we can now address the second question, namely, Is "Christian Zionism" a heresy?

The answer is obviously not, since the Bible supports the most fundamental tenets of Christian Zionism. How can it be heretical to believe what the Scriptures explicitly teach?

"But," the retort might come, "the Church Fathers taught no such thing, and the concept of Christian Zionism is a direct outgrowth of dispensationalism, which can be traced back to the teachings of J. N. Darby in the 1830s."

Certainly, there is truth to this statement as far as it pertains to the teaching of the Church Fathers. At the same time, many of them did speak of a future spiritual conversion of the Jewish people.

In the words of Augustine (354-430), "The time will come, the end of the world will come, and all Israel shall believe; not they who now are, but their children who shall then be."

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Or as stated by Jerome (347-420), "[W]hen the Jews receive the faith at the end of the world, they will find themselves in dazzling light, as if our Lord were returning to them from Egypt."

At the same time, it should also be noted that the Church Fathers were far from perfect in their doctrines and beliefs,

with many espousing a dangerous antisemitism that left its ugly mark throughout Church history. While many of their teachings are worthy of great respect, they differ among themselves on various points and do not carry the final authority of Scripture.

What is remarkable, though, is how many Christian teachers over the centuries have believed in the return of the Jewish people to their homeland, with some stating explicitly that they would return to the Land in unbelief, only to turn to the Messiah afterwards.

Here are some representative quotes, beginning with highly respected Puritan leaders in 17th century England.

Thomas Brightman (1562-1607) wrote, "What, shall they return to Jerusalem again? There is nothing more certain: the prophets do everywhere confirm it and beat upon it."

John Owen (1616-1683), the greatest of the Puritan theologians wrote, "They shall return to their own land; they shall enjoy it for a quiet and everlasting possession, their adversaries being destroyed; they shall also be filled with the light and knowledge of the will and worship of God, so as to be a guide and blessing to the residue of the Gentiles who seek after the Lord, and perhaps, shall be entrusted with great empire and rule in the world. The most of these are foretold concerning them, not only in their own prophetic writings, but also by the divine writers of sundry books of the New Testament."

According to the New England Puritan leader Increase Mather (1639-1723), "the Israelites shall again possess . . . the Land promised unto their Father Abraham."

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Skipping ahead to the 19th century, Anglican Bishop J. C. Ryle

(1816-1900) wrote, "I am well aware that many excellent Christians cannot see the subject as I do. I can only say, that to my eyes, the future salvation of Israel as a people, their return to Palestine and their national conversion to God, appear as clearly and plainly revealed as any prophecy in God's Word."

And it was none other than Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), hailed as the Prince of Preachers, who said in 1864, "I think we do not attach sufficient importance to the restoration of the Jews. We do not think enough about it. But certainly, if there is anything promised in the Bible it is this. I imagine that you cannot read the Bible without seeing clearly that there is to be an actual restoration of the Children of Israel."

And he made abundantly clear that there was to be a physical return to the Land as well as a spiritual return to God. (Of course, neither Spurgeon nor Ryle were dispensationalists.)

I'm quite aware that there are many Christians who differ with these statements and interpret the Scriptures differently. But to claim that Christian Zionism is either a heresy or of recent vintage is to speak in serious error.

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