

ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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ISRAEL'S WAR FOR TRUTH

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The declaration of the State of Israel by David Ben Gurion, 1948

Since its reemergence as a nation in 1948, Israel has suffered opposition on nearly every level possible. She has been attacked repeatedly in the military arena by hostile neighbors, the public relations arena by the world media, the political arena by the United Nations, the religious arena by replacement theologians, and even in the diplomatic arena by countries that claimed to be her allies. In recent years, however, a groundswell of support has arisen, creating for Israel a new and powerful friend in the form of evangelical Christians. From all over the world, many of these believers, perhaps like some of us, are proud to carry the label "Christian Zionist" and are determined to use their political, financial, and spiritual leverage to help Israel withstand whatever attack might come next.

That support is grounded in the Scripture. Growing numbers of Bible-believing Christians are seeing in its pages a mandate to love that nation and its people with the same passion that God says He does. Not surprisingly, however, as new allies have appeared on the scene, a new assault has been launched. This one could best be described as a theological attack and, though it takes many forms in practice, its weapon of choice is the very Book in which Jews and Christians are finding commonality.



The Bible as Our Only Protection

The Bible is the infallible, inerrant Word of the Creator of all things, given to us as a guidebook for life. In it, God reveals His character to mankind, laying out His plans for the world from beginning to end. It speaks of His omnipotence, omniscience, covenant faithfulness, and extravagant love for His creation. It clearly delineates what is right and wrong and the consequences for either choice. It shares God's desire for all men to be in relationship with Him and tells the story of a Land and a people who are central to His plan for the world's redemption. It is not *a book*; it is *the Book*, and without the truth it reveals, mankind has no protection from deception that leads to destruction.

Unfortunately, however, it isn't being read much these days. Recently, I came across a study that had been done by a reputable organization in the United States regarding Christians and their belief in the Bible. I was shocked to learn that over 60% of those queried who call themselves "believers," including "born again" believers, could not name the four gospels, could not list five of the Ten Commandments, didn't believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, and made moral determinations based on their own opinions rather than biblical truth. Another study indicated that less than 50% of professing Christians read the Bible daily. Unfortunately, the situation is just as bleak in many other nations around the world.

The effects of that lack of biblical foundation can be seen in virtually every area of society, from moral decay to the breakdown of the family, soaring crime rates and

pervasive fear. But nowhere is it more evident than when the subject of Israel arises. The nation that God says is the apple of His eye pervades the pages of the Bible, and yet precious few in the Church base their opinions about it on what God says. Many other voices are shouting to be heard, and Christians who lack sound biblical understanding are being tossed about by every wind of unfortunate, anti-Semitic doctrine.

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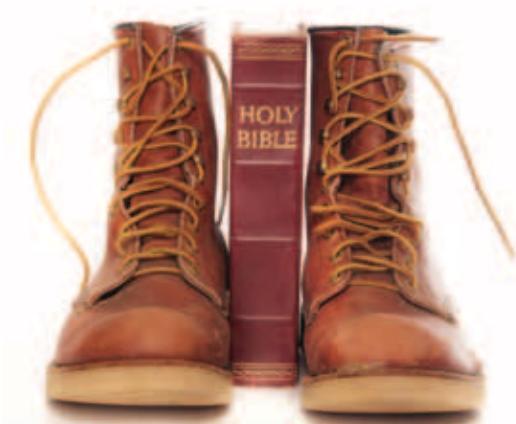
Old Heresy in a New Suit

Such has been the case since the third century AD when the heresy of Replacement Theology began to grow within the Church. It spread the belief that God washed His hands of the Jewish people, replacing them with Christians who were now chosen to be recipients of all the blessings in the Book. Jews, however, continued to be the unfortunate beneficiaries of the curses. For nearly two millennia, biblically undernourished Christians believed that God had reneged on His covenant with Israel and the Jewish people. To the tragic detriment of both communities, Replacement Theology became the standard regarding the relationship between the Church and Israel, giving rise to nearly two millennia of Christian anti-Semitism.

Today, Replacement Theology is taking center stage again through one element of that theological attack against Israel. A religious movement with huge political ramifications, Palestinian Fulfillment Theology—also known as Christian Palestinianism—is taking the Christian world by storm. And it can only do so because many Christians don't read their Bibles and lack the understanding of truth that Word provides.

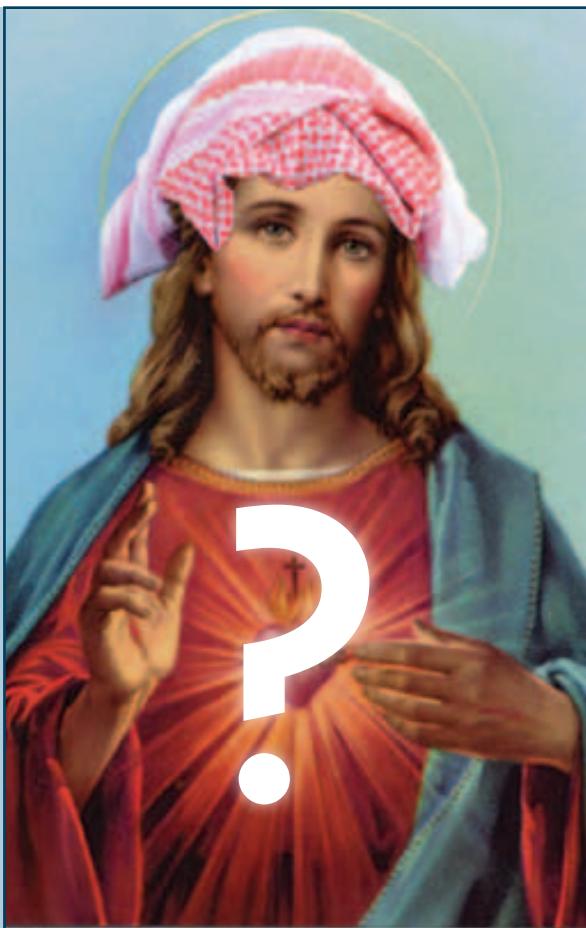
Paul Wilkinson, in his book *For Zion's Sake*, actually coined the phrase Christian Palestinianism and defines it as an inverted mirror image of Christian Zionism: While many evangelicals today see the Bible as a very Jewish book, this movement sees it as solely a Christian document, the New Testament superseding the Old in relevance and authenticity; the Church is not a new people called out of the Gentiles and grafted into the olive tree that is Israel, but *is* Israel, the *new* Israel; the Land of the Bible is not Israel but Palestine; the Holocaust is to be resented not remembered.

This blatantly anti-Semitic cartoon was a winner in a caricature competition held by a Palestinian NGO in 2010. Funders of this NGO include a number of European governments and international church groups.



www.ngo-monitor.org

The idea that Jesus was not a Jew but a Palestinian is central to Christian Palestinianism theology.



A cartoon that compares the suffering of Jesus to that of the Palestinians.



While Israel supporters recognize May 14, 1948, as a mighty miracle of God, Christian Palestinianism sees it as a catastrophe. The State of Israel is not prophetic but illegitimate; Israeli Jews are not a dispersed people who have been called back to their homeland by the Lord but are militaristic empire builders and illegal occupiers. And finally, Jesus is not a Jew at all, but a Palestinian.

Creating a New Jesus

The recognized father of the movement is an Anglican clergyman born in Nazareth named Naim Ateek. By reworking the Catholic liberation theology of the 1970s, Ateek has created this movement centered around Jesus as a social liberator, Himself a "Palestinian who suffered under military occupation of the land of Palestine."

In a Lenten message in 2001, he had this to say:

Here in Palestine Jesus is again walking the Via Dolorosa. Jesus is the powerless Palestinian humiliated at a checkpoint, the woman trying to get to the hospital, the young man whose dignity is trampled, the student who can't

get to the university to study, the father who needs to find bread to feed his family. In this season of Lent, it seems to many of us that Jesus is on the cross again with thousands of crucified Palestinians around him. It only takes people of insight to see the hundreds of thousands of crosses throughout the land, on which Palestinian men, women and children are being crucified; Palestine has become one huge Golgotha. The Israeli government crucifixion system is operating daily...Palestine has become the place of the skull.

Ateek's attempt to delegitimize the nation of Israel and its biblical claim to the land by creating a Palestinian Jesus is unfortunately seeing success. This new Jesus has become normative for Christian Palestinianists and a powerful propaganda weapon in their anti-Israel crusade. With alarming regularity, such references are being used in pulpits around the world, often taking listeners to the next logical conclusion: if Jesus was born a persecuted Palestinian, His sympathies today would naturally lie with the Palestinian people. International evangelical speaker Carl Medearis asks, "How would Jesus vote if He had a seat at the UN?" His answer: "...Jesus would support the Palestinian statehood bid."

Although the idea that Jesus was not a Jew but a Palestinian is central to this theology, it is not unique to this movement. The same historical revisionism is also emanating from the Muslim world, as more and more Islamic leaders and teachers make the same claim. A Palestinian television broadcast last Christmas saw a Muslim cleric claiming "Jesus was a Palestinian and no one denies it. He was the first shaheed [martyr]." Another referred to Jesus as, "a Palestinian, tortured in his own land." And still another claimed, "Jesus was born in this land [Palestine], grew up in this land, spread his teachings in this land; he and his mother Mary were Palestinians par excellence."

"De-Zionizing" the Bible

Another claim of Christian Palestinianism is that any reference to the Jewishness of Jesus robs the Gospel of its universality. It is a message for all men throughout all time and referring to Jesus as a Jew, it is

said, creates an exclusivity that is unacceptable. Further, proponents challenge any reference to Israel as a nation set apart for a specific glorious future. Colin Chapman, in his book *Whose Promise Land*, challenges the concept of a Jewish Jesus, as well as the use of “everlasting” in reference to God’s covenant with Israel and their possession of the land. He says, “The New Testament writers ceased to look forward to a literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies of a return to the land and a restoration of a Jewish state. The one and only fulfillment of all promises and prophecies was already there before their eyes in the person of Jesus.”

Should the Bible itself make such claims for Israel, it too is accused of exclusivity. Naim Ateek, takes issue with verses such as those found in Isaiah 61, which speak of the day when Gentiles will serve an Israel established at last as God’s holy nation and the joy of the earth. His response: “This exclusive text is unacceptable today...It must be de-Zionized.”

A House Divided

Unfortunately, many well-known evangelical leaders are not only believers in Christian Palestinianism, but are also activists, using their influence to bring this unbiblical message to the Christian masses around the world. Tony Campolo, John Piper, Stephen Sizer, Hank Hanegraaff, Lynn Heibels, and Gary Burge are just a few of the teachers and leaders who endorse the movement. Through their pulpits, influence, and resources, they not only demonize Israel, but proclaim a message of anti-Zionism as well, claiming that Christians who support Israel are a threat to the Gospel and guilty of apostasy.

In his book *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon*, Stephen Sizer calls Christian Zionism a “totally unbiblical menace” and “one of the most dangerous and heretical movements in the world,” blaming it for fueling the Arab-Israel conflict. Hank Hanegraaff writes, “Christian Zionist beliefs and behaviors are the antithesis of biblical Christianity.” And Emerging Church leader Brian McLaren writes of the “...terrible, deadly, distorted yet popular theologies associated with Christian Zionism...”

One Battle, Many Fronts

One cannot help but be alarmed as we witness this very aggressive campaign becoming increasingly politicized while gathering ever widening support among evangelical leaders and denominations as well as para-church organizations worldwide. Conferences, videos, print media, and the Internet are weapons being expertly wielded in the battle to draw the hearts and minds of Bible-believing Christians away from the truth of God’s covenant promises to the nation and people of Israel. The following are five examples of the growing arsenal in this very real war.

1. Christ at the Checkpoint Conference (CATC)

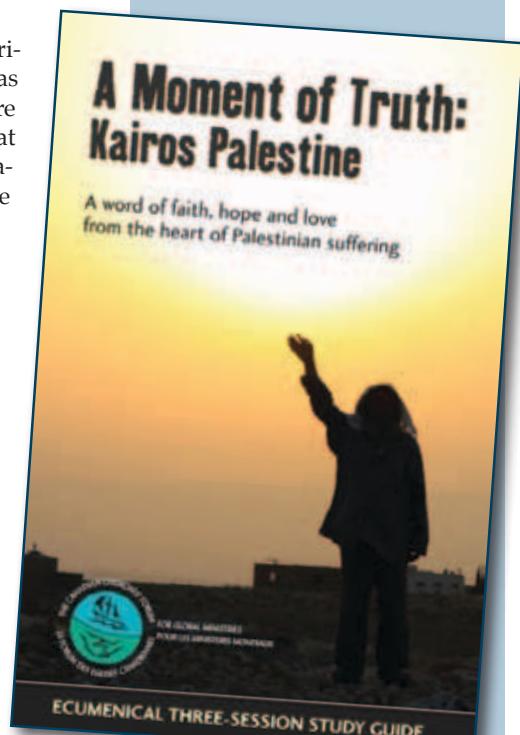
The third annual conference was held in March of 2012 in Bethlehem, an event advertised as an open forum to seek common ground in the search for peace in the Middle East. It was, however, a gathering whose real purpose was to demonize Israel, opposing her right to existence as a Jewish state and denying any legitimate claim to the land. Speakers included Stephen Sizer and Gary Burge, and prior to the actual event, the CATC Web site was rife with anti-Israel and anti-Christian Zionist rhetoric.

It seems somehow appropriate that the conference was held as Jewish people the world over were celebrating Purim, the holiday that remembers the efforts of the evil Haman to destroy the Jewish people and their rescue through Esther.

2. Kairos Palestine Document (KPD)

In late 2009, a group of Palestinian clergy issued this document. Under the guise of a call for peace, the document placed the blame for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict squarely on Israel, attempting to justify the Palestinian policies of violence and terrorism as a legitimate reaction to what it called “the occupation.” Urging Christians to revert to Replacement Theology, it denies the legitimacy of Judaism and Jews.

A study guide created by The Canadian Churches Forum teaches the theology behind the Kairos Palestine Document, urging Christians to revert to Replacement Theology.





Poster of a screening of the documentary *With God on our Side* at a church in the UK

Olga Besnard / Shutterstock.com



The document has made its way around the world, collecting the support and signatures of Bible-believing Christians. A study guide was created in 2011 to help churches, Sunday schools, and study groups grasp the importance of the document.

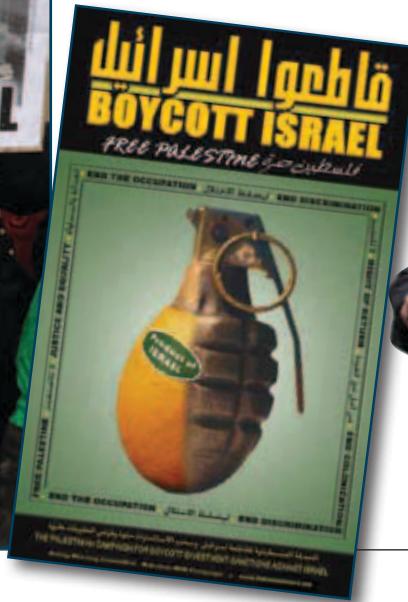
3. The Bethlehem Call

This document, created in 2011 by Christians participating in the Kairos for Global Justice Conference in Bethlehem, clearly depicts the delegitimization and criminalization of Israel as positive and necessary to the achievement of peace in the Middle East. It refers to Israel as an illegal regime guilty of systematic injustice and brutality against the Palestinian people. It constantly refers to Israel's "occupation" of the land, which it calls a crime and sin. The document states that signers reject any theology which would justify Israel's current position and, among other demands, calls for the right of return for Palestinians.

4. With God on Our Side

2010 saw the release of this documentary film produced by Porter Speakman Jr. and based on the work of Stephen Sizer. The film was purported to be a new look at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that promotes an inclusive and just peace with love for Jews and Palestinians alike.

In reality, it was an expertly done propaganda film denouncing Christian Zionism, demonizing Israel, and painting those who take God's promises to Israel literally as unsophisticated fanatics. The film was widely viewed in churches and academic institutions across



BDS campaigns from around the world

the United States, Canada, and the UK, often accompanied by Speakman and Sizer.

5. Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)

Finally, the BDS movement defines itself as a global campaign of boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel until Israel complies with international law and Palestinian rights. On its Web site, it accuses Israel of ethnic cleansing, colonization, racial discrimination, and military occupation. It calls for the end of the "occupation" and "colonization" of Arab land, the dismantling of the wall (security fence), and the Palestinian right of return.

Boycotts are aimed at products and companies that purportedly profit from the violation of Palestinian rights and target everything from educational institutions to agricultural products and cosmetics. Divestment targets corporations accused of being complicit in the violation of Palestinian rights and attempts to ensure that investment portfolios and pension funds are not used to finance such companies. Sanctions, according to the BDS Web site, are an essential part of demonstrating disapproval for Israel's criminal activities. By calling for sanctions against her, the Web site says campaigners educate society about violations of international law and seek to remove what it calls Israel's "unmerited veneer of respectability."

Although the BDS movement is not theological in nature, the concepts it represents have strong appeal and have gained popularity among some Christian groups. Unlike our other examples, which are confined strictly to the Christian community,

the BDS movement represents a rather unholy alliance between many Christian churches and denominations worldwide, international corporations and institutions, and 171 Palestinian NGOs, trade unions, and political parties.

A Christian Response

These latest assaults on Israel have huge ramifications for the Church. On recent international trips, I have encountered Christians who have become confused by the arguments put forth by proponents of Christian Palestinianism. Some are even struggling with Replacement Theology and its pseudo biblical facade, while many others are just plain angry as they recognize these movements for what they are: spiritualized political crusades that find their origins in the same irrational hatred of the Jewish people as all other anti-Semitic movements.

This time, however, it is not just Israel that is being assailed, but Bible believers who stand with her as well, and in so-doing, proponents of these movements have called into question the very character of the God of Israel and the veracity of His Word. How should we respond?

1. Know your Bible.

The most important step Christians can take against this kind of attack is to become stalwart students of the Bible. We must restore the Bible to its rightful place as the inerrant, infallible Word of God Himself and the only source of truth.

So when confronted with a theological movement that relies on emotionalism and historical revisionism as the standards for interpretation, a carefully considered, biblically sound response is fundamental. According to Naim Ateek: "When confronted with a difficult passage in the Bible...one needs to ask such simple questions as: Is the way I am hearing this the way I have come to know God in Christ? Does this fit the picture I have of God that Jesus has revealed to me?...If it does, then that passage is valid and authoritative. If not, then I cannot accept its validity or authority."

Such a low view of scriptural authority requires a solid response firmly grounded in the very Scriptures that are being challenged. Memorize and meditate on verses such as the following and don't allow your trust in God's faithfulness to be shaken by this "new hermeneutic."

"I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:2-3).

"that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on

you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers" (Deut. 30:3-5).

"You will arise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favor her, yes, the set time, has come. For your servants take pleasure in her stones, and show favor to her dust. So the nations shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth Your glory. For the LORD shall build up Zion; He shall appear in His glory" (Ps. 102:13-16).

"I will bring My exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,' says the LORD your God" (Amos 9:14-15, NIV).

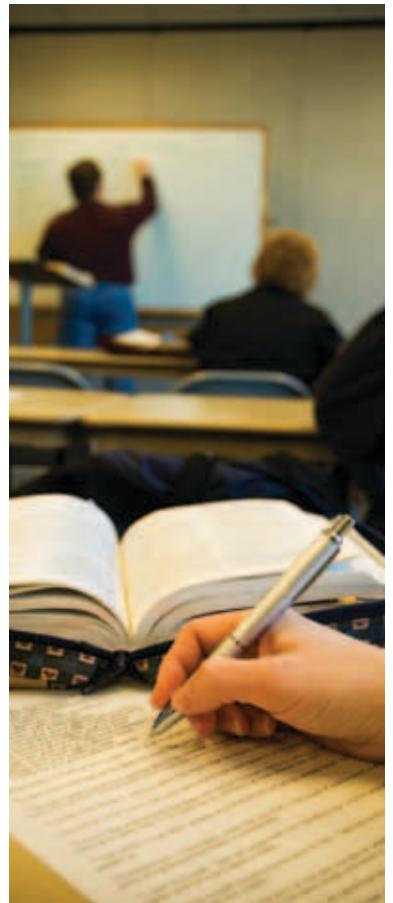
Other relevant passages include Jeremiah 31:35-40; Ezekiel 36 and 37; Joel 3:1-2; Obadiah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Acts 15:13-16, and Romans 9:1-11.

2. Know your enemy.

It is critically important to recognize that standing with Israel is indeed standing with God. Conversely, attacks on Israel are tantamount to attacks on God. Individuals who are involved in these movements are unfortunately playing into the hands of our very real enemy who seeks to discredit God by proving Him to be unfaithful to His covenant promises. These individuals are not the enemy and must be treated with the same compassionate love and respect Christians are required to display to all men.

3. Speak the truth in love.

Many Christians who stand with Israel are very passionate in that support. They love Israel because they believe it is a mandate from God and, therefore, are very firm and sometimes outspoken as they watch Israel encounter opposition. It is important to speak out, to confront lies and misconceptions with truth, and make sure that a truly biblical perspective is heard and understood. In doing that, passion is often not a good friend. A calm, dispassionate presentation of the truth, with facts and Scriptures in hand, is by far the best defense.



The most important step Christians can take against this kind of attack is to become stalwart students of the Bible.

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4. Pray

There is no weapon more powerful than prayer. We must remember that this is a spiritual battle, and it needs to be fought on that front.

- Pray often and regularly for Israel, reminding God of His covenant promises and proclaiming them over His Land and people.
- Pray that the Church worldwide will come to recognize and embrace God's heart toward His chosen nation, repenting of the heresies of Replacement Theology and Christian anti-Semitism.
- Pray that the Bible will again be read, studied, and valued as the sacred volume that it is, protecting believers from deception.
- Pray that the Lord will clearly reveal His truth to those involved in the Christian Zionism movement and restore unity to His Church.
- Pray that the relationships of love and trust that are being built between Jews and evangelical Christians will survive every assault and grow ever stronger to the honor and glory of God's name.

By Cheryl Hauer, International Development Director

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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

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