

ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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Vol. # 770316 • March 2016

Christian Zionism

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT



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B'nei Menashe arrive at Ben Gurion airport



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SOME YEARS AGO I sat listening as Rabbi Ari Abramowitz, a great friend of Bridges for Peace, explained to our group, “Naturally, Jews focus on *Jewish* Zionism and Christians focus on *Christian* Zionism, but there’s really one Zionism for all of us to focus on, and that’s *biblical* Zionism.”

My heart was stirred that day with the notion that Jews and Christians can come into solidarity over the powerful call to Zion found in the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments. As Christians, our call is not one of rushing in to displace Israel in the plan of God. Rather, the Christian call to Zion is built on the firm foundation of the “Old” Testament covenants and promises for Israel, enlarged through the Gentile expansion plan replete in the “New” Testament. That’s why Christians who believe God’s promises from the “Old” rejoice in finding their fulfillment in the “New.”

For Christians to be authentic biblical Zionists as Rabbi Abramowitz envisioned, we must be well-studied in both the front and back of the Book. Regarding the “Old” Testament, much Christian scholarship has been accomplished and many excellent resources are available which present defensible biblical support

for the Jewish return to Zion and the Gentile role in that earth-altering process. Since the “New” Testament could use closer inspection on the matter of Zionism, we’ll go on a Bible exploration to search out Christian Zionism in its pages.

Let’s take a brief journey through the Writings of the Apostles as compiled in the canon of Scripture commonly called the New Testament. There’s not space here to cover every supporting passage, but this overview will provide a springboard for further study and exploration for the well-grounded, well-rounded, biblical Zionist who wants to be “all in” with God’s call to Zion.

It’s the Land of Israel

“Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel...”
Matthew 2:20

The message came from heaven through an angel of the Lord that appeared to Joseph, the father of Yeshua (Jesus) while he safeguarded his family in Egypt. Take careful note of where Joseph was directed to go—not to “Palestine,” there was no such place—but to *“the land of Israel.”* This appellation is very important to Christian Zionists for it gives heaven’s definition of the territory we are talking about when we support the regathering of the Jewish exiles to their ancient homeland.

Then consider Yeshua, the Jewish exile. Directed by God, the infant Yeshua’s Jewish family had fled Herod’s murderous rampage against the baby boys of Bethlehem. In our passage, Yeshua’s family begins the long return to the land of Israel. We see in this a prototype of Yeshua’s people who would be driven out by the ruthless Romans, later to be returned by God in an era of Christian blessing and cooperation.

As Christian Zionists, we echo the angel’s message to Joseph when we exhort others to *“go to the land of Israel.”* Maybe we should tell our friends, “If Yeshua’s family could do it on foot and donkey, you can do it by airliner and luxury touring



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coach!” In fact, Christian Zionism accounts for some 825,000 tourists in the land of Israel each year (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs). For most, a biblical study tour in Israel goes well beyond a vacation to a life-changing encounter with the God of Israel who is actively regathering His people to His land.

Many Christians are making a “return” to Zion of their own sort. Arriving a tourist, they depart a Zionist with a mission to come back and serve the Jewish people as they return from exile. Several worldwide Christian Zionist organizations are now long-established and headquartered in the land of Israel. One of them is Bridges for Peace which has brought in thousands of volunteer workers who daily provide food, shelter, home supplies and much-needed moral support to needy Jews coming home by the millions. Bridges maintains a stalwart contingent of over 60 staff and volunteers from over 12 nations who have answered the strong call to Zion.

Good Works

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:16

Yeshua’s instruction to His disciples, whom we are, is to bring glory to His Father by letting our light, which He is, shine out to all people. We do that by doing good works that meet the heart needs of others. We know from the Apostle Paul that our good works don’t save us but are the clear evidence of our salvation (Eph. 2:8–10). Therein lies the opportunity and responsibility of Christian Zionists as we humbly and respectfully come alongside the returning exiles.

The Apostle James has something to say about good works too: *“I will show you my faith by my works”* (James 2:18b). How Jewish of James!

Christian Zionists have learned from the Jewish apostles and the Jewish people’s example that it’s not so much about what you say, or what you believe, as what you do. Your outward actions reveal your inward reality.



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At Bridges for Peace, we put our faith into action with 50.8 tons of kosher food provided monthly “from Dan to Beersheva” across the land of Israel. That means 26,000 people are fed monthly, 390 hungry school children receive hot lunches daily, and hundreds of other precious Jewish lives are strengthened in their call to build up Zion. Bridges has repaired over 1,050 homes, stockpiled 318 tons of war-time readiness supplies, and rescued from the Former Soviet Union over 54,000 Jews who now thrive in Israel. Having witnessed these works, many in Israel are giving great glory to their Father in heaven.

Wise and Harmless

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” Matthew 10:16

In the work Christian Zionists do among the Jewish people, our motives are regularly tested—as we should expect. Centuries of Christian anti-Semitism, forced conversions, expulsions and abusive end-times scenarios have engendered deep pain in the Jewish psyche. In contrast to this regrettable legacy, Yeshua counsels us to be like three creatures, all at once: a sheep that humbly follows the shepherd, a serpent that slips in unnoticed, and a dove that delights all unconditionally.

This metaphorical triad is seen in the life of the Christian who receives Yeshua’s shepherding heart towards his “countrymen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3b), maintains an unobtrusive place among the Jewish people, and makes him/herself a welcomed presence of peace and blessing. By consistently living this way, Bridges for Peace workers have brought healing to countless Jewish hearts and engendered a powerful reconciliation that enables God-honoring relationships between Christians and Jews in Israel and worldwide.

The Least of These

“And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’” Matthew 25:40

“The King” is Yeshua, returning to judge the nations. In this judgment He’s not calling individuals to account, but nations. He’s not judging based on their beliefs but on their works. Specifically, He’s concerned about how the nations (plural, Gentiles) have treated His nation (singular, the Jewish people) whom He holds dear as *“the least of these His brethren.”*

The Christian Zionist plays a key role in determining on which side of the balance his/her nation ends up using Yeshua’s scales of justice. Through our consistently biblical message to the nations, and through our holy actions toward the vulnerable of God’s nation, we set a standard of right conduct and inspire others to join us in the work of feeding the hungry, clothing the destitute and taking in the stranger. Our duty becomes our honor to serve Yeshua’s natural family.

Here we discover that compassion for needy Israelis equals love for our Lord—a divine linkage of Christians and Jews! Bridges for Peace is abundantly privileged to be an available vessel in God’s hand for dispensing His mercy and grace to “the least” of the regathered of Israel. And we don’t neglect the rest of the household of faith—we’re also honored to serve the needy among our beloved Arab-Christian brethren (Gal. 6:10).

Declaring the Shema

“Jesus answered him, ‘The first of all the commandments is: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”’” Mark 12:29–31

Christian Zionists have learned a prayer that finds complete agreement within the Jewish soul. Every Christian knows Yeshua’s priority on loving the Lord and your neighbor, but too few are aware of the context of the command that the Apostle Mark preserves in his Gospel. When the scribe asked Yeshua, *“Which is the first commandment of all?”* (Mark 12:28) Jesus immediately recited the prayer that is foremost on the heart and mind of every faithful Jew—the *Shema*: *“Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one”* (Deut. 6:4).

Here then is the hallmark of the pure-hearted Christian Zionist—fulfilling Yeshua’s command to love in the context of declaring Israel’s one, true and living God. Sadly, Church fathers banned Christians from reciting the *Shema* charging it was “anti-Trinitarian” (Jewish Currents). How strange, considering that one of the persons of the Trinity had no problem declaring it! Christian Zionists are correcting that damaging theology every time we declare Israel’s God who is One, while loving our Jewish neighbors as ourselves.



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All Things *Tanakh*

“Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’” Luke 24:44

Together with the Jewish people, Christian Zionists uphold our founding document: the Bible. Jews call the Hebrew Scriptures the *Tanakh*, an acronym for *Torah* (instructions), *Nevi'im* (prophets) and *Ketuvim* (writings). Yeshua called it the same thing, though it comes through the Greek to English in this passage as the “Law, Prophets and Psalms.” The point is that Yeshua completely affirmed its canonicity and authority when He declared that all things written in it must be fulfilled.

Luke also records the Apostle Paul upholding “all things” of the *Tanakh*: “Until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:21) and “...believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14b). The “all things” include Gentiles like us who would someday bring Israel home, comfort them and aid them in restoring Zion for God’s glory. Yes, the restoration is established in the first Testament, affirmed in the second and coming to fulfillment before our very eyes.

Through awareness, prayer, serving and giving, Christian Zionists are cooperating with God in His personal commitment to Zion. As we like to say at Bridges for Peace, “Why just read about Bible prophecy when you can be a part of it?” Yes, join us in the work of preparation for the complete restoration of Israel to the land, and the Kingdom to earth!

Among Them, With Them

“You, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them...”
Romans 11:17

The Church was not birthed on the earth to replace Israel. Rather, our role is to “fill-full” God’s cultivated Jewish olive tree by bringing in the wild Gentile branches for God’s miracle work of ingrafting, “contrary to nature,” as Paul explains the divine horticulture (Rom. 11:24). Living among the Jewish people includes venturing respectfully into their communities in both their dispersion and regathering. However imperfectly, Christian Zionists are bridging the gap and modeling the lifestyle for other Christians to emulate.

Biblical Zionists I read about, but even more so the ones I actually got to know, significantly shaped my own call to Zion. These are the pioneers who believed God’s Word and acted upon on it, trusting Him for the final outcome. My heart journey was radically transformed when a verse in this same passage leapt off the page and into my heart: “...through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy” (Rom. 11:31). After centuries of wounding curses inflicted upon the Jewish people by my Christian forebears, I realized that I was being given the opportunity to be a vessel of God’s mercy for the healing of Jewish hearts. In that instant, I answered the call to Zion.



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Rejoicing With His People

“Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: ‘For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name.’ And again he says: ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!’” Romans 15:8–10

Rooted in *Tanakh*, this passage informs us that “His people” Israel are rejoicing, no matter their suffering, for God will provide “*atonement for His land and His people*” (Deut. 32:43). Then God commands Gentiles to rejoice with His people. What kind of Gentile might we expect to do the rejoicing? Christian Zionists naturally, especially as they make pilgrimage from the nations to join in the biblical feasts and other celebrations amid restored Jewish sovereignty in the promised land of Israel.

Through doctrinally sound biblical exegesis, Zionists help our fellow Gentiles understand why we rejoice with the Jews. At Bridges for Peace, a long heritage of biblical Zionist scholars have shaped our education ministry so that today we offer invaluable resources like *Israel and the Church: God’s Road Map*, an anthology of the essentials in this end-time drama, and *Sinai Speaks*, a *Torah*-based Christian devotional. We publish the news magazine *Dispatch from Jerusalem*, the monthly Hebraic-rooted *Israel Teaching Letter*, and a weekly email update from Jerusalem. Bridges for Peace also provides Christian leader training, educational seminars and Israel advocacy for all who want to find their voice for Zion in the nations.

Eyes on Israel

“Observe Israel after the flesh...” 1 Corinthians 10:18

Paul instructs Gentiles to learn from the nation of Israel. Sadly, later Church leaders led our heritage out of the illuminating Hebrew olive grove down the darkening tunnel of Greek philosophy, Roman polity and Western conformity. The Church has suffered for this—Israel has suffered even more. The gap between us grew so cavernous that a “Christian” Europe hosted a Holocaust and is still largely unrepentant for it.

But a remnant of the Church, not unlike the remnant of Israel, has persisted, prayed and brought forth leaders who have helped the Church return to a place of learning at Israel’s feet. Bridges for Peace founder, Dr. G. Douglas Young, gave this a try in the 1950s, and his legacy continues to grow as a fruitful tree planted in season. A pioneer of 20th-century Christian Zionism, Dr. Young dared to study the Hebrew Scriptures with Jewish colleagues. Combining wisdom and humility, he saw that Christians would benefit from the wealth of biblical understanding resident in the rabbis and sages. This led him to Zion—literally—where he founded the Institute of Holy Land Studies upon the rocky slopes of Mt. Zion. The advent of Bridges for Peace followed as a means to carry Hebraic-rooted education out of Zion and to the nations.

Bridge-building

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation.” Ephesians 2:13–14

I wonder if the plural “bridges” in Bridges for Peace was chosen to convey the two bridges referenced in this powerful passage: First, the bridge between God and man; second, the bridge between Jew and Gentile. Seeing both of these gaping wounds healed was important enough to the Jewish apostles that they devoted the preponderance of their writings to the matter. They preached the Gospel of Messiah’s reconciliation between God and man while wrestling with the reality that Jews and Gentiles are destined for true fellowship.

Christian Zionists cherish the One who is *the* bridge: Yeshua, who is our peace. We engage in closing both chasms through long-term, Spirit-led bridge-building efforts. Through a daily labor of love, Bridges for Peace volunteers focus on bridge two, the Jew-Gentile part of God’s longing. For those of us called to Zion, “Building relationships in Israel and around the world” goes way beyond our mission statement—it’s our passion.

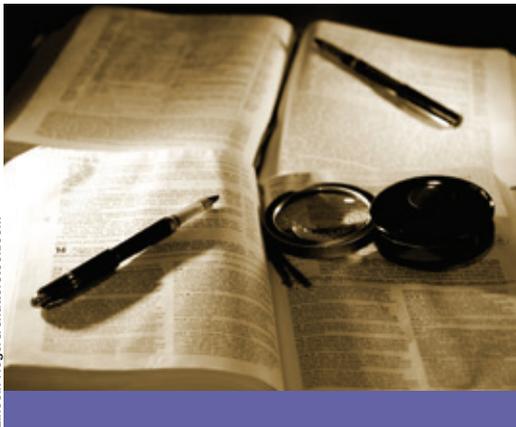
Moving Towards Torah

“Those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.” Titus 3:8–9

Devoted followers of Yeshua are also devoted to good works rooted in God’s law. Yet Christendom has a poor track record in this arena. We’ve tended to either ignore the law, sliding off into license, or fixate on it to the point of suffocating legalism. What Paul called *“holy and just and good,”* (Rom. 7:12) must be handled

with accuracy and awe. Neither are we to disregard it nor demand another’s keeping of it—these only engender divisive strife in a climate of control. Sadly, that’s when God’s holy, just and good law becomes man’s destructive legalism.

Learning much from our *Torah*-observant Jewish friends, Christian Zionists are exploring God’s law, which in Hebrew actually means God’s instruction,



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in the joy and fear of the Lord. It comes as a wonderful realization when Christians discover that through our relationship with Yeshua, that instruction is now written on our hearts (Heb.8:10). It's not far off! It is no longer an external control but an internal motivation. Zionists further rejoice that the law that went forth from Zion has entered Gentile hearts manifesting in joyful obedience, including a return blessing to Zion.

Holy Conduct

“What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God...? Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.” 2 Peter 3:11, 14

Like most Bible-believers, the Christian Zionist is pure-heartedly longing for the *“coming day of God.”* The problem arises when we divide over conflicting end-times scenarios. Unwelcomed prophecy mongering on our part frightens our Jewish friends who approach prophecy quite differently. Zionists are gaining literacy in the Hebraic worldview of prophecy that is not about predicting the future but rather knowing the prophecies so that when they come to pass, one has certainty that God is fulfilling His word (Acts 2:16).

The Apostle Peter instructs us to elevate our holy conduct over our eschatological preferences. Rather than majoring in end-times erudition that alienates Christian from Jew, Zionists prioritize being *“found by Him in peace”* when Messiah comes.

All Israel, All Nations

“And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: ...Judah... Reuben...Gad...Asher...Naphtali...Manasseh...Simeon...Levi...Issachar... Zebulun...Joseph...Benjamin. After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands.” Revelation 7:4–9

It doesn't take a Zionist to figure out that the twelve tribes of Revelation are not the Church. Much of Christendom over many centuries made claims to the contrary—hoping that Christians were the promised Israel instead of the Jews. But the text is explicit that “the children of Israel” (Rev. 7:4) have the *“seal of the living God”* (Rev. 7:2). The Apostle John sees all Israel represented in the Kingdom of Heaven! This is cause for praise to the living God, the God of Israel, for His covenantal-keeping power.

After the apostle beholds the redeemed sons and daughters of Zion, he turns his gaze to the overwhelming spectacle of gathered nations, tribes, peoples and tongues. How great is God's salvation, brought in through the Jews (John 4:22), to the Jew first and also to the Gentile! (Rom. 1:16).

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The Christian with a call to Zion lives, prays and serves in the present hope of this future reality. The labor, the service, the sacrifice will in no wise be in vain. From this glimpse into eternity, we rejoice in knowing that just as surely as God is gathering Israel to His covenant land, He will gather us to His eternal Kingdom. We'll coalesce as the New Jerusalem with the twelve tribes as our gates and the twelve apostles as our foundations (Rev. 21:12–14).

Biblical Zionist

It was at seminary that I first heard the term *Christian Zionist*. It was not from a Bible scholar but from a dear lady who had served as a volunteer with Bridges for Peace. As she stood to ask a question in a public lecture on Judaism, she readily identified herself as a Christian Zionist. Frankly, I was put off by her claim because it seemed contradictory for a Zionist to have anything to do with peace! I had assumed a Zionist to be a radical Jewish militant who hates Arabs—or some such nonsense.

I couldn't reconcile a Christian being a Zionist until I made the effort to get to know the real Israel, the real Jewish people, and to study what God says on the matter. That's when I found that the key to being an authentic Christian Zionist is being a *biblical* one. Alongside our Jewish friends and colleagues, may we endeavor to live and serve worthy of God's call to Zion.

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Bridges for Peace: Christians supporting Israel and building relationships between Christians and Jews in Israel and around the world.

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