

## COMPARATIVE CHRISTIAN HERMENEUTICAL APPROACHES TO THE LAND PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

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While formerly inflammatory topics such as the deicide charge<sup>1</sup> have waned in Jewish–Christian relations, disputes over the land and State of Israel provoke intense controversy and disagreement. Decades ago, in the Christian world, this topic was already widely said to be especially divisive, and today, it remains so.<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising that an issue that provokes intense geopolitical interest and touches on territory of nearly unsurpassed religious significance would be so provocative. The nexus of politics and religion is especially volatile. Among Christians, church organizations and individual theologians in the west (North America, Europe) join diverse religious claims and biblical interpretations to their foreign policy statements and arguments. Sometimes, it seems that the political views trump the religious. For example, Christian disputes over the State of Israel often can be mapped onto existing deep divisions in the American churches over domestic policies or military action, with left and right presenting predictable arguments. It is understandably tempting to see appeals to Scripture and theology as tools to buttress pre-existing political views.

However, a sympathetic reader should also recognize the presence of serious theological reflections on this contested and fraught sacred space. Christians who grapple with the land and State of Israel do so in the wake of highly complex millennia-old Christian theological traditions about Jews and Judaism, sacred space generally, and the land of Israel in particular. There are profound religious issues at stake that go beyond

politics, for the State of Israel as a “Jewish state” inevitably raises religious questions for Christians, especially for those rethinking largely negative historical views of Jews and Judaism. For many centuries, nearly all Christians believed that Jewish powerlessness and exile were divine punishment for Jews’ refusal to believe in and/or murder of Jesus. The ejection of many Jews from the biblical land of Israel and the end to Jewish sovereignty there were proofs of the truth of Christianity. Not surprisingly, then, in the wake of the 1948 creation of the State of Israel, the ingathering of (some) Jews to the land, and the (partial) end of Jewish subordination to Gentile rulers, many Christians struggled to make sense of this event not just politically but theologically.<sup>3</sup>

The difficult theological questions raised by this event, and for some subsequent events, such as the Israeli capture of all of Jerusalem in 1967, include as follows: Does the creation of the state—though a result of a United Nations vote—have any religious significance for Christians, as a contemporary act of God in history or manifestation of God’s will? Need it prompt changes in Christians’ views about Jewish landedness or landlessness, and if so, how broad might these changes be? Are the policies of the state to be evaluated by Christians using religious criteria different from those used when evaluating other countries? Because these questions rest on underlying (and changing) Christian theological views about Jews and Judaism, they should be situated in a broader context: how do widespread contemporary Christian efforts to understand Judaism in theologically positive ways influence Christian views of the land and State of Israel specifically?<sup>4</sup> This last question provides the context for addressing this topic. Since many western Christian groups and thinkers now reject supersessionism and affirm the ongoing legitimacy of the Jews’ covenant, the biblical promises concerning the land are an unavoidable topic.<sup>5</sup> Even those who deny any contemporary religious significance to the State of Israel must face it, if only to make this separation between biblical promises and the modern nation-state clear.<sup>6</sup>

There have been studies on contemporary Christian views of the religious significance or lack of religious significance of the land and State of Israel. Most have focused on one group or one perspective, such as liberal Christians,<sup>7</sup> Catholics,<sup>8</sup> evangelical/conservative Christians,<sup>9</sup> and even British churches<sup>10</sup> or Canadian churches.<sup>11</sup> Other studies—fewer in number—survey a variety of perspectives.<sup>12</sup> Much attention has been paid in par-

ticular to church/Christian activism, such as support for or opposition to Israel and its policies.<sup>13</sup> Surprisingly, less attention has been paid to the underlying religious issues of the covenant between God and the Israelites/Jews and the land promises, and especially how these biblically rooted subjects are understood exegetically and theologically. Perhaps because of the perceived challenge in the creation of the State of Israel offers to Christian theology or the complexity of juxtaposing or even linking biblical and modern periods, there are fewer studies on these subjects.

Furthermore, there are few *comparative* studies on these issues as they are treated by those with very different religious (and political) perspectives. There is, however, a need for such a comparative approach. Christian reflections on these topics often are polemical, whether implicitly or explicitly. Statements on the land and State of Israel by groups or by individual thinkers frequently engage with—if only to reject—the views of others on these topics, presenting a valuable opportunity for comparative studies.<sup>14</sup> These topics are not limitless but rather limited to a select number of prominent biblical texts that treat the promise of the land to the ancient Israelites and their possible relevance to the present. Also, these reflections are situated in the context of the enormously significant trend among Christians to develop more favorable views of Jews and Judaism after the Shoah.

In this essay, I want to present a preliminary heuristic model for a comparative theological and exegetical study. My focus is on selected examples of interpretations of biblical texts and topics in some relevant contemporary Christian sources. As a preliminary work, it illustrates one such approach. It is not a comprehensive survey. I will consider some discussions of one issue in biblical theology that is nearly ubiquitous in such Christian writings by individuals and organizations/churches on the land and modern State of Israel: the land promises to Abraham and his descendants. These are an essential part of the overall covenant found in the Hebrew Bible that emphasizes progeny, land, and divine favor as part of the relationship between God and Israel. They are repeated often in many of God's statements to the patriarchs and to the Israelites/Jews, and are sometimes conditional (i.e., linked with demands and threats of punishment for disobedience), sometimes unconditional.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Christians who turn to Scripture when thinking theologically about the land and

State of Israel unavoidably have to engage these land promise passages. Because the land promises are so prominent in Scripture, this broader covenantal context is essential. Furthermore, in line with standard approaches in the study of the post-biblical reception and interpretation of Scripture, I note hermeneutical issues about, for example, the choice of biblical texts and theological assumptions about how to interpret texts. That is, interpretations reflect hermeneutical decisions about which texts and which concepts to include or to draw upon, or, conversely, to ignore or to de-emphasize.

To survey some representative Christian approaches, I organize selected statements in two groups based on how emphatically they affirm the land promises and on what grounds or with which limitations. The two approaches can be labeled the “weak affirmation approach” and the “strong affirmation approach,” though within each group, there is some variety. After offering an overview of the group’s approach, I will highlight the prominent claims by some of those in each group. I will then offer some general observations.

### **Weak affirmations of the biblical land promises**

The weak affirmation group, most often on the theological and political left, emphasizes the *conditionality* or *fragility* of God’s promises of the land of Israel to the Israelites/Jews. They highlight God’s threats to revoke the promises to Israel because of the people’s disobedience. Some weaken the promises to the people of Israel (and by extension to the land and State of Israel, implicitly or explicitly) by expanding in various ways the recipients of the promise to those outside Israel as usually understood. This undermines an exclusive connection between Israel the land and Israel the people. It also supports the frequently made denial of any direct relevance of the biblical land promises to the modern state.

To buttress the argument for the conditionality and fragility of the land promises, those in the weak affirmation group emphasize the onerous biblical responsibilities for remaining in the land. These, it is said, outweigh God’s generosity in giving the land. While recognizing the promises of land, they prioritize the heavy requirements the Bible imposes on its recipients. Rather than emphasize God’s intention that the people (continue to or go to) live there, they instead insist that the land promises are in the main conditional and subject to revocation. Some

juxtapose such warnings about dispossession and dispersion against the land promises in Genesis and elsewhere.

A major 1987 statement from the Presbyterian Church U.S.A on Judaism illustrates this position. After noting the promise of land to Abraham and Sarah's descendants, it immediately insists that "the [biblical] blessings of the promise [of land] were dependent upon fulfillment of covenant relationships."<sup>16</sup> It emphasizes the demands in the Bible linked with the covenant—for fair treatment of the oppressed or disadvantaged, for example—which are then not just juxtaposed to but prioritized over the promises. The statement thus places the threat of dispossession over the promise of possession: "Disobedience [of the terms of the covenant] could bring loss of the land." Without denying the promise, it nonetheless puts greater weight on those acts which would lead to its revocation, what it labels the "temptation" of immoral conduct. It is, therefore, aptly labeled a weak affirmation.

A recent lengthy British Methodist Church exegetical and theological statement offers a similarly weak affirmation of the land promises. On the one hand, the statement briefly notes the existence of a biblical promise of land: "There is no question that, according to the Biblical witness, covenantal promises were made to Abraham and his descendants and these, in part, related to a specific piece of land."<sup>17</sup> On the other, this single line is followed by a much longer and more detailed series of qualifications of the promise, regarding doubts about its geographical scope, continuing legitimacy, and recipients. In its interpretation of the biblical message, it emphasizes the biblical demands over the biblical promises: "We would want to reaffirm that at the very heart of the Hebrew Bible's concept of covenant is the notion of a relationship and with it, a set of responsibilities."<sup>18</sup> This insistence on responsibilities predominates, concluding with a dominant requirement for covenantal life that one be "committed to a life of love in action to all."

Another major church statement, from the Church of Scotland in 2003, "Theology of Land and Covenant," adopts a similar approach. After a brief description of the nature of the biblical covenant, the statement says the Torah "stresses the continuing possession of the land as being dependent upon faithfulness to God, and, conversely, disobedience of God will inevitably lead to the judgment of losing the land."<sup>19</sup> This too is a judgment about where the force of the Torah's covenantal theology lies.

The statement recognizes promises of land but then qualifies them by saying they can be abrogated or that something more important is at stake. Land promises are here weakened by linking them with actual experiences of exile (viewed as divine punishment in both the Bible and in this statement) or with threats of punishment. The statement thus summarizes the land promises in Scripture as “full of ambivalence and ambiguity.”<sup>20</sup>

Others similarly cast this emphasis on the requirements on those possessing land over the promises of land, but in notably stronger terms. We see this in a much-discussed 2011 statement by well-known Christian ethicists Glenn Stassen and David Gushee. They write, “the Bible, in the prophetic writings, also teaches that persistent injustice on the part of Israel has evoked, and still can bring, God’s judgment, which can extend even to war and exile.”<sup>21</sup> Along with a weak affirmation of the land promise (“even if one accepts...a divine promise of land to the Jewish people as recorded in Scripture”), they much more emphatically highlight the biblical insistence on “doing justice...and making peace” without which the Israelites—and now the Jewish Israelis—risk divine punishment. Again, they make a judgment to highlight the conditionality of the promise. Likewise, it is their interpretive choice to downplay divine promises compared to divine threats. While both are present in Scripture, Stassen and Gushee are almost exclusively interested in the latter.

Gushee and Stassen’s reference to another part of the Bible—in this case, the prophetic writings—that might weaken or counterbalance the firmness of the land promises is common for those in the weak affirmation group. Whether citing the prophetic denunciations or the possible punishments in Deuteronomy for disobedience to God, those who offer a weak affirmation of the land promises privilege conditional or threatening biblical texts over those affirming unconditional land promises. For example, after warning of the revocation of God’s promises to Israel, the statement cites Psalm 103:6, which speaks of God’s “vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.” The Presbyterian concern for using the land justly, supported with a Psalm textually unrelated to the land, lays out the fundamental requirement for residence, in both biblical times and after 1948. The statement thus offers a clear standard by which transgressors can be judged and punished, and their land promises overridden.

The British Methodist statement likewise cites Deuteronomic and prophetic texts that make demands on the people.<sup>22</sup> Some are land related; others are general demands of divine service, cited, again, in order to weaken the force of the land promises. Another British Methodist document, from 2007, citing both Torah and prophets, similarly warns that the Genesis land promises are “no blank cheque [to] do as you like. There are clear conditions. . . This firm teaching then throbs through Deuteronomy, showing that the prophetic teaching has been taken to heart.”<sup>23</sup> This statement reflects a hermeneutical decision to juxtapose other biblical texts, with their stark demands for obedience, against the biblical promises. These documents bring to bear requirements for proper behavior elsewhere from Scripture, which, if not heeded, can result in exile and punishment.

Some of those in this group also qualify or limit their affirmations of the land promises when in tension with universalistic standards or expectations. They insist that Abraham and his descendants were ultimately given the land in order to benefit not one people but all of humanity. A central text for this argument is the statement in Genesis 12:3 that “all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by [Abraham].” On this text, Marlin Jeschke, in his book *Rethinking Holy Land*, writes, “The fulfillment of the promise that Abraham would be a blessing to the nations is stifled when limited to a tiny geographical area.”<sup>24</sup> Contrary to appearances, he argues, the land promises are ultimately intended to serve all humanity; the people of Israel are not its sole or even primary focus. A 2012 Anglican statement makes a similar point in more positive terms: “Always, though, the gift of the Land is a gift to enable mutual hospitality, to create a place of universal welcome where the people of all nations can be welcomed.”<sup>25</sup> The specificity of the promises of land to Abraham’s descendants is counterbalanced by expectations for service to all humanity; the promises are thus primarily instrumental. Anglican archbishop (and former Archbishop of Canterbury) Rowan Williams casts them broadly as well, writing in a presentation on theologies of the land of Israel that “Israel is called to be a paradigm nation. . . to show God’s wisdom in the world.”<sup>26</sup> The covenant has this universal application and scope as its fundamental purpose. Finally, to quote the 1987 Presbyterian document again, it says “Land is to be used as the focus of mission, the place where a people can live and be a light to the nations.” This notion

of service to all beyond Israel undergirds an expansive view of the promises. In these statements and others, the promises are not ultimately about the land of Israel or the people of Israel. By assembling other biblical texts with seemingly universalistic and often eschatological perspectives, they dramatically extend the range of the land promises and concomitantly weaken any particular geographical or social referent.

Finally, a counterpart to these claims about universalistic service in the present or future are efforts to universalize the promises by arguing that their original audience went beyond the Israelite or Jewish descendants of Abraham. Unlike the interpretations just cited, this type of interpretation is chronologically backward, not forward, looking. It is found in claims that the original recipients of God's blessings of land in Genesis included those outside the Abraham–Isaac–Jacob line. Again, to quote Stassen and Gushee, “. . .the promise to possess the land includes the offspring of Isaac, and the offspring of Isaac includes Esau, with his five Edomite sons and their offspring.” These other descendants, and not just the Israelites, received land from God too. This therefore weakens the idea of an exclusive link between the people of Israel, the land of Israel, and God. The 2010 Methodist document implicitly supports a weak affirmation of the land promises as traditionally understood. It asks “who can legitimately claim to be Abraham’s descendants and hence heirs to the [land] promises. Since the patriarch is claimed by all three monotheistic religions—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—does it follow that all three are legitimate inheritors of the covenantal [land] promises?”<sup>27</sup> Without answering the question, the statement hints at a broadly defined view of the recipients of the promises. These include not just Israelites/Jews but other peoples who claim the heritage of Abraham, offering another form of a weak affirmation of the land promises.

### **Strong affirmations of the biblical land promises**

The second approach to the biblical land promises is what I call the “strong affirmation approach.” Interpreters in this group are mostly from the conservative side of the religious and political spectrums. Rather than emphasize the fragility or conditionality of God’s land promises, they argue for their *eternality* or *unconditionality*. This too reflects a hermeneutical judgment. While it may not seem remarkable for those inclined toward a traditionalist reading of Scripture to say, in short, “A promise is

a promise,” conditional texts like those favored by the first group are de-emphasized by those in this second group. Likewise, they too make decisions about which texts should be cited or ignored, or which values or concepts should influence their interpretations. However, in contrast to most of those in the first group, those in this group sometimes link biblical Israel, and the promises of land, to the modern State of Israel, though the theological implications of this vary.

Those in this second, strong affirmation group emphasize biblical passages that refer to unbreakable promises of land over passages that include conditions for remaining in the land. They generally employ a different hermeneutical approach from those in the first group. As would be expected, texts containing divine promises of land are treated as authoritative and given much attention; contrasting texts are either ignored or de-emphasized. For example, a statement by the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, a prominent supporter of Christian Zionism, states that God

swore two irrevocable and unconditional oaths to Abraham: 1. To ‘bless’ or redeem the world through his seed (Genesis 12:1–3), and 2. To deliver the Land of Canaan to Abraham’s natural descendants as an ‘everlasting possession’ (Genesis 17:8). . . Yet many Christians ignore or demean the land component of the Abrahamic Covenant, even though the Bible lays emphasis on it throughout its pages. For instance, when the Psalmist describes the covenant with Abraham, he stresses the land promise and its validity for ‘a thousand generations’ (Psalm 105:8–12).<sup>28</sup>

There are both positive and negative claims here: the land promises are eternal and unending, and no people other than those called Abraham’s “natural descendants,” meaning Israelites/Jews, and not those descended from Ishmael (despite the ambiguous term “natural”) received them. Christians who think otherwise misread Scripture.

Note, however, that there is a modest effort made to recognize at least some tension in the overall biblical message. In an important parallel to statements in the weak affirmation group admitting that there are seemingly unconditional promises, the ICEJ statement briefly notes the existence of competing biblical texts, in this case, ones that impose conditions on remaining within the covenant: “Now it is true that in the

Mosaic covenant, God then comes along and places conditions on Israel's right to enjoy possession of that which they already own (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28)." This tension, however, is immediately minimized by the insistence on the supposedly dominant theme of unconditionality. As above, countervailing evidence is noted but largely ignored.

Claims that the biblical land promises are unconditional and unbreakable are common. In another example, Richard Land, the influential former president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, presents as his core claim that "the Bible teaches that God gave [Jews] that land forever."<sup>29</sup> This theme of eternity recurs throughout his statement (e.g., see his repeated use of the word "forever"). John Hagee, a prominent American pastor and founder of Christians United for Israel, is especially insistent on this interpretation. Arguing against the traditional Christian supersessionist view that after the coming of Jesus the covenant between God and Israel—which includes the land promises—was abrogated, he says, "We believe that this [Gen 12:3] is an eternal covenant between God and the seed of Abraham to which God is faithful."<sup>30</sup> To underscore its importance, this statement appears on a list as one of the fundamental beliefs of Hagee's ministry, alongside belief in Jesus Christ's divinity and resurrection, for example. In Hagee's view, then, all responsibility falls on God. Commenting on promises made to Abraham in Genesis, he writes "God says five times in this covenant, 'I will, I will, I will.' He never says to Abraham, 'You must. . . you must!'"<sup>31</sup> Conditionality and responsibility go unmentioned.

Similar views are also present in the writings of a relatively moderate interpreter such as Marvin Wilson, a leading Evangelical scholar. While more nuanced, he basically shares the others' emphases. Quoting Genesis, he says, "The covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants was to be an 'everlasting covenant' . . . and the land was to be an 'everlasting possession' . . ."<sup>32</sup> This is the aspect he and others consistently underscore. As a biblical scholar, he does not ignore biblical demands for how to live in the land and admits that disobedience is punished. Despite this, the emphasis is strikingly different than in the weak affirmation group. Threats are minimized, while promises are highlighted. However, Wilson, unlike most others in this group, emphasizes the biblical demands for justice but (unlike those in the first group) decouples them from threats of covenantal abrogation.<sup>33</sup>

In an apparent similarity to those in the first group, those in this group see the promises of the land as relevant to others as well. However, the ways humanity (i.e., Gentiles) can benefit are quite different. Most commonly, the universal benefits of the promise are achieved in a very particular, land-centered and Jewish-centered way, namely, by defending the eternal connection of Abraham and his descendants through Isaac alone to the land. To quote Richard Land again, when asked why he says the land promises are eternal promises to the Jews, he says “God blesses those that bless the Jews and curses those who curse the Jews.” In his minor tweak on the text of Genesis 12:3 (rather than “Jews,” the biblical text reads “you”), he implies that a strong defense of the land promises to the Jews is what ultimately brings blessings to others. Those who affirm this are rewarded by God for supporting this interpretation.<sup>34</sup> The ICEJ statement, referring to Genesis 17, which foretells the covenant with Isaac not Ishmael, also insists on a promise limited to this familial line but with broader benefits. Gifts given or promises made to other children of Abraham are treated as irrelevant. It is the Abrahamic promises, through Isaac and his descendants, which serve “the purpose of world redemption.” Thus, unlike the first group, with its tension between the particular promises of one place to one people, on the one hand, and notions of service to all people, on the other, this second group tries to minimize the tension between particular and universal. They argue that affirming the particular *as particular* (i.e., a strong affirmation of the land promises to Israel) can serve all of humanity.

### **Comparison of the two approaches**

Lastly, I want to suggest ways these interpretations might yield insights into broader trends in Christian views of Jews and Judaism. Again, I can do no more than offer some tentative observations, but I do think approaches to the specific topic of land provide insights into the general topic of covenant and the diverse ways it is construed. One common feature on all sides, as noted, is a rejection of supersessionism. The Christians mentioned here widely reject the millennia-old claim that the Jews’ covenant with God was abrogated after Jesus. All wrestle with the *terms* of the covenant, not the *existence* of the covenant. By contrast, those who do not reject supersessionism—on this issue, some conservative Christians and, outside the west, some Arab Christians—naturally ignore this

topic entirely; if the *covenant itself* was vitiated by the Jews' refusal to believe in Jesus, there is no reason to debate the specific *terms* of the covenant.<sup>35</sup>

Despite this similarity between the two groups, however, the strong affirmation group is more insistent about contrasting their affirmation of the covenant from traditional supersessionism. For complex reasons (e.g., the belief among some that the creation of the State of Israel is a fulfillment of the covenantal promises and a step toward Jesus' return), the suggestion that the covenant could be cancelled is an anathema to them. Even the possibility that it might be temporarily suspended meets firm resistance. Of course, it should not be surprising that some of the more conservative groups that hold other views that seem to cast doubt on the legitimacy of Judaism—such as support for converting Jews to Christianity—would simultaneously insist on the eternity of the covenant in order to minimize an apparent paradox between affirming the biblical covenant and wanting Jews to become Christian.<sup>36</sup> By contrast, the weak affirmation group, while likewise often rejecting supersessionism, is consistently less vocal about this; without any interest in connecting the land promises to future events (as some in the other group do), there is apparently less at stake theologically in the threat of divine rejection of the disobedient.<sup>37</sup>

These commonalities should not obscure that the groups' views largely clash and are embedded in a polemical context. The contentious debate about the existence and the policies of the State of Israel is always present, explicitly or implicitly. Especially among the weak affirmation group, the State of Israel is almost never assigned any religious significance. It is viewed as a secular entity and not to be religiously legitimated. That is why the biblical promises that might lend support to the state, while not denied, are minimized as much as possible. They are also limited to the past rather than the present. The weak affirmation group thus makes a two-pronged argument: land promises are weak, and land promises do not apply to the present. This raises a tension that goes unmentioned: if the land promises are entirely limited to the past and the State of Israel has no theological legitimacy, discussions of the biblical standards for behavior by the state which are ubiquitous among those in this group would seem to be irrelevant. That is, one might expect Scripture to play no role at all in the views of those insist on the viewing the state in entirely secular terms.<sup>38</sup>

The strong affirmation group operates within this polemical context as well, often linking biblical promises to the modern state and criticizing those who fail to do so. Hence, the interpretation of the Genesis passages as unconditional and eternal buttresses efforts to legitimate Israel's existence and sometimes policies on religious grounds. More than Jews and Judaism, it is the modern state itself and its unique role in Christian religio-political thought that explains their emphases, or, again, overemphases. Yet few actually wrestle with the appropriateness of applying Scriptural promises to a secular nation-state. For most, an insistence on the unconditionality of the promises noted earlier seems to be all that is necessary to make the link to today. Furthermore, in what can be seen as a major omission, they make little effort to explore the covenant between God and the Jews apart from the land promises. Their interest seems to begin and end with this topic, though the content of the biblical covenant goes beyond the land.<sup>39</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This study, while preliminary and selective in the use of sources, is primarily intended to highlight a prominent issue in biblical theology that has clear relevance to a contentious subject in both Christian theology and Jewish-Christian relations. It is also intended to demonstrate a comparative methodology for studying different approaches to Scriptural interpretation of common texts and topics. It has promise for a more comprehensive and inclusive study. In particular, by drawing on more sources, such a study would likely illustrate a range of views within each group, as well as differences between, say, church statements and individual theological statements.

Even this limited survey has shown that interpretations of the biblical land promises reveal starkly different hermeneutical approaches. All of these interpreters chose to draw on other biblical texts of debatable relevance to the land promises and/or insisted on interpreting the promise texts according to their own theological principles (e.g., universalism, divine faithfulness, etc.). Despite often grudging brief mentions of alternative interpretations, most present their own with confidence and little nuance. One might expect that discussions of such a polemical and contested topic would prompt greater circumspection. Despite this (or maybe because of this), most dismiss or ignore views that differ from their own.

Political views of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are never far from view and deserve attention. Most obviously, expressions of sympathy and support for one side or the other help to explain why certain interpretations are offered. More interesting, however, are often sophisticated discussions about the relationship between biblical promises and the modern State of Israel (and its Jewish residents). Though it is more common for those in the second group to connect the two, all of the interpreters, as noted above, believe that it is appropriate to bring biblical texts into discussions of the existence and behavior of the modern state. This is true even among those who deny that the state can be “validated theologically.”<sup>40</sup> Strikingly, decisions about which texts to draw upon are almost never explicitly explained, and additional study could therefore provide useful insights into how and when interpreters move from ancient texts to modern contexts. As with interpretations of biblical texts, there are here unstated assumptions about the application of Scripture to post-biblical contexts. The approach used here would yield greater insights into both biblical hermeneutics and Jewish–Christian relations.

## Notes

1. This loomed large in discussions during the Second Vatican Council but is seldom discussed today; see John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews 1933–1965* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 239–72.
2. An important recent survey can be found in Edward Kessler, *An Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 147–69.
3. Alan Brockway, Paul M. van Buren, Rolf Rendtorff, and Simon Schoon, eds., *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People: Statements by the WCC and Its Member Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988), p. 170; Michael McGarry, “The Land of Israel in the Cauldron of the Middle East: A Challenge to Christian-Jewish Relations,” in *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity’s Sacred Obligation*, ed. Mary C. Boys (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), p. 213–24.
4. For a discussion of recent changes in Christians’ views of Jews and Judaism, see Mary C. Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing?: Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist, 2000), p. 247–66.
5. I do not consider supersessionist views in this essay; see below.
6. E.g., “A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews,” (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), 1987), p. 14; “Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis of the Roman Catholic Church,” (Vatican Commission For Religious Relations With The Jews, 1985), Sec. 33.
7. E.g., A. James Rudin, “Haze over Harmony,” *Reform Judaism*, December 2011, p. 48–55; Stephen R. Haynes, “Jews and Presbyterians: The Current Controversies and Some Underly-

ing Issues,” in *Let Us Reason Together: Christians and Jews in Conversation*, ed. Joseph D. Small and Gilbert S. Rosenthal (Louisville, KY: Witherspoon, 2010), p. 47–61.

8. For a recent study, see Alain Marchadour and David Neuhaus, *The Land, the Bible, and History: Toward the Land That I Will Show You* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

9. Recent studies include Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Motti Inbar, *Messianic Religious Zionism Confronts Israeli Territorial Compromises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 151–84; Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Gerald R. McDermott, “Evangelicals and Israel,” in *Uneasy Allies? Evangelical and Jewish Relations*, ed. Alan Mittleman, Byron Johnson, and Nancy Isserman (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), p. 127–54.

10. Anthony Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 532–88.

11. Alan Davies, “Jews and Palestinians: An Unresolved Conflict in the United Church Mind,” in *The United Church of Canada: A History*, ed. Don Schweitzer (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), p. 239–57.

12. Recent publications include Caitlin Carenen, *The Fervent Embrace: Liberal Protestants, Evangelicals, and Israel* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Mark Silk, “The Protestant Problem(s) of American Jewry,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 24 (2010), p. 126–40. See also the earlier work by Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes Towards the State of Israel* (Montreal, QC & Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

13. For example, see Christopher Leighton “The Presbyterian-Jewish Impasse,” in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, ed. Jonathan Frankel and Ezra Mendelsohn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 106–25; Joseph D. Small, “Presbyterian Disestablishment,” in *Let Us Reason Together: Christians and Jews in Conversation*, ed. Joseph D. Small and Gilbert S. Rosenthal (Louisville, KY: Witherspoon, 2010), p. 163–75.

14. Most often, this is seen in discussions of the biblical promises of land and Christian Zionism (however defined); presentations of one view are frequently juxtaposed with critiques of another; e.g., “Why We Should Be Concerned About Christian Zionism,” (National Council of Churches, 2008); “Land of Promise?: An Anglican Exploration of Christian Attitudes to the Holy Land, with Special Reference to ‘Christian Zionism,’” (Network for Inter Faith Concerns of the Anglican Communion, 2012).

15. E.g., Gen 15:18 (unconditional); Lev 18:1–29 (conditional). For a recent attempt to resolve some of the tension between conditionality and unconditionality, see R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 170–72.

16. “A Theological Understanding.”

17. “Justice for Palestine and Israel,” (The Methodist Church UK, 2010), p. 9.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

19. “Theology of Land and Covenant,” (Church of Scotland, 2003), p. 7.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

21. David P. Gushee and Glen Stassen, “An Open Letter to America’s Christian Zionists,” Accessed online at <http://newevangelicalpartnership.org/?q=node/139>. (October 21, 2014).

22. “Justice for Palestine and Israel,” p. 10.

23. Dick Jones, "God's People: A Series of Bible Studies Reflecting on the Holy Land," ed. The Methodist Church UK (2007).
24. Marlin Jeschke, *Rethinking Holy Land: A Study in Salvation Geography* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2005), p. 39.
25. "Land of Promise?: An Anglican Exploration of Christian Attitudes to the Holy Land, with Special Reference to 'Christian Zionism'," p. 58.
26. Rowan Williams, "Holy Land and Holy People," in *Challenging Christian Zionism: Theology, Politics and the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, ed. Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis, and Maurine Tobin (London: Melisende, 2005), p. 294.
27. "Justice for Palestine and Israel," p. 10.
28. "Response to Evangelical Letter to President Bush," International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, Accessed online at <http://int.icej.org/content/icej-response-evangelical-letter-president-bush>. (October 21, 2014).
29. Richard Land, "Why Christians Must Keep Israel Strong," Accessed online at <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/2002/06/Why-Christians-Must-Keep-Israel-Strong.aspx?p=1>. (October 21, 2014).
30. Quoted in Timothy Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friends* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 2004), p. 227.
31. John Hagee, *In Defense of Israel* (Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine, 2007), p. 165.
32. Marvin R. Wilson, "Zionism as Theology: An Evangelical Approach," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22 (1979), p. 29–30, 42.
33. See *ibid.*, p. 43.
34. On this interpretation see Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, p. 23; Moberly, *Theology*, p. 162–78.
35. For examples of such views, see Stephen Sizer, "The Theological Basis for Christian Zionism: On the Road to Armageddon," in *Challenging Christian Zionism: Theology, Politics and the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, ed. Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis, and Murine Tobin (London: Melisende, 2005); Gary M. Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise?: What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians* (London: Paternoster, 2003).
36. Richard Land, for example, supports proselytizing Jews. Whether this contradicts a strong affirmation of the covenantal promises to the Jews is not a question that needs to be answered here.
37. On the tension between the emphasis on conditional promises of land and opposition to supersessionism, see the critical remarks by Moberly, *Theology*, p. 173–74.
38. The Catholic Church, at least in its official statements, has sought to be more consistent in this regard, both denying theological legitimacy to the State of Israel and rejecting the use of biblical standards to evaluate the existence and policies of the state; see "Notes," Sec. 33. For a critical review of this approach, see Philip A. Cunningham, "A Catholic Theology of the Land? The State of the Question," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 8 (2013), p. 1–15.
39. A recent example of this lack of interest in exploring a positive value to Judaism beyond the land promises is Robert W. Nicholson, "Evangelicals and Israel: What American Jews Don't Want to Know (but Need to)," Accessed online at <http://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2013/10/evangelicals-and-israel/?mode=print>. (October 21, 2014).
40. "A Theological Understanding," p. 14.