

# Christian Zionism

**Christian Zionism** is a belief among some Christians that the return of the Jews to the Holy Land and the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 were in accordance with Bible prophecy. The term began to be used in the mid-20th century, superseding **Christian Restorationism**<sup>[1][2]</sup>

Traditional Catholic thought did not consider Zionism in any form,<sup>[3]</sup> but Christian advocacy grew after the Protestant Reformation in support of the restoration of the Jews. A contemporary Israeli historian suggests that evangelical Christian Zionists of the 1840s "passed this notion on to Jewish circles",<sup>[4]</sup> while Jewish nationalism in the early 19th century was widely regarded with hostility by British Jews.<sup>[5]</sup>

Some Christian Zionists believe that the gathering of the Jews in Israel is a prerequisite for the Second Coming of Jesus. The idea has been common in Protestant circles since the Reformation that Christians should actively support a Jewish return to the Land of Israel, along with the parallel idea that the Jews ought to be encouraged to become Christians as a means of fulfilling Biblical prophecy.<sup>[6][7][8][9]</sup>



Lord Shaftesbury's "Memorandum to Protestant Monarchs of Europe for the restoration of the Jews to Palestine", published in the *Colonial Times*, in 1841

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## History prior to the First Zionist Conference

## Protestant Reformation

Christian advocacy of the restoration of the Jews in Palestine was first heard following the Protestant reformation particularly in the English-speaking world among the Puritans. It was common practice among Puritans to anticipate and frequently pray for a Jewish return to their homeland.<sup>[10]</sup> John Owen, a 17th-century English Covenant theologian, for example, wrote: "Moreover, it is granted that there shall be a time and season, during the continuance of the kingdom of the Messiah in this world, wherein the generality of the nation of the Jews, all the world over, shall be called and effectually brought unto the knowledge of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ; with which mercy they shall also receive deliverance from their captivity, restoration unto their own land, with a blessed, flourishing, and happy condition therein."<sup>[11]</sup> John Gill took a similar position.<sup>[12]</sup>

Samuel Rutherford, a seventeenth-century Scottish theologian, expressed the ardent spirit of prayer of many of his contemporaries: "O to see the sight, next to Christ's coming in the clouds the most joyful! Our elder brethren the Jews and Christ fall upon each other's necks and kiss each other! They have long been assunder; they will be kind to one another when they meet. O day! O longed-for and lovely day-dawn!"<sup>[13]</sup>

In 1762, Charles Wesley wrote:<sup>[14]</sup>

O that the chosen band  
Might now their brethren bring,  
And gather'd out of every land  
Present to Sion's King;  
Of all the ancient race  
Not one be left behind,  
But each impell'd by secret grace  
His way to Canaan find!

Christian support for Jewish restoration was brought to America by the Puritans who fled England. In colonial times, Increase Mather and John Cotton, among many others, favored Jewish restoration.<sup>[10]</sup> Later Jonathan Edwards also anticipated a future return of Jews to their homeland.<sup>[15]</sup> However it was not until the early 19th century that the idea gathered political impetus.

Ezra Stiles at Yale was a supporter of Jewish restoration. In 1808, Asa McFarland, a Presbyterian, voiced the opinion of many that the fall of the Ottoman Empire was imminent and would bring about Jewish restoration. One David Austin of New Haven spent his fortune building docks and inns from which the Jews could embark to the Holy Land. In 1825, Mordecai Manuel Noah, a Jew who wanted to found a national home for the Jews on Grand Island in New York as a way station on the way to the Holy Land, won widespread Christian backing for his project. Likewise, restorationist theology was among the inspirations for the first American missionary activity in the Middle East<sup>[16]</sup> and for mapping the Holy Land.<sup>[17]</sup>

Many Christians believed that the return of the Jews to Judea, as prophesied in the Bible, was a necessary preliminary step towards the Second Coming. In this particular interpretation, after the Jews returned they would both accept Jesus as their savior and rebuild the Temple, which would usher in the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>[18]</sup>

## Restorationism, Dispensationalism and its Detractors

Most early-19th-century British Restorationists, like Charles Simeon, were Postmillennial in eschatology.<sup>[6]</sup> With the rise of James Frere, James Haldane Stewart and Edward Irving a major shift in the 1820s towards Premillennialism occurred, with a similar focus on advocacy for the restoration of the Jews to Israel.<sup>[6][19]</sup> As the demise of the Ottoman Empire appeared to be approaching, the advocacy of restorationism increased. At the same time, the visit of John Nelson Darby, the founder of a variant of Premillennialism called Dispensationalism to the United States catalyzed a new movement. This was expressed at the Niagara Bible Conference in 1878, which issued a 14-point proclamation (relying on Luke 12:35–40, 17:26–30, 18:8 Acts 15:14–17, 2 Thessalonians 2:3–8, 2 Timothy 3:1–5, and Titus 1:11–15), including:

that the Lord Jesus will come in person to introduce the millennial age, when Israel shall be restored to their own land, and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord; and that this personal and premillennial advent is the blessed hope set before us in the Gospel for which we should be constantly looking.

The dispensationalist theology of John Nelson Darby which motivates one stream of American Christian Zionism is often claimed to be a significant awakener of American Christian Zionism. He first distinguished the hopes of the Jews and that of the church and gentiles in a series of 11 evening lectures in Geneva in 1840. His lectures were immediately published in French (*L'Attente Actuelle de l'Eglise*), English (1841), German and Dutch (1847) and so his teachings began their global journey. Some dispensationalists, like Arno Gabelein, whilst philo-semitic, opposed Zionism as a movement born in self-confidence and unbelief.<sup>[20]</sup> While Dispensationalism had considerable influence through the Scofield Bible, Christian lobbying for the restoration of the Jews preceded the publication of the Scofield Reference Bible (first published by OUP, 1909) for over a century,<sup>[6]</sup> and many Christian Zionists and Christian Zionist organizations such as the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem do not subscribe to dispensationalism. Many non dispensationalist Protestants were also strong advocates of a Jewish return to their homeland, Charles Spurgeon,<sup>[21]</sup> both Horatius<sup>[22]</sup> and Andrew Bonar, Robert Murray M'Chyene,<sup>[23]</sup> and J C Ryle<sup>[24]</sup> were among a number of proponents of both the importance and significance of a Jewish return to Israel. However Spurgeon averred of Dispensationalism: "It is a mercy that these absurdities are revealed one at a time, in order that we may be able to endure their stupidity without dying of amazement".<sup>[25]</sup> In 1864, Spurgeon wrote:<sup>[21]</sup>

We look forward, then, for these two things. I am not going to theorize upon which of them will come first — whether they shall be restored first, and converted afterwards — or converted first and then restored. They are to be restored and they are to be converted, too.

## Secular motivations

The crumbling of the Ottoman Empire threatened the British route to India via the Suez Canal as well as sundry French, German and American economic interests. In 1831 the Ottomans were driven from Greater Syria (including Palestine) by an expansionist Egypt, in the First Turko-Egyptian War. Although Britain forced Muhammad Ali to withdraw to Egypt, the Levant was left for a brief time without a government. The ongoing weakness of the Ottoman Empire made some in the west consider the potential of a Jewish state in the Holy Land. A number of important figures within the British government advocated such a plan, including Charles Henry Churchill.<sup>[26][27]</sup> Again during the lead-up to the Crimean War (1854), there was an opportunity for political rearrangements in the Near East. In July 1853, Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, who was President of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, wrote to Prime Minister Aberdeen urging Jewish restoration as a means of stabilizing the region.<sup>[6][28][29]</sup>

Late-19th-century non-Messianic Restorationism was largely driven by concern over the fate of the Jews of the Russian Empire, beset by poverty and by deadly, government-inspired pogroms. It was widely accepted that western nations did not wish to receive Jewish immigrants. Restorationism was a way for charitable individuals to assist oppressed Jews without actually accepting them as neighbors and fellow-citizens.<sup>[30][31][32]</sup> In this, Restorationism was not unlike the efforts of the American Colonization Society to send blacks to Liberia and the efforts of British abolitionists to create Sierra Leone. Winston Churchill endorsed Restoration because he recognized that Jews fleeing Russian pogroms required a refuge, and preferred Palestine for sentimental reasons.<sup>[33]</sup>

## Early religious views in Protestant America

In 1818, President John Adams wrote, "I really wish the Jews again in Judea an independent nation", and believed that they would gradually become Unitarian Christians.<sup>[34]</sup>

In 1844, George Bush, a professor of Hebrew at New York University and the cousin of an ancestor of the Presidents Bush, published a book titled *The Valley of Vision; or, The Dry Bones of Israel Revived*. In it he denounced "the thralldom and oppression which has so long ground them (the Jews) to the dust," and called for "elevating" the Jews "to a rank of honorable repute among the nations of

the earth" by allowing restoring the Jews to the land of Israel where the bulk would be converted to Christianity.<sup>[35]</sup> This, according to Bush, would benefit not only the Jews, but all of mankind, forming a "link of communication" between humanity and God. "It will blaze in notoriety ...". "It will flash a splendid demonstration upon all kindreds and tongues of the truth."<sup>[7]</sup>

Herman Melville expressed the idea in a poem, "Clarel; A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land":

the Hebrew seers announce in time  
the return of Judah to her prime;  
Some Christians deemed it then at hand  
Here was an object. Up and On.  
With seed and tillage help renew –  
Help reinstate the Holy Land

## **Blackstone Memorial**

The tycoon William Eugene Blackstone was inspired by the conference to publish the book *Jesus is Coming*, which took up the restorationist cause, and also absolved the Jews of the need to convert to Christianity either before or after the return of the Messiah. His book was translated and published in Yiddish. On November 24–25, 1890, Blackstone organized the Conference on the Past, Present and Future of Israel at the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Chicago where participants included leaders of many Christian communities. Resolutions of sympathy for the oppressed Jews living in Russia were passed, but Blackstone was convinced that such resolutions—even though passed by prominent men—were insufficient. He advocated strongly for the resettlement of Jewish people in Palestine. In 1891 he lobbied President Benjamin Harrison for the restoration of the Jews, in a petition signed by 413 prominent Americans, that became known as the Blackstone Memorial.<sup>[36]</sup> The names included the US Chief Justice, Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Chair of the House Foreign Relations Committee, and several other congressmen, Rockefeller, Morgan and famous industrialists.<sup>[36]</sup> It read, in part: "Why shall not the powers which under the treaty of Berlin, in 1878, gave Bulgaria to the Bulgarians and Servia to the Servians now give Palestine back to the Jews? ... These provinces, as well as Romania, Montenegro, and Greece, were wrested from the Turks and given to their natural owners. Does not Palestine as rightfully belong to the Jews?"<sup>[37]</sup>

## **Views in the British Empire**

Ideas favoring the restoration of the Jews in Palestine or the Land of Israel entered the British public discourse in the 1830s, though British reformationists had written about the restoration of the Jews as early as the 16th century, and the idea had strong support among Puritans.<sup>[38]</sup> Not all such attitudes were favorable towards the Jews; they were shaped in part by a variety of Protestant beliefs,<sup>[6]</sup><sup>[39]</sup> or by a streak of philo-Semitism among the classically educated British elite,<sup>[40]</sup> or by hopes to extend the Empire. (See *The Great Game*)

At the urging of Lord Shaftesbury, Britain established a consulate in Jerusalem in 1838, the first diplomatic appointment to Palestine.<sup>[6]</sup>

In 1839, the Church of Scotland sent Andrew Bonar, Robert Murray M'Cheyne, Alexander Black and Alexander Keith on a mission to report on the condition of the Jews in Palestine. Their report was widely published.<sup>[41]</sup> They traveled through France, Greece, and Egypt and, from Egypt, overland to Gaza. On the way home they visited Syria, the Austrian Empire and some of the German principalities. They sought out Jewish communities and inquired about their readiness to accept Christ and, separately, their preparedness to return to Israel as prophesied in the Bible. Alexander Keith recounted the journey in his 1844 book *The Land of Israel According to the Covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob*. It was also in that book that Keith used the slogan that became popular with other Christian Restorationists, a land without a people for a people without a land. In 1844 he revisited Palestine with his son, Dr George Skene Keith (1819–1910), who was the first person to photograph the land.<sup>[42]</sup>

In August 1840, *The Times* reported that the British government was considering Jewish restoration.<sup>[38]</sup> An important, though often neglected, figure in British support of the restoration of the Jews was William Hechler (1845–1931), an English clergyman of German descent who was Chaplain of the British Embassy in Vienna and became a close friend of Theodor Herzl.<sup>[43]</sup> Hechler was instrumental in aiding Herzl through his diplomatic activities, and may, in that sense, be called the founder of modern Christian Zionism. When it came to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Theodor Herzl, it was noted by the editors of the English-language memorial volume that William Hechler would prove "not only the first, but the most constant and the most indefatigable of Herzl's followers".<sup>[36]</sup>

## Recent political analysis and developments

Hal Lindsey, one of the most popular American promoters of dispensationalism, has written in *The Late Great Planet Earth* that per Ezekiel 39:6–8, after Jews fight off a "Russian" invasion, Jews will see this as a miracle and convert to Christianity. Their lives will be spared the great fire that God will put upon Russia and people of the "coastlands." And, per Zechariah 13:8–9, one third of Jews alive who have converted will be spared.<sup>[45]</sup> Lindsay has been critiqued for highly specific, failed predictions even by those who share his eschatology like John MacArthur.<sup>[46]</sup>

Examples of Protestant leaders combining political conservatism with Christian Zionism are Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, leading figures of the Christian Right in the 1980s and 1990s. Falwell said in 1981: "To stand against Israel is to stand against God. We believe that history and scripture prove that God deals with nations in relation to how they deal with Israel." They cite part of the blessing of Isaac at Genesis 27:29, "Those who curse you will be cursed, and those who bless you will be blessed." Martin Luther King, Jr. has also been cited as a Christian supporter of Israel and Zionism.<sup>[44]</sup>

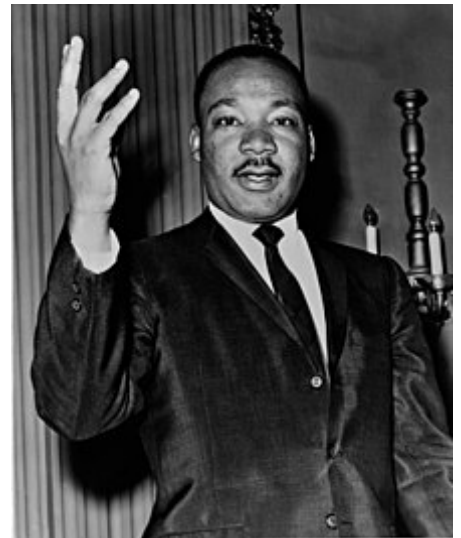
The government of Israel has given official encouragement to Christian Zionism, allowing the establishment in 1980 of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem. The embassy has raised funds to help finance Jewish immigration to Israel from the former Soviet Union, and has assisted Zionist groups in establishing Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

The Third International Christian Zionist Congress, held in Jerusalem in February 1996, issued a proclamation which said:<sup>[47]</sup>

God the Father, Almighty, chose the ancient nation and people of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to reveal His plan of redemption for the world. They remain elect of God, and without the Jewish nation His redemptive purposes for the world will not be completed.

Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah and has promised to return to Jerusalem, to Israel and to the world.

It is reprehensible that generations of Jewish peoples have been killed and persecuted in the name of our Lord, and we challenge the Church to repent of any sins of commission or omission against them.



Martin Luther King, Jr. was a notable Christian supporter of Israel and Zionism.<sup>[44]</sup>



A demonstration in the square Narinkka in central Helsinki in support of the State of Israel.

The modern Ingathering of the Jewish People to *Eretz Israel* and the rebirth of the nation of Israel are in fulfilment of biblical prophecies, as written in both Old and New Testaments.

Christian believers are instructed by Scripture to acknowledge the Hebraic roots of their faith and to actively assist and participate in the plan of God for the Ingathering of the Jewish People and the Restoration of the nation of Israel in our day

Popular interest in Christian Zionism was given a boost around the year 2000 in the form of the *Left Behind* series of novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins<sup>[48]</sup> The novels are built around the prophetic role of Israel in the apocalyptic End Times.

## Disapproval by other churches

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### Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (Catholic), the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese of Jerusalem, the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, in 2006 published the *Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism*, which rejects Christian Zionism as substituting, in its view, a political-military program in place of the teachings of Jesus Christ.<sup>[49]</sup> It criticizes Christian Zionism as an obstacle to peace and understanding in Israel-Palestine.

### United States

The General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in November 2007 approved a resolution for further study which stated that the "theological stance of Christian Zionism adversely affects:

- justice and peace in the Middle East, delaying the day when Israelis and Palestinians can live within secure borders
- relationships with Middle Eastern Christians (see the Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism)
- relationships with Jews, since Jews are seen as mere pawns in an eschatological scheme
- relationships with Muslims, since it treats the rights of Muslims as subordinate to the rights of Jews
- interfaith dialogue, since it views the world in starkly dichotomous terms<sup>[50]</sup>

The Reformed Church in America at its 2004 General Synod found "the ideology of Christian Zionism and the extreme form of dispensationalism that undergirds it to be a distortion of the biblical message noting the impediment it represents to achieving a just peace in Israel/Palestine."<sup>[51]</sup> The Mennonite Church published an article that referenced what is called the ongoing illegal seizure of additional Palestinian lands by Israeli militants,<sup>[52][53]</sup> noting that in some churches under the influence of Christian Zionism the "congregations 'adopt' illegal Israeli settlements, sending funds to bolster the defense of these armed colonies." As of September 2007, churches in the USA that have criticized Christian Zionism include the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA),<sup>[54]</sup> and the United Church of Christ<sup>[55]</sup>

The film *With God On Our Side*, by Porter Speakman Jr. and Kevin Miller (the latter of whom also co-created the film *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*), criticizes both the underlying theology behind Christian Zionism as well as its negative influence on the church.<sup>[56]</sup>

### Scotland

The Church of Scotland, despite its Restorationist history,<sup>[57]</sup> has recently been critical of Zionism in general, and in turn has received strong criticism over the perceived injustice of its report, "The Inheritance of Abraham: A Report on the Promised Land",<sup>[58]</sup> which resulted in its republication in a briefer form.<sup>[59]</sup>

## Church of England

On 9 July 2012, the Anglican General Synod passed a motion affirming support for the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI).<sup>[60]</sup> This was criticised by the Board of Deputies claiming the Synod 'has chosen to promote an inflammatory and partisan programme'.<sup>[61]</sup> The advocated group was simultaneously criticised for its publication of a call for sit-ins at Israeli Embassies, the hacking of government websites to promote its message, and support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign against Israel.<sup>[61][62]</sup> The Church has been consequently criticised for its advocacy of a body that selectively ignores terror attacks against Israelis and solely blames Israel for the conflict, along with the 'demonisation and delegitimisation of Israel'.<sup>[63]</sup>

## Biblical interpretations

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Some Christian Zionists interpret the prophetic texts as describing inevitable future events, and these events primarily involve Israel (taken to mean the descendants of the Biblical patriarch Jacob) or Judah (taken to mean the remaining faithful adherents of Judaism). These prophecies are seen as requiring the presence of a Jewish state in the Holy Land, the central part of the lands promised to the Biblical patriarch Abraham in the Covenant of the pieces. This requirement is sometimes interpreted as being fulfilled by the contemporary state of Israel!<sup>[64][65]</sup>

### Prophetic and Messianic texts

Among the principal relevant prophetic texts are those found in the Old Testament in the Book of Daniel, the book of Isaiah and the Book of Ezekiel, and those found in the New Testament in the Book of Revelation

Although many Christian Zionists believe that conversion of the Jews to Christianity is a necessary adjunct of the Second Coming or the End of Days, conversion of the Jews is not part of the theology of Christian Zionists such as John Hagee and was not thought to be required by the nineteenth-century restoration advocat&William Eugene Blackstone

### Other

Christian schools of doctrine which consider other teachings to counterbalance these doctrines, or which interpret them in terms of distinct eschatological theories, are less conducive to Christian Zionism. Among the many texts which address this subject in counterbalance are the words of Jesus, as for example in Matthew, "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it".

In *Defending Christian Zionism*, David Pawson, a Christian Zionist in the United Kingdom, puts forward the case that the return of the Jews to the Holy Land is a fulfilment of scriptural prophecy, and that Christians should support the existence of the Jewish State (although not unconditionally its actions) on theological grounds. He also argues that prophecies spoken about Israel relate specifically to Israel (not to the church, as in "replacement theology"). However, he criticises Dispensationalism, which he says is a largely American movement holding similar views. Pawson was spurred to write this book by the work of Stephen Sizer, an evangelical Christian who rejects Christian Zionism.

## Notable proponents

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- John Adams<sup>[66]</sup>
- Bishop Michael Alexander
- Herbert W. Armstrong<sup>[67]</sup>
- Simeon Ashe<sup>[10]</sup>
- Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury<sup>[6][68]</sup>
- Arthur Balfour<sup>[69]</sup>
- Glenn Beck<sup>[70]</sup>
- Edward Bickersteth<sup>[6]</sup>

- William Eugene Blackstone
- Andrew Bonar
- Horatius Bonar<sup>[22]</sup>
- E. W. Bullinger<sup>[71]</sup>
- Edmund Calamy<sup>[10]</sup>
- John Cennick<sup>[72]</sup>
- Sandor Nemeth<sup>[73]</sup>
- Clark Clifford
- John Cotton
- Ted Cruz<sup>[74]</sup>
- John Nelson Darby
- Tom DeLay<sup>[69]</sup>
- Jonathan Edwards<sup>[15]</sup>
- Mike Evans<sup>[75]</sup>
- Jerry Falwell<sup>[69]</sup>
- Don Finto<sup>[76]</sup>
- Joseph Frey
- John Gil<sup>[12]</sup>
- Thomas Goodwin<sup>[10]</sup>
- William Gouge<sup>[10]</sup>
- John Hagee<sup>[69]</sup>
- Robert Haldane<sup>[6]</sup>
- William Hechler
- Malcolm Hedding<sup>[77]</sup>
- Mike Huckabee<sup>[78]</sup>
- Alan Keyes<sup>[69]</sup>
- Hal Lindsey<sup>[79]</sup>
- Martin Luther King, Jr<sup>[44]</sup>
- John F. MacArthur
- Robert Murray M'Cheyne<sup>[23]</sup>
- James David Manning<sup>[80]</sup>
- Increase Sizer<sup>[10]</sup>
- Chuck Missler<sup>[81]</sup>
- Isaac Newton<sup>[82]</sup>
- John Owen<sup>[11]</sup>
- Lt Col John Henry Patterson<sup>[83]</sup>
- David Pawson<sup>[84]</sup>
- E. J. Poole-Connor<sup>[85]</sup>
- Pat Robertson<sup>[69]</sup>
- John Rippon<sup>[86]</sup>
- Denis Michael Rohan<sup>[67]</sup>
- Samuel Rutherford<sup>[13]</sup>
- J C Ryle<sup>[24]</sup>
- Tim Salazar
- Walid Shoebat
- Charles Simeon<sup>[87]</sup>
- Charles Spurgeon<sup>[21]</sup>
- Ezra Stiles
- Jack Van Impe
- John Walvoord<sup>[88]</sup>



- Charles Wesley<sup>[14]</sup>
- John Wesley<sup>[14]</sup>
- William Wilberforce
- Orde Wingate<sup>[89]</sup>
- William Marrion Branham<sup>[90]</sup>

## See also

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- Antisemitism
- Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation
- Christians United for Israel
- Christian Zionism in the United Kingdom
- Christianity and antisemitism
- Christianity and Biblical prophecy
- Christianity and Judaism
- Day to Praise
- Friends of Zion Museum
- Gathering of Israel
- International Fellowship of Christians and Jews
- Muslim supporters of Israel
- Palestinian Christians
- Supersessionism

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