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Jerusalem and Judaism

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In my experience, Christians have had a hard time understanding the role that Jerusalem and the land of Israel have played in Rabbinic Judaism—that is, in Judaism as it was reshaped after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. In this article I hope to shed some light on that issue, before suggesting that a discussion about its religious/theological implications could be mutually beneficial. What I say here will be less a scholarly inquiry and more an essay in which I share some impressions gained from forty years of involvement in Jewish-Christian dialogue.

I am convinced that part of our calling in today's world is to understand our neighbors who practice another religion. One possible benefit is to lay to rest the stereotypes we have inherited from the past—stereotypes that have too often been harmful or even destructive. In the Western world, Jews and Judaism have been the object of an unusually high number of surprisingly persistent stereotypes. A discussion between Jews and Christians, even about only one small point, may help move beyond these caricatures.

In order for this to work, it is important to clarify what this essay does *not* intend to do. It does not intend to contribute anything directly to the complex dispute between Israelis and Palestinians in the Holy Land today. That is an important topic—just not one I intend to discuss here.

Let me begin with two reminders. The first has to do with Temple Judaism. Though at the time of Jesus only about 10–15 percent of the Jews lived in Israel,

The image of Jerusalem is a key component of both historical and contemporary Judaism. Beyond the struggle for territory and space, it is also about the involvement of God in history and in the world. This is something that can parallel Christian understandings, and might be a place for Christians and Jews to engage in fruitful discussions and understandings.

as many as possible of the other 85–90 percent came to Jerusalem to the temple to celebrate one or more of the three annual pilgrim festivals. The tradition had strengthened over time. After 164 BCE the Hasmoneans had actively supported the temple. King Herod, during his reign, encouraged and welcomed the involvement of the Jewish Diaspora in Jerusalem. He spent a good deal of money and effort to expand the Temple Mount,[1] and he constructed other large buildings in Jerusalem. As we notice in the Gospels, Judaism was dynamic and diverse. The Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Essenes, the Qumran community (also Essenes?), the followers of John the Baptist, the followers of Jesus all represented different versions of Judaism. And there were other divisions. The religious leaders in Judea were not sure about the Jewishness of those from the mixed population of Galilee. In return, the Qumran community and Jesus and others were not happy with the temple leaders. The Qumran leaders objected to having the same person serve as both the high priest and the political ruler. Then, after the Romans assumed control, many objected to the close cooperation between the chief priests and the Roman rulers. In short, not only were the Jews of that day geographically diverse; their religious priorities were also diverse. Along with the Torah and the Prophets, what held them together were the holy days and the pilgrim festivals—celebrated on the expansive Temple Mount.

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The second reminder has to do with the social patterns of life in the Roman Empire. Wherever persons lived, they were tied to their homeland via a religion. It was perfectly acceptable for people to practice more than one religion, but not acceptable to abandon the religion of their homeland. The insistence by Christians that their members abandon loyalty to all other religions, including that of one's native land, was cause for scandal. It defied social expectations. So, both the specifics of Jewish practice (the pilgrim festivals) and the general expectations of Greco-Roman society reinforced a strong Jewish attachment to Jerusalem.

All of this helped make the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem (70 CE) and the eventual expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem (135 CE) so tragic. In the Judaism reconstructed by the rabbis post-70, members of synagogues were reminded of that tragedy (as well as of the destruction of the first temple) every year on Tisha B'Av (the ninth day of the month of Av), when the book of Lamentations was read.

[1] Lee Levine, "Second Temple Jerusalem: A Jewish City in a Greco-Roman Orbit," in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Celebrity in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Lee Levine (New York: Continuum, 1999), 60.

The broken glass at wedding ceremonies was also a reminder of the destruction of Jerusalem. The sorrow lived on in ritual observance.

But alongside the sorrow was also hope. This too was part of ritual observance. The Seder at Passover and the service on the Day of Atonement both ended with "Next year in Jerusalem." And as a reminder of this hope, the daily prayers included references to Jerusalem.

What Jerusalem represents is quite complex. Jerusalem is the temple; Jerusalem is the land; Jerusalem is the people of Israel; Jerusalem is where God is present; Jerusalem is where the Hebrew Bible comes alive. Jerusalem is tied to Jewish agony, Jewish hope, and divine promise. In the words of Avigdor Shinan, formerly a professor at Hebrew University, "The rabbis' preoccupation with Jerusalem does not *merely* represent an effort to glorify past history or lament the splendid city of yore. Nor do they *only* seek to portray a brilliant image of the future on which to hang the nation's hopes. The prominence of Jerusalem in rabbinic literature *also* serves as a signpost of caution engraved with the woes of a city whose many transgressions led to her destruction, forcing the readers to pay heed that such sin and punishment never be repeated."[2]

What I find important about all of this is that Jerusalem is a geographical place. For Jews, every encounter with God occurs at a time and a place. As Abraham Heschel says, "Even those who believe that God is everywhere set aside a place for a sanctuary. For the sacred to be sensed at all moments everywhere, it must also at this moment be somewhere."[3] This particularity does not prevent the encounter from having a significance that extends beyond the moment. The encounter at one time and place can inspire a similar encounter at another time and place, but for Judaism its particularity cannot be erased or ignored.

Ralph Reeves is a psychiatrist and psychotherapist in Wyomissing, Pennsylvania, who writes as a Christian. He has just finished a book, not yet published, about "we" statements. These statements occur in counseling, when the patient formulates something insightful about the relationship—insightful for both the patient and the therapist. "We" statements also happen in other healthy human-to-human relationships (indeed, they are a sign of health) and, Reeves thinks, in significant divine-human encounters and relations. A "we" statement reflects what is going on in a specific dialogue between specific persons, but it is important and memorable enough to continue to be significant after the moment has passed. And it may also be helpful to others.

For Jews, the human encounter with God is something akin to a "we" statement—in that it occurs in a specific setting and with a specific person or persons. It is available to others, but cannot be uprooted from the time, place, and individuals involved.

The original promise to Abraham included descendants (a specific people) and a land (a specific piece of geography) and a blessing (specifically through his

[2] Avidgor Shinan, "The Many Names of Jerusalem" in *Jerusalem*, 128. (Italics added.)

[3] Abraham Heschel, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), 11.

descendants) to other nations of the world. One account of this promise occurs in Genesis 12. Another, in Genesis 17, states the promise of the land this way: "And 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; and I will be their God" (Gen 17:8). Land is part and parcel of the historic relationship between God and the people of Israel. It is not only in the content of the promise; it is also the setting in which the God of promise meets the people of promise. The sequence of particular encounters that continued to form and shape Israel and, later, Judaism cannot be separated from the places where they happened.

Land is part and parcel of the historic relationship between God and the people of Israel. It is not only in the content of the promise; it is also the setting in which the God of promise meets the people of promise.

One reason for this particularity is that the encounters are unique occurrences. They are not simply statements about what is universally true or what repeats itself. As Heschel says, "Genuine history is not mere repetition, moving in a circle. It is a fresh attempt, a new arrival. The Bible begins with the words 'At the beginning. . . .' . . . Jewish understanding . . . implies that also in history there can be novelty, beginning."[4]

The underlying idea is that, to bless others, God works through the particular. God works through a people nourished and shaped by a land and the presence of God in it.

According to Heschel, "The central theme of the story of the Covenant is the promise of land to Abraham."[5] "To abandon the land would make a mockery of all our longings, prayers, and commitments. To abandon the land would be to repudiate the Bible."[6]

Or, again, "What is so precious about the land? . . . The land of Israel—biblical chapters hovering everywhere. . . . The land is a text. . . . It is a land where the [Jewish] Bible is at home."[7] The combination of land and people and Bible provides an overarching story that spans the ages and continues to shape the religious identity of the Jewish people.

But there is yet another dimension to the tradition. The land is also a temptation—to forget the covenant, to ignore the divine source of its blessings, to dissociate the land from the divine-human relationship envisioned in the oft-repeated goal that "I will be your God, and you shall be my people" (e.g., Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23).

Remaining in the land and returning to the land have been linked to practicing the kind of human behavior laid out in Jewish teaching. Historically, the

[4] Heschel, *Israel*, 50–51.
[5] Heschel, *Israel,* 46.
[6] Heschel, *Israel*, 44.
[7] Heschel, *Israel*, 119.

temple was the place to remember and renew the relationship. The need for this did not end in 70. Writing in 1967, Heschel remarks: "[Now that the state of Israel exists,] we face a decisive hour in Jewish history as well as a radical trial of our character and integrity as Jews. It calls for more than generosity; it calls for wisdom and sacrifice."[8]

I want to suggest that there is a parallel in Christian teaching. I am not saying that, even on this one point, the two religions believe or teach exactly the same thing. Differences remain, but I think there is enough similarity for a fruitful discussion.

The first place to observe this similarity is in the early church's struggle against Docetism—the view that Jesus was a god (like those of Greece and Rome) who merely appeared to be human. In order to guard against Docetism, the Apostles' Creed included references to specifics: "born of the virgin Mary" and "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried." The choice of specifics was not accidental, because gods could not be born of a human and could not suffer and die. The Creed's insistence on the humanity of Jesus tied this part of early Christian teaching to a particular time and a particular place. An individual man, Jesus, continued to serve as a "we" moment, a communication event, a channel of the presence of God.

A second place to observe the similarity we are discussing is in Christian preaching. Much of it focuses on events recorded in the Gospels. The expectation is that a story of Jesus interacting in the first century with specific individuals (Mary, Martha, Peter, and Zacchaeus, for example) and groups (such as the crowds who were hungry) and with their specific needs can mediate to us a similar encounter. The particularity is not an obstacle; it can be the means to communicate divine-human and human-to-human encounters effectively.

A third place to observe the similarity is the use of parables. This was, of course, a feature of Jesus's teaching, but it was also a feature of rabbinic teaching. It reflects a reality—we humans often respond more readily to the story of an individual than to the recitation of exalted principles or to descriptions of the plight of millions.

To be sure, this is only part of the story. In many other ways, Christians universalized their teachings. For example, they later taught that everyone has original sin. They required that everyone endorse the portrait of God as divine "substance" described in the Nicene Creed. So much was this the case that by the nineteenth century, theologians claimed that the universalism of Christianity was a sign of its superiority when compared to Judaism. Anti-Jewish tropes sometimes still repeat this claim. One clue that Judaism did not follow exactly the same path is the absence of doctrines and dogmas that all Jews are expected to endorse.

One theologian who touches on this similarity is Rabbi Irving Greenberg. Although he does not talk about the connection in the way I am doing and makes clear that he does not endorse Christian beliefs about Jesus as the Messiah, he is

[8] Heschel, *Israel*, 204–205.

willing to use the Christian word *incarnation* in a way that connects Judaism and Christianity. Although Rabbinic Judaism (correctly, he thinks) denied "the occurrence of divine incarnation" in Jesus, this denial "[unfortunately] tempted it to overlook the genuine Jewish dimension of the Christian attempt to close the gap between the human and the divine."[9] For him, incarnation is a Jewish notion. To return to Heschel, "A central concern in Jewish thinking is to overcome the tendency to see the world in one dimension, . . . to reduce history exclusively to God's actions or to man's [*sic*] action, either to grace or to man's initiative. . . . the sacred and the secular are not mutually exclusive. . . . The heart of the relationship of God and man is reciprocity, interdependence. The task is to humanize the sacred and to sanctify the secular."[10] I suggest we follow the hints Greenberg and Heschel offer and recognize a similarity of approach between the Jewish loyalty to God's promises in the particulars of geography and time, and the Christian affirmation of God's special presence in a particular human being living in first-century Israel.

I emphasize again that I am not saying Jews and Christians teach exactly the same thing. I am not suggesting that a fruitful discussion about God's presence in the particular requires that Jews endorse the divinity of Jesus or that Christians adopt a Jewish understanding of the land.

So why then call attention to their similarity?

For one thing, Docetism remains a perennial problem for many Christians. They regard Jesus to be so divine that they have trouble accepting that he "in every respect has been tested as we are" (Heb 4:15). This latent Docetism thwarts the profound moral transformation to which Christians are called. It fosters cheap grace.

Why call attention to this similarity? Because Christians can fail to recognize God at work behind the scenes, being present to people and inspiring them to serve their neighbor and the wider community in courageous ways. They can lose hope. They can and do resort instead to dire predictions about the end of the world or to other compromises with secularity that exempt them from responsibility for their neighbors' well-being.

Why again? For centuries, the Jewish community was excluded from political power. One of the temptations of exclusion is despair. And such despair leads down various paths, in some cases down one involving preoccupation with security and self-defense.

During the same period of time (and beyond), the Christian community did have access to political power. Its temptation has been to seize control—to practice "triumphalism."

Why call attention to the similarity? Because Christians and Jews do their best work when they focus on individuals and groups of persons who need help—whether that is a meal, a home, or an advocate. They do their best when they avoid

[9] Irving Greenberg, "Judaism and Christianity: Their Respective Roles in the Strategy of Redemption," in *Visions of the Other: Jewish and Christian Theologians Assess the Dialogue*, ed. Eugene Fischer (New York: Paulist, 1994), 24.

[10] Heschel, *Israel*, 159.

prescriptive ideologies and recognize that "saving one life is like saving all of humankind."[11]

There has also been a tendency in Christianity to "spiritualize" the events of the Old Testament. Here is Heschel's lament:

> While it is proper and even necessary to seek to derive by a variety of interpretive methods new meaning from ancient sources, it is a fact that the attempt of traditional Christian theology to reduce concrete narratives, hopes, expectations connected with a living people and a geographic land, to paradigms of Church dogma has had detrimental results for Christian theology. . . . the tendency to spiritualize . . . made many Christians incapable of understanding or empathy for what the Holy Land means to the Jewish people and the authors of the Hebrew Bible, or for what the people Israel means in the flesh, not just as a symbol or as a construct of theological speculation.[12]

The two communities can benefit from cooperation and mutual critique. For example, mainline Christians in the United States easily brush off descriptions of this country as a "Christian nation" as empty political rhetoric. But to Jewish ears the same words are ominous. They are a reminder of mistreatment at the hands of those espousing "Christendom" or religious nationalism. Each side needs the "ears" of the other.

Why call attention to the similarity? Because Christians and Jews do their best work when they focus on individuals and groups of persons who need help—whether that is a meal, a home, or an advocate.

Both the Jewish attachment to Jerusalem and the land and the Christian attachment to Jesus of Nazareth are recognitions of God's involvement in history and the world. Because of God's deep commitment to human freedom, it is a non-controlling involvement, which means it is costly to God. Israel forgets and wanders away from God. Christians fall prey to triumphalism and other errors. It takes God's involvement in and through humans to bring things back on track. To help either community discern its need for correction, the "ears" and "eyes" of the other community can be helpful.

It is particularly important for Christians not only to recognize but also to endorse and adopt the Jewish emphasis on human involvement. This outlook understands that it takes humans to help repair what humans have damaged. So God invites their participation. As Terence Fretheim has shown, this emphasis is

[11] Versions of this saying appear in both the Jewish Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin IV, 5b) and the Qur'an (Surah 5, verse 32).

[12] Heschel, *Israel,* 139.

biblical—a direct reflection of the Hebrew Scriptures.[13] Luther's way of describing this human involvement was to see humans as the "channels" of God's grace and gifts to others.[14] For him, the eyes of faith see God's presence in the ordinary. Unfortunately, of course, humans can also be obstacles to grace. Whether they are channels or obstacles matters a good deal to the world and to God.

The work of the Jewish community and the Christian community is to keep the channels open and at work. That is, the ongoing task is to serve the world that God loves, not in the abstract but in deeds of love and mercy and justice.

So, why emphasize the similarity we have been discussing? Because it invites Jews and Christians to work together for the benefit of God's world. They can work together to bring food to the hungry, to find a home for refugees, and to stand with those who face harassment or harm. Not only can they work together, but they can encourage each other. Together they can empower their efforts by lamenting every injustice and violation of human dignity and celebrating every glimmer of generosity, morality, and dignity.

The advantage of recognizing this connection is not to minimize or overlook the differences in understanding, but to make room for a conversation that can be mutually beneficial—that can keep Christianity from going off in a triumphalistic direction and keep Judaism from becoming too comfortable with the ambiguity of the ordinary in which the divine manifests itself and the gradualness with which love and justice can be achieved. Greenberg tells about discovering Christians in Sri Lanka who had traveled from Scandinavia to work with brain-damaged children. In his eyes, their actions were heroic expressions of their faith; they went beyond what he expected from his own congregation. He confesses he had been "tempted into being too reasonable [that is, timid] in my expectations of myself and my own community."[15] With the support of a faith community, Christians and Jews discern their individual calling, which can range from the most ordinary (e.g., changing diapers) to the most extraordinary of specific deeds (e.g., endangering one's life to rescue another). Each of the two communities needs to make room for both.

Greenberg continues, "Our task is to find ways for humans to hear God. We should measure religions by the criterion of how people act after they hear the word in community."[16] This is a remarkable test—one worthy of mutual self-examination! Judaism and Christianity, he continues, need "an identity that is not dependent on the denial of the other."[17] Amen. "Both religions have a major task at hand in the generation after the Holocaust. Both religions need to take up the charge of correcting their own deviations from the covenantal way."[18] "Both reli-

[13] See, for example, Terence Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

[14] See, for example, his discussion of the First Commandment in the *Large Catechism*.

[15] Greenberg, "Judaism and Christianity," 25.

[16] Greenberg, "Judaism and Christianity," 24.

[17] Greenberg. "Judaism and Christianity," 27.

[18] Greenberg, "Judaism and Christianity," 26.

gions can show the world a model of service" and show "that we understand that, as believers, we are channels and vehicles of the divine, not the imperialist owners of God."[19] Again, amen.

One more topic deserves some attention: What then about Jewish expectations for a messianic age? It is a core part of Rabbinic Judaism, but it does not change what we have been saying. Three things should be noted.

The first is that Jerusalem is tied to this hope. Isaiah's prophecies about the nations coming to Jerusalem are part of this tradition. A symbol of that tie is the practice, over the centuries, of Jews being buried in Jerusalem, where they can join the Messiah, once the messianic age arrives. Or, less expensively, being buried with one's feet facing Jerusalem.

The second thing to note is that merely returning to Jerusalem is not what the messianic age is about. In Heschel's words, "The State of Israel is not the fulfillment of the Messianic promise, but it makes the Messianic promise plausible."[20] "The return to the land is a profound indication of the possibility of redemption for all men [*sic*]."[21] The messianic age is a matter of peace and justice; these are not available to any one person or any one people in isolation. The transformation needs to be more extensive, to include and benefit all humans.

The divine promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 is not only that God will bless Abraham's descendants but also that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3). A typical Jewish expectation is that this will happen one step at a time as specific persons in and outside of the people of Israel respond to God's benevolence and God's call to practice shalom.

The third is that the messianic age will not arrive without human involvement. It is a long-term project with responsibilities to which humans are called. Drawing again on Heschel, "Not only is redemption a necessity for man [*sic*], man is a necessity for attaining redemption. His actions are vital and affect the course of that process. Man holds the key that can unlock the chains fettering the redeemer."[22] In order to understand Heschel's meaning, it is important to note that he is using *redemption* to mean not individual salvation (as many Christians use the term) but an end to oppression and the creation of the kind of community in which justice prevails and human dignity is upheld. The divine promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 is not only that God will bless Abraham's descendants but also that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3). A typical

[19] Greenberg, "Judaism and Christianity," 27.
[20] Heschel, *Israel*, 223.
[21] Heschel, *Israel*, 220–221.
[22] Heschel, *Israel*, 159.

Jewish expectation is that this will happen one step at a time as specific persons in and outside of the people of Israel respond to God's benevolence and God's call to practice shalom. It will be neither an instantaneous nor a unilaterally divine accomplishment.

For Jews, the generosity and the call of God have been nourished by the gift and promise of Jerusalem and the land. For Christians, the generosity and the call of God have been nourished by the gift and promise of Jesus of Nazareth. They differ. Yet they have this in common: the coming together of the divine and the ordinary in the experience of God's presence, in the recognition of God's call, and in the need for acts of love and mercy. The two communities will be enriched if they can explore together, without compromising their distinctiveness, what this commonality does and does not mean and if they can find ways to support each other and cooperate with each other in fostering human dignity, freedom, and justice. To the degree this happens, both communities will be a blessing; they will be agents of God's vision, repairing the world.

Addendum

The tradition regarding a return to Jerusalem was relatively stable until recent centuries. Let me offer a very quick and sketchy summary of modern developments.

In 1783 in his book *Jerusalem*, Moses Mendelssohn challenged the attachment. On the one hand, he advocated that the state had no right to interfere with the religion of its citizens, Jews included. On the other, despite the book's title, he made few references to Jerusalem or the land. It was not important to him. Judaism was a religion (not a people or a nation in exile).

Napoleon's decision in 1805 to allow Jews in Western Europe to become citizens changed their status. Reform Judaism responded with adjustments that allowed Jews to accommodate this change. Services were conducted largely in the language of where people lived, rather than in Hebrew. On the basis of historical analysis, rules regarding kosher foods and utensils were relaxed. Head coverings were removed. Throughout the next 125 years, Jews in Western Europe became more and more integrated into the surrounding communities. Jews and non-Jews lived in the same neighborhoods. They had professional and business contacts. Their children attended the same schools. They fought side by side in World War I. For many, Germany, France, the Netherlands became their home in a way that had not been true since before the Middle Ages.

Jews who came (mostly from Western Europe) to the United States in the nineteenth century adopted this way of thinking. They were almost exclusively Reform Jews. The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 said: "We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state."[23] Though never formally adopted,

[23] The Pittsburg Platform (1885) can be found here: https://tinyurl.com/yxxt8xpv.

the Pittsburgh Platform was influential and reflected the outlook of most Jews at the time.

But already, a new set of immigrants had begun to arrive, not from Western Europe but from Eastern Europe (especially Russia and Poland). They came to avoid a persecution that broke out in 1881, were mostly Orthodox or secular, not Reform, and brought with them a very different sociopolitical experience than those who had come earlier. They had lived apart and not felt at home in Eastern Europe. "Next year in Jerusalem" was still their hope. The relative uniformity of those who were here before 1881 soon disappeared.

About the same time, racial anti-Semitism began to grow in Europe, replacing religious anti-Judaism. It claimed to have a scientific authorization.

In the 1890s Theodor Herzl, an Austrian journalist who was covering the Dreyfus trial in Paris, realized that if Jews could not be safe in France, with its dedication to the ideals of the French Revolution, they could not be safe anywhere in Europe. He formulated "political Zionism." It said that, like other people, the Jews needed to have their own homeland and their government and thereby to have status in the international community. Only then would they have the minimal protections available to others. This was a political movement, not a religious one, but it drew on the traditions we have attempted to describe.

Then came Nazism. By declaring the Jews stateless, it excluded them from the protections of international law and international organizations. Despite an international conference at Evian, the nations of the world for the most part refused to help the refugees who were trying to escape Germany during the 1930s. Then came the concentration camps, work camps, and death camps of the 1940s, followed by a displaced remnant after 1945.

Through all of this, a trickle of immigrants to the Holy Land slowly grew—and challenged the British policies that restricted entrance. In 1948 Israel declared itself a state. To many, doing so seemed to be the only way forward politically—the only way to avoid the destruction of the Jewish people so narrowly averted in 1945. In order to perform the role envisioned by Theodor Herzl, Israel adopted the "law of return," which allowed any Jew, anywhere in the world, to claim citizenship, thereby preventing Jews from being "stateless" again.

The Six-Day War of 1967 played a significant role, as people in the United States listened to speeches in the United Nations in which the nations surrounding Israel vowed to push the Israelites into the sea. It jarred American Jews. Were this threat successful, it would be the Holocaust all over again. It crystalized support from across the spectrum of Jews—support that was channeled largely through Jewish Federations.

At the same time, a revised premillennialist dispensationalism was being popularized among American Protestants, especially by Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth*, published in 1970 (by 1990, 28 million copies had been sold). Lindsey claimed that the existence of the State of Israel was the missing key that unlocked the timetable for the end of the world. It set the clock moving. This contributed to the rise of Christian Zionism, which has channeled large amounts of financial

support to Israel—especially to the settlements, because theirs has been an expansionist view of Israel. In preparation for the end of the world, they have desired and expected Israel to regain control of all the land King David ruled.

And from the 1950s through the 1980s the Cold War made Israel's existence and friendship important to the diplomatic policies of the US.

Over the years, changes occurred within Israel. The settlers who trickled in prior to World War II focused on the land—on organizing *kibbutzim* and finding ways to grow crops. They brought with them the experience of having lived in Europe. After 1967, large numbers of Jews from North Africa and the Middle East moved to Israel, bringing with them quite different experiences. This diversity of backgrounds contributes to an ongoing struggle in Israel to define its identity.

In the United States, the uniformity of the post-1967 years has begun to fall apart. AIPAC and J Street and Americans for Peace Now have quite different views of Israel's future and of its current leadership. Israel is the source of intense debates, often dividing differing generations of American Jews.

There is little support among Jews for rebuilding the temple. Mostly this is a recognition of how volatile it would be, given the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque that now sit on the site. But, more significantly, it reflects the success of Rabbinic Judaism, which was able to craft ways to worship, to study Torah, and to celebrate festivals that did not require the temple. Except for some fringe groups and some zealous Christian Zionists, it has become unnecessary. Perhaps, if the Temple Mount were empty, the idea would find more support, but the Western Wall provides access to the geographical site and to the religious history so important to Judaism.

This brings us back to interreligious understanding. If the land is part of the promise, can Christians and Jews find a way to explore what role it should play today? How do Christians follow and live out Paul's judgment in Romans 11:29, when talking about the Jews, that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable"? What are those gifts? And what kind of cooperation contributes to a world where "justice roll[s] down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24)?

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