

*The New Christian Zionism:  
Fresh Perspectives on Israel and  
the Land*

Available September 2016

\$26, 304 pages, paperback

978-0-8308-5138-6

*"Zionism is the movement that supports the return of Jews to the land of Israel to establish a homeland," writes McDermott. "There have been secular and religious Zionisms, and among the latter both Christian and Jewish Zionisms. Christian Zionism refers to one of several movements of Christians who believe that the recent gathering of Jews in the land of Israel, and their establishment of a polity there, are fulfillments of biblical prophecy."*

## What Is the New Christian Zionism?

Most scholars have assumed that all Christian Zionism is an outgrowth of premillennial dispensationalist theology. Originating in the nineteenth century, this school of thought became popular because it was taught in the notes of the Scofield version of the King James Bible and then developed by Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* and the best-selling *Left Behind* series.

The traditional dispensationalist version of Christian Zionism puts Israel and the church on two different tracks, neither of which runs at the same time. This version is attached to an elaborate schedule of end-time events dominated by the great tribulation and a rapture of the church that leaves Jews and the rest of the world behind.

The Christian Zionism that this book proposes is not connected to traditional dispensationalism. It looks to a long history of Christian Zionists who lived long before the rise of dispensationalism and to other thinkers in the last two centuries who have had nothing to do with dispensationalism — theologians such as Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, Robert Jenson and the Catholic Old Testament scholar Gary Anderson, as well as President Harry Truman. More on this in the first chapter.

So what do the scholars and experts in this book mean by "the New Christian Zionism?" The best answer to this question, we think, is the rest of the book. This introduction will telegraph, as it were, the basic implications of what we mean by this term. The first is that the people and land of Israel are central to the story of the Bible. This might seem obvious. But Israel has not been central to the church's traditional way of telling the story of salvation. Typically the story has moved from creation and fall to Christ's death and resurrection, with Israel as an illustration of false paths. We believe that the Bible claims that God saves the world *through* Israel and the perfect Israelite; thus the Bible is incoherent and salvation impossible without Israel. We propose that the history of salvation is ongoing: the people of Israel and their land continue to have theological significance. I will return to Israel and salvation in the next section of this introduction.

We are also convinced that the return of Jews from all over the world to their land, and their efforts to establish a nation-state after two millennia of being separated from controlling the land, is *part* of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Further, we believe that Jews need and deserve a homeland in Israel — not to displace others but to accept and develop what the family of nations — the United Nations — gave them in 1948. We would add that this startling event climaxed a history of continual Jewish presence in the Levant going back at least three thousand years.

We should explain what we do *not* mean by the New Christian Zionism. We do not mean

INTERVARSITY PRESS

Visit [ivpress.com/media](http://ivpress.com/media)



**FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO SCHEDULE AN INTERVIEW CONTACT THE INTERVARSITY PRESS PUBLICITY TEAM:**

Alisse Wissman, print publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or [awissman@ivpress.com](mailto:awissman@ivpress.com)

Krista Clayton, broadcast and online publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or [kclayton@ivpress.com](mailto:kclayton@ivpress.com)

[ivpress.com/academic](http://ivpress.com/academic)



that the state of Israel is a perfect country. Or that it should not be criticized for its failures. Or that it is necessarily the last Jewish state we will see before the end of days. Or that we know the particular timetable or political schema that will come *before* or *in* the final days.

*“The essays here offer a fresh perspective on Christian Zionism, one based on careful biblical exegesis and in dialogue with the historic traditions of the church. A paradigm-challenging volume.”*

– **Timothy George**, founding dean, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, general editor of the Reformation Commentary on Scripture

But we *do* know that the state of Israel, which includes more than two million non-Jews, is what protects the people of Israel. Support for this state and its people is eroding all over the world. Israel lies in a region of movements and governments bent on its destruction. Mainline Protestants have withdrawn their support. Many evangelicals are now starting to withdraw their support, using the same faulty arguments proffered by the Protestant mainline. Those arguments will be reviewed in chapter seven. For these and other reasons, it is time for Christians, not just Jews, to make a case for the Jewish people and their land.

The goal of this book, however, is not simply to make a prudential argument that the state of Israel is needed to provide a shelter for its covenant people. Some of the chapters that follow will make some of those arguments, and some of them need to be made, now more than ever. For example, Shady Khalloul, a leader of the Aramean community in Israel, argues that the rights of his non-Jewish community and other minority communities will be protected only in the Jewish state. Attorney Robert Nicholson probes and refutes the charge that Israel violates international law. Lutheran ethicist Robert Benne considers the political ethics of Zionism by revisiting the work of Reinhold Niebuhr. Historian Mark Tooley weighs the arguments made by mainline Protestant churches against Israel.

But the purpose of these prudential arguments – political and legal and moral – is to undergird a new *theological* argument for the twenty-first century. So the center of this book is made up of chapters three through six, which focus first on theological history and biblical hermeneutics and then on authors of the New Testament. The burden of these chapters is to show *theologically* that the people of Israel *continue* to be significant for the history of redemption and that the land of Israel, which is at the heart of the covenantal promises, *continues* to be important to God’s providential purposes.

– *Adapted from the introduction*



Gerald R. McDermott (PhD, University of Iowa) is Anglican Chair of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. He is also associate pastor at Christ the King Anglican Church. His books include *The Other Jonathan Edwards: Readings in Love, Society, and Justice* (with Ronald Story), *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (with Michael McClymond), *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions* (with Harold Netland), *Cancer: A Medical and Spiritual Guide* (with William Fintel, MD), *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods and World Religions: An Indispensable Guide*.

## Can Israel Claim the Promised Land?

*In his new book, The New Christian Zionism, editor Gerald McDermott draws together experts to propose that Zionism can be defended historically, theologically, politically and morally. Project editor Drew Blankman recently interviewed Gerald about this controversial field of study.*

### **Zionism is kind of a hot-button issue. What drew you to this topic?**

**Gerald McDermott:** After twenty-four years and fourteen trips to Israel, and becoming friends with both Palestinians and Jews in Israel, I was becoming increasingly disturbed by the discordance between what I saw there and read in Scripture on the one hand, and today's narratives about Jesus and modern Israel on the other. I also became convinced that the best way to approach this was academically, since many of what I consider to be false narratives have started in the academic world.

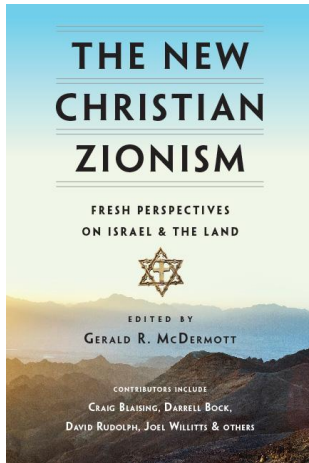
### **How would you describe the current widely accepted narrative regarding Christian Zionism?**

**McDermott:** Christian Zionism is usually thought to be a result of bad exegesis and zany theology. While most scholars concede that the Hebrew Bible is clearly Zionist (that is, that its primary focus is on a covenant with a particular people and land, both called Israel, and the land sometimes called Zion), they typically insist that the New Testament drops this focus on a particular land and people and replaces it with a universal vision for all peoples. Concern with Jews as Jews is thought to be absent from the New Testament – except to insist that there is no longer any significant difference between Jew and Greek (Gal 3:28). Hence neither the people nor the land of Israel have any special significance after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

According to this narrative, the only ones who have advocated for the idea that the New Testament maintains concern for the particular land and people of Israel are old-style premillennial dispensationalists. Their theology puts Israel and the church on two different tracks, neither of which runs at the same time, and they often hold to elaborate and detailed schedules of end-time events, including a rapture, through which the true church is protected from great tribulations.

### **Many readers may be surprised that up to the 1960s mainline churches in the United States were largely Zionist. What contributed to the change?**

**McDermott:** Probably the biggest reason for the change has been the perception that Israel is violating international law by its continued occupation of the West Bank after the Six-Day War (1967), and the feeling that Israel oppresses Palestinians. We address these perceptions in our book and explain why we think that many of them are based on misconceptions.



*The New Christian Zionism:  
Fresh Perspectives on Israel and  
the Land*

Available September 2016

\$26, 304 pages, paperback

978-0-8308-5138-6

*"My hope is that readers will see that there is a serious theological argument to be made for Christian Zionism that is not dispensationalist but responsible, both exegetically and theologically."*

**If it is true, as you and the contributors argue, that the New Testament sees a future for both the people and the land of Israel (that is, that the New Testament is Zionist), why has this been missed by so many Christians, academics and laypeople alike for so many years?**

**McDermott:** We see what we have been taught to see. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* showed that scientists were often so indoctrinated in existing paradigms that they were unable to see what was staring them in the face. So too for the Zionism in the New Testament. We have not seen it because we have been taught not to see it.

Whenever Israel or Jerusalem are mentioned, especially their future, our supersessionist training kicks in. So it fails to register that Paul uses the present tense when he says in Romans 11:28 that Jews who were rejecting Jesus as Messiah *are* beloved for the sake of their forefathers, or that Revelation proclaims that the new Jerusalem will have the names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed on its gates (Rev 21:12). This mention of Israel in the *future* does not fit our preconception that Israel as a distinct entity will no longer exist. So we reinterpret it as a non-Jewish feature of the church.

**Do the contributors make an argument that present-day Israel, a secular state, has significance for theological Zionism? And if so, does the book discuss how one can support Christian Zionism without being a partisan for the present state of Israel?**

**McDermott:** The contributors are agreed that the present regathering of Jews in their ancient homeland is theologically significant. And so is their (necessary) organization as a people under a self-chosen government.

But we also point out that the assembly of the dry bones into a fully functioning body in Ezekiel's vision (chap. 37) proceeds in stages. So the road to the eschaton is a gradual one. One need not support every aspect of each stage along the way to believe that the road is leading toward a divinely-ordained goal.

There is always tension between promise and fulfillment of any prophecy, and we need to live with that tension. We already live with that tension in the church, believing it is the body of Christ despite its many spots and wrinkles and blemishes (Eph 5:27). So if we grieve the imperfections we see in present Israel, let us remember that we grieve much imperfection in the church.

The final coming, which we await, is not a perfect Israeli people or state but that of the Son of Man.