

HOW STRONG IS THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CHRISTIAN ZIONISM?

Colin Chapman

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SESSION 1. The BIBLICAL BASIS for CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

Defining Christian Zionism

“Christian support for Zionism and the state of Israel that is based on a particular interpretation of the Bible.”

“Christian Zionism is a movement within Protestantism that views the modern state of Israel as the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy, thus deserving our unconditional economic, moral, political and theological support” (Don Wagner).

The difference between Restorationism and Dispensationalism

Restorationism is the conviction (first articulated by the Puritans in the 17th C) that prophecy in the Bible about the restoration of Israel to its land is to be understood as a prediction of the return of Jewish people to the land.

Dispensationalism is a theological system (built on the foundation of Restorationism and first developed in the 1830s and 1840s), which divides the whole of history into seven periods or dispensations and describes a specific timeline of events leading up to the second coming of Christ and the start of his millennial reign on earth.

KEY TEXTS FOR CHRISTIAN ZIONISTS

1. Promises in the OT about the nation and the land

12 Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to **the land** that I will show you. ²I will make of you **a great nation**, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³**I will bless those who bless you**, and the one who curses you I will curse; and **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**” ⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him ... and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan... ⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, “To your offspring I will give **this land**” (Gen 12:1-7).

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. ²And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” ...⁷I 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.** ⁸And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, **the land** where you are now an alien, **all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding (as an everlasting possession, NIV); and I will be their God**” (Gen 17:1-8).

³⁵Thus says the LORD,
who gives the sun for light by day
and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night,
who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—
the LORD of hosts is his name:

³⁶If this fixed order were ever to cease
from my presence, says the LORD,
then also **the offspring of Israel would cease
to be a nation before me forever** (Jer 31:35-36).

KEY TEXTS

2. Prophecies about a return to the land and the restoration of Israel

On that day I will **raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches** ... and rebuild it as in days of old; ¹² **in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name** ... says the LORD who does this. The time is surely coming ... when the one who ploughs shall overtake the one who reaps ... **I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel**, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them ... ¹⁵ **I will plant them upon their land**, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them, says the LORD your God (Amos 9:11-15).

¹⁴ Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, “As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt,” ¹⁵ but “As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them.” For **I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their ancestors** (Jeremiah 16:14-15).

²² Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³ I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴ I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and **bring you into your own land**. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. ²⁸ **Then you shall live in the land** that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God (Ezekiel 36:22-28).

¹¹ Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ ¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; **and I will bring you back to the land of Israel**. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD” (Ezekiel 37:11-14).

KEY TEXTS

3. NT Verses

³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” ³²He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, **you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”** (Luke 13:15)

²⁰“When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it; ²²for these are days of vengeance, as a fulfillment of all that is written. ²³Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people; ²⁴they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and **Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled** (Luke 21:24).

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you **will restore the kingdom to Israel?**” ⁷He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:6-8).

KEY TEXTS

... my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. **They are Israelites**, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, **the covenants**, the giving of the law, the worship and **the promises**; to them belong the patriarchs ... (Rom 9:4-5).

⁵I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, ²⁶and in this way **all Israel will be saved**. As it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion ...” As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but **as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable** (Rom 11:26).

INTERPRETING the OT THROUGH THE EYES OF THE NT: SOME GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*The key question: how did Jesus and the NT
writers interpret these themes in the OT?*

Principle 1

Jesus and the NT writers don't always interpret OT promises and prophecies literally

God's promise about David's descendants

Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ **He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.** ¹⁴ **I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.** When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. ¹⁵ But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ **Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever** (2 Sam 7:11-16).

Jerusalem as the place where God lives 'for ever'

13 For the Lord has chosen Zion ... "This is **my resting place forever**; here I will reside, for I have desired it. (Psalm 132:13-14).

And the name of the city from that time on shall be, **The Lord is there** (Ezek 48:35).

The coming of Jesus as the fulfilment of the promise about David's descendants

The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² **He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.** ³³ **He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end'** (Luke 1:30-33).

God living among us through the Word made flesh

And **the Word became flesh and lived** (literally 'tabernacled') **among us** (John 1:14).

"**Destroy this temple**, and in three days I will raise it up" ... he was speaking of **the temple of his body**. (John 2:19-21).

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God ... "See the home of God is among mortals. **He will dwell with them as their God**; they will be his people, and God himself will be with them ..." (Rev 21:2-3).

A vision of water flowing from the temple down to the Dead Sea

Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple; there, **water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east ...**⁸ He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh...” (Ezek 47:1-12).

¹⁸ In that day
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the stream beds of Judah
shall flow with water;
a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD
and water the Wadi Shittim (Joel 3:18).

⁸ On that day **living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea;** it shall continue in summer as in winter (Zechariah 14:8).

Jesus relates the vision to himself and the Holy Spirit

³⁷ On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. **As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’**” ³⁹ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:37-39).

John relates the vision to ‘the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God

22 Then the angel showed me **the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb** ² **through the middle of the street of the city.** On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him ...(Rev 22:1-5).

Principle 2

Titles that are given to Jesus identify him with the people of Israel

Israel as God's son

"Thus says the Lord: **Israel is my firstborn son** ... Let my son go ..." (Ex 4:22-23)

He (the Lord) said to me, "**You are my son**; today I have begotten you ..." (Psalm 2:7).

Israel as a vine

⁸ You brought **a vine** out of Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.

⁹ You cleared the ground for it;
it took deep root and filled the land ...

¹⁴ Turn again, O God of hosts;
look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for **this vine**,

¹⁵ the stock that your right hand planted ...

¹⁷ But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
(Psalm 80:8-17)

Restoration of the nation "on the third day"

⁶ "Come, let us return to the LORD;
for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us;
he has struck down, and he will bind us up.

² After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him (Hosea 6:1-2).

Jesus as God's son

And a voice came from heaven, "**You are my Son,**
the Beloved ..." (Mark 1:11; cf Mark 9:7)

... and from the cloud there came a voice, "**This is my Son, the Beloved**; listen to him!" (Mark 9:7).

Jesus as the true vine

15 "I am **the true vine**, and my Father is the vinegrower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit... ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned (John 15:1-1).

The resurrection of Jesus

"... and **after three days** rise again" (Mark 8:31).

³ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴ and that he was buried, and that he was raised **on the third day in accordance with the scriptures**, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve (1 Cor 15:3-5)

Principle 3

When NT writers use the language of fulfilment, they're not only thinking in terms of fulfilment of predictions, but of patterns that are being repeated (typology)

Jesus returns from Egypt

“Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, ‘**Out of Egypt I have called my Son**’” (Matt 2:14-15).

Jesus identified with the Suffering Servant

“That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, ‘**He took our infirmities and bore our diseases**’” (Matt 8:16-17).

The glory of God seen in Jesus

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and **we have seen his glory**, the glory as of a father’s only son ... (John 1:14)

Israel as God’s son called out of Egypt

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and **out of Egypt I called my son**” (Hosea 11:1).

Isaiah’s Suffering Servant of the Lord

“Surely **he has borne** our infirmities and carried our diseases ...” (Is 53:4).

Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple

... and the **glory of the Lord filled the temple** (Ezek 47:43).

Principle 4

An OT prophecy can be seen to be fulfilled in more than one way and at more than one time

Zechariah's vision of people looking "on the one whom they have pierced"

"And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they **look on the one [Heb. on me] whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him**, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn" (Zech 12:10).

Ezekiel's vision of spiritual restoration following return to the land

"I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will **sprinkle clean water upon you ... A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you... I will put my spirit within you**, and make you follow my statutes ... **Then you shall live in the land ... and you shall be my people, and I will be your God ...**" (Ezek 36:24-28)

John relates Zechariah's vision to the crucifixion

"But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, ... one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at one blood and water came out ... These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.' And again another passage of scripture says, '**They will look on the one whom they have pierced**'" (John 19:23-37)

Matthew relates it to the coming of Son of Man

"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then **all the tribes of the earth will mourn**, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt 24:10).

John relates it to the second coming

"Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, **even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail**" (.Rev 1:7).

"... our hearts **sprinkled clean ...**" (Heb 10:22)

"... you have been **born anew ...**" (1Pet 1:23)

" God has **sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts ...**" (Gal 4:6)

"... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, **God's own people ...**" (1Pet 2:9)

Principle 5

The restoration of Israel is seen by NT writers not as something in the future but as something that has already happened

The restoration of Israel has implications for the gentiles

On that day I will **raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old;**

12 in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name, says the Lord who does this...

14 I will **restore the fortunes of my people Israel,** and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.

15 I will **plant them upon their land,** and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them, says the LORD your God (Amos 9:11-15)

Isaiah looks forward to the redemption of Jerusalem

“Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion! ... For thus says the Lord: You were sold for nothing, and you shall be **redeemed without money** ...

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace ... for in plain sight they see the Lord return to Zion.

Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem, for **the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem ...**” Isaiah 52:1,3,7-10

James sees gentiles coming to faith as fulfilment of Amos

After they finished speaking, James replied, “My brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first looked favourably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written,

‘After this will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which was fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord – even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago” (Acts 15:13-18).

The redemption of Jerusalem/Israel completed in Jesus

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to **the consolation of Israel ...**” (Luke 2:25)

“At that moment she [Anna] came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for **the redemption of Jerusalem**” (Luke 2:18).

“Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because **your redemption** is drawing near” (Luke 21:28).

““We had hoped that he was **the one to redeem Israel ...**’ Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that **the Messiah** should suffer these things and then enter into his glory? ...These are my words ... that **everything written about me** in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:13-49).

CONCLUSION

- *The people of Israel had a clear understanding of what it meant to be God's chosen people living in the promised land. This would have been part of the world-view of the disciples of Jesus, who were looking forward to the restoration of Israel.*
- *As a result of being with Jesus, the disciples had to develop their ideas about the nation and the land, and the NT reflects the new ways in which they had come to think about Israel and its land.*
- *If NT writers believed that so much of the promises and prophecies of the OT had already been fulfilled in the coming of Christ, is it reasonable for us to believe that they should be fulfilled once again in the return of Jews to the land and the creation of the state of Israel?*