An Examination of Christian Zionism

Part 1. – The Roots of Christian Zionism: Key Figures and Movements Before Theodor Herzl

Christian Zionism, the belief that the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel is a fulfillment of biblical prophecy, existed before Theodor Herzl and the advent of political Zionism in the late 19th century. Its roots can be traced back to various figures in the West, particularly within Protestant movements. Here are key figures and events that contributed to early Christian Zionism:

I. 16th-17th Century Roots: Puritan and Protestant Thought

The Reformation led to widespread interest in studying the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, in its literal sense. This influenced the idea that the Jewish people had a future role in God's redemptive plan.
The Puritans in England, with their focus on biblical prophecy, were among the first to discuss the restoration of the Jews to their ancestral homeland.

Key figures:

- **Thomas Brightman (1562–1607):** A Puritan scholar who wrote that the Jews would return to the land of Israel as part of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

- **Henry Finch (1558–1625):** A prominent English lawyer and theologian who, in his work *The World's Great Restoration* (1621), argued for the restoration of the Jews to Israel. He believed it was God's plan for the Jewish people to be gathered to their land.
    - Finch's work caused controversy, as it challenged both political and ecclesiastical norms at the time.

II. 18th Century Enlightenment and Evangelical Revival

In the 18th century, evangelical Christians began to blend their eschatological beliefs (focus on the end times) with a desire to see the Jews restored to Palestine. The rise of **Premillennialism** and a literal interpretation of prophecy further fueled Christian Zionism.

Key figures:

- **John Gill (1697–1771):** A Baptist theologian who anticipated the physical return of the Jews to their homeland, linking it to biblical prophecy.
    - **John Gill vs. John Nelson Darby:** While Gill and Darby both believed in the future restoration of the Jews, there were significant differences in their theology. Gill, rooted in **historic premillennialism**, focused on a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy regarding Israel, but he did not adopt the **dispensationalist framework** introduced later by Darby. Darby's system, which emerged in the 19th century, divided history into dispensations (periods) and introduced the concept of a pre-tribulation rapture of the church, which Gill did not teach.

Gill’s focus was more on a general premillennial return of Christ after the fulfillment of prophecies concerning Israel, while Darby’s theology more explicitly separated God’s plans for Israel and the church.
    - Gill’s approach to prophecy influenced many who later adopted similar positions but without the systematic dispensational divisions seen in Darby.

- **Joseph Eyre (1731–1803):** An English clergyman who wrote that the return of the Jews to Palestine was an essential step in God’s plan.
- **William Romaine (1714–1795):** A well-known evangelical preacher who echoed similar themes in his teachings.

III. 19th Century British and American Christian Zionism

By the 19th century, Christian Zionism had become more prominent, particularly among British evangelicals. This period saw increasing interest in Jewish restorationism due to geopolitical, religious, and prophetic expectations.

Key British figures:

- **Edward Irving (1792–1834):** A Scottish preacher and a prominent early advocate for Christian Zionism. He believed that the Jews’ return to their land was a necessary part of Christ’s second coming.
- **Lewis Way (1772–1840):** A British lawyer and missionary who strongly advocated for the Jewish restoration to the Holy Land. He also influenced the establishment of organizations promoting Jewish evangelism.
- **Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1801–1885):** A prominent British politician and philanthropist who is often regarded as a key figure in

Christian Zionism. He lobbied for the restoration of the Jews to Palestine and supported Jewish causes. He famously described the land of Palestine as “a country without a nation for a nation without a country.”

Key American figure: William E. Blackstone (1841–1935):

- **William E. Blackstone** was a prominent American evangelist and is often called **“The Father of American Christian Zionism.”**
  - In **1878**, Blackstone published *Jesus is Coming*, a highly influential book on **premillennialist dispensationalism**, which taught that the restoration of the Jews to Palestine was a necessary step in the prophetic timeline leading to Christ’s return. This book, influenced by **John Nelson Darby**, became foundational for many Christian Zionists.
  - In **1891**, Blackstone spearheaded the **Blackstone Memorial**, a petition sent to U.S. President Benjamin Harrison, calling for American support for the restoration of the Jews to Palestine. Blackstone presented both a humanitarian argument (to relieve Jewish suffering in Europe) and a prophetic one, citing biblical texts as evidence of God’s plan.
    - The Memorial was signed by over **400 prominent Americans**, including J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, and Supreme Court justices.
  - Blackstone’s advocacy predated Theodor Herzl’s **First Zionist Congress** (1897) by several years. Herzl himself was later given a copy of the Memorial, showcasing Blackstone’s pivotal role in connecting Christian Zionism with early political

Zionism.

Blackstone’s work influenced both Christian and Jewish leaders and laid a significant foundation for American support of Jewish restorationism, aligning theological conviction with political advocacy.

IV. Influence of British Imperial Interests

The British Empire’s geopolitical interests in the Middle East, particularly with the decline of the Ottoman Empire, coincided with the religious motivations of Christian Zionists. The two often became intertwined.

- **Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821):** Although not a Christian Zionist, Napoleon’s 1799 proclamation inviting Jews to reclaim their land in Palestine sparked interest in the idea of Jewish restoration among Christians in Europe.

V. The Rise of Missionary Societies

Missionary societies in Britain and America often worked to convert Jews to Christianity while simultaneously promoting their return to Palestine.

- **The London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews (1809):** This group was instrumental in advancing Christian Zionist thought.

Conclusion

Christian Zionism predates Theodor Herzl and political Zionism by centuries, emerging from Reformation-era biblical

interpretations and gaining momentum in the 18th and 19th centuries through Puritan, evangelical, and premillennialist theology. Figures such as Henry Finch, Edward Irving, Lord Shaftesbury, and William E. Blackstone played pivotal roles in promoting the idea that the Jews' return to the land of Israel was both a fulfillment of biblical prophecy and a solution to Jewish suffering.

Blackstone's work in particular, through *Jesus is Coming* and the Blackstone Memorial, highlights the connection between Christian Zionist theology and early political Zionist efforts, making him a crucial bridge between the two movements. This religious sentiment, combined with geopolitical considerations, laid the groundwork for the later emergence of political Zionism and Herzl's efforts in the late 19th century.

Part 2. – The Great Deception of Christian Zionism

Christian Zionism has become one of the most significant theological and political movements within modern evangelical Christianity, particularly in the United States. It presents itself as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy and a necessary part of end-times theology. However, upon closer examination, Christian Zionism is founded on a series of theological errors and misunderstandings of Scripture. This essay explores the origins, teachings, and heresies of Christian Zionism, demonstrating why it is a dangerous deception that undermines the gospel of Jesus Christ. Additionally, we will explore the historical and ideological roots of Zionism, particularly the role of Theodor Herzl and other key figures in the movement, and how this ideology became intertwined with Christian Zionism.

I. The Rise of Christian Zionism

Christian Zionism has been around for approximately 120 years, but it gained significant traction after the Six-Day War in 1967, when Israel captured territories in the Middle East. Since then, it has shaped not only Christian theology but also U.S. foreign policy. Christian Zionists believe that modern Israel and its Jewish inhabitants are the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This belief, however, is built on a shaky foundation, as the Bible teaches no such thing about the modern state of Israel.

Christian Zionists often cite **Genesis 12:1-3** as a foundational verse to justify their support of modern Israel:

> *"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."*
> *— Genesis 12:1-3, KJV*

Christian Zionists argue that supporting the modern state of Israel is equivalent to fulfilling the command to "bless" Abraham's descendants. However, this passage speaks of the blessings that come through Abraham's seed, which is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, as Paul writes in **Galatians 3:16**:

> *"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."*
> *— Galatians 3:16, KJV*

The blessings promised to Abraham's descendants are realized

through the gospel of Jesus Christ, not through political support for a modern nation-state.

II. The Role of Theodor Herzl and Zionism

The ideology of Zionism, which led to the formation of modern Israel, has its roots not in Christian theology but in the political aspirations of European Jews, particularly in the late 19th century. Theodor Herzl, an Austro-Hungarian journalist and writer, is often regarded as the father of modern Zionism. In his influential 1896 pamphlet *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*), Herzl argued that the only solution to the problem of anti-Semitism in Europe was the establishment of a Jewish homeland.

Herzl was not motivated by a religious vision but by a secular nationalist ideology. He believed that Jews, like other ethnic groups in Europe, needed their own state to ensure their survival and security. Herzl convened the First Zionist Congress in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland, where the goal of establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine was formally articulated. At the time, Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire, and Herzl's vision was for Jews to peacefully immigrate and settle there, although other locations like Uganda and Madagascar were also considered in the early stages of the Zionist movement.

Herzl's ideas were revolutionary, but he was not alone in pushing for the establishment of a Jewish state. Other notable figures in the early Zionist movement included:

- **Chaim Weizmann**: A key figure in British Zionist circles, Weizmann was instrumental in securing the Balfour Declaration in 1917, in which Britain expressed support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.
- **David Ben-Gurion**: The primary national founder of the State of Israel and the first Prime Minister of Israel,

Ben-Gurion played a critical role in the establishment of Israel in 1948.

- **Vladimir Jabotinsky**: Founder of Revisionist Zionism, Jabotinsky promoted a more militant approach to establishing a Jewish state, advocating for the use of force if necessary to achieve Zionist goals.

The Zionist movement gained momentum in the early 20th century, particularly after World War I, when Britain gained control of Palestine under the mandate system. The **Balfour Declaration of 1917** was a turning point, as it represented the first time a major world power had endorsed the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. However, the declaration also promised that the civil and religious rights of the non-Jewish communities in Palestine would not be violated—a promise that was soon broken as Jewish immigration increased and tensions between Jews and Arabs escalated.

III. The Occupation of Palestine

The creation of modern-day Israel in 1948, following the end of the British mandate, resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs. This period, known to Palestinians as the *Nakba* (Catastrophe), saw the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state, while the indigenous Palestinian population was forced into refugee camps or into neighboring countries.

The ideological drive behind the creation of Israel and its subsequent expansion into Palestinian territories has deep roots in the Zionist belief in the necessity of a Jewish state for Jewish survival. Zionism, however, did not originally arise from a biblical mandate but from a nationalist desire to secure land. Herzl and many early Zionist leaders were secular, and their efforts were driven by political and social motivations rather than theological ones.

As more Jews settled in Palestine throughout the 20th century, tensions between the Jewish settlers and the Arab inhabitants grew, leading to violent conflicts. By the time the State of Israel was declared in 1948, these tensions had reached a boiling point, resulting in the Arab-Israeli War. Since then, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories has been a central issue in Middle Eastern politics, and it remains a source of conflict today.

IV. Christian Zionism's Support for Political Zionism

Despite the secular and political origins of Zionism, Christian Zionists have embraced the movement as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. This alliance between Christian Zionists and political Zionists has shaped U.S. foreign policy, with Christian Zionists lobbying for continued military and financial support for Israel. This has led to billions of dollars in aid being sent to Israel, often at the expense of addressing pressing social and economic needs within the United States.

However, this support for modern Israel is based on a misunderstanding of Scripture. Christian Zionists often promote the idea that the modern state of Israel is the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, but as we have seen, the Bible teaches that these promises are fulfilled in Christ, not in a political entity.

V. The Heresies of Christian Zionism

Christian Zionism promotes several heretical doctrines that distort biblical theology and the gospel. One of these is the belief that God has two separate plans of salvation—one for His "earthly people," the Jews, and another for His "heavenly people," the Church. According to this teaching, Jews will be saved through the reestablishment of Old Testament animal

sacrifices, while Gentiles are saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

However, the Bible teaches that there is only one plan of salvation for all people. Jesus Himself declared:

> *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”*
> *— John 14:6, KJV*

Furthermore, the New Testament emphasizes that there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles in Christ. As Paul writes:

> *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”*
> *— Galatians 3:28, KJV*

The idea of two separate plans of salvation undermines the unity of the body of Christ, which includes both Jews and Gentiles who have been reconciled to God through faith in Jesus.

Another major error promoted by Christian Zionism is the “postponement theory,” which asserts that Jesus’ mission to establish the kingdom of God was postponed because the Jews rejected Him at His first coming. According to this theory, Jesus was supposed to assume David’s throne immediately, but instead, He went to the cross. This idea is not found in Scripture and undermines the purpose of Christ’s first coming, which was to die for the sins of the world. As Jesus declared before Pilate:

> *“My kingdom is not of this world.”*
> *— John 18:36, KJV*

Christ’s kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, not an earthly, political one.

VI. The Misinterpretation of the 144,000

Christian Zionists also teach that 144,000 Jews will become evangelists during the end times and lead a great revival. This belief is based on a misunderstanding of **Revelation 7**, which mentions 144,000 sealed from the tribes of Israel. However, the 144,000 represent the fullness of God’s people, both Jews and Gentiles, who are spiritually marked by God, not literal Jewish evangelists. As Paul explains in **Romans 9:6**:

> *“They are not all Israel, which are of Israel.”*
> *— Romans 9:6, KJV*

True Israel is defined not by ethnicity but by faith in Christ.

VII. The Antichrist: A Misunderstood Figure

Christian Zionism teaches that a singular Antichrist figure will arise in the future and make a covenant with the Jews. However, the Bible does not support the idea of a singular future Antichrist. Instead, John writes:

> *“Even now are there many antichrists.”*
> *— 1 John 2:18, KJV*

An antichrist is anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ. The focus on a future, singular Antichrist distracts from the reality that the spirit of antichrist is already present in the world, manifesting in those who reject Christ, including those in Judaism who do not acknowledge Him as Messiah.

VIII. The Delusion of a Third Temple

Perhaps one of the most dangerous aspects of Christian Zionism is its obsession with rebuilding a third temple in Jerusalem. Christian Zionists believe that the reestablishment of the temple and its sacrificial system is necessary for the fulfillment of prophecy. However, the New Testament teaches that the true temple is not a physical structure but the body of Christ and the Church. As Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 6:19**:

> *"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"*
> *— 1 Corinthians 6:19, KJV*

When Jesus died, the veil of the temple was torn, signifying the end of the old covenant sacrificial system. As the writer of Hebrews explains:

> *"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."*
> *— Hebrews 10:10, KJV*

There is no need for a third temple or further sacrifices because Christ's sacrifice was final and sufficient.

IX. The Misuse of Psalm 122:6

Another verse frequently quoted by Christian Zionists is **Psalm 122:6**, which says:

> *"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee."*
> *— Psalm 122:6, KJV*

Christian Zionists often use this verse to justify their

support for the modern state of Israel. However, this verse was part of the "Songs of Degrees," sung by the Israelites as they ascended to Jerusalem for worship under the old covenant. It is not a command for Christians to pray for a political city. Jesus Himself did not pray for Jerusalem; rather, He wept over it and pronounced judgment upon it:

> *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee… Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."*
> *— Matthew 23:37-38, KJV*

Jerusalem's physical and religious system was left desolate because of its rejection of the Messiah.

X. The Danger of Supplanting Christ

Perhaps the greatest danger of Christian Zionism is that it supplants Christ as the focal point of God's plan of salvation. Christian Zionists often elevate the Jewish people and the land of Israel as the central figures in biblical prophecy, relegating Christ to a secondary role. This is a fundamental distortion of Scripture, as **Revelation 19:10** declares:

> *"For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."*
> *— Revelation 19:10, KJV*

Jesus Christ is the central figure of prophecy, and the focus of Scripture is on Him, not on a physical nation or ethnic group.

Conclusion: Exalting Christ, Not Zionism

Christian Zionism is a dangerous deception that has led many Christians astray. It distorts Scripture, promotes false doctrines, and shifts the focus away from Jesus Christ to a

geopolitical narrative centered on modern Israel. As the body of Christ, we must reject this false gospel and return to the true message of Scripture: salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

We must remember that the true temple is Christ and His body, the Church, and that His sacrifice on the cross was final and sufficient for the forgiveness of sins. As Paul warns:

> *“God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.”*
> *— 2 Thessalonians 2:11, KJV*

Christian Zionism is such a delusion, and it is vital that the Church refocuses on the true gospel. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, and it is through Him alone that we find hope, salvation, and the fulfillment of all God’s promises.

Let us exalt Christ as our Prophet, Priest, and coming King, and reject any doctrine that seeks to replace Him as the center of God’s redemptive plan.
