Rapture and Realignment:
The New Christian Right and American Conservative Views of Israel

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Ian E. Van Dyke
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The New Christian Right and American Conservative Views of Israel

by
IAN E. VAN DYKE

has been approved for
the Department of History
and the College of Arts and Sciences by

Kevin Mattson
Connor Study Professor of Contemporary History

Robert Frank
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
VAN DYKE, IAN E., M.A., August 2016, History

Rapture and Realignment: The New Christian Right and American Conservative Views of Israel

Director of Thesis: Kevin Mattson

This thesis examines the ways evangelical Protestant views of Israel shaped perceptions of the Middle East among the wider American conservative movement during the second half of the twentieth century, as well as the centuries-old ideas underlying their idiosyncratic worldview. Motivated by God’s promise to Abraham to “bless those” who showed favor to his progeny and fascinated by Israel’s role in End Times prophecy, politically conservative evangelical Christians worked tirelessly to promote the cause of the Jewish State to their American audience. As they gained influence within the American conservative movement, the rhetoric of New Christian Right activists like Jerry Falwell, Tim LaHaye, and Pat Robertson helped redefine Israel in the conservative imagination. In crafting an apocalyptic worldview that translated Israel’s spiritual significance into secular politics, the New Christian Right transformed American conservatism in ways still visible today.
DEDICATION

In memory of Nancy Collier, who taught me how to write with a purpose.
Education is a process of accruing debts in more ways than one. In that spirit, I must begin by thanking the Ohio University History Department and the Contemporary History Institute, whose generous funding made it possible for me to perform research for this thesis. Speaking of research, I also wish to thank archivist Abigail Sattler, whose assistance at Liberty University’s Jerry Falwell Library was invaluable.

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Many others have made my time at Ohio University a wonderful experience, especially my fellow graduate students, whose friendship, humor, and kindness have made the last two years a joy, rather than a chore. Last but certainly not least, I must thank my family, without whose love and support none of this would have been possible; and Andrea, who joined me one rainy day to wander around Athens and soon became my best friend. I love you, and I look forward to our many adventures yet to come.
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INTRODUCTION:

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS?

“I should like to begin,” said William F. Buckley as he leaned back in his chair on the set of *Firing Line* in 1981, “by asking Mr. Falwell to spend a few minutes on the question, whether his teachings are in any way animated by, or conducive of anti-Semitism, there being—I am aware—a difference of opinion on the subject among Jewish leaders.”¹ Buckley, the premier intellectual personality of American conservatism, was interviewing the Baptist minister and right-wing activist Jerry Falwell for his current-affairs television show. Decades before, Buckley had been instrumental in purging anti-Semitic “kooks” from “respectable” conservative circles, and he seemed to take offense at a statement attributed to Falwell that God did not hear the prayers of Jews.² Despite Falwell’s insistence that he never made such a statement, Buckley persisted, “well, the records show, a) that you said it and, b) that you said you were sorry you said it.”³

Falwell responded that his recently chartered political action group, the Moral Majority, was a friend to Jews because support for the State of Israel was one of its basic tenets. “We are committed to the pro-Israel position. One cannot belong to Moral Majority without being committed to the State of Israel and the Jewish people in America and everywhere.” Falwell then added what might, at first, have seemed a curious statement: “Various magazines write us up as blindly pro-Jewish, pro-Israel, et cetera, et

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¹ William F. Buckley, Jr., interviewing Jerry Falwell, “Are We Menaced by Moral Majority?” *Firing Line* (Columbia, SC: Southern Educational Communications Television, Jan. 21, 1981), DVD.
³ Buckley interviewing Falwell, *Firing Line*. In this case, the record actually did not show Falwell hadFalwell had ever said that God did not hear the prayers of Jews. This assertion was actually made by Bailey E. Smith, the president of the Southern Baptist Convention—the largest evangelical denomination in the U.S. The uproar over Smith’s controversial statements will be discussed in greater detail later in this thesis.
cetera, promoting the cause of Zionism…and we take more fire from the far right on that issue than anything else.”

Viewed from the perspective of 2016 America, Falwell’s claim of conservative displeasure with his unflinchingly pro-Israel views might seem odd. The politicians and commentators of the contemporary American right have almost unanimously appointed themselves the guardians of America’s “special relationship” with Israel, an attitude further entrenched by bitter partisan disagreement over President Barack Obama’s nuclear accord with Iran. As Tevi Troy notes in *Commentary,* “when it comes to a Republican Party riven by squabbles, the Jewish state has become a unifying glue. Support for Israel is all but unanimous.”

Similarly, Falwell’s claim to be a friend of the Jewish people probably appears contradictory; the minister’s *Firing Line* paean hardly seemed to square with his record of statements that could most charitably be called highly insensitive, if not downright anti-Semitic. Yet in the 1980s, to the millions of conservative evangelical Christians throughout the United States who comprised a vital part of the emerging Republican political coalition, Falwell’s views about Jews, Israel, and the Israeli–American relationship would have been neither contradictory nor surprising. The idiosyncratic product of centuries of Protestant thought, combined with the charged cultural politics of the Cold War era, Falwell was the leading exponent of a muscular Christian Zionism that saw Israel not just as an indispensible American ally, but as an essential component of God’s plan for humanity.

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4 Ibid.
American evangelicals often displayed seemingly incongruous attitudes toward Jews and Israel reminiscent of Falwell’s. Especially after 1967, evangelicals became vocal in their rhetorical defense of the Jewish state even as they continued to indulge in some of the crude anti-Semitism that too often characterized evangelicalism, and indeed much of American Christianity, prior to the Holocaust. To be sure, evangelicals embraced Israel for a number of reasons, not least of which was God’s promise to Abram, “I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Yet evangelicals’ fascination with Israel also arose in a specific geopolitical context, which provided both a powerful rationale for supporting that country and a language to make pro-Israel sentiments appealing to non-evangelical conservatives.

Like American evangelicals, the broader American conservative establishment gradually came to value a close U.S. relationship with Israel for a number of reasons—Israel’s repeated successes on the battlefield against Soviet-backed Arab armies, and the ascent of more assertive neoconservative ideology important among them. Yet conservative politicians and opinion leaders seemed to become much more enthusiastic about Israel—and more vocal in their support of that country—at precisely the same historical moment as high-profile evangelical Christians began to emerge as a recognizable (and, perhaps more importantly, self-conscious) political force within the...

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7 Any standalone scriptural quotations, such as this one, come from the Authorized (King James) Version. Biblical references that appear as part of a larger quotation may vary. In Gen. 17:5–6, God commands that the 90-year-old Abram will henceforth be called Abraham (“father of many”), promising “I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee.” Abraham’s sons Isaac and Ishmael are regarded, respectively, as the ancestors of the Israelites and the “Ishmaelites,” or Arabs.
Republican Party. It therefore seems at least plausible that the pro-Israel views espoused by religious leaders like Falwell also influenced the attitudes of lawmakers and foreign policy professionals, just as they helped redefine the GOP’s rhetorical stances on social issues like abortion, feminism, school prayer, and gay rights. Moreover, even a cursory examination of the US–Israel alliance during the Reagan era and beyond would suggest that it was on *this* foreign policy issue, not the stuff of the domestic culture wars, that conservative evangelicals might have enjoyed something of an enduring legacy of partisan political success.⁸

Such an assertion, however, is far beyond the scope of this thesis. What follows is neither a study of Republican policymakers (many of whose papers are in any case still inaccessible to researchers), nor a sociological examination of Christian Zionist beliefs among the rank-and-file conservative voters who were less likely to follow the intricacies of international relations or read the policy journals so influential among the nation’s governing class. Rather, this thesis is an intellectual history—the story of a worldview and its tumultuous coming of age. Shaped by learned theologians as well as laypeople, the discourse of evangelical Protestant Zionism, combined with evangelicals’ ever-more-intense involvement in conservative politics, proved both exceedingly durable and surprisingly pervasive. Manifest in both subtle and explicit terms, this distinctive pro-Israel ideology helped make American support of a tiny, distant country an issue of passionate concern for the conservative grassroots, irrespective of both the worldly geostrategic considerations of policy professionals and the idealistic humanitarianism that

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led many to laud the creation of a Jewish homeland in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust. It also allowed pro-Israel evangelicals to paper over some of the aspects of labor Zionism and Israeli society—such as the kibbutzim, collective farming communities where private property was essentially non-existent and even child rearing was undertaken communally—that might have troubled traditional-minded American anti-communists.

In the following pages, I hope to illustrate how a set of ideas, shaped by an eccentric cast of thinkers, writers, preachers, and activists came to inform millions of conservative, politically engaged evangelical Christians. This Christian Zionist ideology provided a totalizing intellectual framework, reshaping the complicated realities of the Middle East and guiding believers from church pew to voting booth, making Israel a central concern for Americans who might never have visited the Holy Land, or who indeed might not have even been able to locate the area on a map.

Jerry Falwell is central to this story, representing perhaps the culmination of evangelical Christian Zionists’ hopes for public influence and visibility. Falwell was in many ways a larger-than-life figure, jetting from the U.S. to the Holy Land and back, appearing frequently on television, and producing dozens of books and hundreds of shorter pamphlets and articles read by audiences around the world. Yet Falwell is far from the only important character. In order to more fully understand American Christian Zionism and its diffusion into the wider conservative movement, it is necessary to examine other thinkers, writers, and political leaders who came before and after Falwell—including William E. Blackstone, Billy Graham, John F. Walvoord, Hal
Lindsey, Frederick Schwarz, Tim LaHaye, and Sen. Jesse Helms—spread over nearly a century and a half.

Beyond outlining the American Christian Zionist discourse and introducing its makers, I also hope to provide some commentary on the effects of a century of effort by evangelicals in the U.S. to advance their vision for the future of the Jewish people and what they perceived to be the wellbeing of their homeland. The aim of this thesis is not to chastise conservative evangelicals for not embracing the same preferences and predilections as twenty-first century liberals; the figures of the New Christian Right, like any other historical subjects, deserve to be understood on their own terms. Yet it remains undeniable that evangelicals’ understanding of Israel was both historically important and continues to shape our own contemporary discourse, for better and for worse. At base, American evangelicals were unabashed supporters of Israel and staunch advocates of a close U.S.–Israeli alliance. They undoubtedly succeeded both in making Israel more familiar to Americans and in winning friends for the Jewish state in a world more often hostile than not. Without entertaining the kind of semi-conspiratorial thinking that lumps Christian Zionists into an all-powerful, Jewish-controlled “Israel lobby” that controls America’s Middle East policy even to the detriment of its own strategic interests, however, it remains clear that evangelicals’ uncompromising pro-Israel stance, rooted in a literalist biblical hermeneutic, could also have decidedly negative ramifications.

One of the most evident of these problems is a simple lack of self-reflection on the part of conservative evangelical opinion leaders. Discussing popular evangelical

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treatments of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, including John F. Walvoord’s best-selling *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis*, historian of religion Mark Noll laments, “The books came to various conclusions, but they all shared the disconcerting conviction that the best way of providing moral judgment about what was happening in the Middle East was not to study carefully what was going on in the Middle East.”

Indeed, conservative evangelical thinking about Israel and the Jews almost invariably demonstrated the paradoxes and limitations of their particular worldview. Even after the horrors of the Holocaust in Europe had become readily apparent, for example, evangelical opinion leaders occasionally indulged in blatant anti-Semitism. During one sermon in 1984, for example, Pentecostal televangelist Jimmy Swaggert displayed pictures of prisoners in Auschwitz as an illustration of the fate that awaited anyone—including Jews—who rejected the teachings of Jesus Christ. That Swaggert was an outspoken defender of Israel and praised the Jews for their role in bringing about the impending Kingdom of God apparently struck him as neither ironic nor objectionable. 

Conservative evangelicals thus remained highly ambivalent about Jews, and at the same time displayed how their dispensationalist theology instrumentalized Jewish Israelis. Though they would certainly deny it, Swaggert and others remained so fixated on the prophetic and apocalyptic elements of their beliefs that they essentially disregarded Jews as autonomous human beings of equal intrinsic value, viewing them not as ends in themselves but merely as a means to an end, or, more accurately, the End of Days.

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If Jews ranked somewhat lower than Christians in evangelicals’ mental hierarchy of the Middle East, however, Arabs (or Muslims; the terms were essentially interchangeable in New Christian Right parlance) in general and Palestinians in particular fared even worse.\textsuperscript{12} Conservative evangelicals routinely demonized Arabs not only as culturally inferior but as intrinsically evil, uncritically subscribing to a pernicious “Orientalism” of the kind described by Edward Said in his eponymous 1978 book.\textsuperscript{13} Even the normally easygoing “Jesus people” of Southern California reserved a special vitriol for the Arabs. In a 1973 issue of \textit{Maranatha} magazine, for example, an unnamed author put it succinctly when discussing the ramifications of the Yom Kippur War:\textsuperscript{14} “It might at times appear as though we are pro-Israel and anti-Arab, but such is not the fact. If we are anything, we are pro-Jesus and anti-devil.”\textsuperscript{15} Although the Orientalist framework was far from unique to American evangelicals,\textsuperscript{16} it reinforced their totalizing Christian Zionism to the point of obliterating the Palestinians entirely from their imagined landscape of the Holy Land.\textsuperscript{17} American evangelicals’ biblical hermeneutic de-legitimized any Palestinian

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] I will use the Israeli term, “Yom Kippur War,” rather than the Arabic “October War” or the more ponderous “Arab–Israeli War of 1973” for the October 1973 conflict between Egypt, Syria, and Israel. This is mainly a matter of familiarity; most American sources, it seems, use the Israeli name for the war. Similarly, I will refer to the “Six-Day War,” rather than “June War” or “Arab–Israeli War of 1967.”
\item[16] Lawrence Davidson, \textit{America’s Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood} (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 213.
\end{footnotes}
claim, not only to the land that fell within the borders of the State of Israel proper, but even to the Palestinian-majority areas of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem controlled by the Israeli military since 1967.

Of course, not all American evangelicals embraced a rigidly pro-Israel, anti-Palestinian line. After leaving the Oval Office, for example, President Jimmy Carter (himself a devout Baptist deacon) became increasingly vocal in his criticism of Israel’s policies in the Occupied Territories. In 2006, Carter published *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, in which he identified “some Israelis” who “believe they have the right to confiscate and colonize Palestinian land and try to justify the sustained subjugation and persecution of increasingly hopeless and aggravated Palestinians” as one of the primary obstacles to peace in the Middle East. Yet Carter represents a distinct exception among America’s approximately 94 million evangelical Christians, who tend to harbor decidedly more conservative political views than the Georgia Democrat and almost invariably describe themselves as more sympathetic toward Israelis than Palestinians.

Conservative evangelicals’ tendency to privilege the Israeli perspective over the Palestinian hardly made them exceptional. However, their prophetic worldview meant they did not view the Israeli–Palestinian peace process as a complicated give-and-take between two groups with legitimate claims to a contested land. Rather, Falwell and the New Christian Right conceptualized “peace” as the triumph of absolute good over absolute evil. 

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irredeemable evil. They cast the conflict as a zero-sum contest between God’s chosen people and a fanatical foe bent on their total annihilation—a war framed in existential terms that mirrored America’s own apocalyptic showdown with Soviet communism. Viewed in such extreme terms, issues like border disputes or settlement construction must have seemed like trifling distractions. Although some came to welcome Israel’s peace treaties with neighboring Arab states, American evangelicals did not support negotiations with the Palestinians that might legitimize their right to live in the land that made up the biblical Kingdom of Israel 3,000 years ago.

Of course, not everyone was troubled by these aspects of American evangelicals’ thinking about the Middle East. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin famously cultivated relationships with Jerry Falwell and other conservative Christians because, as he succinctly put it after one meeting with the Virginia pastor, “Israel has very strong enemies and Israel needs friends.”20 To the Israeli leader, the fine points of conservative evangelicals’ theological and eschatological ideas were unimportant; these Americans offered not just rhetorical support of Israel, but also the potential to influence policymakers. In this way, Begin was not so different from Falwell himself, who hoped to see his eclectic beliefs become more important in guiding American legislation and executive action, both at home and abroad.

Though the extent of Falwell and other conservative evangelicals’ influence on America’s Israel policy is debatable, one fact remains undeniable: Bible-believing evangelicals like him have left an indelible mark on both the style and substance of American conservative thought about the Jewish state. In the space of about three

decades, conservative Christians were instrumental in transforming what was once a controversial and somewhat unusual position among the American right into a simplistic gospel of rhetorical support, almost completely irrespective of Israel’s actions on the ground or at the conference table. The apparent crudeness of the Christian Zionist worldview, however, belied its strength. The pro-Israel beliefs of the New Christian Right did not exist on the same plane of reality as American grand strategy in the Middle East. The “realist” considerations of government policymakers did not influence the conservative evangelical worldview, nor did idealistic concerns about human rights or national self-determination, for either Israelis or Palestinians. The pro-Israel conservatism that emerged from American Christian Zionism was neither a cold-blooded policy calculation nor a nefarious conspiracy. It was (and remains) a potent mixture of theology and cultural politics—not a strategy trying to account for the vexing and tragic complexities of the Middle East, but a myopic ideology that longed for a world (to paraphrase religious historian Timothy Weber) in which believers did not expect they would actually have to live.21

CHAPTER 1: TOWARD A “NEW CHRISTIAN RIGHT”

Before delving into the story of American Christian Zionism, it is necessary to situate this idiosyncratic set of beliefs within the wider evangelical movement that spawned it, as well as examine the conservative movement that eventually embraced it. “Evangelicalism” is simultaneously the most important historical movement to understand and the most difficult to characterize. I use a somewhat expansive definition of evangelicalism that is as much attitudinal as doctrinal or theological, and it is this evangelical attitude or mindset that naturally lent itself to the burgeoning conservative movement in the U.S. over the last half-century. During this period, evangelicals and conservatives alike largely defined themselves in opposition to mainstream American liberalism—whether the theological “liberalism” of mainline Protestant churches and seminaries that threatened Biblical orthodoxy, or the liberal “collectivism” of the New Deal that threatened unregulated free markets and individual liberty. Indeed, both groups shared something of a “rebel style” that was more radical than conservative in the traditional sense.22 Jerry Falwell, for example, explained his “fundamentalism” as “liberalism in reverse,”23 and often remarked that a fundamentalist was just “an evangelical who is angry about something.”24 Examining why exactly Falwell was angry, and why his wisecrack would have reverberated with his followers, provides a useful glimpse into his worldview and the political landscape he sought to transform.

The Political Faith of American Evangelicalism

As scholars of American religion can attest, the term *evangelicalism* is more slippery than it might first appear, and encompasses an incredible variety of religious experience. Churches falling under the “evangelical” label range from the huge Southern Baptist Convention (the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S.) to much smaller groups like the Church of the Nazarene, not to mention thousands of independent community and “mega-churches” unaffiliated with any particular denomination. Evangelicalism embraces both Pentecostal churches like the Assemblies of God and pacifist Anabaptist sects like the Mennonites. It also includes historically black denominations like the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, as well as the Presbyterian Church in the United States, which split from mainline American Presbyterianism in 1861 over both doctrinal disputes and the issue of slavery, and was originally known as the “Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America.”

With its bewildering array of denominational (and non-denominational) affiliations, worship styles, doctrines, creeds, and statements of faith, it is probably more useful to outline general characteristics of American evangelicalism than to precisely define it. Broadly speaking, evangelicals are Protestants of the Reformed or Wesleyan traditions (that is, traditions rooted in Scottish Presbyterianism or the English Baptist or Methodist movements) who hold the individual believer’s conversion experience—being “born again”—as central to their faith. In addition, they generally adhere to a literalist interpretation of the Bible, seeing it as the inspired and infallible word of God rather than

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a historical product of imperfect human authors. Such emphasis on the authority of the inerrant Bible leads evangelicals to downplay or dismiss altogether various doctrinal elements, such as rigid church hierarchies or strict liturgical codes, which provide theological cohesion to mainline Protestant denominations as well as the Catholic Church. As a result, in the words of historian Randall Ballmer, evangelical churches can be “susceptible to the cult of personality” of individual faith leaders.26

In addition to its distinct theological characteristics, evangelicalism is an activist faith. Believers are not only commanded to “evangelize” or “share the good news;” they are called to actively express their faith outside the confines of their churches. Although they believe that Christ will one day return to earth to initiate the Kingdom of God, evangelicals take seriously Jesus’ parable of the ten pounds, in which a wise king entrusted his servants with his fortune and instructed them to “Occupy til I come” (Luke 19:13). Although faith in Christ’s imminent return creates a degree of intellectual tension with the directive to live as though the millennium would not arrive for a thousand more years—what Timothy Weber calls the “now/not yet” hermeneutic—most evangelicals feel called to religious action in all aspects of their lives.27 Combined with the prevalence within evangelical churches of many high-profile pastors who emphasize social activism, then, it should come as no surprise that many evangelicals are particularly plugged-in to the world of politics.

Indeed, the history of evangelical social and political engagement is a rich one. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, these Christians embarked on a numerous campaigns to spread the Gospel and advocate for liberal social reforms. Figures like John Wesley, William Wilberforce, Charles Finney, and Lyman Beecher took up the banner of faith to promote the abolition of slavery and temperance. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, “the Great Commoner” William Jennings Bryan not only railed against the teaching of evolution and the gold standard, but also advocated passionately for women’s suffrage and the direct election of Senators. As the twentieth century loomed, however, the nature of evangelical political activism began to change. Feeling threatened by the influx of Catholic and Jewish immigrants, as well as new intellectual and social trends, evangelicals gradually embraced a more reactionary and parochial worldview, and adopted a new identity to convey their profound disillusionment with modernity.

Of course, twentieth-century evangelical religion did not automatically translate into a conservative politics—Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners magazine, is probably the best-known figure of the contemporary “evangelical left” in the U.S. Nevertheless, working- and middle-class white American evangelicals embraced conservatism en masse in a century defined by the World Wars, the Cold War, the New Deal, and the Great Society. Conventional wisdom holds that evangelicals’ rightward tilt can be explained by the rise of the “culture wars” and hot-button social issues like feminism,

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abortion, and gay rights.\textsuperscript{30} Other scholars point to economic considerations, noting that Bible-believing Christians espoused a “Christian libertarianism,” backed by powerful business interests, who opposed the “collectivist” agenda of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his successors.\textsuperscript{31} Still others point to the existential crisis of the early Cold War, an age when only divine grace seemed able to make sense of a world on the brink of atomic Armageddon.\textsuperscript{32}

While both cultural and economic considerations were no doubt important to evangelicals, these analyses miss a more foundational feature of American evangelicalism: a deep skepticism of authority in virtually any human form—be it academic, ecclesiastical, or political. Evangelicals are guided by Martin Luther’s principle of \textit{sola scriptura}—“by the Scriptures alone”—meaning that the Bible, freely and equally accessible to any reader, represents the only source of spiritual guidance necessary to live life in accordance to God’s wishes. Church tradition, as well as human reason, are to varying degrees subordinated to a literalist Biblical hermeneutic that provides an all-encompassing worldview.\textsuperscript{33}

Just as evangelicals deny the special status of priests, bishops, and popes, so they also rejected the elite political and intellectual classes at the pinnacle modern, twentieth-century society. Evangelical religion is populist, individualistic, and dubious of authority. Derided as crude anti-intellectualism by critics from H. L. Mencken to Richard

\textsuperscript{30} See, for example, Clyde Wilcox and Carin Robinson, \textit{Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics}, 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Philadelphia: Westview, 2011).
Hofstadter, the evangelical “mindset” can more charitably be described as radically egalitarian—a natural complement to the modern American right’s reaction against corporatism, academic specialization, and government bureaucracy.

This natural egalitarianism precipitated a crisis of ideas that would have important and far-reaching ramifications for evangelical life. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, born-again, “Bible-believing” evangelical Christians tended to label themselves “fundamentalists,” after an influential set of essays titled, The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth. Published between 1910 and 1915, the essays attacked evolution, socialism, and “Romanism,” as well as reaffirming the centrality of apocalypticism and belief in Christ’s literal future return. In addition, The Fundamentals argued against “higher criticism,” a movement among biblical scholars who sought to understand the historical context and authorship of the Scriptures—a practice held by traditionalists as heretical because it cast doubt on the authorship of certain biblical books and even their divine inspiration.³⁴

The questions raised by higher criticism were far from academic, and continued to trouble even later generations of evangelicals. As Billy Graham recounted in his memoir, “the particular intellectual problem…was the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. Seeming contradictions and problems with interpretation defied intellectual solutions, or so I thought. Could the Bible be trusted completely?” Graham melodramatically continued, “if I could not trust the Bible, I could not go on… I would have to leave pulpit

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³⁴ Noll, A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada, 381–86.
evangelism. I was only thirty years of age. It was not too late to become a dairy farmer.”

More cerebral evangelicals than Graham also shared his apprehension that human reason might threaten orthodox belief. In his influential 1946 book *Remaking the Modern Mind*, theologian Carl F. H. Henry lamented that evangelicals had ceded their place at the center of American Protestant thought to upstart liberals whose doctrines were “more identifiable with humanism than with traditional Christianity.” Henry linked the rise of liberal theology to secular belief in human perfectibility and inevitable progress, which he held responsible for the “decay” of Western society—prefiguring the conservative intellectual Russell Kirk’s assault on modernism in his 1953 tome *The Conservative Mind*. By the mid-twentieth century, then, evangelicalism had jettisoned its historic commitment to social reform for fundamentalism’s deep skepticism of “progress”—an attitude shared both by ordinary churchgoers and the theologians and bible professors of evangelical seminaries.

Traditionally, scholars have argued that the anti-modernist turn within the evangelical movement, marked by the embrace of the “fundamentalist” label, relegated these Christians to the political wilderness, more or less until the rise of high-profile evangelists like Graham in the late 1940s. However, more recent scholarship is beginning to challenge this narrative. As Matthew Sutton and Darren Dochuk have pointed out, fundamentalists remained active in American political life throughout the early twentieth

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century. Opposition to Darwinism, immigration, and Catholicism did not marginalize fundamentalism; it allowed the “plain-folk religion” to prosper, particularly among the hardscrabble farmers of Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. The confluence of traditional fundamentalist concerns with economic hardship and anti-statism in the 1930s created a more rigidly conservative political identity, one that fused evangelical traditionalism with hostility to the New Deal and racial integration.  

Evangelical Christianity’s close relationship with politics points to another important fact, one often missed by scholars of religion: modern American evangelicalism is not just politically active; it was, in part, the creation of Christian activists who viewed politics as a way of creating unity out of religious discord. Beginning in the 1940s, a powerful group of self-identified “fundamentalist” clergymen and thinkers—including Carl F. H. Henry, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Charles Fuller, Bob Jones, Harold Ockenga, and L. Nelson Bell (Billy Graham’s mentor and father-in-law)—launched an effort to reassert their claim to the historic “evangelical” label. In 1942, these leaders founded the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), in no small part to distance themselves and their churches from the negative associations of fundamentalism with Prohibition and the Scopes “Monkey Trial” of 1925. At the same time, the new NAE reached out to Pentecostals, whom many fundamentalists had “once regarded as tongues-speaking, chandelier-swinging, faith-healing radicals” to join their movement. Politics would serve to unite a more diverse theological tent; the “neo-evangelicals” would be bound together by patriotism, nationalism, and political conservatism, rather than divided

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by internecine squabbles over theology. While the NAE worked to reinforce political uniformity, it also cultivated a more respectable image, trying to distance evangelicalism from the most embarrassing episodes of racism, anti-Catholicism, and anti-intellectualism in its past.\(^{40}\)

Despite the “new” evangelicals’ attempts to play down their ancestors’ rhetorical excesses, however, their firm conservative beliefs remained largely unaltered. Using the “fundamentalist” terminology still prevalent (if declining) at the time, Richard Hofstadter noted acidly in 1962:

> The fundamentalist mind…is essentially Manichean; it looks upon the world as an arena for conflict between absolute good and absolute evil, and accordingly it scorns compromise (who would compromise with Satan?) and can tolerate no ambiguities. It cannot find serious importance in what it believes to be trifling degrees of difference: liberals support measures that are for all practical purposes socialistic, and socialism is nothing more than a variant of Communism, which, as everyone knows, is atheism.\(^{41}\)

Hofstadter might have been excessively harsh in his assessment of American fundamentalism, but he was not totally incorrect; the intellectual “crisis of authority” within the evangelical/fundamentalist movement meant that leaders who hoped to unify believers in the face of new cultural and political threats had to rely as much on secular (and especially political) ideas as on religious dogmas. As Molly Worthen notes, evangelical thinkers like Ockenga relied in large part on the foil of socialism (at home and abroad) to develop a specifically Christian *Weltanschauung* that wedded their

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 293–95.

longstanding apocalyptic urgency with the new, patriotic battle against totalitarianism. As the twentieth century progressed, the right-wing ideology holding together the increasingly diverse mainstream of evangelicalism would only become harder and more uncompromising once the religious movement began to realize its latent political potential.

Conservative Views of Israel Prior to the New Christian Right

Twentieth-century American conservatism was, in large part, a reaction against the expanding liberal state, embodied most obviously by FDR and “Vital Center” Democrats but also by moderate Republicans like President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who paid lip service to conservative principles but did little to check the growth of the federal government. In addition, both “movement” conservatives and evangelical Christians in the postwar period shared a libertarian economic philosophy and an affinity for “traditional values”—often defined by the 1950s under the umbrella term “Judeo-Christian.” Finally, both avowed an uncompromising anticommunism, combined with a sense that elected officials were not doing enough to curb the spread of the “red menace” abroad or at home.

Despite these broad similarities, evangelicals and movement conservatives differed significantly over one foreign policy issue making headlines throughout the late 1940s and 1950s—the creation of the State of Israel and the ensuing conflict between the

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42 Worthen, *Apostles of Reason*, 24–28. *Weltanschauung*, which can most accurately be translated as “world-and-life-view,” was actually a concept introduced to the English-speaking world largely through its frequent use by the Nazis.

new Jewish state and its Arab neighbors. While evangelicals largely felt that God’s covenant with the Jews and subsequent biblical prophecies made support of the fledgling Israel all but imperative, non-evangelical conservatives much more wary of the new state in Palestine and the labor Zionist ideology that helped create it. Indeed, although Republican policymakers, like almost all Americans, were horrified once the full scale of Hitler’s Final Solution became known, they generally displayed a cool ambivalence to Zionism in the months and years leading up to Israel’s declaration of independence in May 1948. Steeped in wary anti-interventionism and vehemently opposed to foreign aid, Republicans in Congress largely opposed the U.S. “taking sides” in the civil war erupting between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. One notable—and quite surprising—exception was “Mr. Republican” himself, Sen. Robert A. Taft of Ohio. Famed as an ardent isolationist, a vocal opponent of U.S. involvement in World War II and FDR’s provision of military aid to Britain and France, Taft nevertheless co-sponsored a Congressional resolution in 1944 to establish a Jewish state in Palestine in a move his biographer James T. Patterson called “most uncharacteristic of his opposition to American meddling abroad.” Moreover, even as he railed against the Marshall Plan several years later, Taft proposed a $150 million aid package for the new State of Israel.

Brian Kennedy asserts that, though Taft might have been personally moved by the immense suffering of Jews during the Holocaust, he was primarily motivated to support

the creation of Israel by much less high-minded concerns. Vehemently opposed to large-scale immigration (particularly if the persons arriving on American shores were not of Anglo-Saxon stock), Taft viewed a Jewish state in Palestine as a neat solution to the problem of displaced persons in Europe, arguing that “some plan for colonization in Asia or Africa” would avoid “the complete flooding of this country by people who have not the background nor a knowledge of American institutions.”46 In addition, Taft developed a political partnership with Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, a staunch Zionist who campaigned vigorously for the Senator in Cleveland and helped him eke out a narrow victory in the 1944 election.47

Despite his legislative clout and national political presence, Taft remained an outlier among conservatives in his outspoken support for Zionism and Israel—which in any case appears to have been more of a product of political expediency than religious beliefs or a systematic ideology—until his unexpected death in 1953. To be sure, overt anti-Semitism drove some of the American right’s animosity toward the Jewish state. One wildly popular book, English professor John O. Beaty’s 1951 bestseller The Iron Curtain Over America, not only claimed that “the close ties between Communism and ‘Israel’ were…obvious to any penetrating reader of the New York Times,” but further purported that Jews had “infiltrated” American society and were working with the

47 Patterson, Mr. Republican, 282; Michael J. Cohen, Truman and Israel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 63–64.
Democratic Party to undermine “our Constitution and our heritage of Christian civilization” in preparation for a communist revolution.\textsuperscript{48}

Despite the popularity of bigoted screeds like \textit{The Iron Curtain Over America} (which went through eight printings its first year alone), the noisy “radical right” that included Beaty and other vehemently anti-Semitic “Christian nationalists” who wrote for such publications as the \textit{American Mercury} were increasingly marginalized within conservative circles.\textsuperscript{49} Nevertheless, most conservative Republicans, and especially members of the New Right movement beginning to coalesce around William F. Buckley and his magazine \textit{National Review} in the late 1950s, still regarded Israeli labor Zionism as an alien political system with troubling ties to the international socialist movement. Although it ultimately never succeeded in creating a classless society, Israeli “nationalist socialism” was nevertheless an essential component of the country’s identity.\textsuperscript{50} Indeed, many of the founding generation of Israelis regarded their Zionism as a secular “religious surrogate” that sought to provide “meaning and purpose to individual existence by mobilizing the individual in a collective effort to establish in the Land of Israel an ideal society based on social equality, social justice, and productive labor”—a set of beliefs.

\textsuperscript{48} John O. Beaty, \textit{The Iron Curtain Over America} (Dallas, TX: Wilkinson, 1951), 125, 80. Beaty always referred to “Israel” in quotation marks. The professor’s anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and shoddy research eventually caught the attention of the board of trustees of Southern Methodist University, where he taught a number of writing classes as well as Old English and the history of the English language. (Beaty had even served as the chairman of the English department from 1927 to 1940). In 1954, the board voted to censure Beaty for his unsubstantiated anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, but he remained on the faculty until 1957 (“John O. Beaty controversy papers,” \textit{Texas Archival Resources Online}, Southern Methodist University, \url{http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/smu/00034/smu-00034.html}).

\textsuperscript{49} See, for example, Leo Ribuffo’s treatment of Gerald B. Winrod and Gerald L. K. Smith in \textit{The Old Christian Right}, 80–177.

more similar to utopian socialism than the traditional Christian values and free-market
economy prized by American conservatives.51

In addition to their underlying philosophical and ideological suspicions, American
conservative commentators often cast Israel as an untrustworthy and intransigent actor in
the Middle East which, more often than not, would stake out positions beneficial to itself
even if they were inimical to U.S. interests. In 1956, for example, National Review editor
Willi Schlamm commented on the crisis developing over the Suez Canal. In July of that
year, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the canal, much to the ire of
its British and French proprietors. Schlamm viewed the Israelis as treacherous and
unprincipled, castigating them for “taking a leaf out of [Indian Prime Minister
Jawaharlal] Nehru’s textbook on neutralism” by entering into negotiations with the
Egyptian government instead of announcing support for America’s Western allies.
Schlamm excoriated “Mr. Ben Gurion’s Machiavellian policy,” claiming the Israelis
operated on a principle of, “whenever the West is in trouble, declare yourself entirely
indifferent to its fate; in fact, pick that moment for a rapprochement with the West’s
foe.”52 As it happened, Schlamm’s anger was premature. Several months later, in a move
that blindsided the Eisenhower administration, Israeli troops swept into the Sinai in a
coordinated attack with Britain and France, who bombarded the Egyptian city of Port
Said and attempted to seize back control of the Suez Canal. American condemnation of
the allies’ aggression put an end to British and French military operations against Egypt.

51 Charles S. Lieberman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political
1956, 13. It is difficult to miss the anti-Semitic undercurrent of Schlamm’s analysis, casting David Ben-
Gurion as the embodiment of anti-Jewish stereotypes of duplicity and opportunism.
and Israeli forces withdrew several months later.\textsuperscript{53} Nevertheless, \textit{National Review}’s coverage of the Suez Crisis indicated that at least some on the American right viewed Israel with equal suspicion to her Arab enemies.

The event that perhaps best crystallized the widespread suspicion of Israel among American conservatives, however, was the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in 1961. Israeli agents had captured Eichmann a year earlier in a Buenos Aires suburb and flown him to Israel without securing his legal extradition from Argentina, prompting protests that the Israelis had violated Argentinean sovereignty.\textsuperscript{54} In the U.S., the editors of \textit{National Review} echoed this sentiment, writing, “it is clear he [Eichmann] is a beast, not clear whether there are laws against his kind of beastliness, nor whether if there are, Israel is the proper prosecutor under those laws.”\textsuperscript{55} Whatever the merits of the case against Eichmann, the editors contended, Israel’s “show trial” would “almost certainly encourage the Hate Germany movement,” which “aims unerringly at the marrow of anti-Communism.” The editors equated the Eichmann trial with simultaneous events in the Soviet Union, where three Estonians had been sentenced to death for participating in the Nazi extermination of 125,000 people. If the Soviets were prosecuting Nazi collaborators, \textit{National Review}’s logic went, the alleged crimes must have been invented or at least exaggerated with the aim of promoting the communists’ agenda. “Perhaps, for all we know,” the editors joked, the “original crime was the theft of a Byelorussian bicycle by a

\textsuperscript{53} Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr., and Lawrence Davidson, \textit{A Concise History of the Middle East}, 9\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2010), 312–13.
\textsuperscript{55} “Let’s All Hate Germany, Comrade,” \textit{National Review} (March 25, 1961), 172.
Latvian kleptomaniac.” To the editors of *National Review*, the Israelis (already suspect for their well-known socialist leanings) were merely following the Soviets’ lead, stirring up old grievances that played into the hands of America’s Cold War enemies.

Offering some “thoughts on Eichmann” a month later, the nation’s premier conservative publication again questioned whether “the State of Israel can define a crime against the Jewish people, swoop down on anyone presumed to have committed such a crime, and try that person in an Israeli court,” insisting that such a trial was not only of dubious legality but that it would only result in “bitterness, distrust, the refusal to forgive, the advancement of Communist aims, the cultivation of pacifism.” Israel, then, was at least an unwitting ally of communist objectives on the international stage. Despite their lambasting the Jewish state for “whipping up interest in the Eichmann case” and “titillating the world’s appetite for horror stories,” it was the American editors of *National Review* who seemed most engrossed with the events unfolding in Jerusalem.

Indeed, as historian Peter Novick concludes, compared to other general-circulation magazines, *National Review* “outdid all others in the frequency and vehemence of its attacks on the trial.”

War erupted in the Middle East again in 1967, with Israel launching a pre-emptive attack on Egyptian air bases. Within six days, in a show of overwhelming military superiority, Israeli forces had re-occupied the Gaza Strip and the Sinai in addition to capturing the Golan Heights from Syria and the West Bank (including the Old City of

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56 Ibid.
East Jerusalem, which contained the Temple Mount\(^60\) from Jordan.\(^61\) *National Review* generally, though cautiously, sided with the victors, unsurprisingly preferring the Jewish state to her Soviet-armed (in the case of Egypt and Syria) Arab neighbors. Nevertheless, the editors advocated for a remarkably evenhanded policy that recognized the rights of Palestinians and called on Israel to cede territory captured from the Arabs. The conflict “must be settled,” the editors declared after the guns fell silent, “by Israel’s withdrawal to her 1956 boundaries.”\(^62\)

Perhaps even more astonishingly, *National Review*’s editors—who, to a man, shared a general contempt for international institutions, particularly the unwieldy United Nations\(^63\)—called for “making Jerusalem an open city under international jurisdiction.”\(^64\) Though many Americans hailed Israel’s capture of Jerusalem’s holy sites, Buckley’s conservative acolytes contended that “sovereignty by any single nation violates Jerusalem’s peculiar supra-secular essence, and fails to furnish to any of the three [that is, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim] communities or to mankind at large the necessary assurance for its safety and its accessibility.”\(^65\)

The writers and editors at *National Review* were not, however, the only conservative voices sounding off against Israel. *Human Events*, a Washington, D.C.

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60 I use the term “Temple Mount,” rather than the Arabic *al-Haram al-Sharif* (“The Noble Sanctuary”) for two reasons. First, “Temple Mount” is undoubtedly the more familiar term to most Americans; second, and more importantly, it is the term used by Christian dispensationalists to discuss the site of the two historic Jewish temples in Jerusalem, which today houses the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque as well as the Western (or “Wailing”) Wall—making the contentious location the holiest site in Judaism and the third-holiest site in Islam.


65 Ibid.
newsweekly whose sensationalistic coverage of political and international issues made National Review look almost liberal by comparison (the pamphlet, which later expanded into newspaper format, was a favorite of Ronald Reagan’s\textsuperscript{66}), nevertheless reflected the same ambivalence about the Jewish state as Buckley’s more refined journal. In 1955, anti-Zionist Human Events contributor Alfred Lilienthal praised the Eisenhower administration for “refusing to bow and scrape to Zionist demands” for recognition of Jerusalem as the capitol of Israel.\textsuperscript{67} A year later, libertarian guru Frank Chodorov was even harsher in his analysis of the “problem” for America posed by Zionism: “In dealing with Israel he [Secretary of State John Foster Dulles] is not dealing with a conventional nation, seeking to preserve its identity through self-sufficiency, but rather with a world movement that is a blend of fanatical racism and tribalism, imbued with a sense of destiny that knows no bounds, least of all economic necessity.” Despite the domestic implications of Israeli “propaganda,” Chodorov concluded, “the Arab-Israeli imbroglio is one we should keep out of.”\textsuperscript{68}

*Human Events’s* coverage of Israel’s victory in the Six-Day War of 1967 was mostly laudatory; the writers seemed especially to enjoy how the war had driven a wedge between American Jewish liberals (many of whom supported the war as a matter of Israeli self-defense) and the New Left. Ralph de Toledano commented with glee, “there is no joy in that particular Mudville which the liberal movement inhabits. The Israeli


victory has caught the self-appointed guardians of truth off-base.” Yet even as conservatives hailed Israel’s success on the battlefield, they still voiced concern for the plight of Arabs displaced by Israeli action. Responding to a “gripe from a Zionist” that he was insufficiently pro-Israel, Morrie Ryskind reiterated his position that “you cannot indefinitely have a million refugees living in tents on the outskirts of the land they were born in and existing on nine cents a day… To the victor these days go not just the spoils but the obligation of magnanimity.”

Even into the 1970s, *Human Events* remained equivocal on issues surrounding Israel and the Middle East. In 1974, regular contributor Jeffrey Hart argued that the Ford administration should “make the case to the Arabs that we alone possess the leverage with Israel that could ultimately produce a settlement involving the return of Arab land” in order to persuade OPEC to lift their oil embargo—essentially reversing the position of the Nixon administration in order to restore the supply of cheap energy. That same year, Eric Brodin lamented that the “overwhelmingly emotional aspects of the Arab-Zionist conflict” distracted from “the just cause of the displaced Palestinians.”

Although they shared movement conservatives’ free-market, anticommunist sensibilities as well as their commitment to a traditionalist, “Judeo-Christian” social identity, conservative evangelicals must have been disappointed with the non-evangelical right’s continued ambivalence toward Israel. As they worked to build a self-conscious

political movement of their own, evangelicals would work hard to make their pro-Israel views acceptable to a wider conservative audience. Couching their arguments in the well-worn rhetoric of anticommunism, evangelical personalities like Billy Graham and Fred Schwarz began the work of transforming the American conservative movement’s attitude toward the Jewish state.

**Crusaders for Christ: Billy Graham and Fred Schwarz**

While evangelical Christian Zionism was hardly a new phenomenon by the middle of the twentieth century, the existential conflict of the Cold War helped propel what was once a somewhat marginal theological tradition into the mainstream of American culture. As Americans awoke to the reality of a bipolar world, the “old-time religion” of evangelists like Billy Graham offered comfort and clarity in a time of fear and uncertainty. As Graham and other popular ministers preached to packed stadiums, however, they were paving the way for a political movement as well. One of the most successful figures of this movement was Fred Schwarz, who built on Graham’s political networks to launch an anticommunist political movement imbued with the spirit of evangelical activism. Beginning in the 1950s, charismatic faith met sharp-edged anticommunism in a model for Christian activists who would follow over the next several decades. Conservative evangelicalism was about to go mainstream.

William Franklin “Billy” Graham, Jr. was a North Carolina preacher with an anthropology degree from Wheaton College who by 1949 had attained celebrity status (with the help of friendly coverage in William Randolph Hearst’s newspapers) thanks to
his outdoor “crusades” in cities like Los Angeles.\(^\text{73}\) Despite his efforts later in life to portray himself as a serene, nonpartisan minister above the petty squabbles of worldly politics, Graham was nevertheless a character whose actions carried much political and cultural heft. Intensely interested in cultivating relationships with the politically powerful, Graham befriended a number of congressmen and senators before a well-publicized but ultimately disastrous meeting with President Harry S. Truman in July 1950. Truman had invited Graham to the Oval Office at the insistence of House majority leader John McCormack, but was infuriated when the evangelist shared details of their discussion with the press and even knelt down to re-enact his prayer with the president on the White House lawn for the benefit of photographers.\(^\text{74}\)

A few months after his embarrassment in Washington, Graham ventured to criticize Truman and the Democrats’ deficit spending on domestic programs and the Marshall Plan in Europe. During the 1952 election, the evangelist condemned the Truman administration as “cowardly” for not escalating the Korean War by attacking communist China and all but overtly endorsed the Republican candidate, retired General Dwight D. Eisenhower.\(^\text{75}\) These remarks were the beginning of Graham’s careful but unmistakable entry into the world of partisan politics—though he would not explicitly endorse the positions of one party or candidate (and despite remaining a nominal Democrat throughout his life), the evangelist nevertheless made it clear he favored the social, fiscal, and foreign policy positions of the emerging conservative right.\(^\text{76}\) Graham enjoyed a

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\(^\text{75}\) Ibid.

much friendlier relationship with Eisenhower than he had with Truman, even encouraging the former general to be baptized into the Presbyterian Church once he became president, and subsequently enjoyed access to the White House under both Democratic and Republican administrations.  

Graham’s high-profile friendships with presidents were far from his only political activities, however. At a 1953 crusade in Chattanooga, Tennessee, he “personally tore down the ropes separating the white from the black sections.” Graham’s desegregated Crusades could certainly serve as powerful moral symbols, but he was careful not to make strident public statements about racial equality. Although personally opposed to segregation, Graham walked a fine line on racial issues, espousing what Steven Miller calls a “politics of decency” that sought to split the difference between the rabid segregation of Jim Crow and the immediate integration demanded by Civil Rights protesters. Graham’s popularity, combined with his well-publicized preference for “law and order” over rapid change (as well as his eventual support for the Vietnam War)  

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77 The nexus of religiosity and public affairs in the 1950s, exemplified by Graham’s friendship with Eisenhower, elicited much comment. In his widely discussed Protestant–Catholic–Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), sociologist Will Herberg declared, “Religion has not disappeared; it is probably more pervasive today, and in many ways more influential, than it has been for generations. The only question is: What kind of religion is it? …What Americans believe in when they are religious is, as we have already had occasion to see, religion itself. Of course, religious Americans speak of God and Christ, but what they seem to regard as really redemptive is primarily religion, the ‘positive’ attitude of believing. It is this faith in faith, this religion that makes religion its own object, that is the outstanding characteristic of contemporary American religion” (265).

Yet Graham’s emotional appeals to national salvation through individual repentance hardly resembled the amorphous, Judeo-Christian “civil religion” identified by Herberg and espoused by Eisenhower and other conservatives in the 1950s. Evangelicals like Graham promoted a very specific, conservative Protestant faith, and though they might have viewed Jews as God’s special, chosen people, they did not view Jews (or Catholics) as participants in equally valid religious traditions. Graham’s highly visible public persona and his many relationships with political powerbrokers belied the fact that he still adhered to a very rigid and very specific faith. While he welcomed the spotlight, Graham’s was a truly an evangelical Protestant “old-time religion,” not the milquetoast civic faith of Eisenhower or other elected leaders.  

78 Graham, Just As I Am, 426.
prefigured the stunning success of Republican politicians like Richard Nixon in the previously “solid” Democratic South.80

While treading lightly on civil rights, Graham reserved his greatest rhetorical ire for communism, advanced either by “armed aggression” abroad or by “a fifth column inside society.” “We are dealing with a treacherous and vicious enemy who has the supernatural forces of evil behind him,” Graham wrote, sounding his unequivocal opposition to the atheist philosophy of Marx and Lenin.81 The evangelist frequently equated communism with Satan, telling an audience in Berlin that communism was “a well-oiled machine, supernaturally empowered by the devil himself.”82 Beyond his frequent anticommunist preaching and writing, Graham opened political doors to other evangelical anticommunists, most notably the Australian surgeon-turned-activist Dr. Fred Schwarz.83

By the late 1950s, Graham had established himself as the foremost popular voice of American evangelicalism, and his comments on cultural and political affairs lent pious authority to a conservative agenda of free markets, traditional social values, and military might. A charismatic orator who made savvy use of print, radio, and eventually television to spread his message, Graham was a pathbreaker in more ways than one. Besides offering a model of effective communication that seamlessly blended personal appeals for individual salvation with thinly veiled prescriptions for political action, Graham demonstrated that conservative evangelicals could ally themselves effectively to political

80 Ibid., 124–54.
81 Graham, Just As I Am, 381–82.
82 Graham, quoted in Lahr, Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares, 85.
83 Kruse, One Nation Under God, 149.
causes without sacrificing their popular spiritual credibility. In time, Graham’s ever-growing popular influence would also allow him to promote another evangelical cause célèbre, the wellbeing of the State of Israel, among the politically conservative circles who had proved so receptive to his message of national repentance and strident anticommunism.

In March 1960, Graham was excited to visit Israel for the first time as part of his tour of Africa and the Middle East (Graham called it his “safari for souls”). He was soon dismayed, however, when he learned upon arrival that Israeli authorities had imposed restrictions on his preaching. Worried that “too much mention of Jesus or Christianity [might] cause a bad reaction,” and facing backlash from Orthodox Jewish groups and conservative newspapers like the Jerusalem Post, Israeli government officials barred Graham from staging his revival at the Frederic R. Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv, one of the largest arenas in the country. Instead, authorities from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stipulated that Graham could only hold meetings on property owned by Christian groups and instructed him not to give a public invitation to receive Christ, a regular feature of Graham’s crusades in the U.S. and elsewhere. Fearful of the negative press that might result in the event that Graham might publically “say, in response to a question, that [he] had been denied the use of the Tel Aviv stadium,” Israeli Minister of Religious Affairs Jacob M. Toledano and Foreign Minister Golda Meir met in private with the American evangelist before his first press conference in Jerusalem. At the meeting,

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Graham assured Toledano and Meir that he “did not take their refusal as a personal insult,” noting “Jesus and Paul were also respectful of civil authority.”

Despite official Israeli restrictions and the relatively cool response from his mostly Jewish audiences, Graham was undoubtedly still pleased to finally visit the Holy Land. In his folksy North Carolina twang, Graham told reporters at his Jerusalem press conference that, as a Christian, he had “committed his life to a Jew who was born in this country and reared up here in Nazareth.” Although he did not state it publically, there was another reason Israel was so special to Graham. The evangelist noted, “I have always believed that the Jews were God’s special people, chosen to preserve the Hebrew Scriptures through the centuries and to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus.” Thus for Graham, as for millions of other evangelicals, Israel was not merely a modern state, but the living embodiment of God’s covenant with the Jewish people that Christians were obliged to support even as they anxiously awaited Christ’s return.

Even before his visit to the Holy Land, Graham had reminded audiences of their duty toward the Jewish state, as well as Israel’s role in the End Times. At his 1958 crusade in Charlotte, North Carolina, Graham wedded his analysis of international affairs with apocalyptic biblical prophecy and a call to political action in an urgent appeal that would become very familiar to American evangelicals in the coming decades:

In the third chapter of second Peter, I believe you will find a description of the atomic bomb. Nobody could explain those passages of Scripture until the bomb fell on Hiroshima. And now no theologian dare deny that that can take place, in which a third of the world can be burned up! Oh, there are so many things you

86 Graham, Just As I Am, 354
87 Ibid.
could talk about. You could talk about the tremendous happenings within Israel which many people believe is [sic] a sign of the end! That doesn’t mean that we are to become hysterical. It doesn’t mean that we are to become morbid. It doesn’t mean that we are to sit down and say the Lord is coming, we shouldn’t work.  

Graham reminded listeners that Christ’s imminent return, signaled by both the development of atomic weapons and the creation of Israel, was not a cause for inaction. Rather, Graham exhorted his audience of over 15,200 that they must redouble their efforts to spread the Gospels and witness to God’s plan in all parts of their lives. 22 years later, in an opinion piece for the New York Times, Graham reiterated his belief that “Israel will once again occupy center stage in world affairs,” calling the “signs transpiring in the Middle East” an indication that the “times of the Gentiles” foretold in Luke 21:24 might be coming to an end.  

Graham remained a vocal supporter of Israel throughout the 1960s and 1970s. After Israel’s capture of the West Bank and East Jerusalem in the Six-Day War, he issued a public statement urging “Israeli leaders not to yield to pressures that could jeopardize their nation’s security.” Touting his connections with policymakers, Graham also said that during the conflict, he had “been in touch privately with American political figures, urging support for Israel’s right to survival,” though he declined to reveal the identities of those with whom he spoke. Graham again asserted that the fates of America and Israel

were linked, declaring, “we cannot place ourselves in opposition to Israel without
detriment to ourselves.”

Publically, then, Graham maintained his unequivocal commitment to Israel.
Privately, however, Graham demonstrated that evangelicals’ sympathy for the Jewish
state did not always translate into a friendly view of Jews as individuals. In an Oval
Office conversation after the 1972 National Prayer Breakfast with President Richard
Nixon—the president with whom Graham enjoyed perhaps the closest personal
relationship—the evangelist echoed the chief executive’s conspiratorial view that the
American media was controlled by a coterie of left-wing Jews:

NIXON: Now, *Life* is totally dominated by the Jews. *Newsweek* is totally, is owned
by Jews, and dominated by them, their editorials. The *New York Times*, the
*Washington Post*, are totally Jewish…They’re way out. They’re radical. They’re for peace at any price, except where the support of Israel is concerned. The only way [unclear] that I have on this, and this is the reason: the best Jews, actually, are the Israeli Jews.

GRAHAM: That’s right.

NIXON: … Now, however, in this country we must be under no illusions. You’re aware of that, aren’t you? You’re aware of the fact that in the media, we confront almost a solid block of people [unclear]. And it doesn’t have anything to do with anti-Semitism. It happens, though, insofar as the
media is concerned, the power of the media—

GRAHAM: They’ve got it!

NIXON: They’ve got it right by—

GRAHAM: And they’re the ones putting out the pornographic stuff, and putting out every-
thing.

NIXON: I don’t know why they do.

GRAHAM: But this stranglehold has got to be broken or this country is going to go
down the drain!

NIXON: Do you believe that?

GRAHAM: Yes, sir.¹²

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Like other evangelical Christians before and after him, Graham thus demonstrated that affection for the Jewish nation did not necessarily equate to a willingness to stand up for Jews in America, especially when they were regarded as enemies of a Republican political agenda. Nevertheless, Graham’s star power, his unrivaled effectiveness as a public communicator, and his ability to develop and maintain close relationships with politicians meant he would serve as a model for future generations of evangelical leaders interested in cultivating a socially and fiscally conservative, anticommunist, pro-Israel political movement of their own.

As Billy Graham showed evangelical Christians they could successfully engage with the wider American culture and make inroads among the nation’s political establishment, a group of conservative evangelicals worked to create a grassroots movement to fight for the issues that most concerned them. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, before the counterculture, the women’s movement, and the anti-Vietnam War movement provided useful domestic targets for Christian conservatives, anticommunism remained perhaps the single most important evangelical political issue. Evangelical activism—centered on opposition to communism abroad and collectivism at home—was instrumental in the explosive rise of the Republican Party in California and throughout the South. Born-again Christians voted overwhelmingly for Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon in 1952, then became increasingly vocal in their dissatisfaction with the Eisenhower administration’s moderate domestic policies and apparent lack of interest in rolling back communism worldwide. The story of one group in particular, the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade (CACC), illustrates how the bond
between conservative ideology and evangelical Christianity was continually reinforced throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century.93

The CACC was the brainchild of Australian surgeon and evangelical lay pastor Fred Schwarz, who had emigrated to the U.S. in 1952 to “form an organization that would educate people about the Communist menace, and at the same time be in harmony with Christian evangelism.”94 Starting with a $50 honorarium from the Foursquare Gospel Church in 1952, Schwarz had by the mid-1950s built CACC into a national organization that sponsored “Schools of Anti-Communism” in Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, St. Louis, Chicago, Dallas, New York, and other large cities.95 Schwarz soon became a conservative idol, garnering adulation from William F. Buckley, Ronald Reagan, and Arizona Sen. Barry Goldwater. The Australian crusader so impressed Billy Graham that in 1953 he arranged for Schwarz to meet with a delegation of congressmen and cabinet members on Capitol Hill, followed by other meetings in the House and Senate, and presentations to the Congressional Republican Club and HUAC. Sympathetic entertainers like John Wayne, Roy Rogers, and Pat Boone also appeared at televised CACC Schools of Anti-Communism, lending their star power to the high-profile political events. Schwarz also continued to appear frequently at religious events,

95 Ibid., 104–107, emphasis in original; Dochuk, From Bible Belt to Sunbelt, 152; Kruse, One Nation Under God, 148–61. In fact, as Kruse points out, many Birchers were active in the CACC, and John Birch Society founder Robert Welch wrote Schwarz to affirm his support.
such as the National Association of Evangelicals’ 1960 convention, where he successfully advocated for an “unequivocal and aggressive anti-Communist” resolution.96

At the same time, Schwarz turned his hand to writing; he published his first book-length manifesto, You Can Trust the Communists (...To Do Exactly as They Say!) in 1960. The book ran through over a dozen printings in several languages, and sold millions of copies worldwide, including 50,000 purchased by the state of Louisiana for use in school libraries.97 In You Can Trust the Communists, Schwarz tied the appeal of communism to “unfulfilled religious need” among the educated youth of the world, recalling the sentiments of American fundamentalists half a century before. “Man is born with a heart to worship God,” Schwarz wrote, but atheist communism provided a substitute. In communism, the Australian doctor declared, the lost soul found “a refuge for his godless and unbelieving heart.”98 Schwarz also understood communism itself in explicitly religious terms. He explained that the “godless materialism” of Marx “perverted religious enthusiasm to conquer the world” and “has completely reversed the meaning of our basic moral terms.”99 Only Christianity could destroy the rival religion of communism, and Schwarz believed his Crusade represented the vanguard of the struggle. This assessment echoed that of ex-communist spy Whittaker Chambers, who argued communism was “a simple, rational faith” whose “promise was whispered in the first

96 “NAE Reaffirms Strong Anti-Communist Stand,” Christianity Today (May 9, 1960), 30.
97 Schwarz, Beating the Unbeatable Foe, 170–74. Some later editions of Schwarz’s first book were titled, You Can Trust the Communists (To Be Communists!). In 2010, a year after Schwarz’s death, CACC released an updated version, You Can Still Trust the Communists—To Be Communists (Socialists and Progressives, Too), highlighting the ways the evangelical anticommunist discourse could morph—even outlasting the fall of communism itself.
99 Ibid., 16.
days of Creation under the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil: ‘Ye shall be as
gods.’”

Schwarz aped historic evangelical attitudes in another way when, in 1958, he was approached by “a considerable number of Catholics,” including political activist Phyllis Schlafly and her husband Fred, to “form a joint Protestant-Catholic anti-Communist organization.” The evangelical lay pastor rebuffed the would-be Catholic Crusaders. Though he maintained, “I believe competition is preferable to monopoly” in terms of political organization, Schwarz was nevertheless attuned to longstanding evangelical prejudices: “Support from Evangelical Protestant Christians had contributed substantially to my ministry and the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade; if I associated with Catholics in that way, I would be suspect in certain circles.” Schwarz instead encouraged the Schlaflys and other anticommunist Catholics to form a separate organization, which eventually materialized as the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation. For all his public outreach and work that crossed evangelical denominational boundaries, Schwarz remained unwilling to form political alliances with Catholics, whom he and many other Protestants continued to regard with thinly-veiled suspicion—a hallmark of evangelical activism until the rise of the New Christian Right several decades later.

Although Schwarz linked communism within democratic societies to secular education and labor unions, the doctor-turned-cold warrior maintained that international “encirclement” represented the most pressing communist threat to the free world—an

101 Schwarz, You Can Trust the Communists, 179.
102 Schwarz, Beating the Unbeatable Foe, 165. The group took its name from Hungarian Cardinal József Mindszenty, a leading Catholic voice against communism in that country.
assertion that led him to some interesting forays into the realm of foreign affairs. Besides
his long-running project to establish a Christian anticommunist newspaper in India,
Schwarz was attuned to events in the Middle East. In November 1956, in the midst of the
Suez Crisis, Schwarz reassured readers in the CACC newsletter that “Russia is not ready
for a military venture into Africa,” but would continue to “fan the flames of bitterness in
Arab, Western relations so that the Arab may be her military tool when the time is
ready.”103 Eleven years later, however, Schwarz struck a much more alarming tone. On
the eve of the Six Day War, he warned CACC members, “the Middle East may burst into
flames momentarily as the hostile armies of Egypt and Syria confront those of Israel and
the warships of Nasser block Israel’s access to the Red Sea.” Differences between Israel
and the Arabs notwithstanding, Schwarz framed the impending conflict in ominous Cold
War terms: “Like an evil genie, the Soviet Union hovers over all.”104

In the next CACC newsletter, published on June 19, 1967, Schwarz offered
Crusaders “an Analysis of the Arab–Israeli War from the Communist Viewpoint.” In the
doctor’s estimation, “the ultimate Communist objective is the establishment of
Communist dictatorship over the entire area from the Persian Gulf to the Atlantic… The
clear-cut national division in the Middle East is into Jews and Arabs, and the bitter hatred
between these two groups provides an ideal force for Communist manipulation.”
Fortunately, the Soviet plot was foiled by Israeli determination; Israel “decided to act
alone, and in a lightning war of 2–3 days’ duration, they smashed the encircling Arab

103 Schwarz, CACC Newsletter, Sept. 1956 (Christian Anti-Communism Crusade, Manitou Springs, CO
[hereafter referred to as CACC Archives]), 1, http://www.schwarzreport.org/uploads/schwarz-report-
104 Schwarz, CACC Newsletter, June 1, 1967 (CACC Archives) 1,
military forces and simultaneously delivered a smashing blow to Soviet prestige."

Schwarz warned readers to remain vigilant; the U.S. should emulate Israel’s decisive, unilateral action against the Soviets to prevent future “ambushes.” “The so-called ‘Detente [sic],’” he wrote, was nothing more than “a tactic designed to achieve American defeat.”

Schwarz held up Israel as a paragon of toughness and determination. The Jewish State was a warrior-nation whose strength and resolve compared favorably to the weakness and decadence of America’s Baby Boom generation—flaws that left the U.S. vulnerable to a communist Holocaust. In 1972, a year by which American (and Australian) defeat in Vietnam had become indisputable, Schwarz wrote, “not long ago, I witnessed a young man stand up and say, ‘I can conceive of no circumstance in which I would be willing to die.’ This is the attitude which the communists believe assures their success.”

Echoing evangelicals (and conservatives generally) who bemoaned the moral decay of the nation’s youth, Schwarz admonished Americans to look across the sea for guidance: “if the Jews of Israel were not prepared to die, their nation could not live and the tragedy of the gas chambers would be repeated…Those who love freedom must be willing to sacrifice as much as to retain it as the totalitarians are to destroy it.” Israel thus represented both an exemplar of military prowess and a righteous people committed to a national ideal—one Americans would ignore only at their own peril.

107 Ibid.
108 Melani McAlister notes that this critique, comparing the brash, militaristic Israel to a soft and “emasculated” U.S. humiliated in Vietnam, became prevalent in 1970s popular culture. See McAlister, Epic Encounters (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 158.
For more than 40 years, Schwarz remained unfailingly consistent in his worldview. Christian anticommunism provided a lens through which he viewed not just events in India or the Middle East, but cultural issues within the U.S. as well. (In his 1996 autobiography, Schwarz claimed, “any description of the pathology of Communism would be incomplete without reference to the environmental consequences of sexual promiscuity, drug intoxication, family disintegration, the sanctification of sodomy… and the devaluation of life”\(^{109}\)). Schwarz’s support of Israel was no exception; Israel’s repeated military successes against Soviet-backed Arab states was reason enough for the CACC’s pro-Israel stance.

Schwarz and the CACC thus demonstrated that American evangelical support for Israel did not necessarily revolve around that country’s unique, Jewish identity. Anticommunism—albeit a particular, conservative Protestant anticommunism—motivated Schwarz and other Crusaders to declare Israel a strong and virtuous example to the free world in the fight against Soviet tyranny.\(^{110}\) Opposition to Arab aggression, believed by conservative Christian cold warriors to be directed from Moscow, represented a significant component of evangelicals’ support of Israel that would remain viable until the fall of communism. Yet anticommunism was arguably more important in creating a language through which believers could engage with the wider American right. By framing the Arab–Israeli conflict in diametrical Cold War terms, politically engaged

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\(^{109}\) Schwarz, *Beating the Unbeatable Foe*, 419.

\(^{110}\) Schwarz’s conception of Israel as an indomitable “David” that repulsed the Arab “Goliath” and thwarted Soviet machinations exemplifies the Cold War discourse of Israel and the “new Jew” in American culture. See Michelle Mart, *Eye on Israel: How America Came to View the Jewish State as an Ally* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), particularly 141–67.
evangelicals could appeal to a broad conservative audience, even if (as we shall see) their principal motivations had little to do with the politics of the here-and-now.
CHAPTER 2:
FROM IDEAS TO ACTION

As we have seen, conservative evangelicals have cited various reasons to explain their support for Israel. Many mentioned God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:3 (“I will bless them that bless thee…”) as influencing their opinions of the modern Jewish state, a belief common to both moderate evangelicals and conservative fundamentalists.\(^{111}\) In addition to the Abrahamic covenant, however, another theological idea has motivated a small but highly influential minority of Bible-believing, conservative Christians to link the fate of Israel to their own—the doctrine of dispensational premillennialism. Although dispensationalists never represented a theological majority among American evangelicals, they were passionate and prolific advocates for a prophetic biblical hermeneutic that cast Israel and the Jews at the center of the End Times drama foretold in the Book of Revelation.

This chapter briefly examines the rise of dispensational premillennialism in the nineteenth century before detailing its high-profile expansion in the wake of Israel’s foundation in 1948 and victory in the Six-Day War of 1967. By the 1970s, American dispensationalists like John F. Walvoord and Hal Lindsey looked to the recent past and saw what they believed to be a clear vindication of their prophetic worldview. As war and economic turmoil engulfed the Middle East once again, they moved from carefully examining history to confidently predicting the future, injecting the long tradition of evangelical apocalypticism into popular discussion about the End of Days. In the process

of crafting and promoting their idiosyncratic worldview, these academics, writers, and activists left an indelible mark on the way even non-dispensational evangelicals thought about Israel, the U.S., and the world, catapulting dispensationalist Christian Zionism from relative obscurity into the mainstream of American culture.

“God’s Sun-Dial:” William E. Blackstone and Early American Christian Zionism

American evangelicals’ fascination with Israel predated the establishment of Israel as a modern political entity. In the late nineteenth century, a time when anti-Semitism was still a common feature of both liberal Protestant and conservative fundamentalist discourse, a small but well-connected group of Christian preachers and activists made the case for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Their leader, William E. Blackstone, was a Chicago real estate mogul turned evangelist whose ties to the political and business communities allowed him to popularize his religious beliefs, which were based on a literal reading of the Bible that eschewed the traditional Christian doctrine of supersessionism. As the chairman of the Chicago Conference of Christians and Jews, Blackstone produced one of the earliest (five years before the Jewish Zionist Theodor Herzl’s publication of The Jewish State) and most significant expressions of Zionism

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113 Ibid., 8–21. Supersessionism, also called “replacement theology,” is a relatively orthodox doctrine common to most Christian denominations. In a nutshell, it holds that God’s covenant with the Church, initiated by Jesus at the Last Supper, superseded older covenants with the Israelites; Christians, not Jews, represented God’s ultimate chosen people. Dispensationalists argued instead that God’s covenant with the Jews had not been superseded by Christ, but instead remained valid. This interpretation held that there was essentially a two-track “program” for salvation—one for the Jews, and another for Gentiles, including the Church. One of the most important dispensationalist theologians, John F. Walvoord, laid out the difference in numerous of his writings, including Israel in Prophecy (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962), 28–29. Some later dispensationalist writers, including Hal Lindsey, rightly pointed out that supersessionism contributed to historic Christian anti-Semitism.
prior to the Holocaust, a document that would become known as the Blackstone Memorial.

Presented to Presidents Benjamin Harrison in 1891 and Woodrow Wilson in 1916 (neither of whom decided to act upon it), the Memorial was endorsed by many of America’s leading public voices. Prominent Protestant clergymen, Jewish rabbis, newspaper editors, state and federal judges, 10 members of Congress including the Speaker of the House, the mayors of Philadelphia and New York City, and even businessmen like J. P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller all signed the document, expressing their approval of the plan and urging its implementation so that Palestine could be “wrested from the Turks and given to [its] natural owners.” Blackstone approached the problem of “a million of exiles” with a businessman’s common sense; since Palestine was “an inalienable possession from which [the Jews] were expelled by force,” he asked, “why not give Palestine back to them again?” The Memorial called for “an international conference to consider the condition of the Israelites and their claims to Palestine as their ancient home, and to promote… the alleviation of their suffering condition” in Russia, Europe, and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{114}

Although the Memorial entreated the U.S. and European powers to “show kindness” to the Jews in light of their “terrible suffering,” Blackstone’s vision for Israel’s future might have made some of the Memorial’s Jewish signers uncomfortable.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{114} Blackstone, Blackstone Memorial (March 5, 1891), 1–3, William E. Blackstone Papers, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton, IL, \url{http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/BlackstoneMemorial/1891c.htm}.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 2. Blackstone’s relationship with prominent Jewish Zionists is fascinating. The evangelist corresponded frequently with Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis, and Brandeis even maintained a safe deposit box for Blackstone with instructions that he should open it only in the event of the Rapture. Brandeis, for his part, seemed to regard Blackstone as a deluded but politically useful Christian do-gooder;
Blackstone was a believer in the doctrine of dispensational premillennialism, a futurist theology that was the brainchild of Anglo-Irish evangelist John Nelson Darby. The doctrine would later be popularized in the U.S. by Cyrus Scofield’s immensely successful *Reference Bible*, first published in 1909.\textsuperscript{116} Dispensational premillennialism held that God had divided human history into various distinct historical periods, or “dispensations.” The current dispensation, the “church age,” began after Jesus’ resurrection and would end with the “rapture,” when believers (both living and dead) would ascend into heaven. The rapture would precede a seven-year period of immense global suffering under the iron rule of the Antichrist, known as the “great tribulation” or “time of trouble” (after Jer. 30:7). Following the tribulation, Jesus would return to earth to do battle with the Antichrist, his fight culminating with a devastating clash at the valley of Armageddon. This cataclysm would then be followed by God’s last judgment, and then the Millennium, or thousand-year kingdom of Christ. (In this prophetic interpretation, Christ returns before the Millennium, hence the term “premillennial”).\textsuperscript{117}

Israel was central to the dispensational theology of Blackstone and those who came after him. In his best-selling book, *Jesus is Coming*, Blackstone instructed believers, “if we want to know our place in chronology, our position in the march of events, look at Israel,” which he referred to as “God’s sun-dial.”\textsuperscript{118} Blackstone argued that the establishment of a Jewish homeland was essential to the fulfillment of biblical

\textsuperscript{116} Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, 17. Incidentally, the Scofield Reference Bible was one of the best-selling books ever published by Oxford University Press, and remains in print today.


\textsuperscript{118} Blackstone, *Jesus is Coming*, 234.
prophecies about the End Times, with a nod to Mark 13:28–29: “Now if Israel is beginning to show signs of national life and is actually returning to Palestine, then surely the end of this dispensation is ‘nigh, even at the doors.’”

Blackstone and other dispensationalists believed the reconstitution of the biblical Israel would precipitate End Times events including the tribulation, battle of Armageddon, and Christ’s second coming—with obviously dubious consequences for the Jews who had gathered there. Nevertheless, the Illinois evangelist’s support for (and popularization of) Zionism marked a significant turning point in American evangelicals’ relationship with Jews and Israel. No longer was “Zion” merely an amorphous theological idea or extinct historical kingdom; for Blackstone and others, Israel was a living reality intimately intertwined with the fast-approaching apocalypse foretold by the Bible.

As Matthew Sutton concedes, it is impossible to count precisely the number of dispensationalists in America during Blackstone’s time, since believers in the doctrine worshipped within many different Protestant denominations. Nevertheless, Sutton notes that the growth of churches that explicitly embraced the idea in their statements of faith, including the Assemblies of God, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and the Church of God in Christ, was “meteoric” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This tremendous growth was later imitated by the post-World War II explosion of non-denominational and independent evangelical churches that espoused dispensational premillennialism.\(^{120}\)

\(^{119}\) Ibid., 236.
If the exact number of dispensationalist believers remains unknowable, however, their influence on evangelical religious life was indisputable. As the American Protestant community was rocked by the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in the early years of the twentieth century, dispensational premillennialism provided an intellectual framework that could not only offer interpretations of obscure biblical prophecies, but could help believers make sense of a rapidly changing world. The calamitous events of World War I in particular provided vindication to dispensationalists, who could claim to have predicted the defeat of Germany, the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, the creation of a new government in Russia, and the rise of an international confederation in the form of the postwar League of Nations. Just as the Great War had bolstered the morale and credibility of dispensationalist evangelicals, the immense slaughter dealt a significant blow to their theologically liberal foes, who had confidently preached the impending achievement of God’s kingdom on earth through social reform and the advancement of human knowledge.

The most significant single event for dispensationalists during this period, however, was the intensification of the Jewish “regathering” in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration of November 1917, followed shortly thereafter by the British capture of Jerusalem from the Ottomans, prompted an increased wave of Jewish immigration to the Holy Land (known as the Fourth Aliyah), prompting dispensationalists to predict that the “times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24) were about to end. At the same time as evangelical dispensationalists hailed the imminent fulfillment of prophecies concerning the Jews and

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121 Noll, A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada, 376–78.
Israel, they set about vilifying the Arab and Muslim inhabitants of Palestine as heathen “barbarians.” “All too long,” declared one evangelical editorialist at the time, “has the star and crescent, the royal insignia of Death and Hell, been permitted to wave in insulting defiance to Christendom.” Other evangelical writers gleefully predicted “the doom of Mohammedanism” and rejoiced that “the inscrutable Turk…will be driven out of Palestine.” The battle lines between Arabs and Jews in the evangelical mind were thus firmly drawn even before the declaration of a Jewish state in Palestine.

For evangelical Christian Zionists, the political idea of Zionism could not be separated from Israel’s role in End Times prophecy. Though Blackstone did not live to see Israel’s independence (he died in 1935), his Memorial demonstrated that many influential American evangelicals were willing to take up the cause of Jewish nationalism. At the same time, the stunning success of *Jesus is Coming* (which went through multiple editions and sold over a million copies) introduced Zionism for the first time to a wide popular audience in the U.S. As evangelicals began to engage more and more actively with politics, figures of the postwar New Christian Right would carry Blackstone’s support for a Jewish state into the second half of the twentieth century, eventually making it an indispensable element of American evangelical conservatism. During this same period, the establishment of Israel and subsequent events in the Middle East would convince many American Christians that Blackstone’s predictions were coming true before their very eyes.

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The Scholar and the Showman: John F. Walvoord and Hal Lindsey

At first glance, a bespectacled, soft-spoken theology professor from Wisconsin and a heavily mustachioed former tugboat captain from Texas probably seemed unlikely to lead a popular theological awakening in America. Yet between them, John Flips Walvoord and Harold Lee “Hal” Lindsey introduced dispensational premillennialism to millions of readers and sowed the seeds of a movement that explicitly tied biblical prophecies to events around the world. Riding a wave of public interest in all things apocalyptic during a decade of national soul-searching, Walvoord and Lindsey did more even than William Blackstone to tie the fate of Israel explicitly to that of the U.S. While neither Walvoord nor Lindsey were especially “political” in a conventional sense, their theological ideas lent themselves to a conservative evangelical movement that was fast gaining momentum throughout the 1970s. In their own distinct but equally important ways, Walvoord and Lindsey helped make Israel an issue of critical concern to lifelong evangelicals and spiritual neophytes alike. In so doing, they laid the groundwork for the New Christian Right to make support of Israel a partisan issue as well as a religious one.

John F. Walvoord was a Wisconsin-born theologian who attended Wheaton College—then (as now) regarded as the most prestigious evangelical institution of higher education—before obtaining a doctorate from Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS), where he would teach for the rest of his career. Walvoord succeeded Lewis Sperry Chafer as the president of the seminary in 1952. In his 34 years at the helm of DTS, Walvoord worked to expand the school from a small, financially unstable evangelical graduate school to the leading dispensationalist institution in the U.S. Like Chafer before him, Walvoord
adhered to the doctrine of dispensationalism, which formed the cornerstone of his many scholarly writings on biblical prophecy. Walvoord was interested in appealing to a wider audience beyond the small circle of evangelical dispensationalist theologians, however. In 1966, Walvoord published *Israel in Prophecy*, a collection of lectures the DTS president hoped would be accessible to a popular audience. Discussing the prophetic significance of a restored Jewish nation, Walvoord hailed the creation of Israel as a modern political state, as well as its rapid agricultural and industrial growth and its revival of biblical Hebrew as an everyday spoken language. Walvoord’s slim volume sold well enough to remain in print until 1982, but the success of *Israel in Prophecy* on the popular market would pale in comparison to that of one of Walvoord’s former students.

“Keep your eyes on the Middle East,” Hal Lindsey warned readers in 1970. “What has happened and what is happening right now to Israel is significant to the entire prophetic picture.” Lindsey had piloted tugboats on the Mississippi River before attending DTS in the 1960s and then working as a professional activist with Campus Crusade for Christ, a Southern California-based organization focused mainly on evangelism to college students. When he turned his hand to writing, Lindsey broke big with *The Late Great Planet Earth*, a breezy volume that juxtaposed world events against

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125 John D. Hannah, *An Uncommon Union: Dallas Theological Seminary and American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 133–70. Since DTS had no endowments, Walvoord had to be creative in his strategies to raise the money necessary for the expansion of the DTS faculty and campus. One fundraising event in particular, the annual Founders Day Banquet, featured a guest list including a “star-studded cast of prominent evangelicals” and, according to Hannah, was by the 1980s one of the largest events of its kind in the whole city of Dallas (162–63).
127 Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 184, 44.
128 The organization, now known simply as “Cru” in an effort to avoid the negative connotations of the term “crusade,” still exists today.
dozens of biblical passages from the Old and New Testaments, interpreting ancient prophecy and the nightly news side by side in easy-to-read prose.\textsuperscript{129} In \textit{Late Great}, Lindsey warned of a coming global catastrophe, a gigantic battle initiated by the Antichrist at the valley of Armageddon between the forces of “the north,” which Lindsey interpreted to mean the USSR; “Rome” (Western Europe); Arabs; Africans; and the “Red Chinese.” The battle would involve nuclear weapons and cause unimaginable death and destruction, with “so many people slaughtered…that blood will stand to the horses’ bridles for a total distance of 200 miles northward and southward of Jerusalem.” After the cataclysmic confrontation and destruction of the Antichrist, Lindsey predicted the second coming of Jesus and the initiation of God’s kingdom on earth.\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Late Great} was a stunning success, eventually becoming the best-selling book of the entire 1970s—over 7.5 million copies sold in that decade alone. The book was turned into a documentary-style film narrated by Orson Welles in 1979, and remains in print (without any updates or revisions) to this day.\textsuperscript{131}

In the decades between William Blackstone’s death and Lindsey’s sudden rise to fame, events around the world had convinced dispensationalists that they were indeed living in the End Times. Following several waves of Jewish immigration (the Fourth and Fifth \textit{Aliyot}), an escalating civil war between Jews and Arabs, and the announcement that Britain would relinquish control over the Palestine Mandate, an assembly led by David Ben-Gurion declared an independent, Jewish State of Israel on May 14, 1948.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{129} Sutton, \textit{American Apocalypse}, 345–46. \\
\textsuperscript{130} Lindsey, \textit{The Late Great Planet Earth}, 150–66, 165–66. \\
\textsuperscript{131} Sutton, \textit{American Apocalypse}, 346. \\
\textsuperscript{132} Goldschmidt and Davidson, \textit{A Concise History of the Middle East}, 276–97.
declaration of Jewish statehood was hailed by dispensational Christian Zionists, who saw the event as the fulfillment of the parable of the budding fig tree recounted in the Synoptic Gospels. The parable instructed believers to “learn a parable of the fig tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors” (Mark 13:28–29). Believing the fig tree symbolized the Jewish nation, dispensationalists thought the establishment (or re-establishment) of a Jewish state in Palestine would precipitate the fulfillment of other End Times prophecies culminating in the return of Christ.

Lindsey, steeped in dispensationalist doctrine from his time at DTS, argued that Israel would play a central role in the return of the Messiah. Further, he asserted that two of the three specific requirements for the initiation of the End of Days had already been fulfilled: “First, the Jewish nation would be reborn in the land of Palestine. Secondly, the Jews would repossess old Jerusalem and the sacred sites. Thirdly, they would rebuild their ancient temple of worship upon its historic site.” Israel’s independence in 1948, cemented by victory in the subsequent Arab–Israeli War, satisfied the first requirement identified by Lindsey. Victory in the 1967 war, which saw Israeli forces capture the Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, fulfilled the second condition for Christ’s return.

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135 McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 165. Apparently, some of Lindsey’s classmates complained that the hugely successful author had merely “repackaged his lecture notes.”  
136 Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 50–51.
According to *Late Great*, all that was left was for the Jews to build a new place of worship atop the Temple Mount. Not totally ignorant of Jerusalem’s contested religious geography, Lindsey noted, “there is one major problem barring the construction of a third Temple. That obstacle is the second holiest place of the Moslem [sic] faith, the Dome of the Rock.”

In a later aside, he somewhat awkwardly added, “P.S. The Arabs are not going to like this idea of rebuilding the Temple one bit.” Nevertheless, Lindsey predicted efforts to establish a Jewish temple would eventually prevail over the objections of any other group: “Obstacle or no obstacle, it is certain that the Temple will be rebuilt. Prophecy demands it.”

Besides its specific assertions directly linking the Jewish state to an eschatological timetable, Lindsey’s book breathed new life into century-old theological beliefs by tapping into the gloomy cultural, political, and economic milieu of the 1970s. From the national nightmare of Vietnam to inner-city riots, the Watergate Scandal, an economy beset by “stagflation,” and a seemingly resurgent Soviet Union, 1970s America seemed a nation drifting out of control. In 1973, Lindsey tapped into this climate of uncertainty with his next bestseller, *There’s a New World Coming*. Besides the signs related to

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137 Ibid., 56. In reality, the al-Aqsa Mosque, not the Dome of the Rock, is the *third*-holiest site in Islam.
138 Ibid., 152.
139 Ibid., 56.
140 Lindsey was far from the only popular religious figure working toward national revival in the 1970s, a decade that saw not just the hippie-inspired “Jesus People” and a surge of interest in Eastern religions and “new age” spirituality, but also the emergence of a popular Georgia politician whose beliefs the journalist and social critic Tom Wolfe characterized as a “Missionary lectern-pounding amen ten-finger C-major-chord Sister-Martha-at-the-Yamaha-keyboard loblolly piny-woods Baptist faith.” Indeed, it was Wolfe who characterized the 1970s not just as the “Me Decade,” but also as America’s “Third Great Awakening.” See Tom Wolfe, “The ‘Me’ Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” *New York* (Aug. 23, 1976), http://nymag.com/news/features/45938/.
141 Lindsey cites John F. Walvoord’s *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1966) in his own book, linking the DTS theologian’s ideas to his own more explicitly than he had in *Late Great*. 

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Israel that had traditionally fascinated dispensationalists, other timely events Lindsey identified as harbingers of imminent apocalypse included “the population explosion,” “the increase of pollution,” “global weather changes,” “the decline of the family unit,” “the unprecedented turn to drugs,” and even the institution of a European Common Market. Ever the showman, Lindsey proclaimed his latest book was “more up-to-date than tomorrow’s newspaper” because all its information was based on “the greatest sourcebook of current events in the world”—the Book of Revelation. Like Late Great before it, There’s a New World Coming sold millions of copies over the course of the turbulent decade.

One series of events in particular crystallized Americans’ sense of “malaise” in the decade—the October 1973 Yom Kippur War and the subsequent Oil Crisis. These events would inspire other Christian dispensationalists, who would reinforce the End Times discourse and tie domestic and international politics even more closely to biblical prophecy. On October 6, 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack against Israeli forces on Yom Kippur, the most important Jewish holiday of the year. Although the Israelis initially suffered severe losses, they eventually succeeded—with the help of a massive American airlift of supplies—in turning back the Arab attackers, eventually capturing the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt and Golan Heights from Syria. In retaliation for American support of Israel, the Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), as well as Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia declared an oil

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142 Lindsey, There’s a New World Coming (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1973), 65–66.
143 Ibid., 5.
embargo against the U.S., resulting in gasoline rationing, crippling shortages of fuel for transportation and heating, and a 400% increase in prices.  

The latest war in the Middle East and the Oil Crisis of 1973 were not random acts of history, argued Walvoord in his new book, *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis*, published that same year. The DTS president was no doubt aware of Hal Lindsey’s spectacular success, and relied on his son (then a Ph.D. student at Columbia University) to help “produce a treatment of these great subjects in popular language.” Walvoord warned that “the Bible [does] not peddle vague and general predictions” about the End of Days “that could be adjusted to any situation… Although interpretation of minor points may vary, the overall picture is frighteningly clear.” He added, “several preliminary moves, which are predicted in the Bible, will shape the political, religious, and economic climate necessary for end-time events. These preliminary moves are now falling into place in rapid succession.”

Israel and the Middle East were central to Walvoord’s apocalyptic beliefs. Just “as Jeremiah prophesied,” he declared, “the enemies of the Jews have gone down one by one,” noting the fall of Rome, the execution of the Russian tsar, and the destruction of Hitler’s Reich. Israel’s survival was once again threatened, however, by the “new unity” of Arab oil producers, who could use their control of the world’s energy reserves to “separate Israel from her allies, specifically the United States and Western Europe.”

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144 Goldschmidt and Davidson, *A Concise History of the Middle East*, 342–52.
147 Ibid., 40.
148 Ibid., 43.
Like Lindsey, Walvoord also postulated that the deterioration of U.S.–Israeli relations might open up the Middle East to the threat of Soviet invasion—thus blending the dispensationalist discourse surrounding Israel with longstanding Christian mistrust of communism.\(^{149}\) As in *Late Great*, Walvoord’s *Armageddon* ended with a promise of impending global war, set to take place in the Middle East. “The world today is like a stage being set for a great drama,” Walvoord wrote,

> The Middle East today occupies the attention of the world leaders. The world has now recognized the political and economic power in the hands of those who control the tremendous oil reserves of the area… Russia is poised to the north of the Holy Land for entry in the end-time conflict. Egypt has not abandoned her desire to attack Israel from the South. Red China in the east is now a military power great enough to field an army as large as that described in the book of Revelation. Each nation is prepared to play out its role in the final hours of history.\(^{150}\)

Although Walvoord’s prognostications were extreme, they spoke to a growing sense of unease in America. By the mid-1970s, war in the Middle East had drawn national attention to a region of the world most Americans probably could not have previously located on a map. The Oil Crisis jolted U.S. consumers, aggravating the already-fragile economy, increasing prices, and limiting Americans’ freedom to drive. Fuel shortages and gas lines awakened the American public to the reality that their way of life depended on a tenuous international system, outside the sole control of the U.S., which could change at a moment’s notice. American defeat in Vietnam similarly undermined Americans’ confidence; underlying all this uncertainty was the simmering tension of the Cold War.

\(^{149}\) Ibid., 123–29.  
\(^{150}\) Ibid., 206–7.
Though it was intended for the same popular audience as *Late Great*, Walvoord’s book was in some ways even more important despite the fact that it never quite matched Lindsey’s phenomenal sales numbers. (This was not to say that *Armageddon* was a flop; Walvoord remembered fondly in his memoir that he was once stopped by a woman in church who told him, “I read your book *Armageddon* and got saved!” The book in fact sold over 750,000 copies, but even these impressive sales belied its broader significance.) As Melani McAlister notes, Walvoord was a giant of the evangelical theological community, and *Armageddon* thus enjoyed a level of scholarly credibility among born-again Christians that Hal Lindsey’s *Late Great* simply did not. While *Late Great* was introducing a broad swath of non-religious readers to dispensationalist ideas about Israel, *Armageddon* was finding a place on the bookshelves of ministers, educators, and laypeople already “plugged in” to the conservative evangelical movement *in addition to* other curious Americans who might have picked up the book without any idea of the intellectual stature of its author. In each of their own ways, in other words, Lindsey and Walvoord did more than merely reinforce the discourse of Israel and End Times prophecy within the evangelical subculture. Rather, the scholar and the showman took advantage of a distinct historical moment to take their apocalyptic message mainstream in ways their predecessors could scarcely have imagined.

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“A Time of Electrifying Excitement:” Evangelicals and Israel in the 1970s

A year after Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* first appeared on the shelves, the leading lights of the evangelical world gathered in Jerusalem for a remarkable meeting. Organized by evangelical theologian and *Christianity Today* editor Carl F. H. Henry, the Jerusalem Conference on Biblical Prophecy drew 1,500 delegates from over 30 countries, including John F. Walvoord, NAE founder Harold Ockenga, Texas “mega-church” pastor and former president of the Southern Baptist Convention W. A. Criswell, and even future Surgeon General C. Everett Koop. The affair featured entertainment by pop star (and future anti-gay activist) Anita Bryant, as well as a welcome address by former Israeli Prime Minster David Ben-Gurion.

Don Neufeld, covering the convention for the Seventh-day Adventist magazine *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, noted that “a strong segment of the participants” at the Jerusalem conference “take a literalistic view of prophecy and see in current events in the Middle East a fulfillment of Old and New Testament predictions.” One of these participants, Talbot Theological Seminary dean Charles Feinberg, declared, “with charity toward all and not a whit of malice toward any, we hold unswervingly to the literal

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153 Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 58
155 Don F. Neufeld, “Jerusalem Conference on Bible Prophecy,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (July 8, 1971), 9. Seventh-day Adventists, while sharing dispensationalists’ strong belief in the imminent return of Christ, held to a more traditional supersessionist doctrine that End Times prophecies referred to the Christian Church, not the nation of Israel. As the author notes in a later story, “Since the beginning of their history, Seventh-day Adventists have opposed the literalist interpretation” (Neufeld, “The Jerusalem Conference in Retrospect,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* [July 29, 1971], 7).
interpretation of Ezekiel 40–48: THE TEMPLE WILL BE REBUILT.”

Harold Ockenga also reiterated evangelicals’ commitment to searching for the signs foretold in prophecy, and stated his belief that events in Israel and beyond suggested the “times of the Gentiles” were coming to an end. That non-dispensationalists like Ockenga still took the imminent fulfillment of prophecy by Israel seriously spoke to the growing influence of dispensationalist thinking among evangelical opinion leaders more generally.

Ockenga also took to task one of the leading non-evangelical voices at the Jerusalem Conference, the Israeli scholar of religion R. J. Zwi Werblowsky. The Hebrew University professor’s assertion that “Israel exists only right of history…and not by right of prophecy” drew a rebuttal from Ockenga that “the cost to Judaism of deleting prophetic specifics is the loss of messianic expectation in its biblical understanding.”

In other words, Werblowsky’s “secular” understanding of Israeli history was at odds with Ockenga’s evangelical Christian perspective, which held that Israel’s place in the biblical past, its present status as a political state, and its future role in the second coming of the Messiah could not be separated—a point Ockenga no doubt thought should be as self-evident to Jews as to Christians.

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156 Neufeld, “Jerusalem Conference on Bible Prophecy,” 9–10. Capitalization for emphasis in original. Feinberg was a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary who had converted to evangelical Christianity from Orthodox Judaism.


158 Dwight L. Baker, “Bible Prophecy in the Prophets’ City,” Christianity Today (July 16, 1971), 30. The flagship evangelical magazine published only one relatively brief (two-page) news story about the Jerusalem Conference. This fact might be explained by the magazine’s ecumenical editorial line, which de-emphasized some of the more extreme dispensationalist doctrines held by many at the conference. However, it is also the case that many of the publication’s staff were simply on vacation at the time of the conference; Christianity Today was published only once every three weeks during the summer, in contrast to its fortnightly publication schedule during the rest of the year.
Other participants at the 1971 meeting also demonstrated the connection between their religious worldview and their understanding of contemporary politics. Six of the conference-goers, including John F. Walvoord, ignored Henry’s injunction against issuing formal declarations and published a statement commending the Israeli government “for the scrupulous care with which it has protected Christian places and people.” The signers further declared that because “Jerusalem has never been the capital of any people except the Jewish people… The unity of Jerusalem must be preserved at all costs.”¹⁵⁹ This call for an undivided, Israeli-controlled Jerusalem was contrary to the official U.S. government position, which called for internationalization of the city. Conservative evangelicals were thus no longer primarily passive observers of news events in Israel; they were beginning to view themselves as active participants with clear stakes in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Around the same time as American evangelicals began to assert their own agency more actively in Middle Eastern politics, Israeli policymakers were beginning to rethink their relationship with these conservative Christians. While privately denigrating evangelical theological views “as those of a six-year-old child,” Israeli officials nevertheless understood that evangelicals represented a potentially valuable pro-Israel constituency in American politics.¹⁶⁰ Prime Minister Golda Meir, for example, had been impressed by Billy Graham’s 1970 musical documentary His Land, which portrayed modern Israel in glowing terms. (Meir had personally attended the film’s premiere in the

¹⁶⁰ Boyer, When Time Shall Be No More, 204.
Former Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, who had welcomed the 1971 evangelical Prophecy Conference (an about-face from his government’s cool reception of Billy Graham a decade earlier), even reportedly kept a copy of *The Late Great Planet Earth* on his home desk in retirement. In addition, other Israeli public figures like Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek and Defense Minister Moshe Arens began offering celebrity treatment for visiting American evangelicals. The right-wing Likud government of Prime Minister Menachem Begin sought even closer ties with conservative evangelicals after gaining power in 1977; UN ambassador Chaim Herzog even appeared in the 1979 film adaptation of Lindsey’s 1970 bestseller.

One official in the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yona Malachy, was particularly interested in American evangelicals’ attitudes toward Israel, and made numerous trips to the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s to study the Christian Zionist phenomenon. Summing up his findings in a report eventually published in book form, Malachy explained to his Israeli audience, “in the Bible they [evangelicals] find both the justification for the establishment of the Jewish State and a basis for the rights of the Jews to Palestine. This view, however, is based on the unqualified belief that the present and future status of the Jews is inexorably determined by their relationship to Jesus Christ.”

Malachy too was more than merely a passive observer, however. During his visits to evangelical institutions in the U.S., the Israeli scholar and civil servant acted as an

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unofficial cultural ambassador, encouraging conservative American Christians to take a more public, pro-Israel stand at a time when support for the Jewish state among liberal churches was beginning to ebb. Shortly after the Six-Day War, for example, Malachy’s prodding produced a statement by the board of directors of Biola College and Talbot Theological Seminary in California offering unequivocal support for Israel. The document rehashed the usual dispensationalist argument about Israel’s place in God’s prophetic plan, but also added a dire warning for Christians who might not be supportive enough of Israel:

> Throughout its history the nation Israel has been the object of opposition and attack by Satan the archenemy of God’s purpose and program. Untaught and unholy men have unwittingly cooperated with the devil in this. It is our conviction that the true people of God should not be found in league with those who oppose the will and work of God for Israel.

Although the Biola directors also declared that Arabs, “along with all Gentiles, are the objects of God’s love and of the proclamation of His grace,” the message was clear: standing with Israel against her enemies was imperative of all true Christians.

The 1973 war provided another boost to evangelical prophecy believers. *Christianity Today* reported that one group of Americans led by Pastor Chuck Smith of Costa Mesa, California, “were in Israel the entire first week of the fighting. Many, convinced the return of Christ was near, wanted to stay and meet him there.” The magazine went on to note, “doomsday talk is not limited to religious circles. Commenting on headlines to friends in an elevator, a Washington, D.C. office-building manager

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167 Ibid., 195.
remarked, ‘I think the end of the world is coming soon.’ There were no guffaws in
response.” It was on just this kind of secular “doomsday thinking” that a new
conservative evangelical movement hoped to capitalize. Into the gloomy and anxious
1970s emerged a self-consciously activist group of pastors and evangelical laymen
determined to change popular perceptions of Israel in America. These religious leaders
politicized the dispensationalists’ discourse on Israel and Cold War apocalypticism,
marrying the prophetic beliefs of Blackstone, Lindsey, Walvoord, and others to a
conservative political ideology. Determined to make their voices heard in the national
media, the White House, and the Middle East, this charismatic group was armed and
ready for righteous battle. Their victory, though incomplete, would cement popular,
positive perceptions of the U.S.–Israel alliance and resonate into the next century. The
New Christian Right was about to be born.

CHAPTER 3:

“TO STAND AGAINST ISRAEL IS TO STAND AGAINST GOD”¹⁶⁹

As the 1970s drew to a close, a new generation of conservative evangelical leaders hoped to translate their growing cultural visibility into political power. At a time when “liberalism [was] obviously losing its influence on America,” one particularly enterprising Baptist minister from Lynchburg, Virginia sensed “the time [had] come for the Fundamentalists and Evangelicals to return our nation to its spiritual and moral roots.”¹⁷⁰ Jerry Falwell’s zeal for Israel matched his commitment to other right-wing causes, and his acumen for political organizing and mass communication was unmatched among any of the conservative evangelicals who came before him. Falwell and the New Christian Right catapulted American evangelicals’ support for Israel into the mainstream conservative movement, helping transform Republicans’ ambivalent attitude toward the Jewish state into one of firm support. At the same time, Falwell showed the way forward for other conservative evangelicals who wanted to take a more active role in Republican politics, changing the American political landscape in the process.

“War over Bible Truth:” Jerry Falwell and the New Christian Right¹⁷¹

Jerry Falwell was a Baptist minister who proudly labeled himself a “fundamentalist” long after more “respectable” evangelicals had abandoned the term. Nevertheless, his beliefs and ministry bore all the hallmarks of the last half-century of

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 187.
¹⁷¹ Falwell, promotional pamphlet for Thomas Road Baptist Church and Liberty Christian Academy, n.d. Folder 1a, FAL 2:2–5, box 1, Jerry Falwell papers, Jerry Falwell Library, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA (hereafter shortened to JFP-LU).
conservative evangelicalism. In a promotional pamphlet for his Thomas Road Baptist Church, Falwell argued for an activist faith in language that would have been familiar to Harold Ockenga, Carl F. H. Henry, or Billy Graham: “It is right to go to war over Bible truth. It is pleasing for the Lord for His children to stand firm for the faith.”

Falwell’s political conservatism was as militant as his religion; he once summed up his politics by declaring, “I am to the right of wherever you are. I thought [Arizona Sen. Barry] Goldwater was too liberal!” Indeed, for Falwell, as for many other conservative evangelicals, faith and activism were inextricably linked. The Virginia preacher rose to national prominence with the publication of his 1965 sermon *Ministers and Marches*, which denounced Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders as communist stooges inflaming the issue of “alleged discrimination against negroes in the South” to “damage race relations and gender [sic] hate” in America. Despite his famous pronouncement that “preachers are not called to be politicians but soul-winners,” Falwell soon proved he was in fact very interested in “worldly” political matters, hitting

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172 Ibid. Falwell here echoed a growing sentiment of the American right during this decade, elucidated by conservative intellectuals like the neoconservative thinker Norman Podhoretz. Disappointed by the failures of President Jimmy Carter’s foreign policy, conservatives in general, and neoconservatives in particular, advocated a more aggressive American foreign posture. In response to the Islamist takeover of the American embassy in Tehran in 1979, Podhoretz wrote, “as ‘No More Vietnams’ meant retrenchment and accommodation, ‘No More Irans’ will mean making sure that we never again have to submit helplessly to being ‘pushed around.’” See Podhoretz, *The Present Danger: ‘Do We Have the Will to Reverse the Decline of American Power?’* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), 89.


174 Falwell, *Ministers and Marches* (Lynchburg, VA: Thomas Road Baptist Church, 1965), 16–17; 1. Despite their heated denunciations of King and the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, many evangelical conservatives took up the rhetorical mantle of King’s social justice crusade in the fight against abortion rights in the 1970s and beyond.
the campaign trail for segregationist American Independent Party candidate and former
Alabama Governor George Wallace in 1968.\textsuperscript{175}

Much of Falwell’s early activism revolved around his opposition to federal
“overreach” into the local affairs of the South. In 1967, he founded Lynchburg Christian
Academy (later re-named Liberty Christian Academy), a children’s day school,
ostensibly in response to the Supreme Court’s 1962 prohibition of prayer in public
schools—though critics charged the school was actually a private, whites-only
“segregation academy,” conveniently opening its doors the same year Virginia schools
were legally required to desegregate.\textsuperscript{176} A 1973 court battle with the Securities and
Exchange Commission over whether Falwell had knowingly issued fraudulent bonds to
finance the expansion of his church and the recently inaugurated Lynchburg Baptist
College (now Liberty University) further entrenched the minister’s anti-government
sensibilities.\textsuperscript{177} Whatever the case, Falwell spoke a language that blended evangelicals’
old-time religion with states’ rights, limited government (at least in some circumstances),
and anticommunism, seamlessly integrating the discourse of Christian piety with the
agenda of the New Right.

Throughout his career, Falwell worked diligently to ensure his message reached
as many Americans as possible. A tireless promoter who began his ministry walking
door-to-door in Lynchburg, Falwell soon adopted a more high-tech approach to his
evangelism. In 1956, Falwell launched his radio show; later that same year, he began

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 4; Sutton, \textit{Jerry Falwell and the Rise of the Religious Right: A Brief History with Documents} (New
\textsuperscript{176} Susan Friend Harding, \textit{The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics} (Princeton,
buying airtime on his local ABC television affiliate as well. By the early 1970s, Falwell’s *Old Time Gospel Hour* was being broadcast by over 300 television stations and 500 radio stations across the country, bringing his sermons into the homes and automobiles of millions of listeners. (Conservative estimates put Falwell’s regular audience at several million viewers and listeners, though Falwell himself claimed over 50 million).\(^{178}\) Though he did not originate the idea of broadcasting a Christian message, the success of Falwell’s media empire helped create a new evangelical medium. Recalling his entry into the “electric church,” Falwell simply wrote, “I was astounded by the results.”\(^{179}\) While his radio and television networks were primarily focused on religious broadcasting, Falwell’s mass communication experience would serve him well as he launched new initiatives to take his political message mainstream.

By 1979, Falwell had determined the time had come “to call America back to God, back to the Bible, and back to moral sanity.”\(^{180}\) Together with a number of other Baptist ministers and New Right strategists Paul Weyrich and Richard Viguerie, Falwell organized the Moral Majority, Inc. to advocate for conservative causes through media outreach, voter education and registration, and lobbying at the state and federal levels. Within a few short years, the group came to form the core of the New Christian Right, combining effective grassroots organizing with a Falwell’s extensive national media presence and lucrative relationships with conservative donors.\(^{181}\)

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178 Harding, 12–13, 284 n. 5.
Falwell’s political philosophy echoed that of Billy Graham several decades before, and embodied the tension of the “now/not yet” dilemma faced by evangelicals for hundreds of years. In one Moral Majority mailer aimed specifically at evangelical pastors, Falwell maintained that it was every Christian’s duty to “occupy until Jesus comes.” Bible prophecy and the impending Rapture of believers were no excuse to abstain from activism, the Virginia Baptist insisted, pointedly asking his readers, “what will your answer be if you have to face the question from your children: ‘Daddy, where were you the day that freedom died in America?’” In the same mailer, Falwell argued that faith and political activism were in fact one and the same, explaining his metaphors as he wrote lest the message be lost on readers: “this is not a matter of ‘getting into politics’, but rather fighting the spiritual war where Satan is active—in the political arena… It is time for us to go into the valley (political arena) in the name of Jehovah (whose name is blasphemed and whose laws are scorned) and slay Goliath (humanistic liberalism in our government).”  

Although Falwell spoke and wrote at length about domestic issues, railing against abortion and pining for the days when “we laughed at queers, fairies, and anyone who was thought to be a homosexual,” he was also keenly interested in foreign affairs—and no single foreign country received more attention from Falwell than Israel. Like other dispensationalists, Falwell viewed the modern State of Israel as the successor to the biblical kingdom, the subject of prophecies concerning the return of Christ and the End of Days. However, Falwell’s desire to make Israel an issue of passionate concern for

182 Falwell, untitled Moral Majority educational mailer for pastors, n.d., n.p. Folder 1, FAL 3:1, box 2, JFP-LU.
conservatives outside the evangelical church meant that he often couched American
support for Israel in the anticommunist rhetoric of the Cold War.

One 1983 Moral Majority publication perfectly encapsulated Falwell’s blend of
pro-Israel politics, apocalypticism, and Cold War anticommunism. Titled, “Nuclear War
and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ,” the pamphlet echoed familiar dispensationalist
predictions about Israel and the future of mankind within the framework of a future
nuclear exchange with Soviet Russia. Beginning with a vivid depiction of a nuclear blast
(including descriptions of “retinal burning” and a somber prediction that “underground
shelters would become crematories” in the event of a bomb or missile strike), the booklet
warned against those who advocated a slowdown in the production of American nuclear
warheads.

In spite of his lurid portrayal of future nuclear conflict, Falwell reassured readers,
“there should be no fear the world is going to be destroyed by nuclear war for a long
time…the earliest that a worldwide nuclear confrontation could happen is at least 1,007
years away if Jesus would come for His saints today!” 184 Like earlier dispensationalists,
however, Falwell did not rule out the possibility of a global war in the near future.

Predicting an invasion of Israel by the “Red Communist Bear, the USSR,” Falwell
sketched a rough outline of a combined land and sea assault on the Holy Land by the
combined armed forces of the Soviet Union, “Persia” (Iran), the North African nations,
Ethiopia, and perhaps even East Germany. He further asserted that “five-sixths” of the
Russian soldiers would die as a result of the invasion and that the next “seven months

184 Falwell, “Nuclear War and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ” (1983) 2, 6, Folder 3, FAL 2–3, box 1,
JFP-LU. The figure of 1,007 years refers to the seven-year Great Tribulation plus the 1,000-year
millennium, or peaceful reign of Christ.
[would] be spent in burying the dead.”  

Although the Baptist minister did not set an explicit date for the apocalypse, (likely having learned from other dispensationalists’ experiences when their prophecies of doom proved premature) he did still place Israel at the center of a cataclysmic future war.

Whatever Israel’s eventual fate, Falwell maintained that the Jewish state was the special recipient of divine providence. In his 1980 manifesto Listen, America!, Falwell described “that miracle called Israel,” holding up Israel’s 1948 independence and repeated victories on the battlefield as sure signs of God’s favor, specifically the promise to the Jews that “all they that devour thee shall be devoured; and all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and they that spoil thee shall be as spoil; and all that prey upon thee I will give for a prey” (Jer. 30:16). Falwell further asserted, “there is no way that the tiny nation of Israel could have stood against the Arabs…had it not been for the intervention of God Almighty.” He again warned of a future conflict, in which Israel “would be attacked” by “the great Russian armies and her Arab allies,” insisting that the tiny country would remain essential to defending America from hordes of godless communists and “pagan” Muslims.

Falwell frequently linked the fate of Israel with that of the U.S. Although he conceded that “America is not the ‘New Israel’ and thereby the recipient of all of God’s promises to the nation of Israel,” Falwell maintained, “the underlying principles of God’s dealings with Israel are applicable to America”—thereby blending his dispensationalist

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187 Ibid., 96–98.
message with an old American trope. In *Listen America!*, the Virginia pastor wrote, “if this nation wants her fields to remain white with grain, her scientific achievements to remain notable, and her freedom to remain intact, America must continue to stand with Israel.” Similarly, in *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, he succinctly declared, “to stand against Israel is to stand against God… History and Scripture prove that God deals with nations in relation to how they deal with Israel. My deep conviction is that America will not remain a free nation unless we defend the freedom of Israel.”

Because of Falwell’s firm convictions, support for Israel became one of the signature policy issues of the Moral Majority. As part of his “Agenda for the Eighties” campaign, Falwell reiterated that American support for the Jewish state was “one of the essential commitments of the Moral Majority.” The Moral Majority even distributed literature explaining “What Conservative Leaders are Saying About ISRAEL,” featuring short pro-Israel statements by fellow Baptist ministers as well as Republican politicians like New York Rep. Jack Kemp and Colorado Sen. William Armstrong. While he was busy cultivating support for Israel among Republicans, Falwell used the country’s ongoing conflict with the Palestinians to highlight his differences with liberals. He decried the “distressing developments” of recent years, including a “growing willingness to accept as reputable and civilized the murderers of the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization].” Falwell also excoriated pro-Arab officials in the State Department, whose

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188 Falwell, untitled Moral Majority educational mailer for pastors, JFP-LU.  
189 Falwell, *Listen America!*, 98.  
191 Ibid., 190; “An Agenda for the 80’s” (Dec. 29, 1980), FAL 4:1–3, box 1, JFP-LU.  
192 “What Conservative Leaders are Saying About ISRAEL,” n.d. [1985?], MOR 1–4, box 1, Moral Majority Papers, Jerry Falwell Library. Kemp would make his own unwavering support of Israel one of the key foreign policy issues of his 1988 presidential campaign, drawing a distinction between himself and Kansas Sen. Bob Dole.
promotion of U.S. ties with Saudi Arabia he characterized as trading America’s essential “allegiance to Israel for a petroleum ‘mess of pottage.’”  

Recalling John Walvoord’s Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis, Falwell claimed that any relationship with Israel’s enemies represented nothing less than America being “blackmailed by the oil cartel.”

Falwell’s desire to inject his pro-Israel beliefs into American political life led him around the world. Beginning in the late 1970s, Falwell headed numerous tourist trips to the Holy Land, narrating the life and death of Jesus and the stories of the Old Testament prophets against the backdrop of Jerusalem, the Jordan River, and the Judean Desert. Events, however, would soon transform Falwell from tour guide to statesman. The 1977 election of the right-wing Likud government, headed by hawkish Prime Minister Menachem Begin, saw increasing cooperation between the Israeli government and conservative American evangelicals. In April 1978, at Begin’s invitation, Falwell led a delegation of evangelical pastors, theologians, and business leaders on a remarkable trip to the Holy Land. The group of Americans met first with Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat, followed by an audience with Begin, to gain “some insights that will help us to better promote the cause of peace.”

Though Falwell emphasized at his meeting with Sadat that “we don’t claim to be diplomats,” the Virginia pastor nevertheless displayed a politician’s gift for flattery.

193 Falwell, Listen America!, 98. “Mess of pottage” refers to Genesis 25:29–34. This passage relates the story of Esau, who sold his birthright to his younger twin Jacob for a meal of lentil stew.
194 Ibid.
195 Transcript of Falwell’s conversation with Anwar al-Sadat, n.d., 1, Folder 15a, FAL 3–1, box 2, JFP-LU. The document is undated but Falwell refers several times to traveling “next week” to Israel to meet with Begin. The transcripts of Falwell’s subsequent meeting with the Israeli prime minister are dated April 18, 1978 and also reference Falwell’s previous meeting with Sadat. Falwell was in Israel April 16–20, so he would have spoken with the Egyptian leader sometime between April 9 and 15, 1978.
Indeed, Falwell was downright saccharine, telling the Egyptian president, “we see in your behavior and in your conduct, a Christlike demonstration unlike anything any leader in our generation has displayed.” After their introductory remarks, Falwell and his entourage remained mostly silent while Sadat expressed his openness to start negotiations with Israel. The Egyptian leader held forth on the issue of good will between his country and the Jewish state, but also complained that Prime Minister Begin seemed to be dragging his feet. “There is no progress,” Sadat grumbled, “either on the Palestinian question, and this is the main crux and core of the whole problem, or on the Sinai problem,” referring to Israeli settlements built in the Sinai Peninsula after 1967. At the end of the meeting, Falwell promised to convey Sadat’s message to his counterpart in Jerusalem. The minister-turned-media magnate also informed the Egyptian president that he planned “to take your words to the people” of America, telling Sadat, “you will be on American television and radio, with your message to the whole nation for a long time, because we believe that what you are saying comes from your heart.” Despite Falwell’s pledge, Sadat’s public relations campaign in the U.S. never materialized.

A few days after their meeting with Sadat, Falwell and his associates traveled to Jerusalem. Though the Virginia Baptist had been effusive when he met the Egyptian president, Falwell greeted Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin with a simple statement rooted in his evangelical faith: “we do believe this is God’s land and we believe that you are God’s people.” After conveying Sadat’s message to Begin, Falwell

196 Ibid., 1, 11.
197 Ibid., 8, 10–11.
198 Transcript of Falwell’s conversation with Menachem Begin, April 18, 1978, 3. Folder 15a, FAL 3–1, box 2, JFP-LU.
offered some unsolicited analysis to the Israeli leader: “...he [Sadat] said that he felt there could be no peace unless the Palestinian problem was resolved. However, on a positive note, he offered no prescription for the solution... He simply very ambiguously said, ‘the situation must be solved,’ but he made no demands or prescriptive requests of you.”

Begin, to whom the very idea of an independent Palestinian state was simply anathema, responded to Sadat’s unofficial American envoy in characteristically blunt terms:

Now you said President Sadat spoke to you about what he termed the Palestinian question, and then you used the word, he was ambiguous about it, that he didn’t put it in concrete terms. Well about ambiguity we had much, but I can only assure you there is no ambiguity whatsoever. We cannot even afford ambiguity on this issue. And here I must again, with your permission, go to the map. This is Samaria and Judea—those are two names that are very well known to you. From the Bible...Let me again repeat the statement by President Sadat. You go back to those lines preceding the [Six-]Day [War] and then you will have peace. We will not. In those lines and with those demands, we will have the opposite of peace. There will be permanent bloodshed.”

That Begin referred to the Palestinian territories by their biblical names was significant. Though the prime minister’s position on Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai would eventually soften, his commitment to retain control of the West Bank and Gaza remained firm, rooted in a biblical vision for the Israeli state encompassing the entirety of Eretz Israel. Begin’s conceptualization of Israel in these terms allowed him to relate easily

199 Ibid., 4.
201 Transcript of Falwell’s conversation with Begin, 10–12.
with Falwell and other conservative evangelicals, who shared his understanding that
Israel encompassed the entirety of the ancient Jewish kingdoms, not just the pre-1967
political borders of the modern Jewish state. Begin joked to Falwell, “Some people
accuse me, perhaps some of my colleagues, that we quote the Bible from time to time.
What an accusation! I can only say I plead guilty, but I don’t apologize. No reason to.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Falwell never achieved a diplomatic breakthrough
between Sadat and Begin, but a few months after his visit to the Middle East, the
Egyptian and Israeli leaders did manage to hammer out a peace plan with U.S. President
Jimmy Carter at the Camp David retreat in rural Maryland. Falwell’s reaction to the
Camp David Accords might—at first—have appeared highly uncharacteristic.
“Obviously, I’m very pleased,” the pastor told one reporter, calling the agreement “the
greatest breakthrough for peace ever realized in the Israeli–Arab conflict.” Indeed,
Falwell went so far as to praise Carter, a liberal Democrat, despite his opposition to
virtually the entirety of the president’s domestic agenda: “if he [Carter] accomplished
nothing else of international significance during his tenure in the White House, this will
certainly go down in history.”

Falwell’s glowing praise of Carter’s signature diplomatic achievement might have
seemed out of keeping with his commitment to the preservation of Israeli control over all
of Eretz Israel. In fact, however, it seems the preacher-turned-pundit simply viewed the

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203 Transcript of Falwell’s conversation with Begin, 4.
204 Falwell, quoted in Jon Hall, “Falwell Praises Settlement,” Daily Advance (Elizabeth City, NC), n.d.
Thomas Road Baptist Church Files, Jerry Falwell Library.
Camp David agreement the same way as Begin himself. The Israeli prime minister, unlike Carter or Sadat, did not regard the Accords as a first step toward reconciliation with the Palestinians. Rather, Begin believed retreat from the Sinai (which had never been part of the biblical kingdoms) would guarantee peace with Israel’s largest Arab neighbor while decreasing international pressure to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza—territories he still held as inseparable from the State of Israel proper.205

Like Begin, Falwell simply regarded the Accords as a victory for Israel, neutralizing the Egyptian threat while conceding virtually nothing on the Palestinian issue. Whatever his understanding of the treaty, however, Falwell would still revert to old dispensationalist tropes when discussing its significance with like-minded Christians. Barely a year after the agreement was signed, Falwell asserted that despite “the rosy and utterly unrealistic expectations of our government, this treaty will not be a lasting treaty… there’s not going to be any real peace in the Middle East until the Lord Jesus sits down upon the throne of David in Jerusalem.”206

While Falwell’s relationship with the Israeli government continued to grow into the 1980s, Falwell took it upon himself to reach out to Jewish Americans as well. As part of his effort, Falwell (at the urging of Menachem Begin207) coordinated with *Israel Today* editor Merrill Simon in 1981 to conduct an interview “that would correct mistaken notions and perceptions of his views” among American Jews.208 Published in 1984 as a

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205 Shilon, *Menachem Begin*, 275, 301–8. The Accords did contain a “Framework for Peace in the Middle East,” which stipulated the transfer of “full autonomy to the inhabitants” of the West Bank and Gaza after a transitional period of no more than five years.


207 Falwell, *Falwell*, 401.

book in question-and-answer format, *Jerry Falwell and the Jews* was part of a campaign to promote Falwell as an unflinching friend of Israel and the Jewish people, in contrast to what the Baptist minister saw as liberal Jews’ unfair caricature of evangelicals as crude anti-Semites interested only in arcane apocalyptic prophecy.

In Simon’s book, Falwell echoed Begin’s pronouncements about Israeli sovereignty from several years earlier, dismissing “what we have come to know…as Palestinian ‘rights.’” Falwell insisted, “the West Bank, more properly known as Judea and Samaria, is the heartland of the Jewish Biblical and historical patrimony and, as such, the eternal possession of the Jewish people.” In answer to another question, Falwell contended, “even under Moses, Israel took possession of the entire East Bank, including most of that which is now ruled by Jordan (Numbers 32; Judges 11:13–26). Under the present realities, however, I am quite content to see Israel possess all the territory from the Jordan [River] to the Mediterranean Sea.”

In Falwell’s mind, Israel had already given up its claim to part of the territory promised to the Jews by God; any further compromise was simply unthinkable.

Despite Falwell’s insistence that “I am not anti-Arab. I am very much pro-human being,” the Baptist minister’s frequent dismissal of Arabs or Muslims (Falwell used the terms virtually interchangeably) hinted at a worldview based largely on preconceived, Orientalist notions of Arab inferiority. Falwell repeatedly referred to “the underlying

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210 Ibid., 62–63.

211 Ibid., 5. This is not to say that Falwell’s anti-Arab/Muslim prejudice was unusual for the time, either among evangelicals or American public more generally. Falwell’s comments merely reflect a basic fact of his worldview—namely, the notion that Arabs/Muslims or “so-called Palestinians” had any legitimate right to inhabit the land of Israel/Palestine was utterly disregarded without even the faintest pretense of impartiality. For a discussion of “Orientalism,” see, for example, Said, *Orientalism*, especially 284–328;
Moslem [sic] ideology” of “alien,” “totalitarian values,” that clearly precluded “the same potential bond...between the Arab-Moslem nations and America as exists between Israel and America.” In another telling exchange, the Virginia pastor noted with alarm, “the Moslem religion is making terrific inroads among black Americans...we cannot ignore the fact that if such a Shiite religion were in the 51 percent majority in America, we could expect the same treatment as is being given non-Moslems in Iran today.”

Muslims’ “Shiite religion” thus represented not just a different faith, but a monolithic, existential threat to Western values, akin to totalitarian communism—foreshadowing a theme that would become increasingly common on the American right as the twentieth century wound down.

Whether Jerry Falwell and the Jews succeeded in “detoxifying” the evangelist among Jewish circles remains a mystery. Several positive reviews of the book appeared in National Review, though the book seems to have gone largely unnoticed by conservative Jewish publications like Commentary. Nevertheless, Falwell’s unabashed support of Israel was welcomed by a number of influential Jewish leaders and thinkers growing ever more alarmed by what they saw as increasing hostility toward Israel in the...
news media, the academy, and even mainline Protestant churches. As one representative of the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith noted, some American Jews were beginning to worry that liberal Protestants “have turned away from Israel and have expressed their support for the so-called Palestinian cause.” Defending Jewish groups’ ties to the evangelical right, the spokesman continued, “here you have a body of people who, for their own reasons, are expressing their support. They’re a group that needs to be cultivated.” Growing numbers of Jewish leaders, including Menachem Begin himself, agreed. At a fundraising dinner in New York, the prime minister even presented Falwell with the prestigious Jabotinsky medal, making the Virginia preacher the first gentile ever to receive the honor.219

Despite his attempts at outreach to the Jewish community on both sides of the Atlantic, charges of anti-Semitism continued to dog Falwell. When Bailey E. Smith, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, remarked in 1980, “God almighty does not hear the prayer of a Jew,” many journalists mistakenly attributed the remark to Falwell instead.220 Falwell, in no mood for a scandal, found it necessary to undertake a publicity campaign to limit the damage, culminating in his appearance on the public-affairs

217 Benjamin Balint, Running Commentary: The Contentious Magazine that Transformed the Jewish Left into the Neoconservative Right (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010), 107–16, 141–44. Israeli intervention in the Lebanese Civil War, culminating in the invasion and occupation of that country from 1982 to 1983, provoked fierce international criticism. One event in particular, the massacre of hundreds of civilians by Lebanese Christian militants—with tacit Israeli approval—in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps was a source of particular outrage. The war was immensely controversial within Israel as well, and ultimately led to the resignation of Menachem Begin as prime minister. See Bregman, Israel’s Wars, 145–78; and Goldschmidt and Davidson, A Concise History of the Middle East, 387–92. Falwell, for his part, criticized the “hysterical” media reaction to Sabra and Shatilla, saying it “proved again how biased and self-righteous the media can be” (Simon, Jerry Falwell and the Jews, 87).
television show *Firing Line* early the next year. (Though Smith characterized his comment as the result of a “poor choice of words” that did not reflect his true feelings, some of the Southern Baptist leader’s other remarks seem so ill-considered as to be almost unbelievable. In 1981, Smith visited Israel himself to smooth over the results of his inflammatory 1980 statement. Upon learning that Israeli police engraved numbers onto valuable items like television sets and stereos to track them down in case of theft, Smith joked that they “could etch the numbers on your arm so you wouldn’t forget who you were”—apparently oblivious to the association with the numbers tattooed on Jews’ arms in Nazi death camps).  

Despite the flurry of negative press surrounding the Smith affair, Falwell was successful in the early 1980s in gaining Jewish support in both Israel and the U.S. “The fact that the Moral Majority is pro-Israel for theological reasons,” Jewish intellectual Irving Kristol wrote in 1984, “is hardly a reason for Jews to distance themselves from it…It is their theology, but it is our Israel.”  

In a presidential election year, neoconservative Jewish thinkers like Kristol were willing to grant Falwell a pass on “important issues that separate the Moral Majority from the majority of the Jewish community,” such as abortion, because they perceived Israel’s relationship with the U.S. to be under attack by the “Third World ideology” of figures like Jesse Jackson. It would be far from the last time Jewish neoconservative thinkers, such as Kristol and *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz, would come to the defense of the New Christian Right despite a steady stream of troubling (and even blatantly anti-Semitic) statements by

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221 Ibid.
223 Ibid.
conservative evangelicals. Yet Falwell’s efforts at political bridge-building did not stop with Jews. One of the most remarkable—and arguably most important—transformations on the issue of Israel in the 1980s was largely the product of New Christian Right ideology and the political heft of the Moral Majority.

The Conversion of Jesse Helms

Perhaps no elected official personified the political ascendency of the New Christian Right’s pro-Israel ideology more than the Republican senator from North Carolina, Jesse Helms. Helms had garnered notoriety in the 1960s as a television news personality, skillfully using the media to mount “a broad and generally effective attack on liberalism” which, combined with a healthy dose of both subtle and overtly racist appeals, helped propel him to a seat in the U.S. Senate in 1972. Helms quickly emerged as an outspoken conservative, criticizing the Ford administration’s policy of détente with the Soviet Union and inveighing unremittingly against liberal policies like busing, the Equal Rights Amendment, legal protection for abortion, affirmative action, and the federal prohibition of prayer in public schools.

Helms was also a Southern Baptist deacon and personal friend of Billy Graham. The fellow North Carolinians shared anxieties about the spread of atheist communism abroad and “secular humanism” at home, but differed over questions of race—Helms had opposed the integration of his own First Baptist Church in Raleigh and even initiated a

224 William A. Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* New York: St. Martin’s, 2008), 131, 100–105. Unfortunately, the archives of the Jesse Helms Center in Wingate, North Carolina are currently closed to researchers.

225 Ibid., 167–185.
vote to deny membership to a black man who wished to join the congregation in 1963.226 Nevertheless, Helms shared a belief common to many postwar evangelicals that “God expected His people to influence every part of their world, including the government.”227 Personal conviction on this matter dovetailed with Helms’s shrewd political instincts; by the late 1970s, the senator sensed that white, born-again Christians represented a motivated and reliable constituency eager to support conservative causes. In 1979, Helms joined Baptist minister Jerry Falwell and conservative activists Paul Weyrich and Richard Viguerie as a founding member of the Moral Majority, working feverishly to incorporate conservative evangelicals into “movement” conservatism.228 Teaming up with Falwell for a tour of the Tar Heel State, the Republican senator even helped set up voter registration tables in evangelical churches, staffed by ministers and congregants, adding thousands of new voters to the rolls and campaigning on the issues held dear by the Moral Majority.229

Even before the Moral Majority, however, Helms’s staunch conservatism prefigured the ideology of the New Christian Right in both outlook and zeal. In his 1976 call to action When Free Men Shall Stand, for example, Helms sounded the alarm that “traditional Christian beliefs and practices are being replaced by a religion sewn together from scraps of Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, John Maynard Keynes, John Dewey, and other socialist gurus…The new religion is, to sum it up, collectivist, totalitarian, and implacably hostile to the family, the church, and free institutions.”230

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226 Ibid., 127.
228 Link, Righteous Warrior, 178.
229 Ibid., 287–88; Helms, Here’s Where I Stand, 94–96.
230 Helms, When Free Men Shall Stand (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 27. Here Helms updated a conservative trope, replacing “communism” with “secular humanism,” that would have been familiar to Billy Graham or Whittaker Chambers.
The North Carolina senator also frequently compared the U.S. to ancient Israel, a rhetorical device that would later be adopted by Falwell and the Moral Majority (one of Falwell’s early national political productions was a combined musical drama and slideshow titled, *America, You’re Too Young to Die!*231). “The Situation in our country today is remarkably similar to that in Israel in the days of the Judges,” Helms claimed, “when, scripture tells us, ‘there arose another generation…who did not know the Lord or the work which he had done for Israel.’” Likening God’s chastisement of the sinful and blasphemous Israelites to American “malaise” in the 1970s, Helms even asserted, “as we learned to our astonishment in Vietnam, it is not by any combination of money and power and armaments that communism will be restrained, but only through faith in God.”232 In his juxtaposition of a fallen America with the Israel of the Old Testament, Helms was tapping into a jeremiad with roots deep in American culture.233 Yet the twentieth-century politician possessed certain advantages over the writers and preachers of old—including an entire mass media apparatus to deliver his message of impending doom should the godless communists and their liberal allies in Congress, the federal bureaucracy, Hollywood, and the universities prevail.234

Despite his firm opposition to virtually every liberal social and defense issue, Helms differed with Falwell in one important respect: fervent Baptist beliefs notwithstanding, Helms was almost completely indifferent to American support for

Israel. Throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s, Helms repeatedly voted against aid for the Jewish state, expressing suspicion that a “quasi-socialist” country could really serve as a reliable American ally. Rather than send American money and materiel to Israel, Helms advocated instead for increased military assistance to America’s Arab allies. Although he admitted that Arab dictatorships were “not always flawless themselves,” Helms believed they were preferable to leftist regimes “trying to open branch offices of an international totalitarian philosophy with support from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.”

Helms decried Israeli expansionism, holding the Jewish state responsible for its own plight in the Middle East and on the international stage. In 1973, for example, he proposed a resolution calling on Israel to return control of the West Bank to Jordan. A decade later, Helms said the U.S. should cut off economic aid until the Israelis stopped construction of settlements in the Occupied Territories. Well into the early 1980s, Helms remained convinced that America should use its economic and diplomatic leverage over Israel to exact painful concessions; in 1982, he even called for suspension of diplomatic relations with the Jewish state until Prime Minister Menachem Begin ended his military campaign in Lebanon.

Although one of the North Carolina legislator’s dissatisfied constituents charged in 1983 that, “by any measure Jesse Helms had, by far, the worst anti-Israel record of any member of the U.S. Senate,” Helms’s opposition to Israel was in keeping with the general attitude of indifference toward the Jewish state within postwar movement.

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235 Helms, Here’s Where I Stand, 83.
In 1984, however, the senator’s thinking about the US–Israel relationship apparently underwent an abrupt transformation, falling into line with the pro-Israel ideology of the New Christian Right. Visiting Israel that year on a trip he described as “easily the most meaningful week of my life,” Helms declared that Israel was not only a reliable anticommunist ally, but one with “impeccable moral principles.” Similarly, Helms averred that Jews should maintain “a hold on their ancient homeland” and that Israel had “an ancient and moral right to exist.” From 1984 on, Helms was vocal in his praise of Israel and condemnation of any policy that country might find objectionable. In 1985, Helms even led a group of Republican senators in support of continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank, a complete reversal of his position from 1973.

While some observers charged that Helms’s volte-face on Israel was “a cynical and calculated move to improve his standing in the American Jewish community” during a bruising fight for re-election in 1984, it seems unlikely that Jews (representing, as they did, such a tiny minority in Helms’s home state) were the intended targets of his apparent epiphany. Rather, politically active evangelical Christians who viewed support of Israel as an issue of central concern for the nation’s moral wellbeing, mobilized by groups like the Moral Majority, would likely have been receptive to the senator’s effort to distance himself from his past positions.

Helms resolutely maintained that his newfound pro-Israel position was the result of genuinely held convictions rooted in his Baptist beliefs. In one 1986 article for the

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238 Ibid.
Heritage Foundation journal *Policy Review*, the Republican senator framed Israel and its occupation of the West Bank in biblical terms:

How many Bethlehems are there in the United States? How many Bethels? How many Shilohs?…This area called the West Bank is the heart of ancient Israel, the very land the Bible is all about. Not long ago, I was leafing through a historical atlas showing maps of ancient times…I saw a map of the West Bank. When I looked closer, I saw that it wasn’t the West Bank at all, in modern terms. It was entitled “Early Israelite Settlements, 14th Century B.C.” It is ironic that modern Israel is crammed along the seashore, where, in biblical times, the Philistines and Canaanites lived; while biblical Israel, the homeland of the Jews, is the very territory which the U.S. State Department wants the Jews to leave.241

According to the biblical hermeneutic shared by Helms and other conservative evangelicals (as well as the Israeli far right), the State of Israel, including the occupied West Bank, represented the living fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham. Helms argued that “no Jew, whether he be religious or secular, can escape his history. And it is here in Judea and Samaria, where that history took place.”242 The Bible, in other words, was far from ancient history. Helms later reiterated his argument that it was Jewish Israelis, not “rock-throwing mobs of Palestinians,” who held the sole legitimate claim to the whole of *Eretz Israel*.243

The stark contrast between Helms’s pre- and post-1984 positions on Israel suggests a dramatic conversion experience of the sort born-again Christians would recognize. Whether this change of heart was inspired by sincere study of the Bible or by the more workaday concerns of a politician facing electoral defeat, the fact remains that Helms was now speaking the language of conservative evangelicalism. In his

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242 Ibid., 27.
transformation from an opponent of American aid to Israel to an unwavering supporter of the Jewish state (both rhetorically and substantively as a member the Senate Foreign Relations Committee), Helms gave voice to the New Christian Right ideology that elevated Israel’s status from an important but hardly infallible regional ally to the incarnation of God’s will “on the ground” in the Holy Land. A younger generation of conservatives would carry Helms’s politically potent Christian Zionism into the twenty-first century, cementing its place in the pantheon of right-wing causes.

Evangelicals and Israel in the Apocalyptic 1980s

By the time Ronald Reagan took office as president in 1981, Falwell and other conservative evangelicals’ diehard views of Israel represented more than just a fringe movement among a small group of religious extremists. Like other social and political concerns of the New Christian Right, a strong pro-Israel sentiment had taken hold of evangelical Protestantism and the New Right more generally. Indeed, by the mid-1980s, American evangelicals (who had voted overwhelmingly for Reagan in 1980 and 1984) expressed more solidly pro-Israel views than American Jews for the first time.244

In many ways, Reagan was himself emblematic of evangelicals’ political aspirations for the 1980s. Though the truth about the depth and sincerity of the 40th president’s own religious views is somewhat murky, one fact is certain—Reagan actively courted the support of evangelical Christians throughout his career in Republican politics, building a base of support among conservative evangelicals in southern California during

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his time as governor of that state.\textsuperscript{245} Though he would ultimately fail to take decisive action on many of the domestic political issues evangelicals held dear—like reinstating school prayer, reversing Roe v. Wade, rolling back the (modest) gains of the gay rights movement—Reagan nevertheless remained the darling of the New Christian Right.\textsuperscript{246}

This success was due in no small part to his skilful use of the rhetoric of Christian conservatism. For starters, Reagan identified Jesus Christ as “the historical figure he most admired.”\textsuperscript{247} Labeling himself “born again” like Jimmy Carter, Reagan famously declared to an audience of 2,500 conservative clergymen (including Falwell) at the Religious Roundtable’s National Affairs Briefing in Dallas, “I know you cannot endorse me, but I want you to know that I endorse you!”\textsuperscript{248} Indeed, it was before another meeting of born-again Christians, the National Association of Evangelicals, where Reagan first called the Soviet Union an “evil empire”—a term significant not just for its stark portrayal of the Cold War as an existential struggle of absolute good versus evil, but also for its deep prophetic overtones, which would have been obvious to many in the audience.\textsuperscript{249}

Another equally important factor in Reagan’s appeal to evangelicals was his commitment to a strident military posture that aligned perfectly with evangelicals’ unswerving anticommunism. “Peace through strength” came to define Reagan’s early strategy of building up the U.S. military arsenal, and quickly became the preferred

\textsuperscript{245} Dochuk, \textit{From Bible Belt to Sunbelt}, 269–74.
\textsuperscript{249} Weber, \textit{On the Road to Armageddon}, 201.
defense policy of the New Christian Right as well. In the first chapter of *Listen, America!*, Falwell sounded the alarm on America’s “faltering national defense,” warning that the U.S. was “in serious trouble,” “at the threshold of destruction and surrender,” and in imminent danger of infiltration by “godless communism” thanks to the apparent inadequacy of its armed forces.

Falwell voiced similar concerns in a 1983 Moral Majority mailer criticizing the Nuclear Freeze Movement, complete with (quite exaggerated, as it turns out) charts illustrating U.S. numerical inferiority in terms of virtually every nuclear and conventional weapons system. At a time when “the very survival of our nation is at stake,” Falwell ominously warned readers, “the freezeniks are leading this country to the verge of national suicide.” Defense cuts would leave Americans and their children defenseless against “slavery and nuclear destruction at the hands of the Soviet butchers.” In addition to the ubiquitous slip urging readers to send the Moral Majority a $25 check at their earliest convenience, the last two pages of the pamphlet featured a photograph of Falwell and Reagan sitting together in the Oval Office, along with Reagan’s remarks at the 1983 National Association of Evangelicals’ annual convention, “the truth is that a [nuclear] freeze now would be a very dangerous fraud, for that is merely the illusion of peace. The reality is that we must find peace through strength.” It is unclear whether Reagan was aware his words and likeness were being used to solicit funds for Falwell’s latest campaign, but it seems likely he would have welcomed the minister’s support.

251 Falwell, *Listen, America!*, 84.
252 Falwell, “Special Briefing Opposing an Immediate Nuclear Freeze” (1983), 13–14. Folder 9, FAL 3–1, box 2, JFP-LU.
Reagan shared more with Falwell than a commitment to military rearmament, however. He was also keenly interested in the End of Days. At a dinner in 1971, Reagan told the president pro tempore of the California State Senate that, in light of the Israeli capture of East Jerusalem, “for the first time ever, everything is in place for the Battle of Armageddon and the second coming of Christ.” Nine years later, he reiterated his belief that “we may be the generation that sees Armageddon” to an interviewer from a Christian television network. 253 Reagan’s concept of apocalypse, as might be expected, expanded to include the possible ramifications of the Cold War arms race and nuclear energy—and even included a little of the president’s own interpretation of End Times prophecy. Other Reagan administration officials shared the president’s apocalyptic anxieties; in 1982, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger told an audience of Harvard University students, “I have read the Book of Revelation and yes, I believe the world is going to end—by an act of God, I hope—but every day, I think that time is running out.” 254

Reagan also found the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster particularly compelling, both for its ghastly demonstration of the possible effects of nuclear weapons, and because “Chernobyl” is the Ukrainian word for “wormwood.” The president drew an instant connection between the Soviet nuclear accident and the words of Revelation 8:10–11, “there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; And the name of the star is called Wormwood… and many men died of the waters, because they were made

253 Cannon, President Reagan, 288–89.
254 Caspar Weinberger, quoted in Boyer, When Time Shall Be No More, 141.
bitter.” The observation was no more outlandish than some of Hal Lindsey’s predictions, and also illustrated that the apocalyptic mindset that made *The Late Great Planet Earth* such a success had not disappeared with the 1970s.

Despite Falwell’s nearly unconditional backing of Reagan’s conservative agenda, the minister nevertheless ventured to criticize the president over one of the most contentious foreign policy debates of Reagan’s first term. In early 1981, the Reagan administration announced its intention to continue a plan—inhired from the Carter years—to sell five AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) aircraft to Saudi Arabia. The Israelis viewed the plan, which would provide the Saudis with the radar capability to detect other planes up to 350 miles away, as completely unacceptable, and mobilized their allies in Congress to derail the proposal. Rebutting Reagan, Falwell called the AWACS plan “a mistake,” and conceded that although “the President feels very really and truly committed to Israel,” the two men differed on “how to support that commitment. I don’t feel that giving military arms to countries committed to the extinction of Israel is the way to do it. There is no way to sit down at the negotiating table with murderers.”

When Israel launched a surprise air raid that destroyed a nuclear reactor under construction in Iraq later that same year, Falwell again offered his support to Israel despite the Reagan administration’s condemnation of the attack. Indeed, so strong was

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256 Ibid., 188–89. It is interesting to note that Helms, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, never registered any comments about the AWACS sale during the Committee’s lengthy hearings on the plan. See *Arms Sales Package to Saudi Arabia, Day 1: Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 97th Cong.* 5 (1981).
257 Simon, *Jerry Falwell and the Jews*, 69. Despite strong, continuing Israeli objections, the AWACS sale went ahead, and the aircraft were eventually delivered between 1986 and 1987.
Falwell’s relationship with the Israeli government that it was he—not President Reagan—who received Prime Minister Begin’s first telephone call to the U.S. after the attack. Begin explained the rationale behind Israel’s preemptive strike, and asked the Moral Majority leader to take Israel’s case to the American public. Falwell, no doubt delighted to be involved once again with matters of international concern, expressed his congratulations “for a mission that made us very proud that we manufacture those F-16s,” referring to the American-made fighter jets used by the Israeli Air Force to carry out the bombing run. “In my opinion,” Falwell added, “you must’ve put it right down the smokestack.”

Despite Falwell and other conservatives’ dominance of the evangelical conversation about Israel during the 1980s, dissenting voices still occasionally cropped up. In one case, Talbot Theological Seminary professor Mark M. Hanna—who identified as a “moderate dispensationalist”—decried evangelical “jingoists for Israel” in a provocative 1982 article for Christianity Today. “It is high time,” Hanna declared, “for evangelicals to recognize that a blind and one-sided pro-Israeli partiality is a sinful attitude, for its flip side is the negative prejudice that views Arabs as less than full persons.” Citing New Testament passages from Matthew, Luke, James, and Paul’s epistles to the Romans and Galatians, Hanna argued that God’s “demands of truth, justice, and compassion” made it imperative that Christians not play favorites in the Middle East, or anywhere else. “Let us bless Jews,” the Talbot professor wrote, “but if we want to be true Christians, let us also equally bless other people.”

258 Falwell, quoted in Carenen, The Fervent Embrace, 199.
Falwell penned a quick rejoinder to Hanna’s “confused” and “disturbing” article, which appeared alongside the Talbot professor’s missive in Christianity Today. While he agreed with Hanna that Christians “have an obligation to love and witness to all men, Jew and Gentile alike,” the Moral Majority president asserted that God’s “impartiality is only one side of the story.” Conceding that “many Arabs” probably had “been turned off to Christianity” thanks to dispensationalists’ strong pro-Israel stand, Falwell then asked rhetorically, “since when do we determine what biblical truth is in virtue of how Christians use or abuse it?” The “socio-politico-economic aspects” of conservative evangelicals’ support for Israel, Falwell contended, were totally irrelevant; God’s promise to the Jews in Genesis was enough to justify Israel’s actions in Lebanon, the Occupied Territories, and elsewhere.260

Ultimately, it was Falwell, not Hanna, whose views prevailed in the evangelical debate about Israel and the Middle East. While some on the evangelical left continued to protest what they saw as a double standard that absolved Israel of all responsibility for its treatment of Palestinians and seeming disregard for the lives of Lebanese civilians, the New Christian Right was far more successful in blending faith and popular politics to shore up support for the Jewish state among Americans.

Other members of the New Christian Right helped publicize the group’s pro-Israel message as well. Tim LaHaye, a California mega-church pastor and one of the founding members of the Moral Majority, weighed in on the future of Israel and the world in his 1984 book The Coming Peace in the Middle East. LaHaye’s book retold the familiar dispensationalist discourse on Israel, but also included the pastor’s own analysis

of 19 other Middle Eastern and African states, ranging from Afghanistan and Iran to Ethiopia and Niger. Even by the standards of conservative evangelical literature, *The Coming Peace* was full of Orientalist assumptions about Israel’s regional neighbors—for example, LaHaye called war-torn Lebanon “a gun-happy society of feuding militias, political and religious parties, warlords, hoodlums, and crooks.”

LaHaye did not limit his criticism to Arabs, however. Like Hal Lindsey, John Walvoord, and Jerry Falwell, the California preacher believed the Soviet Union would one day invade the Holy Land along with Arab and African allies in an attempt to destroy God’s chosen people in Israel. LaHaye was perhaps the most strident dispensationalist author in his statements about the USSR, declaring not only that the Soviet Union would one day serve as the agent of Satan, but that “in two chapters of the Book of Ezekiel, God establishes that He is against the nation of Russia. That is most unusual, because history shows that God is for mankind.”

LaHaye decried the “satanic presence that indwells the Russian leaders,” even blaming the communists for the AIDS epidemic ravaging the U.S. Calling AIDS the result of “secular humanists and Communist professors on the college and university campuses of America” who encouraged homosexuality and “an obsession with sex in the minds of our young,” LaHaye laid out his evidence for Russian subversion of American society by the “anti-God, anti-morality, anti-free enterprise, and anti-Christian philosophy” of the communist-ridden academy. Blending well-worn elements of the dispensationalist discourse with up-to-date references to domestic cultural

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262 Ibid., 112.
263 Ibid., 112–16.
and political issues, LaHaye thus demonstrated that the conservative evangelical worldview was flexible enough to remain relevant to believers.\textsuperscript{264}

As the 1980s progressed, other dispensationalists were not merely content with predicting the End of Days; some actively tried to take matters of prophecy into their own hands. As we have seen, dispensationalists believed the construction of a third temple atop the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, where the Jews could once again conduct animal sacrifices to God, would precipitate the second coming of Christ. The construction of a new temple would likely involve the destruction of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque, which currently stand atop the Temple Mount. Though a clear minority, a few dispensationalists showed themselves willing to work with equally extreme Jewish groups to pave the way for a third temple. One notable organization, the Jerusalem Temple Foundation, founded by former Stern Gang terrorist Stanley Goldfoot and a number of American dispensationalists, raised enough money (mostly from Goldfoot’s speeches to evangelical churches) to fund an archaeological project that would use radar to “x-ray” the Temple Mount in 1983. Though their plans were foiled by the Israeli police, the Jerusalem Temple Foundation intended their electronic survey not just to discover the remains of past temples, but to provide more accurate data for the construction of foundations for a future Jewish sanctuary.\textsuperscript{265}

\textsuperscript{264} Despite his involvement with the Moral Majority and other conservative evangelical political causes, LaHaye would become most famous for the \textit{Left Behind} series of novels, co-written with Jerry B. Jenkins beginning in 1995, set in the chaotic and violent world of the Great Tribulation. For more on these novels and their place in American culture, see Jennie Chapman, \textit{Plotting Apocalypse: Reading, Agency, and Identity in the Left Behind Series} (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013).

Even high-profile evangelical leaders like Jerry Falwell cultivated rather unsavory ties with the Israeli far right, demonstrating that their privileged relationship with the Israeli government did not deter them from directly challenging state policies they deemed illegitimate. In 1984, for example, Falwell protested the imprisonment of 25 Jewish extremists from a terror cell affiliated with the political organization *Gush Emunim* (“Bloc of the Faithful”), who had carried out bomb attacks against the mayors of several Palestinian cities and murdered three Muslim university students in 1983. Israeli police eventually arrested the group’s operatives when they learned of a plan to blow up five Palestinian buses along with mosques in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Falwell later contributed money to the *Gush Emunim* plotters’ legal defense, helping them secure early release in 1990 despite being sentenced to life in prison only six years before.266

Despite their flirtations with Jewish extremists, the dispensationalist Zionists of the New Christian Right made their mark on American life beyond the tiny, fanatical fringe. By the end of the 1980s, the rhetoric of Armageddon could be heard throughout the U.S., not only in evangelical churches, publishing houses, and radio and television stations, but also in the movement conservative press, the international news, and even the halls of Congress. Figures like Jerry Falwell, former religious outsiders once relegated to the margins of “respectable” discourse, spun their newfound prestige into political and cultural gold, injecting their pro-Israel ideology into popular discussion of the Middle East and America’s role in the world. The Reagan years saw conservative evangelical Zionism truly come of age; the results of this transformation are still visible today.

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CONCLUSION:
TOWARD THE MILLENNIUM

Jerry Falwell and the figures of the New Christian Right paved the way for other conservative, pro-Israel evangelicals to make their mark on American politics beyond the 1980s. Their aspirations were high; indeed, one of the movement’s fastest-rising stars aimed to capture the highest elected office in the land. Marion G. “Pat” Robertson, a Southern Baptist minister and religious broadcaster with charismatic leanings declared in 1986, “America stands at a crossroads. A moral and spiritual renewal of historic proportions is underway. People across the land are crying out for leadership by statesmen… who care about future generations instead of politicians who only care about the next election.” Robertson likely had a particular “statesman” in mind when he wrote those words; less than a year later, the televangelist resigned his chairmanship of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), signed off as host of the network’s flagship program The 700 Club, and announced his run for the Republican presidential nomination.

Ideologically, Robertson was in many ways an unorthodox conservative; for example, he proposed that all debts in the U.S. be cancelled every 50 years, a modern-day

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267 The charismatic movement is a revivalist movement within evangelicalism (although separate charismatic revivals began almost simultaneously within Roman Catholicism and mainline Protestantism as well) that began in the 1960s. Like Pentecostals, charismatics believe the “gifts of the Holy Spirit” manifest in worship, and celebrate signs including faith healing, miracles, and glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. Robertson’s particular beliefs are rather unusual for a Southern Baptist minister because the Southern Baptist Convention explicitly rejects a charismatic interpretation of the Bible. See Noll, A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada, 450–51.


update of the biblical “year of Jubilee” described in Leviticus 25:8–55. On Israel and
the Middle East, however, Robertson echoed the evangelical dispensationalists who had come before him, sharing their prophetic fascination with Armageddon and the second coming of Christ. “The people of Israel are still precious to God,” he wrote in 1984. “At the climax of history the Israelis will turn to God, and their nation will once again become a center of God’s revelation to all mankind.”271 Like other evangelical dispensationalists from Hal Lindsey and John Walvoord onward, Robertson cited the “rebirth” of Israel in 1948 and the Israelis’ 1967 capture of Old Jerusalem as evidence “that we are getting very close to the time when God is going to say that the human race has gone far enough. He may be ready to step in to terminate this phase of human existence and to start another one. That is why I firmly expect to be alive when Jesus Christ comes back to earth.”272 Although Robertson downplayed his statements about the apocalypse during his presidential campaign, he nevertheless remained the ideological heir to a century of American Christian Zionist thought.

Though Robertson failed to win the GOP nomination in 1988, his bid for the presidency nevertheless signaled that pro-Israel evangelical conservatives had truly moved from the periphery to the center of the American conservative movement. As we have seen, evangelical Christians had long engaged with the American political system—William Blackstone had presented his Memorial to policymakers nearly a century before Robertson’s presidential bid—but they had not always enjoyed the kind of access or

272 Ibid., 154.
influence they desired. By the late 1980s, however, evangelical voters had become a reliable and important constituency of the Republican Party—the product of decades of work by ambitious neo-evangelical thinkers and activists like Carl F. H. Henry, Harold Ockenga, and Billy Graham who embraced a conservative political identity as a way of uniting their fractious theological movement.

Perhaps nowhere was American evangelicals’ interest in “worldly” political matters more pronounced than in their prophetic fascination with Israel. Thanks to their literal interpretation of Genesis 12:3, evangelicals were keen to see the Jewish people return to their ancient homeland. Beginning with the 1917 Balfour Declaration, but especially after Israeli independence 1948, American Christian Zionists could point to events in the Middle East as proof the End Times were fast approaching. Subsequent developments, like Israel’s capture of the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967, further reinforced evangelicals’ belief that Armageddon was near. During the frightening and uncertain 1970s, which saw Americans’ attention drawn to events in the Middle East like never before, dispensationalist writers like John Walvoord and Hal Lindsey reinforced the Christian Zionist discourse and helped popularize what had once been a little-known theological movement through wildly successful projects like The Late, Great Planet Earth.

No single figure, however, combined conservative evangelical political sensibilities and dispensational apocalypticism more effectively than Jerry Falwell. During the Reagan years, Falwell worked tirelessly to inject his beliefs—including his strident Christian Zionism—into mainstream conservative political life. Through books
and speeches, television and radio, direct mail and outreach to church congregations across the country, Falwell publicized his unapologetic support for Israel while simultaneously cultivating high-profile relationships with American and Israeli politicians. In addition, Falwell helped mobilize thousands of like-minded voters through the Moral Majority, turning a potent but largely undirected conservative evangelical groundswell into the powerful New Christian Right.

As the New Christian Right grew to prominence, conservative politicians like North Carolina firebrand Jesse Helms began to adopt the language of Falwell and the Moral Majority when discussing Israel and the Middle East. Long conspicuously ambivalent about America’s relationship with the Jewish State, a new breed of Republicans began to exchange their skepticism toward Israel for an attitude of uncritical support. No doubt a combination of factors led to this conservative reappraisal; however, one fact remains clear: by the late 1980s, the rhetorical lines between conservative evangelical leaders and some conservative politicians were becoming increasingly blurred. Evangelical preachers and activists continued to refine their public-relations strategies in an effort to shape the national conversation about issues they held dear. At the same time, conservative politicians and elected officials, keen to appeal to an ever more important constituency, increasingly adopted the language and style of the New Christian Right.

The echoes of conservatives’ realignment on Israel are still audible in today’s raucous Republican politics. Presidential candidates ranging from the Baptist minister and former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee (who, like Falwell, led frequent trips to
the Holy Land, billed as the “Israel Experience with Mike Huckabee”) to Texas Senator Ted Cruz, who favors “recognizing Jerusalem as the eternal, undivided capital of Israel and so the proper location of the U.S. embassy,” are almost unanimous in their unqualified support of the Jewish State. Even the unconventional real estate mogul Donald Trump (the GOP frontrunner at the time of this writing), stuck to boilerplate conservative talking points in his address to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in March 2016, though he went further than most other candidates in his denunciation of Palestinians’ “culture of hatred,” claiming (with characteristic disregard for any semblance of verifiable fact), “half the population of Palestine has been taken over by the Palestinian ISIS and Hamas.”

Though these and other remarks by conservative political figures were undoubtedly shaped by the national climate of fear and suspicion toward Arabs and Muslims following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, recent political disagreements between President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and events in a constantly changing Middle East, they hardly represent a newfound worldview. Rather, statements like these—holding up Israel as a unique ally imbued with spiritual significance while simultaneously dehumanizing Palestinians (or Arabs, or Muslims) as an irredeemably evil monolith—are merely the latest expressions of a longstanding set of beliefs promulgated by the New Christian Right.

As Americans strive to make sense of the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian imbroglio, it bears remembering that our understanding of the land and people between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea has been inextricably shaped by religion. In particular, the language used by evangelical conservatives (and, increasingly, conservatives more generally) to frame the conflict between Jews and Arabs as a clear-cut battle between good and evil has arisen in no small measure from a distinct and uncompromising blend of religious ideology and politics—one far more concerned with the drama of future End Times catastrophe than with the immediate and urgent problems of peace, security, and human dignity for Israelis and Palestinians alike. Though evangelical Christian Zionists earnestly hope for an eventual eternity of perfect peace, the ongoing success of the New Christian Right should give pause to anyone interested in achieving necessary justice on earth. Policymakers, scholars, and analysts should take notice—before the dreams of today become the nightmares of tomorrow.
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