
Pro Rege

Volume 36 | Number 4

Article 4

June 2008

Christian Zionism: Listening Left Behind

Charles Veenstra

Dordt College, charles.veenstra@dordt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Veenstra, Charles (2008) "Christian Zionism: Listening Left Behind," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 36: No. 4, 29 - 39.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol36/iss4/4

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Dordt Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Dordt Digital Collections. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.

Christian Zionism: Listening Left Behind



by Charles Veenstra

Many Americans are familiar with the popular *Left Behind* series of novels, which describe the events that take place near the end of time. For some, these are simply an interesting series of novels; for others, they involve fictional characters in what many believe to be a realistic scenario of events predicted by a particular and literal interpretation of biblical prophecies. What they may not realize is that the underlying theology of these books is very similar to a potent political movement that is

dominated by some Christian conservatives. This political movement, called “Christian Zionism,” is very influential with many political leaders at the present time.

Before dealing with this movement’s listening challenge, I need to lay a foundation by identifying key figures and groups which support this movement, explaining the key elements and beliefs, describing its relation to dispensational theology, and indicating the significant political influence this movement has in American and international politics. Throughout the paper, I examine the extent to which those within the movement listen to those who agree with them and to those who do not. Since this movement focuses on a very one-sided political view of the Israeli/Palestinian dispute, one can expect to find little listening to those who have a different view—both in politics and theology. We need to think about the impact of failure to listen. Finally, I will point to some future directions for solution and hope.

The so-called “Christian Zionism” movement is promoted by several prominent evangelicals: Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Gary Bauer, Tim LaHaye (co-author of the popular *Left Behind* series), Hal Lindsey (author of *The Late Great Planet Earth*), Ralph Reed, John Walvoord, and others. Christian Zionist organizations include the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, Christian Friends of Israel, the Church’s Ministry Among the Jews, Christians for Israel, the Christian Zionist Congress, Christians’ Israel Public Action Campaign, and many more.¹

Dr. Charles Veenstra is Professor of Communication at Dordt College. He also currently serves as a board member of the International Listening Association.

While Zionism movements have been in existence for more than a century, the most recent Christian Zionism movement became much more popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s.² Hal Lindsey's best selling book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, brought the claims of Christian Zionism to the stage in American evangelical and political scenes. As noted, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins' recent *Left Behind* series of novels gave new impetus to the theology that underlies much of Christian Zionism.

Although many of its aims are similar to other Zionist groups, the Christian Zionist groups root their political purposes in their interpretation of biblical prophecies. They saw the establishment of the modern state of Israel and Israel's rapid defeat of the Arab countries in the wars of 1967 and 1973 as fulfillment of prophecy that God was re-establishing the people of Israel on the land he had promised them at the time of Abraham. They take very literally the text in Gen. 12:3: "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you," and they apply it to events in the modern state of Israel since 1948. The growth of the evangelical movements of Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and other televangelists gave a stronger voice to the Christian Zionists.

Gary Burge claims that those committed to Christian Zionism share the same five core beliefs:³

- (1) The Covenant: God's covenant with Israel is eternal and unconditional. Therefore the promises of land given to Abraham will never be overturned. This means that the church has not replaced Israel and that Israel's privileges have never been revoked despite unfaithfulness.
- (2) The Church: God's plan has always been for the redemption of Israel. Yet when Israel failed to follow Jesus, the church was born as an afterthought or "parenthesis." Thus at the rapture the church will be removed, and Israel will once again become God's primary agent in the world. We now live in "the times of the Gentiles," which will conclude soon. This means that there are two covenants now at work, that given through Moses and the covenant of Christ. But the new covenant in no way makes the older covenant obsolete.

- (3) Blessing Modern Israel: We must take Gen. 12:3 literally and apply it to modern Israel: "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you." Therefore Christians have a spiritual obligation to bless Israel and "pray for the peace of Jerusalem." To fail to bless Israel, to fail to support Israel's political survival today, will incur divine judgment.
- (4) Prophecy: The prophetic books of the Bible are describing events of today and do not principally refer to events in Biblical times. Therefore, when we look at, say, Daniel 7, if we possess the right interpretative skills, we can see how modern history is unfolding. This quest for prophecy has spawned countless books interpreting Middle East history through the Bible.
- (5) Modern Israel and Eschatology: The modern state of Israel is a catalyst for the prophetic countdown. If these are the last days, then we should expect an unraveling of civilization, the rise of evil, the loss of international peace and equilibrium, a coming antichrist, and tests of faithfulness to Israel. Above all, political alignments today will determine our position on the fateful day of Armageddon. Since the crisis of 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, it has been easy to persuade the public that history is unraveling precisely as dispensationalism predicted.

Many biblical scholars have criticized this theological framework,⁴ but that is not our immediate purpose. Some comments on that will be made below.

A key point is that Christian Zionists root their interests in the land—what Burge calls a "territorial religion."⁵ This, of course, is not the position of many scholars who see God's movement with the people of Israel from the Old Testament to the New, in which the kingdom of God was expanded worldwide. Most Zionists are more concerned with Israel claiming the land than they are that Jews become converted to Christ.

Christian Zionists oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state. At the Third International Christian Zionist Congress, held in February 1996 under the auspices of International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, the following resolution was passed unanimously: "It would be further error

for the nations to recognize a Palestinian state in any part of Eretz Israel.”⁶ The term “Eretz Israel” refers to the land originally promised by God to Abraham—from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River or even beyond it.

In a June 6, 2001, article in *Jewish World Review*, Cal Thomas stated,

It should now be clear that Israel cannot tolerate

Most Zionists are more concerned with Israel claiming the land than they are that Jews become converted to Christ.

a huge Arab population within its borders, so a political decision must be made. Most Arabs and Palestinians appear to be nonviolent but it can be difficult to tell the difference. . . . Israel should declare its intention to transfer large numbers of its Palestinian residents to Arab nations. . . . Eviction is a better avenue to stability. Will it happen? Probably not. Should it? Yes.⁷

In a protest sent to Tribune Media Services, President Ibrahim Hooper, of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), asked that Thomas’ column be dropped and that those views “would be more at home in the Nazi-era publication *Der Sturmer* than in newspapers subscribing to Tribune Media Services.”⁸

Former presidential candidate Gary Bauer has said that a Palestinian state would jeopardize Israel’s security and violate God’s covenant with Abraham promising the biblical land of Israel to the Jewish people.⁹

John Hagee, Senior Pastor of Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, claims that the Palestinians have no right to the land:

The land has never belonged to the people who now call themselves Palestinians. The area was named Palestine by the Romans, but there has never been a national Palestine, and there is no

Palestinian language. Before 1948 these people were Egyptians, Syrians, Jordanians, Iraqis, and citizens of other Arab nations who had moved to the region. They were displaced by the war of 1948, but Israel is not occupying their territory.¹⁰

About Pat Robertson, Daphna Bermann, reporter for *Haretz*, says,

Only God should decide if Israel should relinquish control of the lands it captured in the 1967 war, including the Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem, Robertson said, in a reference to Sharon’s plan to pull out of Gaza next year.¹¹

In a letter of complaint to Jerry Falwell, several Palestinian evangelical pastors wrote,

On page four of the *International Herald Tribune*, January 22, 1998, under the title: “Christian Right Backs Israel,” the *Herald* wrote: “Mr. Falwell has said that he and several leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention told Mr. Netanyahu that they would mobilize evangelical churches to oppose steps to give up any more territory to the Palestinians, *The New York Times* Reported.”¹²

Gary Bauer is quite outspoken in his opinion that Israel should not give up any land to the Palestinians. In a speech to the AIPAC convention on March 30, 2003, he declared,

We believe God owns the land and he has deeded it to the Jewish people, a deed that cannot be canceled by Yasser Arafat and cannot be amended—even by a president. This God has spoken clearly. He said, “He who blesses Israel I will bless, he who curses Israel, I will curse.” For believing Christians that is clear enough, and good enough for us.¹³

On May 19, 2003, a group of 24 prominent Christian Zionists sent a letter to the president indicating their concerns about the “road map” to peace, which aimed at a two-state solution for the Israelis and the Palestinians. Essentially, they oppose that road map because they do not believe in a Palestinian state:

Mr. President, it would be morally reprehensible for the United States to be “evenhanded” between democratic Israel, a reliable friend and ally that shares our values, and the terrorist infested

Palestinian infrastructure that refuses to accept the right of Israel to exist at all.¹⁴

Some voice stronger opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state. Pat Robertson called it “Satan’s Plan” in a group of some 4000 American evangelical Christians who were in Israel in October 2004 to underscore their support for the Jewish state and opposition to any peace settlement with the Palestinians involving territorial concessions:

Robertson poured praise on Israel, saying the Zionist state was part of God’s plan for the end of time and a precedent to the second advent of Jesus Christ. . . . Moreover, Robertson urged Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to abandon a unilateral plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, saying that “this is God’s land and the Jews are God’s people and nobody has any right to dislodge God’s people from God’s land.”¹⁵

Later he suggested that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s stroke was divine retribution for the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. “He was dividing God’s land, and I would say, ‘Woe unto any prime minister of Israel who takes a similar course to appease the [European Union], the United Nations, or the United States of America,’” Robertson told viewers of his long-running television show, *The 700 Club*; “God says, ‘This land belongs to me, and you’d better leave it alone.’”¹⁶

The primary aims of Christian Zionist groups include lobbying the American government to support Israel and providing financial support for the settlers in the occupied territories in the West Bank (and previously in the Gaza strip), including money to pay for Jews to immigrate to Israel. A cursory examination of web sites reveals many sample letters to government officials as well as appeals for funds for settlers. They also sponsor many trips to Israel. Their web sites indicate many programs of financial support; for example, Christian Friends of Israel pays to help Russian and Ethiopian immigrants, provides care packages for Israeli soldiers, assists rehabilitation of disabled soldiers, aids terrorist victims, etc.¹⁷ This scenario can be repeated for other groups.

The group “Christians Committed to Biblical

Justice”—who call themselves “a group of evangelical pastors, academics and mission executives who have been disturbed by the growing influence of Christian Zionism on the political scene in America, recognizing this ideology to be a major factor in the stalled peace process in Israel / Palestine”—speak strongly against Christian Zionism. They do so by claiming that

The Christian Zionist political agenda is in opposition to the desires of most Jews in both the U.S. and Israel. Consistently in most polls, the majority of Jews recognize the necessity of a political settlement with the Palestinians that would give them a viable state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip (in exchange, of course, for peace!). Most “settlers” on the West Bank are not religious settlers, but instead economic settlers who have moved there because of generous government incentives to do so. They would be happy to leave their settlements. There is a large Jewish “peace group” that favors drawing back to the 1967 borders.¹⁸

The background information provided thus far suggests that Christian Zionists have a problem with listening; that is, they do not demonstrate that they listen to anyone who might hold a different position. Listening has been defined as “the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages.”¹⁹ Donald More claims,

After some three years living at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Jerusalem and many conversations with Israelis and Palestinians, I find it difficult to avoid a pessimistic response to their question, “Is anybody listening?” Simply put, *nobody* is listening, at least nobody who has political clout. This is a difficult conclusion, one I cannot easily live with. It pains me, both for the sake of Israel and my many Israeli friends, as well as for the sake of my Palestinian sisters and brothers. Justice and peace might well kiss, as the psalmist points out, but there are almost no signs of such an embrace here in the Holy Land.²⁰

Some explanation is needed to justify this claim that Christian Zionists do not listen. We will see this especially in relation to three groups that stand in opposition to this movement: Jews, both in

Israel and in the United States; Palestinians, both Moslem and Christian; and Christians who hold a different perspective.

First, many Jews oppose Zionism. For example, “True Torah Jews is a non-profit organization formed by a group of religious Orthodox Jews dedicated to informing the world and the American public and politicians in particular, that the ideology of Zionism is in total opposition to the teachings of traditional Judaism.”²¹ The Israeli Committee Against House Demolition aims “to help raise awareness in the U.S. of the Israeli government’s demolition of Palestinian homes and its gradual annexation of Palestinian land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.”²² In an extensive mission statement, the Jewish Voice for Peace works to support the aspirations of both the Israelis and the Palestinians for security and self-determination.²³ Many other groups exist for the purpose of trying to provide a balanced view of the struggle for both peoples.

What is the response of Christian Zionists to these Jews who oppose these positions that support only Israel? In effect, there is no significant response, or very little. That is why I claim that Christian Zionists do not listen—they have not fulfilled the response requirement of listening. One wonders whether they have received the message in the first place and, if so, what meaning they constructed from the messages of these Jews who oppose them. Their response is muted. For example, Grace Halsell writes of her encounter with John Walvoord, president of Dallas Theological Seminary, who claims that God had given all of Palestine to the Jews:

In talking with Walvoord, I kept referring to the suffering of the Palestinians. “What about them?” I asked. “I am referring to land,” he said at one point. And he added, “You keep talking about spirit aspects.” It actually happens: Those who make a cult of the land of Israel put this cult of land above the teachings of Christ.²⁴

In other words, since the Palestinian people are not important, there appears to be no need to listen to them. The Jews Not Zionists group claims, “Zionism is wrong from the Torah viewpoint, not because many of its adherents are lax in practice

or even anti-religious, but because its fundamental principle conflicts with the Torah.”²⁵ In an article titled “The Differences between Judaism and Zionism,” Neuberger writes, “Judaism and Zionism are by no means the same. Indeed they are incompatible and irreconcilable: If one is a good Jew, one cannot be a Zionist; if one is a Zionist, one cannot be a good Jew As a Jew, I plan to discuss Zionism, which is rebellion against God and treason to the Jewish people.” And he adds, “It takes a lot of courage to be opposed to Zionism in the USA today.”²⁶ His article contains an extensive analysis of why Zionism is not appropriate. If Christian Zionists have chosen to respond, it is not obvious.

*Especially significant is that
Christian Zionists ignore
Christians in Palestine as if
they do not exist.*

It should be obvious that Palestinians would be opposed to Zionism since they are dispossessed and would lose even more if the Zionists get all of what they want. One looks in vain for evidence that Christian Zionists visit Palestinians. In fact, they do not believe in equal treatment for Palestinians and Israelis, as can be seen when Gary Bauer spearheaded a letter in 2003, signed by other evangelical leaders, that warned President Bush that “it would be ‘evenhanded’ between democratic Israel, a reliable friend and ally that shares our values, and the terrorist-infested Palestinian infrastructure.”²⁷ A lack of even-handedness provides precious little opportunity for restoration.

Especially significant is that Christian Zionists ignore Christians in Palestine as if they do not exist. Christians in Palestine are a tiny minority, and the numbers are going down. They join Muslims in the struggle for liberation. Since Christian Zionists do not want liberation for Palestine, apparently they see no need to visit Palestinians—either Christian or Moslem. Sherri Muzher, a Palestinian-American

Christian, analyzes it this way:

I can understand, however, the public-relations for Israelis in ignoring Palestinian Christians. After all, given the unfair vilification of Islam after 9/11, why let your Western supporters know that you are also battling Christians?²⁸

The Palestinians should worry about Christians coming from the West, says Wes Granberg-Michaelson as he warns about Christian Zionists:

Christians from the west have come, and still some continue to come, with an evangelical enthusiasm that is historically ignorant and dismissive of the very churches that carried the gospel forth faithfully since the time of our Lord, and do so to this day. The effect too often has been that Arab Christians, whose lives and history are rooted here, are regarded as foreigners by their Muslim neighbours.²⁹

The importance of visiting Palestinians can hardly be over-emphasized. Hubers claims,

It is telling that nearly every American Christian who has visited Palestine and had a chance to meet Palestinians in the occupied territory, listening to their stories and enjoying their hospitality, has returned to America with a new found empathy and sometimes militant support for the Palestinian cause.³⁰

Rev. Mitri Raheb, of Bethlehem Christmas Lutheran Church, said many American Christians, particularly Christian Zionists, don't visit with Palestinian Christians when they come to Israel. "They regard us as not the true Christians," he said.³¹

Christian Zionists tend to see themselves as defenders of, and apologists for, the Jewish people, and in particular, the State of Israel. This support involves opposing those deemed to be critical of, or hostile toward Israel. It is rare therefore to find Christian Zionists who feel a similar solidarity with the Palestinians.³²

Collateral damage done by this group—beyond that to the Palestinians and to world peace—is that legitimate Christian voices are not heard by the media. The media tend to treat evangelical Christians

as one group. Many Christians do not support the positions of the Christian Zionists. Yet the media appear to assume that Christian Zionists represent the whole of Christian evangelicalism while, in fact, Christian Zionists are estimated to be only a fraction of the whole. Donald Wagner says, "Though Falwell claims to be speaking [as a Christian Zionist] for over 100 million Americans, the number is actually closer to 25 million. Mainstream evangelicals number between 75 and 100 million; fundamentalist and dispensationalist evangelicals, whom Falwell represents, between 20 and 25 million."³³ Granberg-Michaelson adds,

You need to hear what we, and millions of other Christians in the United States, think about these perspectives. First, understand, please, that proponents of "evangelical Zionism" are the extremists. And like extremists everywhere, they attract media attention. I would guess—and this is only a guess—that four out of five Americans would regard the statements of such personalities [Falwell, Robertson, and Franklin Graham] as ill-informed, ill-advised, and irresponsible.³⁴

Many voices are now being raised by Christians who deplore the Christian Zionism movement and argue that its claims are not Christian at all. Ateek and Prior's chapter concludes,

Christian Zionism is a devious heresy and an unwelcome and alien intrusion into this culture, advocating an ethnocentric and nationalist political agenda running counter to the work of reconciliation, and patient witness among both Jews and Moslems.³⁵

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America endorsed John Hubers' paper, *Christian Zionism: A Historical Analysis and Critique*, in which he claims,

the most important critique of this movement is a biblical critique, as Darby's reading of scripture distorts the interpretation of the biblical message mediated through Jesus. The core of Christ's message is reconciliation, which makes Christian Zionist support for an exclusivistic Jewish state with apartheid-like tendencies questionable at best.³⁶

The 2004 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) adopted a resolution to “inform current government officials that Christian Zionism does not represent the majority of American Christians and the faith of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” and to issue to all churches a pastoral letter on Christian Zionism.³⁷

Typical responses by Christian Zionists to Christian critics of their position amount to quick assertions that those Christians are not interpreting Scripture correctly. For example, Alan Lazerte asserts,

Because of false teaching, and erroneous replacement theology, many Christians do not realize that certain “Old testament” covenants still remain in effect for Israel, namely: the Abrahamic land covenant (Genesis 12: 1-3), the Davidic throne covenant for Messiah (2 Samuel 7: 11-16), and the New Covenant for the House of Israel (Jeremiah 31: 31-36), into which the majority have not yet entered. . . . Much of Christendom has been in chaos since abandoning literal interpretation, and losing the distinction in Scripture between “Israel” and “Church.” In fact, most replacement theology leaves Israel only curses.³⁸

*Clearly the key to breaking
the impasse between
Christian Zionists and those
who hold a different view is
the need for listening.*

All of that means that Christian Zionists are not listening. Anyone who disagrees with them seems to be quickly dismissed with the claim that opponents are not interpreting the Bible correctly, that is, literally interpreting certain texts. In response to Fr. Atallah Hanna, official spokesman of the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem, who described Christian Zionist groups as being “not really Christian” and “only serving the Zionist regime that is illegally occupying Arab land,” Lazerte, speaking for Christian Action for Israel, retorts,

“Who gave these so-called ‘orthodox’ folks authority to deny outright what God has stated clearly IN THE WHOLE OF SCRIPTURE?”³⁹

Christians’ responses to the Christian Zionists seem to be growing. For example, a group of professors from Knox Seminary wrote an open letter to Christian evangelicals, and it was signed by many theologians. It begins this way:

At the heart of the political commitments in question are two fatally flawed propositions. First, some are teaching that God’s alleged favor toward Israel today is based upon ethnic descent rather than upon the grace of Christ alone, as proclaimed in the Gospel. Second, others are teaching that the Bible’s promises concerning the land are fulfilled in a special political region or “Holy Land,” perpetually set apart by God for one ethnic group alone. As a result of these false claims, large segments of the evangelical community, our fellow citizens, and our government are being misled with regard to the Bible’s teachings regarding the people of God, the land of Israel, and the impartiality of the Gospel.⁴⁰

Many evangelicals distanced themselves from Robertson recently, particularly after his remarks about Ariel Sharon’s illness being a judgment from God for yielding any land to the Palestinians. A group of Palestinian pastors wrote an open letter to Falwell, appealing to him to re-examine his positions regarding Israeli policies in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.⁴¹ Yet, the political influence of Christian Zionists should not be minimized. Wagner outlines the political lobbying activities of several Zionists who have close ties to or work in the U.S. government.⁴²

Clearly the key to breaking the impasse between Christian Zionists and those who hold a different view is the need for listening. Listening is the first step toward reconciliation. There are several models that demonstrate the power of listening, models that should be emulated by the Christian Zionists. The Middle East Council of Churches, an indigenous Christian agency, has worked quietly and effectively as an agent of mercy and reconciliation in war-torn Lebanon; it has interceded in the delicate dialogue between the Palestinians and the world, preparing some of the more important pathways

that led to the peace process; it was early on the scene in post-war Iraq; it initiated discussions within Arab society to engage both Muslims and Christians in the examination of what should go into building a just and peaceful civil society; and it has participated in some momentous initiatives of Christian reconciliation.⁴³

Christian Peacemaker Teams, an organization developed by Mennonites, sends people to live in Palestine and other areas for extended periods of time. This pacifist group boldly confronts violence on the ground by asking lots of questions and documenting injustices. They listen to both Israelis and Palestinians and work hard to get them to understand each other. Furthermore, these groups send regular reports back to churches and many others in this country in order to help others understand Arabs, especially the Palestinian suffering, and also to help Americans sense the frustration of some Israeli soldiers.

A group with similar aims, The International Solidarity Movement, aims to reduce the level of violence and destruction aimed at Palestinians by the Israeli Defense Force. This group received considerable international attention in 2003 when Rachel Corrie, a 23-year-old American peace activist with I.S.M., was crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer as she tried to halt the demolition of a Palestinian home in Rafah, southern Gaza.

Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding is a Christian group that encourages and facilitates trips to Arab countries. It works to provide a different theological view of the relation of Israel to other countries than is common among many Christian evangelical groups, particularly the fundamentalists. Its goal is to improve relations between Christians and Muslims, Americans and Arabs. Its outreach, as indicated by mailings, appears to be growing. Co-founder of the group is Don Wagner, who said his group

has been there, listened to their voices, tried to understand their reality. Many of the fundamentalists and particularly the Zionists don't have the time of day to address the injustices the Middle Eastern Christians are facing.⁴⁴

The Compassionate Listening Project, developed by Gene Knudsen Hoffman, focuses on

listening. This process requires questions that are non-adversarial and listening which is non-judgmental. Listeners seek the truth of the person questioned, seeing through "masks of hostility and fear to the sacredness of the individual." Listeners seek to humanize the "enemy." They do not defend themselves but accept whatever others say as their perceptions and validate the right to their own perceptions. Compassionate Listening can cut through barriers of defense and mistrust, enabling both those listened to and those listening to hear what they think, to change their opinions, and to make more informed decisions. Through this process, fear can be reduced, and participants will be better equipped to discern how to proceed with effective action.⁴⁵

An interesting recent development involves Christian students from Duke University. Following a semester of discussion on the Middle East, students are going to the region to listen to the common people:

While the title of the journey sounds ambitious—"Seeking the Peace of Jerusalem: Reconciliation for the Children of Abraham"—its organizers and participants say the aim is not to "undo the knots of history," but to practice "faithful listening."⁴⁶

Listening is the critical first step toward reconciliation.

Robert Novak reported that Rep. Henry Hyde, chairman of the House International Relations Committee, has urged the Bush Administration to listen to the Palestinians. Hyde's report contends that "the Christians community is being crushed in the mill of the bitter Israeli-Palestinian conflict."⁴⁷ The voice of Christians in that land is barely being heard by the Bush administration.

Donald More laments the deafness even when many voices are being raised:

There are numerous Israeli journalists—Amira Hass, Uri Avnery and Gila Svirsky among them—who courageously call for compassion, justice and reconciliation in dealings with Palestinians. There are Israeli groups—like Gush Shalom, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Women in Black, Coalition of Women for Peace and Rabbis for Human Rights—that are working

for an end to the occupation. These Israeli voices find their counterpart among many American Jews who consider themselves pro-Israel but anti-occupation. These are Jews who sharply criticize the Sharon government and add to that criticism an even sharper attack on the policies of the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee. Supported in its agenda by thousands of Christian evangelicals, Aipac has been persistent in its unconditional support for whatever actions the Israeli government and hardline political elements deem vital for its security. Aipac also represents a powerful lobbying force in Washington. American politicians seem almost fearful of listening to voices critical of Aipac. Yet the voices are there.⁴⁸

Halsell made several trips to the Holy Land, including one with Jerry Falwell in an attempt to listen to all sides. Her distress clearly indicates what is needed:

I listened to speakers who were Jewish Zionists as well as Christian Zionists. Rather than provide hope by suggesting steps whereby Jews and Arabs might reach reconciliation, and live together, in peace, each speaker seemed to reinforce the fears of the other. Rather than stress how much Arabs and Jews—and indeed all human beings—have in common, speakers told us: Jews are different. They must live exclusively among Jews. . . . The Christian Zionists approve every military action taken by the Jewish Zionists. If Israel bombs Iraq, as it has done, or invades Lebanon, as it has done, or shoots and kills Palestinian children, as it has done, then Christian Zionists will say: “Well, that is a Chosen Land and a Chosen People. All of that is orchestrated by God.”⁴⁹

The place of listening in international reconciliation was put very clearly by Thomas Friedman on *Meet the Press* after the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict began:

If I found one thing as a reporter—worked in the Arab world for 25 years, as a Jewish-American reporter—here’s what I found. I found that listening is a sign of respect. You know, if you just go over and listen to people, and what they have to say, it’s amazing what they’ll allow you to say

back. But when you just say, “We’re not going to go to Damascus, we’re not going to listen to the Syrians,” we—you’re—never going to get anywhere that way. I’m not guaranteeing you you’re going to get somewhere the other way, but all I know, you sure increase the odds if you sit down and just listen.⁵⁰

Signs of hope are dim. Reconciliation cannot happen without listening. Only through the hard process of listening to the other side can progress toward peace be made. One critical step that needs to be taken is for Christian Zionists to listen to ordinary Palestinians, whom they appear to ignore totally. By only focusing their rhetoric on the extreme statements and actions of militant factions of the Palestinians, they ensure that there will be no road to peace. Sometimes it appears that Christian Zionists do not want peace but only eradication of the Palestinians from the land they believe was given by God to the Jews. That position precludes listening. Again, Halsell targets the focal point that Christian Zionists—if they wish to be called “Christian”—must face:

Somehow, in all the sermons of Jerry Falwell and other Christian Zionists, I miss their telling us about the Sermon on the Mount. And I miss these militant Christians reminding us that Christ possessed a way that was NOT based on military strength.⁵¹

Endnotes

1. One web site lists nearly 50 links to Christian Zionist organizations while at the same time listing only five for Jewish Zionist organizations.
2. For a much more complete description of the historical development of Christian Zionism, see John Hubers, *Christian Zionism: An Historical Analysis and Critique*. This paper is available at <http://www.rca.org/synod/christianzionism.html>.
3. Gary Burge, *Christian Zionism, Evangelicals and Israel*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.christianzionism.org/articles/Burge01.html>. Another example is the group Christians Committed to Biblical Justice which maintains a website titled “Challenging Christian Zionism,” and lists many sources to support

its critique. See <http://www.christianzionism.org/default.asp>.

4. See, for example, Stephen R. Sizer, *Whose Promised Land: Israel and Biblical Prophecy*, Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.christianzionism.org/articles/Sizer01.html>. Another excellent source which analyzes the complex debate about the promises of God to Israel is Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?: The Continuing Crisis over Israel and Palestine*, rev. ed. (Baker Books, 2002).
5. Gary Burge, *Christian Zionism, Evangelicals and Israel*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.christianzionism.org/articles/Burge01.html>.
6. Stephen R. Sizer, *Musalaba Theological Seminar: Jerusalem September 1997*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.cc-vw.org/articles/dispen3.html>
7. Cal Thomas, *Coalition of Terror*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://jewishworldreview.com/cols/thomas.html>.
8. Ibrahim Hooper, *Cal Thomas Echoes Nazi Propaganda*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/916945/posts>.
9. "Churches for Middle East Peace." *Outlook for 2003*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.cmep.org/Alerts/2003Jan14.htm>
10. John Hagee, *Israel and the Jewish People*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.jhm.org/faq.asp>.
11. Daphna Berman, as quoted in *Pat Robertson to Bush: Don't Touch Jerusalem!* Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://atheism.about.com/b/a/117265.htm>
12. *Letter to Rev. Jerry Falwell*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.saltfilms.net/issues/openletter.html>.
13. Gary Bauer, *Speech to AIPAC Convention - March 30, 2003*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from http://ouramericanvalues.org/press_release_article.php?id=040303.
14. *Letter to President Bush, May 19, 2003*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from http://www.ouramericanvalues.org/press_release_article.php?id=051903.
15. The Palestinian Information Center Daily News, Oct. 4, 2004. *Pat Robertson: "Road Map" is a "Satanic Plan."* Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.palestine-info.co.uk/cgi-bin/am/exec/view.cgi/3/8320>.
16. CNN.com. *Robertson suggests God smote Sharon* Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.cnn.com/2006/US/01/05/robertson.sharon/>
17. Christians Committed to Biblical Justice. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.cfi-usa.org/reliefprograms.html>
18. Christians Committed to Biblical justice. *Challenging Christian Zionism*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.christianzionism.org/links1N.asp>
19. The International Listening Association voted to accept this definition in 1996.
20. Donald J. More, "America: Is Anybody Listening?" Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.americamagazine.org/gettext.cfm?articleTypeID=1&textID=3049&issueID=439>
21. "True Torah Jews Against Zionism." Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.jewsagainstzionism.com/about/index.cfm>
22. "The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions." Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.icahd.org/eng/about.asp?menu=2&submenu=1>
23. "Jewish Voice for Peace." *Mission Statement*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/publish/mission.shtml>
24. Grace Halsell, "Armageddon—Zionism's Diabolical Goal," *Spectrum* 4, No. 10 (April 2003).
25. "Jews Not Zionists." Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.jewsnotzionists.org>
26. G. Neuberger, *The Difference between Judaism and Zionism*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.jewsnotzionists.org/differencejudzion.html>
27. Sherri Muzher. *Christians Also Battle for Palestinian Side*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2003-06-05-opcom_x.htm
28. Sherri Muzher, *Christians Also Battle for Palestinian Side*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2003-06-05-opcom_x.htm
29. Wes Granberg-Michaelson, *Christian Zionism Distorts Faith and Imperils Peace*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.warc.ch/update/up134/01.html>
30. John Hubers, "Christian Zionism" and the Myth of America. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.cmep.org/theology/2003May9.htm>.
31. Martha Sawyer Allen, *Bethlehem Pastor See Too Much Hate in Middle East*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from http://www.annadwa.org/resources/articles/bethlehem_pastor_sees.htm
32. Nam Ateek and Michael Prior, eds., "Christian Zionism: A British Perspective," in *Holy Land - Hollow Jubilee* (London: Melisende 1999). See also <http://www.cc-vw.org/articles/zionism.html>
33. Donald Wagner, "The Evangelical-Jewish Alliance," in *The Christian Century*, June 28, 2003, pp. 20-24.
34. Wes, Granberg-Michaelson, *Christian Zionism Distorts*

- Faith and Imperils Peace*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.warc.ch/update/up134/01.html>.
35. Naim Ateek and Michael Prior, eds., "Christian Zionism: A British Perspective," in *Holy Land - Hollow Jubilee* (London: Melisende, 1999). See also <http://www.cc-vw.org/articles/zionism.html>.
 36. John Hubers, *Christian Zionism: An Historical Analysis and Critique*. This paper is available at <http://www.rca.org/synod/christianzionism.html>.
 37. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Israel and Palestine: General Assembly Action*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/christianzionism.htm>
 38. Alan Lazerte, *Biblical Reasons for Support of Israel*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.cdn-friends-icej.ca/judeochr/biblical.html>
 39. Alan Lazerte, *Arab Press: Christian Zionists Aren't Real Christians*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://christianactionforisrael.org/notreal.html>
 40. Knox Theological Seminary, *An Open Letter to Evangelicals and Other Interested Parties: The People of God, the Land of Israel, and the Impartiality of the Gospel*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.knoxseminary.org/Prospective/Faculty/WittenbergDoor/>
 41. *Letter to Rev. Jerry Falwell*. <http://www.saltfilms.net/issues/openletter.html>
 42. David Wagner, *The Evangelical Jewish Alliance*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2717>.
 43. Middle East Council of Churches, *Introduction to the M.E.C.C.* Retrieved August 2, 2006, from http://www.mec-churches.org/about_mec.htm
 44. Martha Sawyer Allen, *Bethlehem Pastor See Too Much Hate in Middle East*. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from http://www.annadwa.org/resources/articles/bethlehem_pastor_sees.htm.
 45. Gene Knudsen Hoffman's essays on Compassionate Listening are on the web at: <http://www.newconversations.net/listening.htm>. One can also read and download free her book - *Compassionate Listening: An Exploratory Sourcebook About Conflict Transformation* at the same website.
 46. James Todd, *Christian Students to Practice Faithful Listening in the Holy Land*. http://www.dukenews.duke.edu/2004/12/faithfullistening_1204.html
 47. Robert Novak, "A Plea for Palestinian Christians," *The Washington Post*, May 25, 2006.
 48. Donald J. More, "America: Is Anybody Listening?" Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.americamagazine.org/gettext.cfm?articleTypeID=1&extID=3049&issueID=439>.
 49. Grace Halsell, "Armageddon—Zionism's Diabolical Goal," *Spectrum* 4, No. 10 (April 2003).
 50. Thomas L. Friedman, *Meet the Press*, July 30, 2006. Retrieved August 2, 2006, from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14028605/page/7/>.
 51. Grace Halsell, "Armageddon—Zionism's Diabolical Goal," *Spectrum* 4, No. 10 (April 2003).