

The Unique Relationship between the US and Israel

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The relationship that developed between the US and Israel is entirely unique amongst nations with Israel exerting vast influence on American politics and the US acting as an economic and military sponsor and maintainer of Israel. The relationship even withstood a sustained attack on a US military vessel in 1967 during the six day war that killed 34 crew members and wounded 171 others. The American support for Israel was broadly consistent across the Christian communities immediately following WWII and during the time leading up to the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948. As time passed, however, American support became increasingly limited to Evangelical fundamentalists as dispensationalism became more dominant amongst Evangelical churches. In 2017 a poll by LifeWay reported that more than 50% of Evangelicals support Israel because they see Israel as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy (1) while an earlier poll by Pew in 2013 showed 82% of Evangelicals responding believed that the land had been given by God to the modern State of Israel as opposed to 44% for the overall American population (2). Comparing this to another Pew poll from 2003 only 73% believed this indicating increasing support for Israel during that interval.

Israel has strategically encouraged Christian Zionism with American evangelical leaders building relationships with Israeli leaders along with institutional ties to Jewish organizations and the government itself. A key component of this is American evangelicals who live in Israel like G. Douglas Young who was the founder of the American Institute of Holy Land Studies and is nearly as important to modern Zionism and Cyrus Scofield was to the spread of dispensationalism. This organization has sought to convince American Christians that it is their duty to support the Jewish state and has facilitated relationships between Jewish organizations, the Israeli government, and American evangelicals. (3) Popular literature and media has also played a major role in spreading Christian Zionist activism like Hal Lindsey's "*Late, Great, Planet Earth*" and John Walvoord's "*Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis*". These sorts of writings would typically involve mass conversion of Jews as a final act along with depiction of Russia as the persecutors of Israel who God ultimately defeats. These books were very big sellers and would reach an audience that extended to people who were only loosely connected to church or unchurched. There was also a reappraisal of Catholic attitudes towards Israel and Zionism that was led by Jacques Maritain who was a leading Catholic philosopher and intellectual in the post war period thru the early 1970's that initially may have helped increase support for Israel. (4 p. 246)

Evangelical Christians while acting as a solid pro-Israel voting bloc, never directly steered US support for Israel in congress but acted as a force that can be readily called on to faithfully support those who do. Policy decisions and political action are controlled by the American Lobby Group Advocating for Pro-Israel Policies (AIPAC) that was founded in 1954 in response to negative international reaction to the Qubya Massacre of Palestinian Villagers which was led by future Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that killed 69 people, 2/3 of them women and children (5). AIPAC, which was originally named the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs (AZCPA) was made a separate branch of the American Zionist

Council (AZC) following the Qubya incident and was subsequently renamed in 1959. A factor in splitting the two organizations was President Eisenhower's belief that AZC was funded directly by the Israeli government. (6)

A Contentious Early History

The influence of Zionism and the State of Israel developed and grew stronger from the 1960's onward which created a continually changing relationship between the two nations. During the 1960's AIPAC had not grown strong enough that they lacked political vulnerability and the history between the US and Israel prior to that was not without many serious issues. Beginning in 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel, President Truman was generally supportive of Israel and overcame some resistance in the State Department in recognizing the Jewish state which had a significant number of anti-Zionists most notable of which was Secretary of State George Marshall (4 p. 213). The events surrounding this are somewhat complex and there are a number of books addressing it but his support for Israel was by no means absolute. Truman was facing a difficult election that he was expected to lose. He was dependent on Jewish finances and specifically in New York where there was a large Jewish population, he needed Jewish votes. Privately Truman frequently complained about being "pushed around by the Jews" and being "told what to do". (4 p. 213) In a 1945 diary entry he wrote with regard to the Jews being God's chosen people, "*The Jews claim God Almighty picked 'em out for special privilege. Well, I'm sure he had better judgment. Fact is, I never thought God picked out any favorites.*" (7 p. 120) Showing the dramatic difference amongst fundamentalist aligned groups that occurred rapidly after this point in time, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in 1950 overwhelmingly criticized Truman's rapid recognition of Israel. (8) Prominent Baptist Evangelist and editor of the Fundamentalist newspaper, The Sword and the Lord, John R Rice also strongly condemned the Jewish settlers in Palestine for their treatment of Palestinians. (8)

When the Eisenhower administration came to power in 1953, he was less inclined to align with Israel than Truman was. Some of the issues that were notable during the Eisenhower era were the Israelis building waterworks in a demilitarized zone and channeling water from the Jordan River into Israeli territory in direct violation of the United Nations which led to an unannounced cut off of American aid (4 p. 249). Prior to the Qubya incident Israel was portrayed favorably although this was just one of several similar reprisal raids. Time Magazine reported on the event as follows:

The Israelis moved into Kibya with rifle and Sten guns. They shot every man, woman and child they could find, then turned their fire on the cattle. After that, they dynamited 42 houses, a school and a mosque. . . . The villagers huddled in the grass could see Israeli soldiers slouching in the doorways of their homes, smoking and joking, their young faces illuminated by the flames. By 3 A.M., the Israelis' work was done, and they leisurely withdrew. (9)

This massacre, due to the deliberate killings of civilians and it being so dramatically disproportionate, seriously damaged Israeli's reputation and in America and around the world. According to Israeli Ambassador Abba Eben, the operation "*brought our international standing to the edge of the abyss. . . .*

This operation was the first since the establishment of our state that world Jewry refused to identify with. . . . Even Deir Yassin (a previous similar incident) did not evoke such nausea.” (4 p. 249)

In July of 1956 another serious incident in US-Israeli relations occurred when Egyptian President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal and closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. This was regarded by the Israelis as an act of war and in conjunction with France and England they seized the canal. Britain and France landed paratroopers on the Canal with a secondary objective of removing Nasser from power. Both the US and Russia were strongly opposed to these actions and Israel along with France and Britain were forced to back down. Israel further angered Eisenhower by demanding security guarantees before withdrawing in March of 1957. The war generally went poorly for the Israeli's but they did manage to hold onto part of the Sinai which was its first territorial acquisition since 1949 and they received an American guarantee of shipping through the Straits of Tiran. (4 p. 250)

When Kennedy, who was Catholic and neither a dispensationalist or Zionist, was running for president in 1960 the uncertainty level regarding continued US support for Israel was probably at its highest point and the fact that JFK was Catholic was a major issue still for many Protestants especially those who tended towards a Fundamentalist belief system. When Kennedy spoke to the American Zionist Conference (AZV) on August 25, 1960 just before the election, however, he appeared to give a solid US commitment to defending Israel including the use of American forces if necessary. He was initially far friendlier to Israel than Eisenhower, providing it with increased financial, economic, and military aid including ending the American embargo on arms sales to Israel and the sale of Hawk surface-to-air missiles (4 p. 255). While being openly supportive of Israel he questioned their clandestine and unacknowledged nuclear weapons program in two correspondence; one dated May 27, 1963 and the other June 15, 1963 (10). He wrote the US commitment to the support of Israel could be “*seriously jeopardized*” if they continued to pursue a nuclear weapons arsenal (11). Also Robert Kennedy who was Attorney General under his brother's administration directed AIPAC to register as a foreign agent on November 21, 1962 under the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA) (11). It was possible that Kennedy's thoughts towards Israel were evolving along with his beliefs regarding the Cold War and the Vietnam conflict. This has led some to allege that Israel had a role in the JFK assassination. The evidence for this, however, is sketchy and centers on CIA agent James Angleton. All that can be said of this definitively is that Israel, along with numerous other groups and individuals, benefitted from Kennedy's assassination.

After Kennedy's death Johnson dropped both of these issues. Johnson had a long-standing pro-Jewish record going back to the 1930 when he actively tried to rescue European Jews out of Europe. LBJ was raised in an Evangelical home but, given his ancestry he would have qualified as a Jew under Jewish religious law and his aunt was an active Zionist. Speaking to a meeting of B'nai B'rith he said, “The Bible stories are woven into my childhood memories as the gallant struggle of modern Jews to be free of persecution is woven into our souls.” (4 p. 255) (12)

Moving ahead three years, on June 8, 1967, during the Six Day War, the American technical research ship USS liberty was attacked first by Israeli fighter jets and then by three Israeli Navy motor torpedo boats in international waters north of the Sinai Peninsula about 25 miles from the Egyptian city of Arish. The attack which took place over several hours killed 34 crewmen and wounded 171 others. The

explanation of the event given by the Israeli's was that the Liberty had been attacked in error believing it was an Egyptian ship which the Johnson administration concurred with. The Israelis issued an apology and paid significant damages to the survivors and families of the deceased but both the events and the interpretation of those events has remained a very controversial topic. The Liberty originally asked for a destroyer escort which was denied because the Vice Admiral of the 6th Fleet determined that the Liberty was clearly marked and in international waters. Many of the facts of the case are disputed like the visibility of the flag and the speed the vessel was traveling which the Israelis reported to be 30 knots. According to their naval doctrine at the time this would require them to consider it to be hostile, while the Liberty could only travel at app. 17 knots.

It may be that this was really simply a case of mistaken identity coupled with extreme negligence and incompetence but it was never broadly accepted. Secretary of State at the time, Dean Rusk comments are representative of many others when he said, *"I was never satisfied with the Israeli explanation. Their sustained attack to disable and sink Liberty precluded an assault by accident or some trigger-happy local commander. Through diplomatic channels we refused to accept their explanations. I didn't believe them then, and I don't believe them to this day. The attack was outrageous"* (13 p. 388). Alternative theories include that the Liberty was attacked to hide visibility to war crimes, that the Liberty was jamming Israeli communications, (14 pp. 105-115), that the Liberty would have detected that the Israelis were staging to invade the Golan Heights which was a violation of the cease-fire agreement (15), or the it was a false flag to draw the US into the war (16). Perhaps this will never be resolved but what is certain is that the speed at which this incident was brushed aside at the time was remarkable and few today are even aware of it.

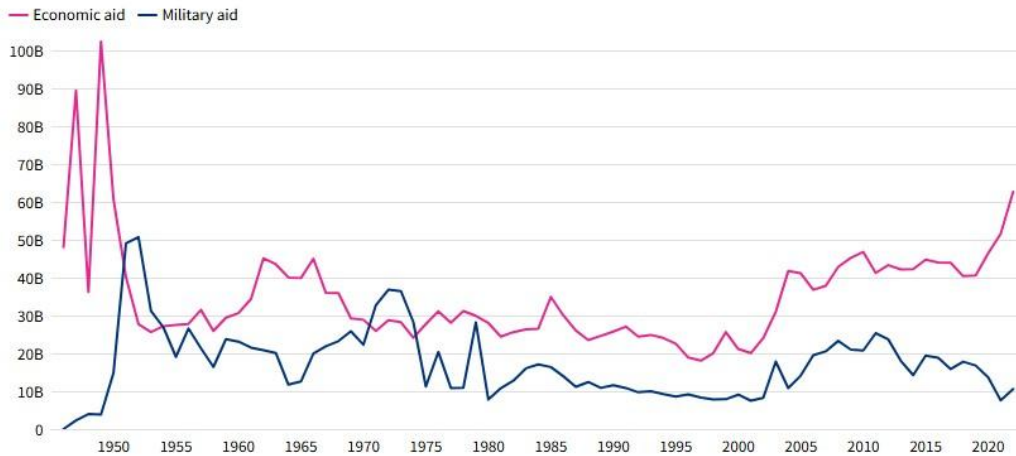
The Rise of the Israel Lobby and Modern Christian Zionism

By the mid 1970's and 1980's AIPAC became able to exercise significant influence over the US government as budgets increased from \$300,000 in 1973 to \$7 Million in 1980 to \$78 Mil by 2014 (17). This was first highlighted in 1978 when President Gerald Ford proposed a re-assessment of the US relationship with Israel but under intense lobbying effort from AIPAC was forced to resend that proposal. AIPAC's approach to lobbying is to assign individual members of a national network to all individual representatives and to *"invest"* in up and coming politicians and this has proved to be a very effective model. They are fully non-partisan exercising very significant influence over both parties. AIPAC is structured as a Political Action Committee (PAC) that is an umbrella for many other associated PACS. (18 p. 100) In addition to various forms of government funding and favorable foreign policy there are both Jewish and Christian Zionist organizations that organize their backers to support Zionist causes and also contribute significant private funding. The largest of these is Christians United for Israel run by John Hagee that reports having 50 million members / supporters. (19)

By the 1970's this political support started to translate into very large direct economic and military support. Starting with the total foreign aid picture going back to the Marshall Plan following WWII we see a spike right after the war for a number of years that then, in constant dollars, is relatively consistent with periodic spikes.

The US sent over \$100 billion in economic aid in 1949, a year after passing the Marshall Plan.

US foreign assistance obligations by type, 1946–2022

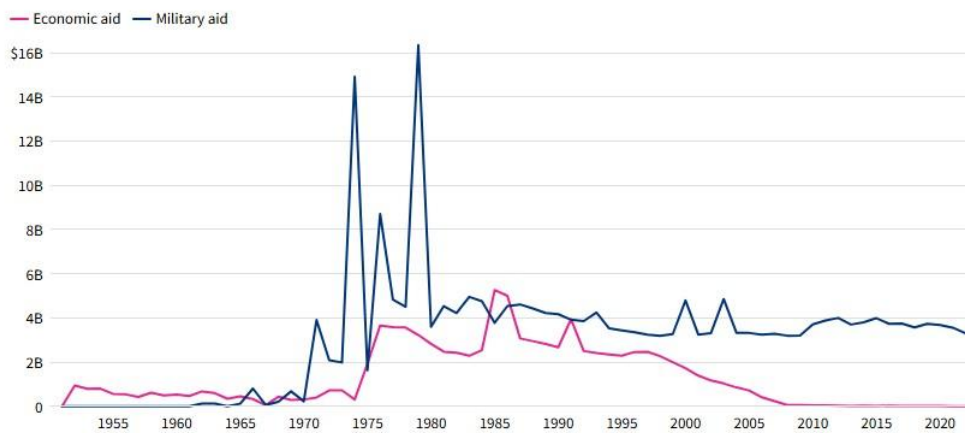


Adjusted for inflation in 2023 dollars. Data for 2021 and 2022 comes directly from the USAID foreign assistance dashboard as of March 6, 2024, while data for previous years was retrieved in January 2024.

Source: [US Agency for International Development](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Embed](#) • [Download image](#) • [Download SVG](#)

(20)

As shown in the chart above, Military Aid is minimal until 1950 and around the time of the “War on Terror” there is a smaller ramp up. Looking only at Israel in the following chart the total US aid is minimal until 1970 and then shoots upward.



Adjusted for inflation in 2022 dollars. Data for 2020–2022 is partially completed.

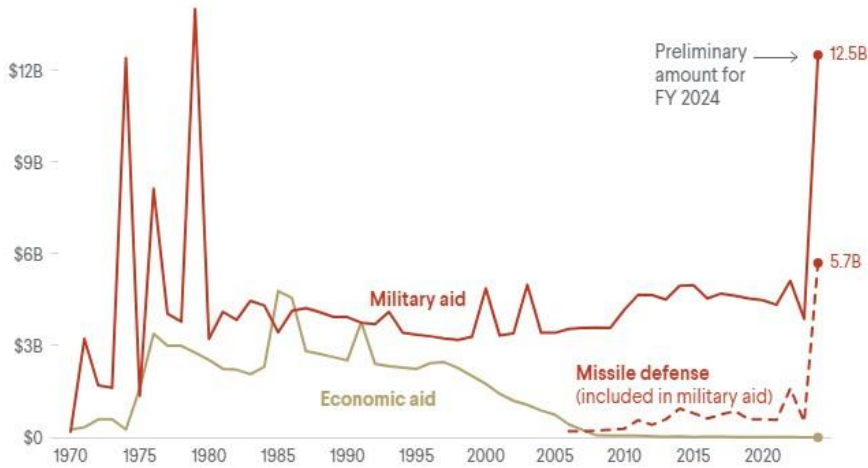
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(20)

As the Israeli tech economy developed between 2005 and 2010 however, the economic aid goes flat. Looking at another version of this basic chart which extends through 2025 both the military aid and economic aid rocket upwards.

The U.S. Has Provided Significant Military Aid to Israel Since the 1970s

Aid by fiscal year (adjusted for inflation*)



*Data is adjusted to constant 2024 dollars using the price index for the first half of fiscal year 2024.

Note: Amounts for FY 2024 are from the March 23 appropriations bill and April 26 aid bill and are preliminary. The April bill included an additional \$5.4B for procuring and replacing weapons in U.S. stocks which is not included in this chart. Data for prior fiscal years is from foreignassistance.gov, with missile defense included starting in 2006 using data from the Congressional Research Service.

Sources: USAID; Congressional Research Service; Bureau for Economic Analysis via Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.

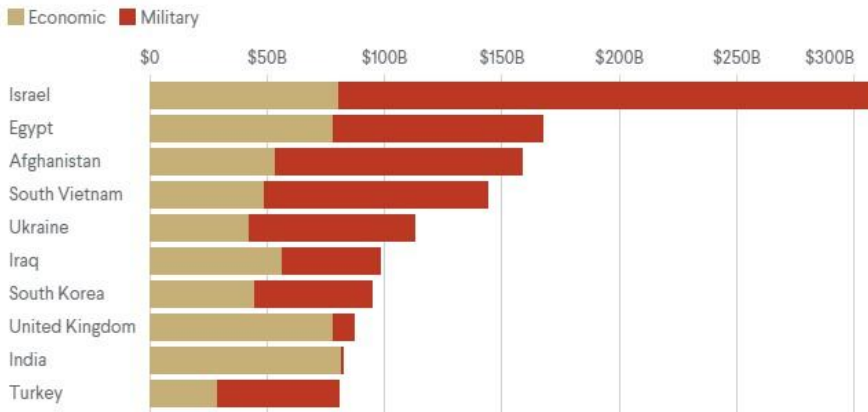
COUNCIL on FOREIGN RELATIONS

(21)

While being a late arrival to the list of American Aid recipients, Israel cumulatively since WWII is by far the largest recipient.

Israel Is the Largest Cumulative Recipient of U.S. Aid

Total aid from fiscal years 1946 to 2024* (constant 2022 dollars)



*Data for fiscal years 2023 and 2024 is incomplete.

Notes: Data for Israel for FY 2024 is from the March 23 appropriations bill and April 26 aid bill and is preliminary. The April bill included an additional \$5.4B for procuring and replacing weapons in U.S. stocks which is not included in this chart. Military aid for Israel includes missile defense starting in 2006. For Ukraine, data for FY 2022 to 2024 is from the Kiel Institute for the World Economy. South Vietnam existed as a country until the end of the Vietnam War in 1975.

Sources: United States Agency for International Development (USAID); Congressional Research Service; Amezza et al., Ukraine Support Tracker, Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

COUNCIL on FOREIGN RELATIONS

(21)

Areas where the US has engaged or sponsored foreign wars figure prominently on this chart but Israel dwarfs all other recipients. What's also notable here is Israel's small land mass and relatively small population. For example, Israel's population in 2020 was app. 9.5 M while England was 68.5M and Egypt was 120M. If normalized for size the total aid received by Israel would have been 20x larger than 2nd place Egypt.

US foreign aid generally is perceived as serving some strategic objective and, during the Cold War era, it could be argued that US support of Israel served this strategic objective although the case would be by no means conclusive. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, however, it becomes very difficult to see how the US relationship with Israel strategically benefits the US especially considering the lack of influence the US has shown in Israeli policy decisions and the constant international problems this association has created. The more viable conclusion is simply that the aid and support given the Israeli's is not intended to strategically benefit the US but is the result of the political power Israel has over their much larger sponsor which again goes back to the electorate.

The degree and commitment of support from US conservative and fundamentalist Protestant churches has also varied with time. In the 1940's through the 1960's, although a minority position, there were Christian anti-communist groups that organized primarily in or around churches that were strongly anti-Zionist with the most well known being the John Birch Society (22). A notable individual in this regard was Benjamin H. Freedman who was by descent Jewish but became a Catholic and both funded anti-Zionist publications and was a relatively well known speaker. These generally came to see international capitalists as ultimately being a bigger threat than Russia. By the 1970's there appeared to be a directed bi-partisan effort to ridicule and marginalize these sorts of views along with those who hold or promote them labeling them as anti-Semitic conspiracy theorists. The John Birch Society still exists today and has maintained a consistent belief system although being treated like a political leper even (or maybe especially) amongst conservatives.

The 1970's clearly marked a step function shift in America's relationship with Israel that is statistically significant. There are some external factors that could have contributed to this. As fundamentalist churches started to attract more followers that did not come from that background it brought about some subtle changes especially with regard to Israel. The newer converts, who either came from other denominations that were liberalizing or where unchurched entirely, were more influenced by current political topics from the late 1960's and 1970's and appear to be significantly more pro-Israel and pro-Zionist. The actions of Israel's adversaries also could be a factor. In the 1970's there were a number of high profile terrorist acts committed by Palestinians and other Arab groups, most notably the Munich Massacre at the 1972 Olympic games that played live for over a week on television and created a lasting image of the Palestinians as the aggressor and the Israelis as the victims. Further some of the actions and groups had an apparent affiliation to European Marxist factions. These acts showed a remarkable ignorance of American culture and did seemingly irreparable damage to the Palestinian cause in the court of American public opinion. Still the time alignment wasn't exact and these are at best only partial explanations. What does align precisely are the plans and actions of prominent Evangelical and Fundamentalist church leaders that steered their followers towards a new understanding of Israel and Judaism which we will look at now.

The Shaping of American Christian Zionism

The evolution of Christian Zionism in the United States went through several distinct phases that correspond with the changes in the leadership of the movement. Historian and author Donald Lewis proposed four periods as follows:

(1) from 1948 to the eve of the Six-Day War in 1967; (2) from the Six-Day War through to 1979; (3) from the rise of the Moral Majority in 1979 through to the election of George H. W. Bush in 1989; and then (4) from 1989 to today—the era of Robertson and Hagee. (4 p. 245)

When Israel came into being it was essentially a closed society for Christian missionaries and proselytizing. There were still some missionaries there as there were also Arab Christians but dreams for a rapid mass conversion of the Jewish people were clearly misplaced. Viewing Israel as a western society the restrictions on their activity came as a surprise to the early Evangelical missionaries to arrive there like Robert Leslie Lindsay who arrived there in 1945 and had witnessed the establishment of the State of Israel. Lindsay and his fellow missionaries faced an anti-missionary movement, composed of mostly Orthodox Jews who regarded Christians as predatory and pressured the government to monitor or deport the missionaries (6 pp. 34-38). During Billy Graham's first visit to Israel in 1960, which was authorized on the condition that he wouldn't proselytize, he employed Lindsay, who was Southern Baptist, as his translator (6 p. 19) (23 pp. 219-226). The dream of converting the Jews to Christianity didn't die but it would require a new more patient approach.

During the 1950's a developing explanation for the success of western civilization was the blended faith heritage of Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism that glossed over many significant differences and started to create the impression that Judaism and Christianity were theologically near equivalents with one simply being an extension of the other. The phrase Judeo-Christian became increasingly common creating a perception of commonality while ignoring the extensive influence of Greco-Roman thought on the New Testament and western heritage. This also played well into the concept of American exceptionalism that became a cornerstone of neo-conservatism (24 p. 24) (6 p. 40) and implied not just a theological alignment between Christianity and Judaism but a political and cultural alignment between America and Israel.

G. Douglas Young, Billy Graham, and Arnold T. Olson

One of the first areas where fundamentalist and Israel found close alignment was Biblical archeology where fundamentalists and other conservative Christians were searching for evidence to combat theological liberalism and higher Biblical criticism. Meanwhile the Israeli government saw this as a way to bolster their claims to possession of the land and also build some potentially useful bridges. The field of study of Biblical archeology was established by William F Albright who saw this as an academic defense of true Christianity. Up until Albright's death in 1971 he had close Jewish allies such as Yigael Yadin that sought to build a case for the close cultural continuity of ancient and modern Israel. (6 p. 53) (25 p. 257) This led to the rise of G. Douglas Young who established the Israel-American Institute of Biblical Studies. Young was a minister from Minnesota who was deeply committed not just to the place of Israel in prophecy but to the state and people of Israel and he would become critically important to

the modern Christian Zionist movement. The mission of the school was to provide students and clergy with a highly positive understanding of Israel and its significance for Christians. The institute was later renamed to the American Institute of Holy Land Studies and became the most important institutional in the development of Evangelical Christian Zionism. (6 p. 59)

Young was raised as a fundamentalist and dispensationalist and attended Westminster Theological Seminary then started attending the Central Evangelical Free Church in downtown Minneapolis. The Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) was a new denomination at the time that appealed to Young's beliefs regarding Israel and the denomination would play a prominent role in shaping Christian Zionism. Young taught for a period of time at the National Bible Institute in Ringwood, New Jersey which was founded by Carl McIntire. As Young became more political he found his beliefs incompatible with those of McIntire and his followers and withdrew from his circle. (6 pp. 62-64) (26 pp. 65-70) Young saw the Bible as the story of God's estrangement and reconciliation with Israel and believed, as did dispensationalists in general, that God's original covenants with Israel remained in place through the "church age". The salvation, or mass conversion, of Israel would be the culmination of God's plan (6 p. 62). He saw the interpretation of biblical references to Israel in figurative or allegorical terms as "*the sin of spiritualizing biblical prophecy*" and further believed that the broad acceptance of this in Christianity had paved the way for what he saw as a long tradition of Christian anti-Judaism. Young became a modified dispensationalist who adapted his theology to accommodate an "intimate social, religious, and political" relationship between Israel and the church. Young held that Jews would eventually convert to Christianity but only after the rapture of the church but then incorporated a second rapture event for converted Jews which avoided the commonly held dispensational belief that 2/3 of the Jews in "the whole land" based on Zechariah 13:8-9. He left behind vast unpublished theological notes. (6 pp. 62-64)

Before moving to Israel, Young denounced the concept of Christian missions to Jews in stronger terms than the Southern Baptist missionaries who went before him and refuted any sort of evangelistic goals believing they hurt Christian credibility as opposed to focusing on Israel as a political entity. While he appreciated the emphasis placed on Israel by dispensational clergy he felt they were too involved with their battle against theological and cultural liberalism as opposed to supporting Israel (6 pp. 72-74). He called for "*Bible based*" political activism to aid Jews and the State of Israel as an end in itself. He would ask his followers, "*Are you helping the new nation of Israel?... Are you helping them in material and physical ways? Are you expressing real friendship always?*" (27 p. 26) (6 p. 76) Young developed an international network of students and donors that came to the attention of Israel's Foreign Ministry which sought to improve the country's image abroad with a potentially useful educational project. The Christian response to the 1967 war was mixed which prompted the attention of American Jew to interreligious cooperation which aligned with Young's vision. For the first time the Israeli government began a systematic outreach to Christian supporters in the US (6 pp. 82-84). Young was a tireless activist for Israel during this period, speaking as many as 200 times a month across Europe and North America under the auspices of the Israeli Ministry of Tourism between 1967 and 1973. He logged 36,000 miles in a two month span as a representative of "Fighters against Racial Hatred" (6 p. 88) (28)

The American Jewish Congress (AJC) had long sought to bring Billy Graham into their orbit and in February of 1968 Gerald Strober, a Presbyterian minister who was an advisor to AFC, met with Graham's

assistants to try to set up an official meeting (6 p. 89). Billy Graham was well aware of the differing views on Israel amongst conservative Christians and knew he would be speaking to a skeptical audience in his first public meeting with American Jewish Leaders in 1969. He proclaimed his “love for Israel” and his theological commitment to the state of Israel saying “No combination of powers will dislodge Israel because God is with them”. He then went on to tell the audience at AJC headquarters in New York City that he acknowledged “all Christians are guilty as far as Jewish experience was concerned” and then asked for the “forgiveness of the Jewish community as a Christian.” (6 p. 16) (29) Graham went on to highlight Israel with the release of his documentary / musical His Land in 1970 which was filmed in Israel and produced by Graham’s World Wide Pictures.

Graham’s proclamation was certainly well received at the time and it would become “anti-Semitic” to question any of it. It fit in with a developing trend in academia and in the media to accept all criticism of European or Christian culture and to proclaim the virtues of anything that wasn’t European or Christian. It also played to collective guilt associated with the holocaust, yet it is historically dubious. The Jewish population during the time of Jesus and shortly thereafter was as high as 10% of the total population of Rome and the vast majority of it lived outside of the Holy Land. Gradually over time, however, that population shrank as it was assimilated into Christian Europe. By the 13th century the population of European Jews is estimated to have been only about 200,000 people that was made up of Sephardim Jews who lived on the Iberian Peninsula until they , along with the Moors, were expelled following the reconquista in 1492, and Ashkenazi Jews in Germanic regions and Eastern Europe primarily. From that point, the population exploded upwards. The most politically acceptable explanation for this is a very high birth rate along with genetic isolation but this could have also been substantially augmented by converts to Judaism. Shortly following this there were mass expulsions in England and then France leaving the bulk of the Ashkenazi population in what is now Germany, Poland, and Russia (note Poland was not a country until after WWI) with by far the largest grouping being in Poland (30). Notwithstanding any context for the expulsions, the majority of Christian people living in Europe from the establishment of the church to the beginning of the 20th century would have had little knowledge of or association with a Jewish population.

Creating the Impression of near Theological and Cultural Unity

Christian Zionism in the late 1960’s and the 1970’s would expand well beyond Young and Graham and attract other prominent evangelicals into this interreligious partnership. One of Young’s early supporters, Arnold T. Olson, who was head of the Evangelical Free Church of America, would become prominent. Olson, like Graham, was an evangelical internationalist who supported expanding American influence across the globe and was open to partnerships with the state, non government organizations, and broader religious networks (6 pp. 93-94). Olson was president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) from 1968 through 1970 and elevated support for Israel as a central tenet of evangelical priorities. He arranged the merger of Swedish and Norwegian/Danish Evangelical Free Churches attempting to minimize differences between immigrant and old school fundamentalists while emphasizing the fight against communism and promoting internationalism as inherently American (6 p. 95). The embrace of internationalism was a complete reversal from the position that dispensationalists had taken after WWI and maintained until the time of Graham and Olson (4 p. 193). In his book Inside

Jerusalem: City of Destiny from 1968 he emphasized their role in the Cold War as an Island of western freedom saying “One cannot localize this conflict,” adding “for war or peace in Jerusalem has its global repercussions.” Olson contrasted Israel’s tenuous alliance with the US with what he perceived as the tight Arab-Soviet bloc. Both of these views were extremely arguable to say the least but came to be broadly accepted. (6 p. 94) (31)

The spirit of religious cooperation that led American Evangelicals to very nearly see Jews as co-religionists did not extend to Arab Christians. Father Elias Chacour, an Israeli Arab priest in Galilee who did attempt to join in a dialogue with the Israelis, placed blame on “the European Christians” who “have fallen in love with the myth of Israel—not the real State of Israel.” (32 p. 106) To American Evangelicals, the Arab Christian practiced a ritualistic faith that seemed similar to Catholicism whether they were Catholic or not and were more Arab than Christian. The State of Israel was seen as the target of the Moslem World that was in league with World Communism to take over the world. In reality there are probably no two philosophies more incompatible than Islam and Marxism and the Jew traditionally had good relations with Sunni Muslims as did the Americans and British in more recent history, most notably, Saudi Arabia.

There still were many Christians who saw the close alignment of Judaism and Christianity as a move towards universalism that would ultimately erode foundational Christian doctrines and beliefs. A notable theological critique of Christian Zionism was offered by Jewish-Christian theologian Jakob Jocz who pointed out what he viewed as the “secularizing and pluralistic tendencies” within this theological shift that emphasized commonalities as opposed to the many significant differences between Christianity and Judaism. He wrote *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ* in 1949 and expanded on these themes in *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ after Auschwitz*. (4 p. 254)

Religious tourism became a major tool for Christian Zionist working with the Israeli government. A network of organizers, tour promoters, guides, and advertisers formed after 1967 to promote holy land tourism and expand Evangelical interest in Israel. This was ultimately intended to promote political activism and mobilization (6 p. 103). The Israel Pilgrimage Committee was formed in 1967 to advise the new Pilgrimage Department in the Ministry of Tourism and included G. Douglas Young and a representative from the United Christian Council in Israel. (6 p. 126) (33)

The shift toward American Evangelicals and the political right remained a point of concern for many Jews but the response of other Christian groups to the 1967 war drove the alliance from the Jewish perspective. After years of interreligious dialogue American Jews came to the realization that with Mainline Protestant denominations and with Roman Catholics they had not made any significant gains and these groups were increasingly seeing Israel as the aggressor and a rogue nation. Americans were also departing the ranks of the liberal Protestants and many were becoming fundamentalist Evangelicals. Americans in general seemed to view Israel as the underdog in the war and were pleased with the outcome much as someone would be pleased if the team they were rooting for won a game but the effect on religious demographics is harder to assess. Jerry Falwell went so far as to propose that large numbers of Christians were converting specifically to support Israel at what he referred to as a “very rapid pace.” (4 pp. 258-259) An increasing percentage of Jews were also seeing a spiritual aspect

to Middle Eastern conflict in a country that was founded by Jewish secularists who had intended modern Israel to be a home for Jews but never a home for Judaism. (4 p. 260)

During the 1973 war the investment in US public relations showed remarkable dividends. As in 1967 Christian Zionism again supported the IDF but was more organized and more effective in organizing visitations to wounded Israeli soldiers and blood drives. The Southern Baptists in Nazareth repurposed their busses as transports for soldiers and the wounded. Billy Graham lobbied President Nixon on behalf of Israel urging an American airlift of supplies while stressing that the “majority of Evangelicals were strongly supportive of Israel.” (6 pp. 141-142) Following the war Jewish – Evangelical alignment continued to gather momentum. The first Jewish-Evangelical alignment conference was held in 1975. The high point of Christian Zionism would be reached between 1973 and 1976 with the beliefs it espoused having become a key part of the American Evangelical identity. This also corresponded with the time that Christian conservatives would emerge as an identifiable voting bloc in the elections of 1976 and then 1980 with Reagan. The movement had overcome continual issues with anti-missionary activity in Israel and the animosity of Israel and Jews in a broader sense to Hebrew Christians. One of the more notable events was the burning of two Hebrew Christian buildings and the bombing of the car of a publisher of Christian material in Jerusalem by the Jewish Defense League. One of their leaders, Rabbi Kahane denied responsibility but foretold more violence to come saying “*If you lose a Jew in Auschwitz or thru conversion,...it’s still a lost soul to our people.*” (6 p. 130)

In assessing the history of Christian Zionism to this point in the story it is hard not to see that it has caused a secularizing effect on both Christianity and Judaism. The centrality of political support for the State of Israel became nearly doctrinal and remains so for the vast majority of Evangelicals from this time period. Closely related to that was fear of and opposition to Russia and acceptance of neo-Liberalism or globalism on an international level at least. It had a similar secularizing effect on Judaism that Reform and Orthodox rabbis had seen as a threat as far back as the early 20th century. In both cases this can be associated with a shifting focus towards the Jews as a people and then a nation and away from Jews as individuals. (4 p. 266)

Falwell, Robertson, and Hagee

Moving forward the movement would start to fragment both with Evangelicals and their Jewish counterparts as the inherently conflicting beliefs of both sides would gradually resurface. G. Douglas Young’s death in 1980 would be a key milestone as he seemed to be the force in the background holding Christian Zionism together under the umbrella of well known personalities. The Graham-Young-Olson alliance took out a full page ad in newspapers across the country in November of 1977 titled “*Evangelicals Concern for Israel*” (6 p. 165) (34) aligned with the Camp David peace negotiations. This ad warned against Soviet involvement in the Middle East and criticized the Carter administration for, “*erosion of American governmental support for Israel,*”. The consensus that was created however within American Evangelical Christianity regarding Israel and Judaism would be cemented for at least two generations and would have a broad influence on American society and politics regardless of religious affiliation.

Jerry Falwell, who as late as the early 1970's disavowed Christian involvement in politics or public affairs in keeping with the Fundamentalist beliefs of those who came before him going all the way back to Darby, emerged as the leader of the Christian Right and the Israeli – Christian Right alliance that was coming to specifically mean the Likud Party in Israel. The new Christian Right became less tied to and inhibited by denominational loyalties (6 p. 160). Starting around 1976 Falwell became deeply invested in the State of Israel while his interests before that time appear to have been only theological. He would use a reference of Genesis 12.3, *"I will curse those who curse you"* to warn that America's prestige and even its existence were dependent on Israel's survival (6 p. 168) He would go on to say, *"God has raised up America in these last days for the cause of world evangelization and for the protection of his people, the Jews....I don't think America has any other right or reason for existence other than those two purposes."* (35) At his peak Falwell would claim 50 million followers.

By 1986 the Moral Majority organization that Falwell established was in decline and he stepped down from leadership. The televangelist community in general was losing public support due to moral failures of some of its more prominent personalities including Jimmy Swaggart and Tammy Faye Baker who was an extremely polarizing figure to begin with. As the Cold War ended the commonly held eschatological beliefs regarding Russia and Israel also seemed less and less believable. By 1989, the Moral Majority was disbanded. (4 p. 275)

Menachin Begin and the Likud Party had invested heavily in developing a relationship with Falwell and this was effective in creating a conservative coalition that advanced Israel friendly policies pertaining to such things as the Iraqi reactor, control and ownership of the West Bank, and control over Lebanon which didn't always align with the position of the Reagan administration (6 p. 176). The Begin-Likud-Falwell alliance would start to fracture the relationship with American Jews who aligned closely with Israel's founding generation, many of whom were at one point Marxist's or Trotskyites, and were strong supporters of the dominant Labor Party. The Likud Party represented a rising Messianic Jewish movement amongst religious Jews in Israel and probably would not have risen to prominence without the support of American Evangelicals. So, while Israel had become highly influential in American politics, American Christian Zionism had created a feedback loop influencing internal Israeli politics.

Olson, who opposed the relationship of Evangelicals to conservative politics, steered the Evangelical Free Church of America and the denomination's seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, to align with the developing "evangelical left". His principal concern was to maintain as broad a base as possible for the State of Israel and supported an ecumenical approach aligned with the National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel (NCLCI) (6 pp. 162-163). Olson was instrumental in creating an image of near theological unity between Judaism and Christianity which is captured in a speech he gave at a protest rally at the United Nations in 1978 where he said, *"as a Christian I share with the Jewish people two things—the Book and the expectation. There is just one point of disagreement and that is the identity of the Messiah."* (6 p. 162) (36)

The charismatic Zionists reshaped the Falwell led Christian right under new leadership which initially was represented by Pat Robertson. Robertson was a televangelist who became the leading American Christian Zionist in the 1980's and 1990's and at one time he would run for president and generate a

respectable level of support. Robertson would be a forerunner to John Hagee but his presentation and even some of his theology was distinctly different. Robertson openly sought conservative political alliances in both the US and Israel. (4 p. 276) Robertson was a Virginian, as was Falwell, and he was the son of a Democratic senator. He graduated from Washington and Lee and studied Law at Yale before becoming an Evangelical Christian and then becoming a Baptist minister. At the age of 30 he founded the Christian Broadcasting Network and started his long running Television talk show, the 700 Club in 1996. In 1977 he founded the CBN University which was later renamed to Regent University in 1990. He quickly became a harsh critic of American liberalism as reflected in the media and prevailing culture but his charismatic theology was an issue to many potential followers. Unlike Falwell and Hagee later he didn't have personal contacts with Israeli politicians. (4 p. 276)

Robertson's theology and eschatology, which tended to evolve, was not typical of a fundamentalist dispensationalist. Like some premillennialists of the past he did at times engage in date setting Christ's second coming initially placing it sometime before the end of 1982 but generally could be considered an adherent of a post tribulation rapture. In his book *Secret Kingdom* in 1982 he followed a standard premillennial position but also seemed to support an optimistic postmillennialism (4 pp. 266-267). Following the failed "*Moral Majority*" the handle "*Christian Coalition*" was not particularly well received by Jewish leaders but another book he wrote in the early 1990's, *the New World Order*, permanently damaged his ability to build close alliances with Jewish leaders both in the US and Israel. In it Robertson made it clear that his principal goal was to stop one world government or governance and not in explaining complex dispensational theology or providing political support to the modern State of Israel (4 pp. 266-267). In *New World Order*, which used a phrase that was common in globalist literature and would be featured in a speech by George Bush Sr., he saw a conspiracy of international bankers taking over the world through financial control and debt. Because Jews, through the Rothschild's and other prominent families, are statistically dramatically over-represented in this realm, it was perceived as a direct attack on Judaism and the Anti-Defamation League harshly criticized the book and Robertson. This book aligned with an alternate eschatology that was common in the 1950's and early 1960's but had become a small minority position since then maintaining that International Capitalism and not Russia posed the real threat of world government and domination. Band from any media presence, this perspective still existed and spread principally in conservative churches without any denominational or clerical support.

The next major force in Christian Zionism who remains in the forefront today is John Hagee. Hagee differs from those who came before him in that he is a Pentecostal and he presents his beliefs in this context with support of Israel being associated with spiritual warfare. His brand of spirit-filled Christian Zionism goes so far as to adopt outward signs of Judaism and building relationships with supportive orthodox rabbis, Israeli religious nationalists, and Jewish settlers in the West Bank (6 pp. 196-7). Hagee's brand of Christian Zionism is more radicalized than Graham or Olson and aligned with and promoted Messianic Jewish radicalism although the comparative messianic visions are not necessarily the same. In 2007 Hagee was the first Christian invited to be the headline speaker at an AIPAC gathering. In his speech he claimed to have 50 million followers (6 p. 185), as did Falwell. This is a remarkable number that if true would represent roughly 20% of the US adult population. Comparing this to the previous

most popular fundamentalist cause of prohibition that had roughly 10% support, shows the political significance of this number. He went on to state that his flock “consider the Jewish people the apple of God’s eye, who see you as the chosen people, a cherished people, and a covenant people with an eternal covenant that will stand forever.” (37) Hagee would become the leading personality amongst several other notable Pentecostals including Rod Parsley, pastor of World Harvest Church; CBN executive Michael Little; and Bishop Keith A. Butler, founder of Word of Faith Christian Center in Michigan. Each of these developed an understanding of Israel’s role in prophecy based around dispensational theology while also having their own unique adaptations.

Hagee and other Christian Zionist became increasingly comfortable with becoming involved in Israeli internal politics. In 1994 Jewish Defense League member Baruch Goldstein murdered 29 Palestinians in Hebron on the West Bank and in November of 1995 Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a yeshiva student. These acts were generally condemned in the media in the US and in Israel but found defenders in the far right of Israeli politics and within Christian Zionism on the grounds that these acts were committed in defense of a divine covenant. Pat Robertson said of Rabin, who sought peace with neighboring people, that his death was an act of God to prevent Israel from ceding its homeland. Hagee was somewhat more tactful who described Rabin’s death as having been caused by his “fanatical pursuit of peace” that circumvented Israeli democracy and further claimed to speak for Knesset members and Israeli settlers. (6 p. 199) Future Israeli Prime Minister BiBi Netanyahu became acquainted with Falwell, Robertson, Hagee, and other Christian Zionist leaders as Israel’s ambassador to the United Nations and these relationships would become very important going forward. As prime minister, he would create the Israel Christian Advocacy Council, consisting entirely of Christian right leaders, whose main function was to act as tourism advisers. (6 p. 200) (38 pp. 135-136)

A Failure to Acknowledge Fundamental Differences

So due largely to the reshaping of the image of Judaism and of Israel by key American Christian leaders the long standing fundamentalist position of avoiding involvement in politics, traceable back to Darby, was replaced with political activism in support of a foreign nation that had previously had contentious relations with their own government. With regard to the Jews, this political activism also displaced personal evangelism and this all happened in a remarkably short time frame around 1970. The theological adjustments required certain beliefs or assumptions be adopted regarding the State of Israel and Judaism. Politically and culturally Israel would need to be seen as closely aligned with American conservatism. Religiously the differences between Judaism and Christianity would have to be reduced to the identity of the messiah, as Arnold Olson proclaimed, “there is just one point of disagreement and that is the identity of the Messiah.” Further, the eschatological hopes of both faiths would need to be seen as being in general alignment. We will now look at whether this can be objectively defended.

Starting with the alignment of American political beliefs and traditions there is little in common with the founders of Israel. The person regarded as the founder of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, was the head of the World Zionist Organization and was also an atheist most of his life and was a follower of Lenin (interestingly as opposed to Trotsky) (39 p. 182). He also became associated with Ho-Chi-Minh. Amongst those who led the founding of Israel within the World Zionist Organization his views weren’t at

all extreme. They were mainstream and more moderate than some. Ben-Gurion as Israel's first Prime Minister agreed to a status-quo arrangement with the Orthodox Agudat Yisrael Party principally for public relations purposes. He recognized that world Jewry would eventually only grow to support Israel if it had a religious context and that this was also largely true of the Christian world especially in America and England. The arrangements he worked out with Agudat Yisrael regarding such things as kosher food and the Sabbath have remained largely in place. Ben-Gurion later in life professed some form of belief in God but never softened his attitudes to Judaism. One orthodox writer described him "*to have hated Judaism more than any other man he had met.*" (40 p. 293) Author Donald Lewis described the Zionist who established and initially settled as Israel as follows:

*The early Zionists were "mostly young anti-traditionalist Jews, [who] often understood that move as an act of rebellion against their parents' world and mentality, at times relating to their choice as a conversion into a new faith."*⁷³ *Now their embrace of secular Zionism was being reinterpreted as consistent with traditional spiritual longings, whereas half a century earlier the rabbinic consensus was that it was a repudiation of rabbinic Judaism.* (4 p. 260) (41 p. 11)

As time passed, Israeli politics and political leaders did appear to be more observant than the Zionist founders in the 1940's and 50's and the Jewish pioneers that went to Palestine before the war, and this may have been due to a feedback loop with American Christian Zionists. Policies were somewhat more favorable to religious Jews and the Likud Party in particular would eventually represent a form of religious Jewish nationalism. Looking at more current and complete data on the religious composition of the Jewish state however, we see not much has changed. 40% of the population identifies as Hiloni or Secular (no or minimal religious or cultural association to Judaism), 23% as Masorti or traditional, 19% as another faith or no faith, and only 10% as Datl or religious and 8% as Haredi or ultra-Orthodox (42). This is a higher percentage of religious Jews than was initially envisioned by the Zionist fathers but is still a small minority. Religious and secular Jews largely live in separate worlds with few if any common friends and very little inter-marriage. The same survey notes that secular Jews are more comfortable with the idea of an offspring marrying a Christian than a religious Jew (42) .

Focusing on the small minority of observant Jews in Israel, the next question is how closely their beliefs align with those of their American Evangelical counterparts. For the American Christian there is an assumption that Jewish beliefs are based on the Christian Old Testament which would then imply that those beliefs are theologically consistent with the Biblical period in which the texts were originally recorded creating a consistent system of belief. This consistency of the Jewish faith, however, doesn't align with history as the belief system has steadily evolved. From a Jewish perspective the same could be said of Christianity and it would be hard to contest that so the point isn't necessarily a condemnation but recognition. To assess the consistency question we will look at the changes that took place between distinct periods of Jewish history as defined by authors Israel Shahak and Norton Mezvinsky along with other academics who have studied this specific topic. Jewish history can roughly be broken down into four periods as follows (43):

Biblical Period: This extends up to the 5th century BC and produced the Biblical accounts and texts. It is also the basis of the Christian perspective of Judaism. As noted in the Biblical account, idolatry was very common and only a minority of the population of the land followed the faith.

Second Temple: This period went from the end of the Biblical period to the destruction of the Temple in 70AD or possibly to the end of the Jewish Wars around 135 AD. This was the formative period during which the Jewish faith and culture was fashioned. Two new ideas here were Jewish exclusiveness that separated Israel from other peoples (gentiles). The second was that all Jews must follow interpretations of Biblical law as established by Jewish authorities which went so far as to incite civil wars. The Sadducee / Pharisee conflict is the best known of these from the Biblical accounts. Related to this, there was a good deal of extra-Biblical material generated during this time that initially took the form of oral tradition and was eventually captured in the Talmud which was compiled incrementally between the 3rd and 8th centuries. The areas of Judea were dominated by Greece and then Rome Empire during this period and these Hellenistic influences had a significant influence on Judaism.

Diaspora: After the Jewish wars most Jews accepted that the Temple was not to be rebuilt nor the system of animal sacrifices resumed which was the ritual center of the faith. Jews typically had limited self-rule headed by a Patriarch who generally had some sort of recognized position relative to the Roman governor. This is shown in the Gospel accounts of Herod and Pilate. There was a great deal of literature produced during this extended time period and the bulk of it was religious in nature. Jewish mysticism, referred to as Cabbala, grew throughout this period and by 1550 to 1750 the overwhelming majority of Western European Jews accepted Cabbala and its beliefs. Messianic Jewish fundamentalism is based on the Cabbala and looks at the later part of the third period of Jewish history as the golden age they seek to restore as opposed to the Biblical kingdom of Israel. The wide circulation of religious literature created a strong sense of Jewish identity.

Modernity: Modernity arrived at different times in different places but it brought about the end of Jewish self rule which also corresponded with conflicts with the host populations and nations.

So, to summarize, during the history of Judaism there have been major changes since the Old Testament period that Christian believers are overwhelmingly ignorant of which include:

- Introduction of the idea of Jewish exclusiveness that became prominent at the end of the 2nd Temple period but wasn't present when the OT texts were actually written.
- Next came the concept of central authority where all Jews must follow interpretations of Biblical law as established by Jewish authorities. Apart from content this could be seen as similar to the idea of Papal authority in the Catholic Church.
- This was followed by the creation of a large amount of extra-Biblical material that was eventually captured in the Talmud. For the Christian this would in effect be like adding content to the theology of the Old Testament.
- The extra-Biblical material was then followed by the introduction of mysticism referred to as Cabbala, that grew throughout this period and by 1550 to 1750 and became broadly accepted

- Messianic Judaism also evolved to be based around Cabala and looked to reestablish the later part of the third period of Jewish history built upon a Jewish identity as opposed to a reborn Biblical Kingdom of Israel

In pointing these things out it is not to say whether these adaptations are inherently good or bad or that the extra-Biblical content entirely has no value but does establish that the commonly held Christian belief that observant Jews follow the Christian Old Testament is largely false. The Christian canon has been superseded by the Talmud and Jewish Mysticism. To the Christian some aspects of Cabala would be especially troubling, if understood, because it includes magic and spells that in a Christian context would be regarded as occult. Nearly all information on this topic is from Jewish and Israeli sources. A few samples are provided below:

The Talmud “is the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law and Jewish theology.” (44)

Until the advent of modernity, in nearly all Jewish communities, the Talmud was the centerpiece of Jewish cultural life and was the foundational to all “Jewish thoughts and aspirations” (45 p. 379)

“The Bible anyway is not the book that primarily determines the practices and doctrines of Orthodox Jews. The most fundamentalist Orthodox Jews are largely ignorant of major parts of the Bible and know some parts only through commentaries that distort meaning.” (43 p. 2)

“Books in Hebrew detailing instructions for spells and witchcraft recipes have been best sellers in Israel for many years.” (43 p. 156)

“Tom Segev, a columnist for Haaretz and one of Israel’s best known authors, wrote that the use of magic by Jews was nothing new in Judaism. In his March 26, 1999, Hebrew-language Haaretz article, Segev transcribed a magical recipe found in a book, composed in talmudic times (AD 200–500) but still popular in the Diaspora in the eighteenth century.” (43 p. 157)

In the earlier days of dispensationalism, these points may well have not mattered much as the intent was simply to return some version of the Jewish people to the land. To the version of Christian Zionism that started to develop around 1970 that was based on political and theological commonality between the two faiths, however, it would probably matter a great deal if these things were generally known.

A Coming Generational Divide

Overall Evangelical support for Israel has remained remarkably strong although there is a developing age divide. In a RNS poll in 2022 of 10,441 US Adults 2/3 of Americans expressed at least a somewhat positive view of Israel; however, Americans under 30 are more supportive of Palestine. In this survey 86% of white Evangelicals said they felt warmly towards Israel while 58% of Black Protestants said they shared that assessment. 70% of white Evangelicals said they believed God gave the land to Israel and the Jewish people while only 32% of US Jews felt that God gave Israel to the Jewish people according to a Pew survey that asked a similar question (46). All of this supports the notion that for anyone growing up

or coming to Evangelical Protestantism during the Cold War era support for Israel is on par with being a fundamental religious doctrine that would take a great deal to even question, much less displace.

When a similar survey isolated American Evangelicals between 18 and 29, however, it told a very different story affirming a strong generational divide. The Study conducted by the University of North Carolina observed that, “The rate of support for the State of Israel among Evangelicals between the ages of 18 and 29 has declined by more than half between 2018 and 2021 – from 69% to 33.6%”. Dr. Yoav Fromer, head of the Center for the Study of the United States at Tel Aviv University observed, “It seems that the Israeli government’s decision to abandon large segments of the liberal, progressive Democratic public and gamble only on the Evangelicals might end up costing us dearly,” (47) The same poll observed that Almost 45% of respondents now support the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, 35.1% said they are neutral on the issue, and only 20.5% oppose the idea of Palestinian statehood (48)

<https://www.dyedinthewoolhistory.com/israelandus>

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