

Q&A: Should Christians Support Israel?

Ben Giselbach
March 16, 2015



Reading Time: 7 minutes

Should Christians support Israel? Your view of Israel says a lot about your faith and whether or not you believe Jesus and His New Testament. While there is room to disagree over politics, the Bible must always have the last word. So how should Christians see modern-day Israel in light of Scripture?

The Political Perspective

The Middle-East is in turmoil, and the Republic of Israel is one of the few strategic allies the United States has in that region. The consequence of sin – sin reaching as far back as the illicit affair between Abraham and Hagar (Gen. 16:3-4) – is deeply rooted. There is so much wickedness, evil, and false religion in that part of the world that peace may never be possible. For that reason, the balance of power the Israeli military provides is essential to whatever political stability the region can ever possibly hope to enjoy.

Perhaps I am over-simplifying the presence modern-day Israel. Because I am not a political scientist, I could easily be wrong about this (and if you wish to argue over this point, I raise my white flag now). But as people made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), we should be interested in peace. We should be supportive of governments who enforce justice against evil (Rom. 13:1-7). And at a time when militant Islam is growing faster than any other

religion, I am thankful that Israel - not America - is in the regional 'thick' of it. For this reason, ***only from a political perspective, I believe one can justify supporting Israel.***

The Biblical Perspective

The Bible, however, offers another view. **Modern-day Israel is not the same Israel we read about in the Old Testament.** When the British military captured the Ottoman-ruled Jerusalem in 1917 after defeating Turkish forces, Britain issued the "Balfour Declaration" which authorized self-identifying Jews to once again dwell in the region. When Nazi persecution arose in Europe over the following years, thousands of Jews flocked to Palestine. After World War 2, with the burden of guilt the Western world felt over the evil actions of Hitler, the United Nations passed a resolution declaring a Jewish nation-state on May 14, 1948. **Prior to this date, Israel didn't exist!**

The first nation to recognize the Republic of Israel was the United States under President Harry Truman. Truman was driven largely by compassion for the victims of the Nazi Holocaust and his confused knowledge of scripture, thinking that because God gave the land of Canaan to the descendants of Abraham almost 4,000 years ago (cf. Gen. 12:1-7), the descendants of Abraham must *still* have a right to that land (Hagee 88). Largely because of this misconception of the Old Testament, the modern nation-state of Israel was born - not because of an act of God, but because of a decree by the United Nations. **Just as the Bible makes no specific mention of France or Argentina, it makes no specific mention of today's Republic of Israel.**

The Physical Israel Of The Bible Forfeited The Promised Land

Some justify the taking of land originally belonging to Palestinian Arabs and giving it to Jewish people by claiming God promised that land to them as an "everlasting" possession. They cite God's promise to Abraham:

And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." (Gen 17:7-8, ESV)

Many point to this promise of an “everlasting possession” and say God made this covenant supposedly without any “condition on Abraham’s faithfulness”(Wright 27). Others say He gave this land to Abraham “without any strings attached” (Jackson 265). Could the descendants of Abraham not forfeit this promise - *even if they tried to?* How absurd!

Moses, however, was unaware of a “no strings attached” promise when he wrote to the Israelites by Divine inspiration, “The Lord will make the pestilence stick to you until he has consumed you off the land that you are entering to take possession of it” (Deut. 28:21; cf. 28:1, 15ff). Was God just making empty threats?

Again, Joshua was evidently aloof to God’s “no strings attached” covenant when he wrote,

Be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God. For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, **until you perish from off this good ground that the Lord your God has given you.** “And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed. But just as all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the Lord will bring upon you all the evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land that the Lord your God has given you, **if you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them. Then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land that he has given to you.**” (Josh. 23:11-16, emp. added)

The story of Israel is indeed sad one. Time and time again, the Israelites were unfaithful to the Lord. Eventually, the northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians (cf. Isa. 10), and the southern Kingdom of Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians (Jer. 25). Judah (“Jews”) was eventually allowed to return to Jerusalem during the post-exile era in order for God to achieve His plan in the redemption of man through His Son.

The Physical Israel Of The Bible Has Been Rejected And Destroyed

The Jews rebelled against the Lord, denied His Word (cf. Acts 7:52; 13:41), and ultimately crucified their Messiah (Luke 20:17). Consequently, the Lord determined to crush them like a massive stone hitting a piece of pottery (Matt. 21:44). In the year A.D. 70, five legions of Roman soldiers, led by Titus (the son of the Roman emperor Vespasian), destroyed Jerusalem. Jesus promised He would inflict this temporal punishment on Jerusalem in His Divine sovereignty (Matt. 24:1-2; John 2:19). Josephus, the Jewish historian, claimed that 1,100,000 (perhaps an exaggerated number) Jews were slaughtered and nearly 100,000 Jews were enslaved (Josephus 760). The temple, where the Jews kept their genealogical records, was completely destroyed. Though attempts have been made, to this day, not a single Jew can confidently trace his tribal ancestry and definitively lay claim to Abraham's bloodline (McClintock & Strong 770).

The Physical Israel Of The Bible Is Now The Church

One cannot have both a proper view of Christ's church (cf. Matt. 16:18; Eph. 5:25) and believe God has a 'special' plan for the modern Republic of Israel. Physical Israel has been replaced by a spiritual Israel. There is now no distinction between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11-22). God still has a special people and a "holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9-10; 1 John 3:1-3) - His favor is just not dependent upon whether one has a Jewish bloodline.

In the Christian age, a "Jew" is not someone with a Jewish bloodline, but someone who follows Christ (Rom. 2:28-29). God's scheme of redemption has *nothing* to do with a declaration by the United Nations in 1948 and *everything* to do with the Gospel (Rom. 1:16). When we obey Christ, we become the true "seed of Abraham" (Gen. 3:29). Note Paul's Words about the spiritual fulfillment of the promise to Abraham:

for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal. 3:26-29)

Thus, the Republic of Israel today must obey God's plan of salvation (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16; John 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21; Rom. 6:4) like any other nation. Those who do not obey the gospel have no hope (2 Thess. 1:8), including the Republic of Israel.

Jesus Sits On His Throne In Heaven, Not Jerusalem

Many have a very shallow, materialistic view of Christ's kingdom, believing He will return to earth to set up an earthly kingdom and reign on David's throne in Jerusalem for 1,000 years. Yet Jesus plainly said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

It is important to note that the prophecies about Jesus ruling on David's throne (e.g. Isa. 9:7; Luke 1:32-33) predict a spiritual throne in heaven, not a material throne on earth.

First, we know this because the last descendent of David to physically sit on his throne was Jeconiah, about whom Jeremiah said,

Thus says the Lord: "Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah." (Jer. 22:30)

Honest students of the Bible must conclude that **any descendent of David after Jeconiah, including Christ** (who is also a descendent of David, cf. Matt. 1:12-16; Luke 3:27), **will not rule again in Jerusalem.**

Second, we know Christ will not sit on David's throne physically in Jerusalem because He is currently both our High Priest (Heb. 4:14) and our King (Heb. 1:8-9; Rev. 1:5). Yet, because Jesus was a descendent of the tribe of Judah, not Levi (for only Levites could be priests, Ex. 32:26-29; Deut. 33:8-10; Num. 1:47-53), he could not serve as a priest in Jerusalem (Heb. 8:4; 7:14-16). Therefore, **if Jesus will continue to be our High Priest, he cannot physically rule as a king in Jerusalem.**

Third, we know **Jesus is reigning on His throne now, not awaiting His throne for a later date.** Clearly, God promised David that his throne would be established forever (2 Sam. 7:12-13; Acts 22:29-31). In fulfillment of that prophecy, Christ's throne has been established forever (Heb. 1:8), and is seated at that throne presently (Rev. 3:21).

To say Jesus is sitting on David's throne is a metaphor for saying Jesus has "all authority" (Matt. 28:19, Eph. 1:21). **Just as the scribes and the Pharisees metaphorically sat on "Moses' seat" (Matt. 23:2), Jesus is now symbolically sitting on David's throne.**

Conclusion

In many evangelical circles, the slogan, “I stand with Israel” is en vogue. But as a Christian, if you stand with Israel, why? Is it because you want political stability in the midst of evil ideologies in the Middle East, or is it because you believe God is restoring the Israel of the Old Testament in preparation for a physical throne of Jesus in Jerusalem? If the latter is correct, such a superficial view of God’s kingdom is in deep opposition to God’s Word.

God’s Israel no longer has anything to do with a Jewish heritage. The “Israel of God” is now comprised of Christians (Gal. 6:15-16). Because of Israel’s apostasy and, ultimately, their national crime of murdering the Messiah, the kingdom has been taken from physical Israel (Matt. 21:43-44) and given to spiritual Israel, the church of Christ (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

Sources

Hagee, John. *Jerusalem Countdown*. FrontLine: FL, 2006.

Jackson, James. *Even At The Doors: Jesus, Israel, and the End Times*. LuLu Enterprises: NC, 2007

Josephus, Flavius. *Wars Of The Jews, Volume 6. The Complete Works Of Flavius Josephus*. Trans. by William Whiston. T. Nelson & Sons: London, 1860.

McClintock, John, James Strong. *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, & Ecclesiastical Literature*. Vol. 3. Harper & Brothers Publishers: NY, 1894.

Wright, Bryant. *Seeds Of Turmoil: The Biblical Roots Of The Inevitable Crisis In The Middle East*. Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 2010.