

Our Call to Bless Israelis & Palestinians

by Dr. David L. Johnston

Labib Madanat, Director of the Palestinian Bible Society, is a Palestinian who grew up in neighboring Jordan. While addressing a large gathering of evangelicals in Colorado Springs in the mid 1990s he said, “You pray for Israel, as well you should. But just remember that when you pray for Israel, she has two lungs. One is Israeli and the other is Palestinian.” In this tiny and crowded piece of real estate, with numbers of Palestinians and Israelis soon to be equal (six million a piece), one has to go back to God’s original promise to Abraham: “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3 NIV). Here we find God’s heart of love and compassion for all the nations. As Jesus told his disciples before ascending to heaven, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone” (Mark 16:15 NLT).

Yet as simple as this call to pray for both peoples together may seem, this turns out to be tough for us American evangelicals to do – for two main reasons. One, politically, the United States was the first country to recognize the modern State of Israel in 1948 and has remained its most staunch ally over time. With its veto power on the Security Council, it has shielded Israel from dozens of UN resolutions, for instance, calling on it to withdraw from the Occupied Territories since 1967. Second, we inherited from the British an old and tenacious love affair with Christian Zionism. These deserve more background information.

The Roots of Christian Zionism

Already in Elizabethan England, Thomas Brightman, an Anglican priest, wrote a book of interpretation on Revelation (Apocalypsis Apocalypseos, or “The Revelation of Revelation”) in 1585, which was published after his death in 1607. In it, he called on the British church and government to find a way to restore the Jews to their original

homeland, Palestine, and establish their own state once again.

In 1621, an influential Member of Parliament, Sir Henri Finch, published a pamphlet, *The World's Great Restauration [sic] or Calling of the Jews and (with them) all the Nations of the Earth, to the Faith of Christ*. In it he spelled out more clearly Brightman's innovative premillennial dispensationalist hermeneutic, that is, he interpreted Old and New Testaments in such a way as to support the idea that the Jews will be restored to their home in Palestine before the beginning of a literal reign of Jesus for one thousand years in Jerusalem (the "Millennium"). This was controversial in Christian circles because it had no precedent in church history (at least the part about the Jewish state), and because it was making political claims that King James considered threatening to his own authority—a fact that sent him to prison for a while.

The Christian Zionist movement slipped under the radar for the next century and a half, but, as is common with the last decade of every century, end-times speculations became rife. Add to this the fruit of the Great Awakening and tumult caused by the American and French Revolutions, and you have an explosive mixture at the end of the eighteenth century. Prophetic concern with the role of Israel and the calling of Britain to help its political restoration makes a dramatic comeback. Many prominent British clergymen, academics and politicians stand behind the newly formed London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews (LSPCJ) and its popular journal, *The Jewish Expositor*.

By far the most influential exponent of Christian Zionism, however, was the founder of the Plymouth Brethren movement, John Nelson Darby. A man of great spiritual depth, love for people, and a prolific writer gifted with unusual leadership skills, Darby left the Church of England to found a movement of home churches, which he helped to establish from the Americas to Africa, from Europe to Australia and New Zealand. Yet much more significant than the 1,500 fellowships he founded worldwide were his views on eschatology and his literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecies of Israel's exiles returning to their land. This is especially important for American evangelicalism, for Darby came seven times to North America, finding receptive ears among the founders of Bible and Prophecy Conference movement in the late nineteenth century. Among the leaders he influenced were James Brooks, the Philadelphia Presbyterian, Dwight L. Moody in Chicago, and most significantly, C. I.

Scotfield, the creator of the Scofield Bible, whose commentary was to mold the next two or three generations on both sides of the Atlantic.

Donald E. Wagner, in his *Anxious for Armageddon*, points out the two salient innovations in Darby's reading of the Bible (besides the premillennial dispensationalism, which was no longer new by then):

1. The Church would be replaced by Israel in the end times. Whereas the New Testament sees the Church comprising Jewish and Gentile believers as central to God's kingdom purposes both here and in the its future installment (Eph. 3:1-6, for instance), Darby sees it differently:

The Church has sought to settle itself here; but it has no place on the earth . . . [Though] making a most constructive parenthesis, it forms no part of the regular order of God's earthly plans, but is merely an interruption of them to give a fuller character and meaning to them (the Jews) (quoted in Wagner, 90).

2. Darby puts forward a new doctrine, the "pre-tribulation rapture," a mechanism that conveniently removes the Church from the earth, so that Christ reigns for one thousand years as the Messiah of the Jewish state. This has since been a central plank of dispensationalist theology.

These theological ideas, however, would never have had much impact on the "real" world were it not for their adoption by the British political elites in the nineteenth century. Of these, Lord Shaftesbury was undoubtedly the most influential. Besides his devotion to the ideas of Darby he already was a defender of the poor and a leader of the Clapham Sect, which a few years before included the anti-slavery activist William Wilberforce. Shaftesbury published a landmark essay in 1839 ("State and Restoration [sic] of the Jews"), calling for a massive immigration of Jews to Palestine in order to set up their own state. His solution effectively welded British colonial imperialism with Darby's dispensationalism:

Shaftesbury then submitted two pragmatic, political suggestions for Britain: (1) that Britain play the critical political role in allowing Jews to

return to power and presence in ancient Palestine; (2) that the Church of England establish a bishopric and cathedral in Jerusalem (Wagner, 91).

Unsurprisingly, the British Foreign Office soon warmed up to the idea. The Bishopric was established during Shaftesbury's lifetime, and his political slogan "A country without a nation for a nation without a country" was picked up in the next generation by the founders of modern Zionism, Israel Zangwell and Theodor Herzl with a slight change: "A land of no people for people with no land." Characteristically, the Palestinians were less than "people." Of course, they were the proverbial "fly in the ointment." So when Lord David Balfour, the evangelical Foreign Secretary during World War I, sent his famous memorandum to British Jew Lord Rothschild in effect promising Palestine to the Jews at a time when they comprised less than ten percent of the population, it was followed by the contradictory Sykes-Picot Agreement between the French, British (and Russians in the background), carving up the Middle East in such a way as to grant Palestinians more autonomy. Such ambivalence continues to plague western policies with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict today.

Israel and the American Christian Right

Since so much has been written on this (see bibliography), we only need to present a brief synopsis here. In its early days, the State of Israel could count on the support of the Roman Catholic Church and the mainline Protestant churches aligned with the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the United States. Church leaders and theologians were bending over backwards to apologize for, and repudiate, Christendom's age-old history of anti-Semitism in the wake of the Holocaust. A shift occurred in the late 1970s, however. First, Jerry Falwell's founding of the Moral Majority in 1976 marked the beginning of evangelical forays into US politics. Evangelical political muscle grew rapidly as he, Pat Robertson and other evangelical leaders stood behind the election of Georgia governor and Southern Baptist Sunday School teacher, Jimmy Carter.

Despite this high-profile victory, the relationship between these leaders and the President soured the next year over the issue of Israel. Carter, who was adamant about applying his faith to the issue of human rights for all peoples, stated in a 1977

speech that Palestinians must be given their own “homeland,” if they were to enjoy their basic human rights alongside Israelis. Falwell, irked by this statement, only drew closer to the newly elected Likud Prime Minister of Israel, and in 1981 succeeded in garnering overwhelming evangelical support for the election of Ronald Reagan. Part of the election campaign was the much-noticed alliance of the Israel Lobby (AIPAC) and the Christian Right. Full-page advertisements appeared in all major US newspapers eliciting support for Israel: “We affirm as evangelicals our belief in the Promised Land for the Jewish people.... We would view with grave concern any effort to carve out of the Jewish homeland another nation or political entity.”

During his presidency, Reagan pronounced seven times the word “Armageddon” in relation to Israel and the neighboring Arab states. Evangelicals knew that his own dispensationalist views would guarantee his unwavering support for Israel and its aggressive policy of multiplying settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. Significantly, at two White House briefings during the Reagan presidency on the special relationship between Israel and the United States only Christian Right evangelicals were invited.

The bonds between the Israel Lobby and the Christian Right were made even tighter in the aftermath of the 2001 September attacks. In the April 2002 “Washington Rally for Israel” on the Washington Mall, Jewish and Christian speakers, politicians and clergymen, addressed more than 100,000 people, urging them to close their ranks even more behind a beleaguered Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was certainly applauded, but the most effusive cheers were reserved for Family Research Council spokesperson Janet Parshall, who proclaimed, “I stand before you today representing the National Religious Broadcasters . . . we represent millions of Christian broadcasters in this country. We stand with you [Israel] now and forever” (quoted by Donald E. Wagner in “Short Fuse to Apocalypse?” *Sojourners*, July 2003, online, <http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=magazine.article&issue=soj0307&article=030710>).

The annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration in Jerusalem is no doubt the high water mark of Israeli-Christian Right collaboration. Organized by the flagship Christian Zionist organization, the International Christian Embassy-Jerusalem, it draws more than 3,000 Christians from North America, Europe and South Africa, and always features prominent Israeli politicians thanking them for their support and underlying how crucial

it is to the very survival of their state. Yet if you ask Palestinian Christian leaders in Israel or the West Bank how they feel about this show of blind loyalty to the nation that keeps them under its thumb, they can only express dismay. They feel betrayed by these foreign Christians who seem oblivious to their suffering – when they are not downright hostile to them. For all those in the Occupied Territories, Muslim or Christian (Gaza and the West Bank), the bitter fruit of 43 years of brutal military occupation has taken its toll. Yet, as Christians, we should perhaps mourn the fact that Christianity is dying in the land where it was born. The hardship of occupation has caused greater emigration among Christians than Muslims. Their percentage is now under one percent (it was close to 20 in 1948).

Understanding the Present Reality

Wheaton College New Testament professor Gary Burge wrote a report on a visit in June 2009 to Israel/Palestine with forty Presbyterians. It was entitled, “A Third Intifada?” In it he tells how a Palestinian village on the outskirts of Jerusalem, Jabal Mukabber, has been told, “You are now part of the ‘Greater Jerusalem.’” For this privilege they pay much higher taxes, yet they still have no sewer system and their running water in old leaky pipes runs dry most of the time. So they have to buy water from trucks. Meanwhile, at the new Jewish settlement sprawling next door with its high-class condominiums, there is more than enough water to irrigate their gardens and fill their swimming pools. No wonder the infrastructure in the Palestinian villages has long crumbled: Israel has consistently invested ten times more in Jewish neighborhoods than it has in Palestinian ones – and even more dramatically in the West Bank since its military occupation in 1967. Burge comments:

Now here’s the catch: When the Palestinians try to build and improve their lot, they are denied building permits in places like Jabal Mukabber. And if they build anyway, Israeli bulldozers destroy the building. I saw the rubble of one. In the last 10 years, the Israeli army has demolished 300 Palestinian homes within the city limits of Jerusalem. According to ICAHD [the Israeli Coalition Against Home Demolitions], the goal here is to so frustrate the Palestinians, that they will leave. And this is to maintain an explicit racial quota in the city: the Israeli government’s

publicized goal is to keep a 72 percent - 28 percent ratio of Jews over Arabs at all times. The explicitness made me dizzy. I couldn't imagine imposing a racial quota on an American city like this (Burge, "A Third Intifada?" Electronic Intifada, August 3, 2009, <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article10689.shtml>).

Nobel Peace-Prize Laureate Jimmy Carter's use of the word "Apartheid" (in his 2006 book, *Palestine: Peace, Not Apartheid*) was by no means exaggerated. As someone who, through his Carter Center, has monitored elections all over the world and brokered peace talks in countless war zones over the last four decades, this book was his best shot at getting Americans (and especially evangelicals) behind the current peace process that aims for a two-state solution. We highly recommend this book as a primer on the backdrop of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite the heart-rending description of some of the injustices and humiliations suffered by Palestinians, it is a hopeful book. The 2002 Arab League offer is perhaps the best reason to go ahead with negotiations that will clear the way for a viable Palestinian state. The 22-member club of Arab nations committed itself to a full-fledged recognition of the State of Israel, if the latter withdrew from the territories occupied since 1967 and recognized a Palestinian state. The implication is, of course, that most of the settlements have to be dismantled.

The Obama administration has continued to push for the 2003 "Road Map," decided by the Quartet (USA, UN, EU, and Russia), which aims for two states side by side, with Jerusalem as a shared capital. The majority of Palestinians support this goal, although the majority on the Israeli side seems to be evaporating. Yet this is the only solution that provides dignity to the Palestinians and security to the Israelis. Christians of all stripes should still stand behind this venture, even if it seems unlikely that Israel will withdraw from most of its settlements in the West Bank – it is still the only realistic option.

In fact, a growing coalition of evangelicals voiced their concerns to President George W. Bush in 2007 through an open letter published in the *New York Times*. Signed by thirty-four prominent evangelical leaders, scholars, mega-church pastors, university presidents and denominational leaders (including Bert Waggoner, National Director of the Vineyard, USA), this letter sought to publicly demonstrate support for a just

solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, explicitly supporting the Road Map strategy and the two-state solution. Here is the central paragraph:

Historical honesty compels us to recognize that both Israelis and Palestinians have legitimate rights stretching back for millennia to the lands of Israel/Palestine. Both Israelis and Palestinians have committed violence and injustice against each other. The only way to bring the tragic cycle of violence to an end is for Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate a just, lasting agreement that guarantees both sides viable, independent, secure states. To achieve that goal, both sides must give up some of their competing, incompatible claims. Israelis and Palestinians must both accept each other's right to exist. And to achieve that goal, the U.S. must provide robust leadership within the Quartet to reconstitute the Middle East roadmap, whose full implementation would guarantee the security of the State of Israel and the viability of a Palestinian State. We affirm the new role of former Prime Minister Tony Blair and pray that the conference you plan for this fall will be a success.

However, since that letter was published and Jimmy Carter wrote his book, facts on the ground seem to indicate that the two-state solution may have died an early death. This is what John Mearsheimer argues in his April 29, 2010 lecture at the Palestine Center in Washington, DC, "The Future of Palestine: Righteous Jews vs. the New Afrikaners." Professor of Political Science and the co-director of the Program on International Security Policy at the University of Chicago, Mearsheimer is also a leading expert on the Jewish Lobby in the US. His central thesis is that Netanyahu's deliberate humiliation of President Obama in June 2010 on the issue of the settlements is just one more sign that Israel will never go back on this policy and that, as always was the case, no American president can afford to put any meaningful pressure on Israel, due to the power of its US lobby. In his words,

In short President Obama is no match for the lobby. The best he can hope for is to re-start the so-called peace process, but most people understand that these negotiations are a charade. The two sides engage in endless talks while Israel continues to colonize Palestinian lands.

Two other reasons why time has fatefully run out for the Road Map objectives is (1) the Palestinians are now badly divided (Hamas vs. PLO), and there is no will either among the Americans or the Israelis to help mend those fences; and (2) the power of the Christian Zionist lobby on Capitol Hill, which wants no part of a two-state solution. As a result, “there is going to be a Greater Israel between the Jordan and the Mediterranean. In fact, I would argue that it already exists,” concludes Mearsheimer. But how will it be ruled and who will live there?

Mearsheimer sees three possibilities. The first is a sweeping act of ethnic cleansing. It is unlikely, however, that Israel would expose itself to an iron wall of international condemnation for any large-scale expulsion and massacre of the Palestinian population. Even if the Palestinians start a third intifada (“uprising”), which considering their frustration and despair level would certainly be more violent than the second one, Israel will find ways to put it down. A second possibility is even less likely, at least in the short run: a bi-national democratic state. Though several Palestinian and Israeli intellectuals have been calling for this, neither side is ready to sit down as equals and resolve their grievances through the ballot box. Israelis especially will not tolerate being dominated by a (soon to be) Palestinian majority.

As one could see from the above quote, Mearsheimer believes we are headed toward the “Greater Israel” between the Mediterranean and the Jordan. It will continue to rule with an iron fist and only give Palestinians a modicum of freedom and human rights. It will be, as it is already to a large extent, an updated version of South Africa in the 1980s – little enclaves of Palestinian self-rule, with big brother controlling everything from the economy to political freedom, from educational curricula to local and national security. Needless to say, when even the American press begins to report on the actual situation of Palestinians, more and more pressure from civil society around the globe will reach a tipping point and force a change, as happened with South Africa. The “righteous Jews,” as he puts it, will keep pushing ever more loudly for equality and freedom for the Palestinian population, while the “New Afrikaners” will do their best to keep the lid on the status quo and find ways to justify it to the outside. But in the end it will inevitably lead to a one-state solution, with democracy for both peoples, though spelling, it is true, the end of the current Jewish state and the Zionist dream.

As of this writing (January 2012), the Obama Administration has made absolutely no

progress in getting Israelis and Palestinians to discuss possible steps toward peace. We were even stunned to find out that the Republican National Committee (Jan. 19 in New Orleans) unanimously adopted a resolution calling for Israel to seize its “God-given right of self-governance and self-defense” and establish one rule of law for all the people within its borders. This is exactly the “Greater Israel” to which Mearsheimer was referring. Does this mean that if a Republican administration takes over next year the two-state solution will be discarded? That is unlikely, as the other members of the Quartet would strongly oppose it. Would Israel itself unilaterally decide to cancel the Oslo Peace Process now in its nineteenth year and annex the West Bank and Gaza again? Of course, only God knows. But what is certain, is that, barring some dramatic change, Israel under Benjamin Netanyahu is headed in this direction.

Blessing Jews and Palestinians Today

King David in Psalm 34 wrote, “Seek peace, and pursue it” (v. 14). As we read the gospels, it is difficult to miss that Jesus is consciously living out the virtues of God’s coming kingdom as mapped out by the prophets, and Isaiah in particular. The Servant of the Lord was to be meek and eschew violence (Is. 42:2), and bring peace to his people through the sacrifice of his life (53:7-9). His peace is closely connected to the justice he offers the poor and marginalized, the eunuchs and foreigners (56:3, 7). From the beginning, Messiah was to fulfill the mission Israel failed to carry out: to be “a light to the nations” (49:6). The passages connecting Messiah’s justice and peace are both numerous and stunning (2:4; 9:5-7; 26:12; 35:15-17; 60:17).

Jesus embodied God’s Kingdom of righteousness and peace in both word and deed. He centered his ministry in the Galilee, that is, with those most despised by the religious elites – a mixed Jewish-Gentile population, with a high percentage of poor day laborers working for rich absentee landlords in Jerusalem and Judea. Among his disciples he not only chose fishermen, but he also brought together people who hated each other: a wealthy tax collector, in essence a collaborator with the occupying forces, and a zealot, or “freedom fighter” aiming to bring down Roman rule by force of arms. He lived very simply, owning only the cloak and shoes he was wearing. With regard to enemies, his teaching was shocking. If a Roman soldier asks you to carry his gear for a mile, walk two miles with him, Jesus taught. If someone slaps you on one

cheek, turn the other. No matter what, refuse to retaliate and escalate violence. In fact, Jesus goes farther: “love your enemies and pray blessing on those who insult you.”

With regard to the land of Israel, Jesus makes not even one mention of it. If anything, he cries over Jerusalem, “the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers.” Its future holds only abandonment and desolation. Its only hope is the second coming of Messiah: “For I tell you this, you will never see me again until you say, ‘Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Mat. 23:39 NLT). In the parable of the Evil Tenants, the absentee owner of the vineyard (a Jewish code word for Israel) has the murderous farmers executed and the property given over to “others,” undoubtedly Gentiles in the context. At one point Jesus tells the religious leaders, “[t]here will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, for you will see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, but you will be thrown out. And people will come from all over the world – from east and west, north and south – to take their places in the Kingdom of God” (Luke 13:29-29 NLT).

Jesus’ “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem is in fact a humble ride on a donkey – hardly a kingly figure about to fight an occupation army! His “cleansing of the Temple” is the opportunity to rededicate it as “a house of prayer for the nations,” seizing again a prophetic word of Isaiah (56:7). Finally, when after his resurrection his disciples ask him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?” Diplomatically – and no doubt with a twinge of exasperation – Jesus replies, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know.” What really counts, he continues, is to spread the Good News to the whole world as witnesses of the Messiah by the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no more hint in the book of Acts, or anywhere else in the New Testament for that matter, that God will restore the political fortunes of Israel in its ancestral land. Ironically, in the most Jewish of all four gospels, Matthew has Jesus giving his “Great Commission” and ascending into heaven from Galilee, as far from Jerusalem as could be. The focus was now on the nations.

Paul in his ministry wrestled again and again with the Judaizers who were trying to make Gentiles into Jews, if they wanted to follow Jesus. On this he never wavers: salvation is through personal faith in Jesus crucified and resurrected. In Ephesians he declares that through the cross “Christ made peace between Jews and Gentiles

by creating in himself one new people from the two groups” (Eph. 2:15). On another occasion, while addressing conflicts over foods to be eaten or not, Paul finally tells the Corinthian church, “For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). In the next chapter he writes, “I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him” (15:13). Just before that, in a wider context: “Live in harmony with everyone . . . Never pay back evil with more evil . . . Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone” (Rom 12:16-18 NLT).

In light of these and many other passages in scripture, how are we followers of Jesus to bless Palestinians and Israelis today? To be sure, there are many ways to do so, starting with prayer for peace and reconciliation, and then finding practical ways to help, depending on how God leads different people according to their own gifts, relationships and opportunities. But here is a useful, general guideline – in the words of the above-mentioned letter to President Bush:

As evangelical Christians, we embrace the biblical promise to Abraham: “I will bless those who bless you.” (Genesis 12:3). And precisely as evangelical Christians committed to the full teaching of the Scriptures, we know that blessing and loving people (including Jews and the present State of Israel) does not mean withholding criticism when it is warranted. Genuine love and genuine blessing means acting in ways that promote the genuine and long-term well being of our neighbors. Perhaps the best way we can bless Israel is to encourage her to remember, as she deals with her neighbor Palestinians, the profound teaching on justice that the Hebrew prophets proclaimed so forcefully as an inestimably precious gift to the whole world.

And finally, when we pray for “the peace of Jerusalem,” let’s not forget that Israel today has two lungs – one Jewish and one Palestinian. Maybe in the not so distant future they’ll share the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan, and as one nation they’ll inhale the life-giving oxygen of peace, justice and mutual respect.

Recommended Resources

These are all excellent resources for understanding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and for finding a way to bring peace as followers of Jesus.

General Historical Background

Elias Chacour, with David Hazard, Blood Brothers, Expurgated edition (Chosen, 2003). The amazing story of the Melchite bishop, Elias Chacour, who grew up in the Galilee, was the first Palestinian to be admitted to Talmudic studies at the Hebrew University. A personal friend of several Israeli prime ministers, he continues today to embody both the prophetic voice and the peacebuilding efforts of Jesus in this troubled land.

Colin Chapman, Whose Promised Land? (Baker, 2002). A classic book on the subject, updated since its original publication in 1983. Chapman served in the Mideast for many years with InterVarsity and this book still offers the best answers to this burning question.

Alex Awad, Palestinian Memories (2008 – buy directly from the Bethlehem Bible College, or check for used copies on Amazon). The story of a Palestinian family of pastors and peace activists. Alex Awad is the pastor of the East Jerusalem Baptist church and his brother Bishara founded and directs the Bethlehem Bible College (<http://bethbc.com/>).

Jimmy Carter, Palestine: Peace, Not Apartheid (Simon & Schuster, 2006). A wonderful primer on the background to the conflict, up to 2006. A passionate plea for a two-state solution by someone who has talked to all parties involved.

Theological Answers to Christian Zionism

Donald E. Wagner, Anxious for Armageddon: A Call to Partnership for Middle Eastern and Western Christians (Herald Press, 1995). Don Wagner, professor of religion and director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at North Park University in Chicago,

is the “dean” of evangelical writing and activism in defense of the Palestinian church. A great introduction to this topic.

Donald E. Wagner, Dying in the Land of Promise: Palestine and Palestinian Christianity from Pentecost to 2000 (Melisende, 2003). A unique, well-researched history of the Palestinian church, which demonstrates its ties to the land of Palestine since Pentecost and presents its greatest challenges over the centuries from both Jews and Muslims. A stunning refutation of the Zionist charge that Palestinians didn’t exist before the state of Israel in 1948.

Gary M. Burge, Whose Land? Whose Promise?: What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians (Pilgrim, 2003). A very useful companion to Colin Chapman’s classic, *Whose Promised Land?*, written by an evangelical New Testament scholar.

Gary M. Burge, Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to “Holy Land” Theology (Baker, 2010). The best theological work on this issue by a New Testament specialist.

Stephen Sizer, Zion’s Christian Soldiers?: The Bible, Israel and the Church (IVP, 2008). A clear presentation by an Anglican vicar who is active in Middle East affairs.

David L. Johnston, “Loving Neighbors in a Globalized World: US Christians, Muslims and the Mideast.” In *Anxious about Empire: Theological Essays about the New Global Realities*, ed. Wesley D. Avram, 59-77 (Brazos, 2004). A readable, short introduction to the issue, based on the Parable of the Good Samaritan and starting with the example of St. Francis.

Brother Andrew, Light Force: A Stirring Account of the Church Caught in the Middle East Crossfire (Revell, 2004). Not so much a theological work as an amazingly informative and poignant account of Palestinian and other Arab ministries in this part of the world. He definitely breaks down stereotypes and gives his readers empathy and admiration for these courageous believers moving mountains for God’s kingdom in very difficult soil, including Gaza.

Background on Christian Zionism

Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend* (Baker, 2005). A fascinating account by a University of Chicago scholar.

Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism* (Yale University Press, 2007). A more sociological approach by a scholar who went to many rallies and met with all the key figures in the movement.

Palestinian and Jewish Voices for Reconciliation

Salim Munayer is the founder and director of Musalaha (“reconciliation” in Arabic), an organization that for the past 20 years has worked at bringing together believers in Jesus both Palestinian and Israeli Jewish. Munayer holds a doctorate in sociology from Oxford and the Hebrew University and was for many years the Academic Dean of the Bethlehem Bible College. Check their website for activities and publications:

<http://www.musalaha.org/>

Naim Stifan Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (Orbis, 2008). Ateek is the internationally known author of *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Orbis, 1989) and founder of the ecumenical Center for Palestinian Liberation Theology, Sabeel. He hosts international conferences in East Jerusalem on a regular basis. His voice is both knowledgeable and inspiring.

Marc H. Ellis, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation: The Challenge of the 21st Century*, 3rd ed. (Baylor University Press, 2004). Ellis is a prominent Jewish theologian whose many books seek to denounce what he calls “Holocaust theology.” He feels strongly that contemporary Jews have sold their birthright for dish of lentils – in this case, Zionist ideology. All his books are arresting and perceptive. This one is perhaps the best to start with.

Mark Braverman, *Fatal Embrace: Christians, Jews, and the Search for Peace in the Holy Land* (Synergy, 2010). In 2006 Braverman left a long, successful career as a clinical psychologist in the USA, to resettle in Israel. His grandfather had been a

sixth-generation Palestinian Jew, so he was “coming home,” in a sense. Yet he was shocked by the brutality of Israeli occupation and the trauma created on both sides of the “Green Line.” Since then he has been involved full-time in Jewish-Palestinian reconciliation in concert with Christians and Muslims.

The Israeli Human Rights Organization B’Tselem (www.btselem.org). They have an international reputation for courageous reporting about Israeli human rights abuses in the Occupied Territories. See the links on their website for other Jewish and Palestinian organizations of this type, and see their interactive 2010 report: http://www.btselem.org/Campaigns/2009_Annual_Report/English/index.html

Rabbis for Human Rights (English: <http://www.rhr.org.il/index.php?language=en>): “Rabbis for Human Rights gives voice to a Jewish and Zionist tradition of concern for Human Rights. RHR sounds the shofar of alarm on issues of human rights in Israel and in territories for which Israel has taken responsibility.”

Ta’ayush (www.taayush.org): “Israelis & Palestinians striving together to end the Israeli occupation and to achieve full civil equality through daily non-violent direct-action.”

Other Useful Resources

Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding (<http://www.emeu.net/>). The organization grew out of a trip to the Mideast by Don Wagner and Ray Bakke in 1985 and their consultations with leaders of churches there, both historic and evangelical. It was founded the next year in conjunction with the Lausanne Committee and numerous other evangelical organizations. Leonard Rogers, a veteran minister in this part of the world, has given it leadership over the years. They organize regular international consultations and their website has useful links.

With God On Our Side (DVD), Porter Speakman Jr. Director (Rooftop Productions, LLC, 2010). A stunning production by an evangelical film crew exposing the ideology of Christian Zionism through the words of some of its chief spokesmen, while documenting the actual plight of Palestinians and the response of Palestinian Christians.

Little Town of Bethlehem (DVD), written, filmed and directed by Jim Hanon (EGM Productions, 2010). An amazing documentary on the power of nonviolence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hanon follows three characters throughout, with perhaps the most attention accorded to Sami Awad, founder of the Holy Land Trust, Palestine (son of Bishara Awad, founder of the Bethlehem Bible College), which seeks primarily to train people in nonviolence as a strategy to bring peace to this troubled region. The other two are Yonatan Shapira, an Israeli activist whose pilgrimage toward nonviolence is all the more dramatic since his father was a decorated Israeli fighter pilot and he himself an IDF helicopter pilot; and Ahmad al-'Azzeh is a Muslim activist who grew up in a Bethlehem refugee camp.

Donald E. Wagner's lecture at a Kansas City Presbyterian Church in 2007 on Christian Zionism: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=4515761169636548436#>. A summary of some of his best arguments in *Anxious for Armageddon*.

Michael Slackman, "Growing Up in Gaza: Families Face an Uncertain Future," Video (4:32 min.), July 14, 2010, New York Times Online, <http://video.nytimes.com/video/2010/07/14/world/middleeast/1247468440263/growing-up-in-gaza.html>. A short, yet striking and heart-breaking summary on why life in Gaza is so miserable.