

Mapping Contemporary Views on Israel-Palestine¹

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Introduction

We live in an era where civil discourse is exceedingly rare to the point of being almost non-existent. Whether in matters of religion and politics, or even the most benign of matters, the worst of human nature seems to win the day in our communication. This pattern is only intensified through social media where Facebook and Twitter have become the tools of cranks and bullies.

This bad behavior is never more pronounced than when it comes to navigating the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. The two sides have grown used to talking past one another to the point where for many the conflict has become like the weather: you can complain about it but there is nothing you can do to change it. Some of us who may be wearied by all of this may just shrug and conclude, “haters gonna hate.” But the admonition of our Lord in this must be, “But you are not to be like that” (Luke 22:26). We believe that when Arabs and Jews can say to one another, “I love you in Jesus name,” the world will see the reconciling power of the Gospel and the power of God to make a difference in this world.

The first step in seeking to make a difference is to make a good faith effort to understand the various viewpoints, to really try to listen to one another’s perspective; hence this paper. While not comprehensive, we have done our best with the available material to present an overview of the most common attitudes and positions of the various players and to highlight some efforts underway among believers in Jesus to heed his admonition —

¹ Although some object to the term “Palestine,” it has become part of the current discourse, even among some Jews. The use of the term is not meant to foreclose any aspect of the discussion, nor does it represent a particular position regarding land issues other than to recognize that there is a potential dialogue partner on the Palestinian side.

and to make a difference. We hope that this effort will help to provide some context for this conference and for further dialogue.

Part I: The Mainstream Jewish Community

First of all, the mainstream Jewish community. Not only are Jews not monolithic on the subject of Israel and the Palestinians, but there are also clear demarcations depending on factors such as geography (America vis-à-vis Europe vis-à-vis Israel) or generational divide at both individual and also organizational level (think AIPAC vis-à-vis Jstreet, more on them below). We begin with the American Jewish community.

1. The American Jewish community

The most recent comprehensive survey was the 2013 **Pew Foundation** survey, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*.² Every such survey seems to generate its share of responses indicating why and how the survey was not done quite right or is not quite representative, but surveys and polls certainly give a good general picture.

Some notable results of the Pew survey:

Did God give the Land of Israel to the Jewish People?

Yes	No	Not asked (don't believe in God)
40% of all American Jews	27%	28%
By Religion		
47% of "Jews by religion"		
6% of "Jews of no religion"		
By Denomination		
84% of Orthodox		
54% of Conservative		
35% of Reform		
24% of "No denomination"		
By Political Affiliation		
67% of Republicans		
30% of Democrats		
44% of Independents		
By Age — No Drastic Effect		

² *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, October 1, 2013, summarized at <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>, with links to download the full report.

Note:

It's not clear what the theological difference is between Jews with and without religion. It doesn't seem to be about God, as only 39 percent of Jews by religion report that they are certain that God or a universal spirit exists.

What is clear is that Jews of no religion act differently.³

What comes out of these figures is the perhaps surprising result not only that 72% of American Jews believe in God (however that is defined for them),⁴ but that given widespread indications of Jewish secularity, so many Jews believe he gave the land.

Prospects for a Two-State Solution

The question was actually worded, "Is there a way for Israel and an independent Palestinian state to coexist peacefully?"

Optimistic	Not optimistic
61%	33%
By Religion	
58% of "Jews by religion"	
72% of "Jews of no religion"	
By Denomination	
30% of Orthodox	
62% of Conservative	
58% of Reform	
72% of "No denomination"	
By Political Affiliation	
35% of Republicans	
70% of Democrats	
44% of Independents	
By Age — No Drastic Effect	

³ The Jewish Daily Forward, *Who Are We Now? Interpreting the Pew Study on Jewish Identity in America Today*, October 2013, Kindle location 217.

⁴ *Portrait of Jewish Americans*, p. 74: "Seven-in-ten U.S. Jews believe in God or a universal spirit (72%)..."

Good-Faith Efforts to Reach a Solution?

Yes, Israel is making a good-faith effort	Yes, the Palestinians making a good-faith effort
38%	12%
By Religion	
44% of “Jews by religion”	No difference
21% of “Jews of no religion”	
By Denomination	
61% of Orthodox	
52% of Conservative	
36% of Reform	
27% of “No denomination”	
By Political Affiliation	
62% of Republicans	5% of Republicans
32% of Democrats	16% of Democrats
By Age	
	15% of age 18–49
	9% of age 50+

Settlements

Here the survey compared the views of American and Israeli Jews.

Hurts Israel’s security	Helps Israel’s security	Makes no difference
American Jews		
44%	17%	29%
Israeli Jews		
35%	31%	27%

What is interesting is that the question concerned security but not the effect of settlements on the prospects for peace, which would seem to be at least as pressing a question.

Level of U.S. Support for Israel

Just right	Not enough	Too much
54%	30%	11%

While the above represents the opinions of individuals, Jewish organizations play a significant role in the life of American Jewry. The Jewish establishment traditionally has advocated support for Israel for the most part without offering critique. Notably, the lobbying organization

AIPAC now has an upstart rival in **JStreet**. “To AIPAC, J Street is beyond the pale of ‘pro-Israel,’ more critical of Israel’s actions than those of its enemies. To J Street, AIPAC represents an old American perception of pro-Israel, ignorant of the beliefs and sentiments of both the younger generation of American Jews and of the majority of Israelis.”⁵

One description of the differences between AIPAC and JStreet mirrors not only the divisions in the Jewish community but reminds one of the intractably different narratives between Israelis and Palestinians (on which see below).

In these different perspectives lies the flaw of each lobby group’s repertoire: a deep transgression of omission. AIPAC presents what Israel is on paper, and what the concept of Israel looked like in 1948 (with, of course, a great deal of accolades for the small nation’s start-up miracles and high-tech achievements), but says nothing of the real status of Arabs in Israeli society, of the women who are made to ride in the back of buses in Haredi communities, . . . J Street presents what is supposedly a liberal Zionist ideal, and a genuine effort to save the soul of Israel. Its narrative seems, however, to include no room to blame anyone but the Likud-led coalition for Israel’s misfortune. No recognition of rocket fire from Gaza on Israeli civilians. . . .”⁶

So concludes the author of the article: “Nonetheless, the insistence of each group on considering only the support for its own agenda in a vacuum, ignoring any and all contravening evidence, leaves behind a sense of lifeless, unproductive dialogue—not entirely unlike the 21st century incarnation of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.”⁷

Finally, we should mention the non-mainstream but significant anti-Zionism of some prominent Jewish intellectuals. **Norman Finkelstein** is the son of Holocaust survivors. With a history that includes varied faculty positions, an interest in political theory, and a time as a committed Marxist, Finkelstein has sharply questioned writings about Zionism as well as claiming that the Holocaust has been used as an ideological weapon (mentioning, e.g. Elie Wiesel). He engaged in a well-known dispute with **Alan Dershowitz** over the latter’s book *The Case for Israel*. Another well-known name is that of **Noam Chomsky**, a linguist and political analyst whose anti-Zionist views have become well-known. A self-described anarchist who was raised in Zionist circles, he also has clashed with Dershowitz and spoken harshly of Israel policies, bordering on questioning

⁵ Charles Kopel, “The AIPAC/JStreet Color War,” *Moment* [2012], <http://www.momentmag.com/the-aipacj-street-color-war/>

⁶ Kopel, “Color War.”

⁷ Kopel, “Color War.”

the legitimacy of the State itself. The views of Finkelstein and Chomsky rarely affect the person on the street, but are worth mentioning as a significant anti-Zionist undercurrent present among some academic Jews.

2. The European Jewish community

a. *Identity à la carte*

Two recent major studies surveyed the European Jewish community. The first, entitled *Identity à la Carte: Research on Jewish Identities, Participation and Affiliation in Five Eastern European Countries*,⁸ produced in 2011 by the **JDC International Centre for Community Development**,⁹ was called “a landmark study of post-Communist Jewish identity” by the *Jerusalem Post*. The study surveyed communities in Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, and Romania. Note that Western Europe was *not* part of this study.

Identity à la Carte offered a less statistical and more summarized report than the Pew study (though statistics were still included). On the Israel-Palestinian issue, Eastern European Jews

all tend to support Israel’s policies: they think that Israel absolutely has a right to exist and they do not have a negative view of Israel’s treatment of the Arab-Israeli conflict or of the Palestinian issue.¹⁰

The responses to the political questions reveal that a large majority of Jews living in the sampled countries support Israeli policy on the Palestinian issue and do not believe that it has harmful consequences for [Eastern] European Jews.¹¹

Results differed by country. On the question, “the way Israel handles the Arab-Israeli conflict is harmful for Jews here [in their own countries],” Latvia and Romania scored lowest, suggesting that they don’t believe the Middle East conflict spills over much into those countries.

Hungary also stood out: “It is clear that respondents in the Hungarian sample are least likely to regard Israel as a source of security, as a spiritual centre, and as a country that Jews have a responsibility to support, while respondents in the Romanian sample are most likely to do so.” Given the

⁸ <http://www.jdc-iccd.org/en/article/26/identity-la-carte-a-policy-oriented-study-of-18-50-year-old-east-european-jews>

⁹ <http://www.jdc-iccd.org>: “Founded in 2005, the JDC-International Centre for Community Development (JDC-ICCD) is located in Yarnton Manor, Oxford University. The JDC-ICCD is devoted to understanding the phenomena of Jewish community and identity more comprehensively.”

¹⁰ *Identity à la Carte*, p. 29.

¹¹ *Identity à la Carte*, p. 8.

reported prevalence of anti-Semitism in Hungary vis-à-vis other non-FSU Eastern European countries, it may be that the facts on the ground lead to an overall sense that security cannot really be found anywhere.

b. *Second Survey of European Jewish Leaders and Opinion Formers*

The same organization produced *Second Survey of European Jewish Leaders and Opinion Formers, 2011*¹² published in April 2012. This survey polled a far greater number of countries and included Western European nations (but not Russia or Ukraine), but this time was directed at those in *leadership* positions. So even though Western Europe is included, to an extent the surveys are comparing apples and oranges.

The greatest consensus (at 85% agreement) agreed that *Jewish communities should provide opportunities for members to share different opinions and points of view on Israel and its policies*. There was also a strong consensus (85%) affirming that *events in Israel sometimes lead to an increase of anti-Semitism in my country*.¹³

Translation: Vis-à-vis Eastern Europe alone, Europe *in toto* believed events in the Middle East impacted anti-Semitism in Europe, and also suggested that there exist a wider variety of views on Israeli policy than in Eastern Europe.

In fact, “As regards subgroup differences, Eastern Europeans see the main future threats as the *alienation of Jews from the Jewish community life* and the *lack of effective assistance from Jewish organizations abroad*. Western Europeans, on the other hand, are more likely to consider *anti-Semitism* as a threat than are Eastern European (30% vs. 14%).”¹⁴

Translation: Eastern European Jews are more concerned with identity and internal issues. Western European Jews are more concerned with external threats.

Note the East/West divide on such questions as: “I am sometimes ashamed of the actions of the Israeli government” (8% East strongly agree, 19% West); “the media in my country regularly portrays Israel in a bad light” (18% East strongly agree, 44% West); “events in Israel sometimes lead to an increase of antisemitism in my country” (22% East strongly agree; 47% West).

¹² <http://www.jdc-iccd.org/en/article/23/second-survey-of-european-jewish-leaders-and-opinion-formers-2011>

¹³ *Second Survey*, p. 7 (italics original).

¹⁴ *Second Survey*, p. 14 (italics original).

Again, Western European Jews are, more *critically* supportive of Israel than Eastern European Jews, while again the former are more concerned with external threats (anti-Semites, media coverage) than the latter.¹⁵

Given the recent rise in popularity of rightist political parties in France and perhaps in Germany, it remains to be seen from what quarters the greatest support from Israel will actually come — given that European rightist parties are have also been recently associated with anti-immigration sentiment and, indeed, anti-Semitism.

3. The Israeli Jewish community

Within Israeli society itself there are the well-known divisions between right and left, Likud and Labor, Sephardim (traditionally more Likud-oriented) and Ashkenazim (traditionally more Labor-oriented). These divisions lead to radically different assessments as to the settlements, the prospects for peace, and the nature of any peace settlement. Having said that, the following observation is noteworthy:

“What’s striking is that the Israeli public seems to have lost interest with the Palestinian question — the general feeling is that it’s like the weather, nothing you can do about it,” observed Guy Ben-Porat, a political scientist at Ben Gurion University. “Economy, housing, all these issues where nobody’s sure what the difference is, exactly, between the parties, there’s a feeling of government failure. I think it’s really a personal election, meaning anti-Netanyahu.”¹⁶

This observation is apparently confirmed by the 2009 survey *A Portrait of Israeli Jews*,¹⁷ produced by the **Guttman Center for Surveys, Israel Democracy Institute**,¹⁸ which was almost entirely concerned with matters internal to Israel. There *were* questions asked that were relevant to the Israel-Palestine issue—but the *results* of those questions were not given! It is important to understand that such questions were asked:

“Do you see yourself as a Zionist,” with 84% answering yes, the only reported statistic on the series of question related to this issue.¹⁹ But other questions were also asked:

¹⁵ Results in Europe also unsurprisingly break out along denominational lines (Orthodox, etc.) as they do in America; those results have not been included in this paper.

¹⁶ Jodi Rudoren, “Netanyahu Says No to Statehood for Palestinians,” *New York Times* (March 16, 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/17/world/middleeast/benjamin-netanyahu-campaign-settlement.html>

¹⁷ http://en.idi.org.il/media/1351622/GuttmanAviChaiReport2012_EngFinal.pdf

¹⁸ From the survey: “The Israel Democracy Institute is an independent, non-partisan body on the seam of academia and politics.” The IDI is based in Jerusalem.

¹⁹ *Portrait of Israeli Jews*, p. 17.

- “In your opinion, is a soldier entitled to disobey an order to evacuate settlements?”
- “Would you say that the main reason you think this is religious or something else?”
- “In your opinion, is a soldier entitled to disobey an order to serve in the territories?”:
- “To what extent do you support the idea of ‘territories for peace?’”
- “Would you say that the main reason you think this is religious or something else?”
- “In the summer of 2005, did you support or oppose the disengagement plan?”
- “What is your position on the evacuation of settlements in the territories as part of a permanent peace accord?”
- “Would you say that the main reason you think this is religious or something else?”
- “As part of a permanent accord with the Palestinians, to what extent would you agree for Israel to transfer the Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem to Palestinian control?”
- “Would you say that the main reason you think this is religious or something else?”

Unfortunately, for reasons known only to the compilers of the report, it was not seen necessary to relate the answers to this series of questions! This seems to reflect Ben-Porat’s observation that these issues have become part of the unalterable landscape, while internal issues have moved more to the fore in the consciousness of the average Israeli.

A better approach to our subject arose from a 2006–2009 study conducted by the **Oxford Research Group**²⁰ “which facilitated separate Palestinian and Israeli meetings to formulate strategic options for peace.” In a 2012 paper, “Towards a Messianic Jewish Theology of Reconciliation: The Strategic Engagement of Messianic Jewish Discourse in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,”²¹ Richard Harvey spoke about the results of the study.

²⁰ <http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/about>: “The Oxford Research Group (ORG) is an independent peace and security think-and-action-tank that has been influential for over 30 years in pioneering the idea of sustainable approaches to security as an alternative to violent global confrontation, through original research, wide-ranging dialogue, and practical policy recommendations.”

²¹ “This paper was originally presented in a summary form at the “Christ at the Checkpoint” Conference in Bethlehem, March 2012. The powerpoint slides and video of the presentation are available at <https://vimeo.com/38967441> and <http://dl.dropbox.com/u/28495742/CATC%20100312a.pptx>”

For the Israeli party in this discussion, “The proposals that the group developed were not so much linked to the problems of Gaza and the West Bank, but were more related to what the future state would look like, and the distinction between Jewishness (cultural Jewish identity), Zionism (national Jewish identity) and Judaism (religious Jewish identity). The social fragmentation of Jewish Israeli society became the main concern of the discussion.” Once again: a focus on internal matters.

While the group did speak about the future relationship of Israelis and Palestinians, for the Israeli party, four “future stories” were proposed based on possible scenarios. A “Jewish home”; “two homes for two peoples”; “one home for two peoples;” and “ a shared home.” It is not necessary to go into details on each scenario. What became clear is that the “fragmentation” of Israeli society made it quite difficult if not impossible for the Israelis to come to a consensus on moving forward.

* * *

In sum, the mainstream Jewish community views the Israel-Palestine situation somewhat differently depending on whether we are talking about American, European, or Israeli Jews. It is unfortunate that the various surveys do not contain parallel questions or break down results similarly. Therefore we are left somewhat comparing apples and oranges. The most complete statistics exist for American Jews, with significant variations in attitudes and beliefs according to religiosity, denomination, political affiliation, and sometimes age. European Jews are divided in attitudes most notably between Eastern and Western European Jews. Israelis, though clearly divided by the Likud-Labor philosophies, are reportedly more concerned with internal than external matters. If possible, what Jews in other countries think should be added into the picture, but that was not possible for this survey. One gets the impression that American Jews are more passionate on the issues than Israelis themselves, while European Jews may fear more for the impact of the conflict on their own well-being. Also important is that Western European and American Jews are more critically supportive of Israel, Eastern European Jews more uncritically supportive. It also seems that Jews in Western Europe are even open to a diversity of opinion on Israel than are Jews in America. This, if confirmed, would not be surprising, since Europeans are far more aware of their neighbors and of the impact of Islamic immigration than are Jews in America, who in comparison tend to be far more insulated from events on the world stage.

Part II: The Mainstream Palestinian Community

Richard Harvey noted that

In 2006–9 the Oxford Research Group facilitated separate Palestinian and Israeli meetings to formulate strategic options for peace, as “few Israelis or Palestinians at the time at political level were interested in dialogue for mutual understanding”. On the Palestinian side, an inclusive strategy group of 40 met several times to produce *Regaining the Initiative: Palestinian Strategic Options to End Israeli Occupation*, which made detailed proposals for future peace.²²

Here Harvey notes the parameters of an acceptable peace process for Palestinians. It is helpful to note the general Palestinian viewpoints before examining those of believers in particular. Harvey references a paper by the Palestine Strategy Group, “Towards New Strategies for Palestinian National Liberation,” which says:

The starting point for this report is the near-consensus in the PSG that the option of ending the conflict with Israel through bilateral negotiations — which the Palestinian leadership has pursued for 20 years — is not available given the intransigence of the present Israeli government. . . .

Scenarios acceptable to many or most Palestinians are:

- (1) A fully sovereign Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital, and a just settlement that fulfills the Palestinian refugees’ right to return and compensation.
- (2) A single bi-national state for Israelis and Palestinians.
- (3) A single democratic state in which all citizens are treated equally before the law.
- (4) A confederation between Jordan and an independent Palestinian state.

Scenarios not acceptable to Palestinians are:

- (5) Continuation of the status quo, with open-ended and intermittent negotiations providing cover for continuing

²² Harvey, “Towards a Messianic Jewish Theology of Reconciliation.”

Israeli settlement on Palestinian land and the consolidation of the occupation.

(6) A Palestinian state with temporary borders and limited sovereignty, permanently under the effective control of Israel.

(7) Unilateral separation by Israel with imposed borders and restrictions on the movement of Palestinians.

(8) Any notions involving the absorption of Gaza by Egypt and the West Bank by Jordan, or other comparable arrangements.

A central strategic aim for Palestinians is emphatically to rule out scenarios (5) to (8), because the Israeli belief that these are preferable to an agreed settlement and are permanently available removes any Israeli inducement to negotiate seriously. Palestinians both can and will counter and block all four scenarios and must convey this forcefully to Israel.²³

This, however, represents the viewpoint of a particular study group and cannot be said to necessarily represent the views of the Palestinians population in general.

For more general views, one must turn to a number of surveys that have been conducted. One such poll was conducted by the **Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research**, an independent nonprofit think tank.²⁴ A poll taken in March 2015²⁵ was preceded by Netanyahu's recent electoral victory and the addition of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to the International Criminal Court. It must be noted that the questions put to Palestinians are often quite different from those that would be put to Israelis, given the differences in matters that are "on the burner" for each group. Among the many statistics compiled, the following are noteworthy for the purposes of this paper.

²³ The Palestine Strategy Group, "Towards New Strategies for Palestinian National Liberation: Options for Achieving Palestinian Strategic Objectives in the Light of the Breakdown of Bilateral Negotiations" (August 2011), pp. 4-5, available at [http://www.palestinestrategygroup.ps/Towards_New_Strategies_For_Palestinian_National_Liberation_FINAL_8-2011_\(English\).pdf](http://www.palestinestrategygroup.ps/Towards_New_Strategies_For_Palestinian_National_Liberation_FINAL_8-2011_(English).pdf). Harvey: "The Palestine Strategy Group (PSG) is an open and inclusive forum for strategic discussion in which Palestinians from across the social and political spectrum conduct strategic analysis of the environment of the conflict with Israel in order to strengthen and guide the Palestinian national project for liberation and independence."

²⁴ <http://www.pcpsr.org/>. See the About Us page at <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/about-psr-page/>. A full explanation of methodology is at <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/153>

²⁵ <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/605>

ISIS:

86% — ISIS (Daesh) is a radical group that does not represent true Islam

8% — ISIS does represent true Islam

6% — not sure or do not know

The reconciliation government (i.e. between Hamas and the PA):

54% — pessimistic regarding success of reconciliation

42% — optimistic

28% — satisfied with the performance of the reconciliation government

War and peace:

> 66% — Support launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip if the siege and blockade continue

51% — support the two-state solution — but only

29% — believe negotiation is the most effective means of establishing a Palestinian state

48% — support an armed intifada

47% — believe that Israel plans to destroy the two mosques, al Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock, and replace them with a Jewish temple

BDS

85% — support the campaign to boycott Israeli products

Priorities (top priority or top problem to be solved)

39% — the establishment of a Palestinian state

36% — obtaining the right of return for refugees

28% — dealing with poverty and unemployment

26% — the continuation of occupation and settlements

That is from one survey. Another survey “commissioned by **The Washington Institute** and conducted by a leading Palestinian pollster”²⁶ was taken in June 2014. This survey broke down views between Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. One salient question was, “If the Palestinian leadership negotiates a two-state solution with Israel, do you think that...”

- Yes, that would be its final goal (we have rounded the figures) — 31% in the West Bank, 21% in Gaza, 27% total
- That would be part of a “program of stages,” to liberate all of historic Palestine later — 63% in West Bank, 70% in Gaza, 65% total

(with less than 10% each no opinion/don’t know)

²⁶ <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/new-palestinian-poll-shows-hardline-views-but-some-pragmatism-too>

The Washington Institute Report has a slideshow of charts available on its web site giving results to a large number of questions.²⁷ Additional surveys can be located by simply typing “surveys of Palestinians” into Google, including those from the Pew Foundation, Hebrew University, and others.

One significant take-away from the Palestinian surveys is that **the questions asked show the concerns and priorities of the Palestinian people** which is quite different from the concerns of Israelis or those in other parts of the world. Thus the very questions asked can offer a point of entrée into understanding and dialogue.

Part III: The Christian Community

General Christian Attitudes

Paul Merkley is one of the most scholarly and knowledgeable voices on Christian views of Israel and of Zionism. He is Emeritus Professor of History at Carleton University in Canada, a Lutheran by denomination, and is board director for the International Christian Embassy in Canada. For specifically evangelical Christian views, key resources are **Yaakov Ariel** (*An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews*), an Israeli-American who teaches religion at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, along with Jewish author **Stephen Spector** (*Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism*).

Following Merkley’s presentation,²⁸ the history of mainstream Christian relations with Israel started out rather sanguinely following the establishment of the State in 1948. A key pro-Israel voice was that of theologian **Reinhold Niebuhr**, of the Christian Council for Palestine and the American Christian Palestine Committee, and founder of the journal *Christianity and Crisis*. Though not a Christian Zionist in the sense of believing God’s biblical promises, his pro-Israel stance was formulated on the basis of (1) the requirements of justice in the aftermath of World War II, and (2) the hope that the Jewish people would become a beacon of European values and civilization in the Middle East. Merkley suggests that the prospect of admitting many post-Holocaust Jews into Western democracies encouraged support for Israel as well.

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http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/other/PalestinianPollingReport_June2014.pdf

²⁸ See Paul Charles Merkley, *Those That Bless You I Will Bless: Christian Zionism in Historical Perspective* (Mantua Books, 2011). This is a more popular and more personal book; cf. also his scholarly *Christian Attitudes Towards the State of Israel* (McGill Queens University Press, 2007).

In fact, says Merkley:

In 1947–48, that part of the Church in the West that is today called “fundamentalist” or “evangelical” was overwhelmingly supportive of the Zionist solution to the Jewish problem. The rest of the Protestant church (what is generally spoken of today as “the mainstream”) was mostly well disposed, but with many dissenters. The Roman Catholic church had powerful objections but did not feel able, in the light of the general humanitarian advantage that the Jewish cause briefly held in the immediate wake of the war, to compel nations with Roman Catholic populations to oppose.

Yet almost immediately after the initial decisions were taken, these latter two constituencies (mainstream Protestants and Roman Catholic) shifted into the ranks of those denouncing the new state — and eventually became overwhelmingly hostile. Had the voting on the partition of the Palestine Mandate taken place five or ten years later, the Jewish state would not have come into existence.”²⁹

The change really began in the 1950s once Israel became “successful”; by 1967, following the Six-Day War, most liberal Christians were anti-Israel. Niebuhr, however, remained in the pro-Israel camp. It should be noted that Israel’s presence in the occupied, or disputed, territories, did not occur until post-1967, with the result that the contours of the modern Israel-Palestine situation developed particularly from that time on.

However, not all Christians rallied behind Israel even on the eve of statehood. The Federal Council of Churches of the United States (later called the **National Council of Churches**) basically abstained on the question of Israel to the Anglo-British Joint Committee of 1946. It again remained silent just prior to the Six-Day War, then spoke against Israel at war’s conclusion. The same agency later denounced the Camp David accords.

Another such example is the **World Council of Churches** (WCC) which post-1948 supported Jews yet characterized Israel “as a complication — never an answer to a problem,”³⁰ as if the creation of the State of Israel had nothing to do with the choices of the world powers at the time. In 1975 at the Nairobi Assembly, the WCC supported “the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination” while in 1983 at the Vancouver Assembly, and at the subsequent assembly in Seoul, called for a Palestinian state.

²⁹ Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes Towards the State of Israel* (McGill Queens University Press, 2007), p. 6.

³⁰ Merkley, *Those That Bless You I Will Bless*, Kindle edition location 3813.

Evangelical Christians, at least here in the U.S., tend to fall into two camps. Not many really jump on an anti-Christian Zionism bandwagon. For many, especially those in the Reformed and Lutheran evangelical churches, the issue is probably not really on the radar. On the other hand, those influenced by dispensationalism and its hermeneutic (Baptists, many independent churches) see the State of Israel as a fulfillment of prophecy and support its existence, often with a conservative, Likud-flavored support of Israeli policy. (In the U.K and elsewhere one can also find a vibrant Christian Zionism that is non-dispensational.)

Among evangelicals, two problems have emerged in the Christian Zionist movement. One problem is the tendency to not engage in any balanced thinking on the Israel-Palestine issue; one suspects that the Palestinians as real people have not been given much thought by many Christian Zionists. Partly this is due to the relative isolation of those in the U.S. from other parts of the world. On the other hand, some Christian Zionists support Israel to such a degree that they seem to be auxiliary branches of Likud, to the point of entire pessimism over any peacemaking in the Middle East. The second problem is that many in this camp distance themselves from evangelization of Jewish people altogether, preferring to “bless” Israel (as though giving the gospel was cursing Israel!) materially and in a misguided effort to see all Jews everywhere make aliyah. Specific organizations in this camp include the **International Christian Embassy**,³¹ **Bridges for Peace**,³² and others. Of particular note is John Hagee’s **Christians United for Israel**³³ (CUFI), the most visible and vocal of American groups, with Hagee disavowing the need for evangelization of Jews. (Of course the so-called mainstream denominations engaged in BDS and so forth also disavow such a need.)

The International Christian Embassy began in 1980 by founder Jan Willem van der Hoeven. The current head is Juergen Buehler, and there are currently branches in some 70 countries. Isaiah 40:1 has served as the ICEJ’s watchword over the years.

From its inception the ICEJ has had two dominant goals; first, to serve as a conduit of comfort and blessing through which believers in the nations could show their love and support to Israel. Second, the ICEJ stands as a prophetic voice to this generation concerning God’s unwavering plan to fulfill His covenant promises to the fathers of Israel. Namely, that He would ultimately restore the

³¹ <http://int.icej.org>

³² <http://www.bridgesforpeace.com>

³³ <http://www.cufi.org>

children of Israel to their rightful land and sequentially to a right relationship with their God, the God of Israel.³⁴

For many, the problem comes not in what the ICEJ does but in what it doesn't do. Writing in 1990, John Ross said:

The evident reluctance of the ICEJ to represent a full and balanced evangelicalism to the Jewish nation is perplexing. In the summer of 1988, while making a video film about Israel, the author invited Jan Willem van der Hoeven to place on record the Embassy's viewpoint on the subject of Jewish evangelism. In private conversation one was left in no doubt that he and I stood on common ground regarding the need of all men, Jew and gentile alike, to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. But Van der Hoeven constantly stressed that this was not the time to preach the gospel to Jews. He emphasized the need for providing a socio/political support for Israel, marginalizing and therefore neutralizing evangelism. The appropriate Christian contribution as Van der Hoeven understood it, did not focus on Israel's spiritual needs but on building good relations with the state of Israel.

The ICEJ further contradicts its evangelical claims by forbidding Christians involved in its events from any kind of evangelistic activity. Participants in the annual Christian Celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles organized by the Embassy, are instructed in the printed programmes when visiting Jewish homes: "Please do not leave tracts or attempt to proselytise. This can cause great offence." Undoubtedly, there is need for sensitivity and tact in evangelism, but it is our opinion the Embassy would be better employed in encouraging sensitivity than in discouraging what is every Christian's Godgiven responsibility.³⁵

For various responses to the ICEJ, see *Mishkan* 12 (1990).

Christians United for Israel, founded by John Hagee, is noted for its fundraising "Nights to Honor Israel" and its high-profile founder, author, political lobbyist, and rally-er to the cause of Israel. In 2004, Hagee was quoted in *Charisma* magazine as disavowing the need for evangelization of Jewish people: "He believes Christians have no duty to evangelize Jews but that 'Gentiles are commanded to treat Jewish people lovingly until the revelation of Jesus [is given] to them.' . . . While Hagee doesn't think

³⁴ <http://int.icej.org/history>

³⁵ John S. Ross, "Beyond Zionism: Evangelical Responsibility to Israel," *Mishkan* 12 (1990), 16-17.

evangelizing Jews is an essential part of the Christian life, he believes that loving them is.”³⁶

In 2007 Hagee wrote a book *In Defense of Israel*³⁷ in which he stated that “Jesus did not come to earth to be the Messiah.”³⁸ He also has stated that peace between Israel and the Palestinians is not possible. “There is no hope for peace between Israel and the Palestinians because Hamas and Hezbollah have covenants calling for the destruction of Israel. . . .They are terrorists sworn to the death of the Jews, so any attempt to make peace with them is a farce.”³⁹

Survey Results

If the preceding gives a very general picture, especially for past decades, the **Pew Research Center**’s 2012 survey captures the recent scene at least for the U.S.⁴⁰ The following chart surveys responses of supportiveness of Israel and usefully compares Christian to Jewish responses. Note that white evangelicals (46%) outnumbered the total of Jews (31%) who felt the U.S. is not supportive enough of Israel, while among white mainlines churches that figure dropped to 26% and to 19% for Black Protestants.

³⁶ Jim Douglas, “Big Faith in Texas,” *Charisma* (March 31, 2004), <http://www.charismamag.com/site-archives/146-covers/cover-story/1173-big-faith-in-texas>

³⁷ John Hagee, *In Defense of Israel*, rev. ed. (FrontLine, 2007).

³⁸ See a response by Michael L. Brown, “Is there serious error in the new book, In Defense of Israel?” *Realtime* (Jews for Jesus, 2007), <http://www.jewsforjesus.org/publications/realtime/december-2007/95>.

³⁹ Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 54, citing Roger Cohen, “Jews and Evangelicals Find Common Political Ground,” *International Herald Tribune*, February 10, 2007.

⁴⁰ “Strong Support for Israel in U.S. Cuts Across Religious Lines,” February 27, 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/27/strong-support-for-israel-in-u-s-cuts-across-religious-lines/>.

U.S. Support for Israel

	Too supportive %	Not supportive enough %	About right %	Don't know %
U.S. Jews	11	31	54	3=100
U.S. general public	22	25	41	11=100
Christian	18	29	41	12=100
Protestant	17	33	39	11=100
White evangelical	12	46	31	11=100
White mainline	25	26	41	8=100
Black Protestant	16	19	48	18=100
Catholic	22	20	47	11=100
White, non-Hispanic	24	21	46	9=100
Unaffiliated	35	13	41	11=100

Source: Pew Research Center 2013 Survey of U.S. Jews, Feb. 20-June 13, 2013.
Q.C2. U.S. general public data from October 4-7, 2012, Pew Research Center poll.

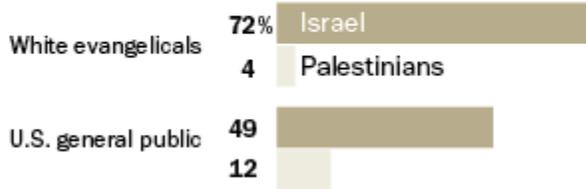
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Note further this breakdown, which not surprisingly shows white evangelical support for Israel vis-à-vis the Palestinians and Iran far outranking the general U.S. public. More troubling to some may be this statistic:

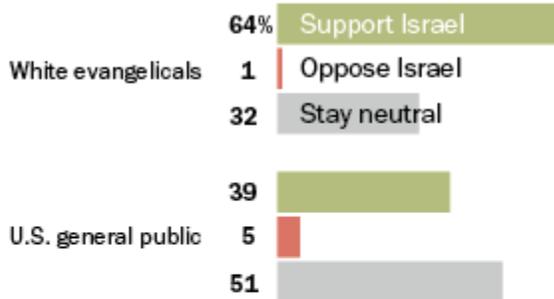
Half (50%) of white evangelicals said there is no way for Israel and an independent Palestinian state to coexist peacefully, a view held by just a third (33%) of U.S. Jews and 41% of the general public.

Support For Israel Among White Evangelical Protestants

In the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians, which side do you sympathize with more?



If Israel were to attack Iran to stop its nuclear weapons program, what position should the U.S. take?



Sources: Pew Research Center surveys, March 2013 and February 2012. On Israel/Palestinians question, those saying "neither" or "both" are not included.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

However, a survey of evangelical *leaders* shows a different story. According to an article in Mosaic Magazine,⁴¹

[In the 2011 Pew survey],⁴² asked whether they side more with Israelis or with Palestinians, about 34 percent of evangelical leaders sided with Israel and 13 percent with the Palestinians; but a full 39 percent claimed equal sympathy for both sides. Among U.S. evangelical leaders, almost half, 49 percent, expressed equal

⁴¹ Robert W. Nicholson, "Evangelicals and Israel: What American Jews Don't Want to Know (but Need to)," *Mosaic* (October 6, 2013)

<http://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2013/10/evangelicals-and-israel/>. *Mosaic* is an online Jewish magazine launched in June 2013; Nicholson is not himself Jewish.

⁴² Nicholson bases his comments on a 2011 "groundbreaking Pew survey of over 2,000 world evangelical leaders."

sympathy for both sides, leaving 30 percent siding with Israel and (again) 13 percent with the Palestinians. In sum, a large number of evangelical leaders are, if not antagonistic, less than stalwart in their feelings for the Jewish state.

Some noted evangelical voices have been prominently raised against Israel — specifically, against Christian Zionism. These include **Gary Burge** (from Wheaton College, Illinois, USA and a past speaker at Christ at the Checkpoint Conferences, see below); **Colin Chapman** (formerly of the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, now semi-retired and affiliated with the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Maten, Lebanon) and notoriously, **Stephen Sizer**, a vicar at Christ Church in Virginia Water, Surrey, U.K. All have authored books concerned with the Land, Sizer authored two thick books on the subject which were published by InterVarsity Press⁴³ and was recently severely sanctioned by the Church of England for anti-Semitic comments.⁴⁴ Specifically, he was banned from using social media for six months as well as from making comments on Middle East matters following his linking to an article which blamed Israel for the 9/11 attacks. Given Sizer's influence and prominence in some circles, it is worth quoting part of the statement issued by The Right Rev. Andrew Watson, bishop of Guildford:

Many who more moderately support the Palestinian cause and share his critique of a particular brand of Christian fundamentalism themselves find Stephen's actions to be increasingly unhelpful and counterproductive, a fact he himself now recognises. It is therefore my decision that Stephen's work in this area is no longer compatible with his ministry as a parish priest.

In order for Stephen to remain in parish ministry, I have therefore asked for and received from him a solemn undertaking, in writing, that he is to refrain entirely from writing or speaking on any themes that relate, either directly or indirectly, to the current situation in the Middle East or to its historical backdrop.⁴⁵

Furthermore, "Watson said Sizer had promised not to attend any conferences linked to the Middle East and to refrain from 'all writing, tweeting, blogging emailing, preaching and teaching on these themes'.

⁴³ Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* (IVP Academic, 2005) and Stephen Sizer, *Zion's Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel and the Church* (InterVarsity Press, 2008).

⁴⁴ "Vicar faces social media ban over Facebook post linking 9/11 to Israel," *The Guardian*, February 9, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/09/vicar-faces-social-media-ban-over-facebook-post-linking-911-to-israel>, and many other sites.

⁴⁵ "Vicar faces social media ban."

Sizer had pledged to resign immediately if he broke the agreement.”⁴⁶ Watson also “welcomed ... his acknowledgement of the gross insensitivity of their timing just prior to Holocaust Memorial Day and his retraction of the ridiculous suggestion that Israel may have been complicit in the events of 9/11.” Whether this will silence Stephen Sizer in the future is a question.

For a description of other “ministers arguing from theology that Israel’s current existence may be an offence to God,” see the blog “Progressive Christian Zionism” at <https://procz.wordpress.com/anti-zion-clerics/>.⁴⁷ This site seeks to offer a balanced support of Israel from a non-dispensationalist perspective (thereby putting the lie to the charge that Christian Zionism and Dispensationalism are necessary bedfellows, like Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee).

We must note another highly influential evangelical voice: **John Stott** (died 2011), whose commendation of Sizer’s *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* reads: “I am glad to commend Stephen Sizer’s groundbreaking critique of Christian Zionism. His comprehensive overview of its roots, its theological basis and its political consequences is very timely. I myself believe that Zionism, both political and Christian, is incompatible with biblical faith. Stephen’s book has helped to reinforce this conviction.” Note: it is not just *Christian* Zionism but *any* Zionism that is incompatible with Christian faith! It has been deeply disappointing to many that Stott, whose writings influenced many a young Christian in the 60s and 70s, threw his weight behind an anti-Zionism position.

These examples are only some of the more significant voices among evangelicals that are coloring perceptions of the situation. **Donald Miller**, well-known and popular Christian author of the book *Blue Like Jazz*, has also come under criticism.⁴⁸ In other media, **David Brog**, the Jewish executive director of Christians United for Israel, points to a series of Christian-made films that, he argues, “feature compelling protagonists wandering earnestly through a Middle Eastern landscape in which all Arab violence, aggression, and rejectionism have been magically erased.”⁴⁹ Specifically, he references *With God on Our Side* (Rooftop Productions, 2010) and *Little Town of Bethlehem* (EthnoGraphic Media, 2010). The former “was

⁴⁶ “Vicar faces social media ban.”

⁴⁷ It is not clear with whom this blog originated, but one can easily see the various signed names on each post.

⁴⁸ Luke Moon, “Author Donald Miller Weighs in on the ‘Situation in Israel,’” *Juicy Ecumenism, The Institute on Religion & Democracy’s Blog*, November 20, 2012, <http://juicyecumenism.com/2012/11/20/author-donald-miller-weighs-in-on-the-situation-in-israel/>

⁴⁹ David Brog, “The End of Evangelical Support for Israel? The Jewish State’s International Standing,” *The Middle East Quarterly* 21:2 (Spring 2014), <http://www.meforum.org/3769/israel-evangelical-support>.

produced by **Porter Speakman**, a former Youth with a Mission (YWAM) activist while Little Town of Bethlehem was funded and produced by **Mart Green**, chairman of the board of trustees of Oral Roberts University and heir to the Hobby Lobby arts and crafts stores fortune.”⁵⁰ Brog goes on to add the 2013 film *The Stones Cry Out* to the list.

The BDS (Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions) Movement

Here we move from the realm of opinions to that of actions. While Christian calls for a Palestinian state can be legitimate, more recent actions against Israel have been notorious for the participation of — if not the initiative by — Christian groups. Paul Merkley locates the origins of the BDS movement can be traced to July 2, 2004 when the **Presbyterian Church U.S.A.** (PCUSA), the largest American Presbyterian denomination, met in Richmond VA and began moves toward divestment.⁵¹ That at least is a reasonable starting point for the Christian BDS movement. On the larger world stage, however, Jon Haber of DivestThis.com traces the origins of BDS a few years earlier, to the **2001 World Conference Against Racism** in Durban, South Africa, at which BDS became a strategy embraced by various anti-Israel groups.

The PCUSA has remained a key player in the BDS movement. Jewish scholar Shaye J. D. Cohen’s book *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* was published by Westminster John Knox Press, a PCUSA-affiliated publisher. Originally published in 1987, two succeeding revisions appeared in 2006 and 2014. With each edition, Cohen has increasingly, in the introductions to the books, distanced himself from the PCUSA and has included an increasingly lengthy critique of the PCUSA’s Israel positions.⁵² In 2011, the denomination published ***Zionism Unsettled: A Congregational Study Guide***. The booklet was an attempt to bring the anti-Zionist position into the pews. However, according to Cohen, it was pulled from the PCUSA website in 2014.⁵³ Also in June, 2014, an **open letter** to the PCUSA signed by 29 Presbyterian pastors and others, excoriated the PCUSA for *Zionism Unsettled* and advocating a rejection of BDS and a one-

⁵⁰ Brog, “End of Evangelical Support.”

⁵¹ Merkley wryly notes that denominations such as the PCUSA, whatever the ramifications of the activities, hardly are any longer representative. He writes, “The PCUSA is one of those denominations which our group-thinking journalists still refer to as ‘mainline’ because they commanded the support of a majority of American Protestants *half a century ago!*” (italics original)

⁵² Shaye J. D. Cohen, “The Presbyterians and I,” July 22, 2014,

<http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/presbyterians-shaye-j-d-cohen/>

⁵³ See also Jaweed Kaleem, “‘Zionism Unsettled’ Guide Is Removed From Presbyterian Church (USA) Website,” *Huffington Post*, June 28, 2014,

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/28/zionism-unsettled-presbyterian-removed_n_5540039.html

state solution. Though the open letter also spoke in passing against the settlement movement, this was in the context of rejecting the main tenets of *Zionism Unsettled*. The open letter further noted that *Zionism Unsettled* was endorsed by white supremacist David Duke!⁵⁴

A booklet⁵⁵ produced by DivestThis.com offers a colorful and informative overview of the BDS movement, while the website includes links to other counter-BDS blogs.⁵⁶ It helpfully lists out further key players in the BDS movement, or at least key moments. Not all represent Christians responses, but they are helpful to mention at this point:

- As noted above, the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa (“**Durban I**”), at which some agree on a BDS strategy.
- 2002, **University of California at Berkeley**, where petitions calling for divestment are circulated, followed by similar petitions at Harvard, MIT, and other campuses.
- 2004, in Ramallah, the **Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel** (PACBI) begins.
- Also 2004, Somerville MA becomes the first municipality to put divestment to a vote, which is shortly rejected after public comment.
- 2005, the **Association of University Teachers** in the UK vote to boycott two universities in Israel. This is “the first successful union vote on an academic boycott.”⁵⁷ It is repealed after a vote by the rank-and-file.
- 2006, the PCUSA rescinds its 2004 vote which had been in favor of divestment (95% in favor is rescinding, 5% against!)
- 2010, the U.C. Berkeley student government rejects divestment.

⁵⁴ “The Things That Make for Peace: An Open Letter to the Presbyterian Church, USA,” *The Layman Online*, June 13, 2004, <http://www.layman.org/things-make-peace-open-letter-presbyterian-church-usa/>. An image appears to be blocking much of the text; use the buttons at the end to download or print for the full text.

⁵⁵ “Divest This! How to Stop the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Attack on Israel,” http://ecbiz135.inmotionhosting.com/~critic20/divestthis.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/DivestThis_Winning_Against_BDS.pdf

⁵⁶ According to *Moment Magazine*, Jon Haber is a blogger who is the voice behind DivestThis.com (<http://www.momentmag.com/an-olympian-struggle/>). Haber’s “prolific, impassioned posts put him on par with Electronic Intifada’s Abunimah” (ibid.). See further at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jon_Haber

⁵⁷ “Divest This!” p. 7.

To this we can add:

- 2012, the **United Methodist Church** put two divestment proposals forth, defeated by the rank-and-file.⁵⁸
- 2013, the **American Studies Association**, comprised of American scholars, votes for an academic boycott of colleges and universities in Israel.⁵⁹ This was followed by a backlash by other scholars.⁶⁰
- 2014, the PCUSA votes to divest from three companies (vote is 310 to 303).⁶¹
- 2015, similar efforts by the **American Historical Association** are tabled by the rank-and-file.⁶²

Note how some moves towards BDS are reversed; sometimes the leadership elites are not in step with their rank-and-file members.

To date [2010], no college or university has divested a single share of stock identified by BDS activists as targets for divestment. In addition, at schools where divestment has been driven by online petitions (such as Harvard and MIT), counter-petitions denouncing divestment have received more than ten times the number of signatures as pro-divestment petitions.⁶³

Since the PCUSA's original BDS actions, a variety of other Christian denominations and groups have joined in such campaigns; divestment campaigns of 2005–06 and 2009–10 included the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada** and the **United Church of Canada**.

Writing in 2010, Jon Haber says that “Over the last ten years, numerous anti-Israel divestment resolutions (usually started by local BDS activists within a church) have found their way to national forums where church

⁵⁸ Laurie Goodstein, “Methodists Vote Against Ending Investments Tied to Israel,” May 2, 2012, *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/03/us/methodists-vote-against-ending-investments-tied-to-israel.html>

⁵⁹ Matt Spetalnick, “U.S. Scholars’ Group Backs Call for Academic Boycott of Israel,” December 16, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/16/us-usa-israel-boycott-idUSBRE9BF19W20131216>

⁶⁰ Tamar Lewin, “Prominent Scholars, Citing Importance of Academic Freedom, Denounce Israeli Boycott,” December 26, 2013, *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/27/education/academic-leaders-denounce-israel-boycott.html>

⁶¹ Laurie Goodstein, “Presbyterians Vote to Divest Holdings to Pressure Israel, June 20, 2014, *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/21/us/presbyterians-debating-israeli-occupation-vote-to-divest-holdings.html>

⁶² Jennifer Schuessler, “Scholars’ Effort to Condemn Israel Fails,” January 5, 2015, *New York Times*, <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/01/05/scholars-effort-to-condemn-israel-fails/>

⁶³ “Divest This!” p. 5.

members meet to chart institutional policy. While these resolutions are routinely voted down at a national level by large majorities, that seems to just give local activists the go-ahead to try to re-craft their rejected BDS calls for resubmission two or four years later.”⁶⁴

The BDS movement has been met by counter-campaigns from the Israeli side even as related movements, such as academic boycotts of Israel, are commanding headlines. In the current age of social media, the two sides find themselves engaged in a war for public opinion. Words such as *imperialism*, *racism*, *apartheid*, and *oppression* color the verbiage. As we write, an email bulletin received March 26 from the Step Up for Israel campaign, part of the organization Jerusalem U,⁶⁵ reports that, “Earlier this month, **University of Toledo** became the third college within two weeks, joining **Stanford** and **Northwestern**, to have its student government pass a resolution to boycott and divest from Israel.” The back-and-forth continues unabated.

The Christian community is thus divided between

- those actively engaged in anti-Israel activities (boycotts, divestment, imbalance in approaching the Palestinian issue);
- those for whom the issue is not much on the radar, but for whom key words like “justice” would likely make them see the Palestinians solely as underdogs victimized by Israel;
- and Christian Zionists who support and bless Israel, sometimes also supporting evangelism, sometimes not, and often turning to biblical land promises as the sole parameter of the Middle Eastern reality

Of course there are those who seek to foster a bigger-picture, more balanced viewpoint among evangelicals. In many cases, those voices come from the Israeli and Palestinian believers themselves, discussed below.

⁶⁴ “Divest This!” p. 19.

⁶⁵ www.jerusalemu.org. The organization “creates and distributes innovative and stimulating feature films and film-based educational programs with the goal of making young Jews feel proud of being Jewish and emotionally connected to Israel.”

Part IV: Messianic Jewish Views

1. Israeli Messianic Jews

As described in his “Towards a Messianic Jewish Theology of Reconciliation”, Richard Harvey sent a small-scale survey to 80 Messianic leaders (congregational or otherwise) in January 2012, of which 36% were from Israel, 31% from the UK, 27% from the USA and 7% from elsewhere. The scale of the survey makes it somewhat problematic to draw firm conclusions, nor was it taken among the Messianic Jewish community at large, only leaders. We can note that among these leaders, 12% were “emerging”, 44% “established,” and 44% “senior.” It is unclear how the results would differ if taken for example, only among a group of younger (emerging) leaders. Questions asked and tabulation of results included these:

1. Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the possibility of peace in the Israel-Palestine/Arab-Israeli conflict? Why?

- 71% pessimistic
- 7% “very pessimistic”
- 18% realistic (middle ground)
- 7% optimistic

2. What would be your own proposals/preferred outcome be for a peace settlement in the Arab/Israeli conflict?

No statistics given but a “preference” for a two-state solution, with some open to a one-state solution, which “is likely to become more popular with the younger generation of emerging leaders due to the emphasis on human rights.”

3. What approach or strategy do you think Israel should adopt to achieve this?

- Hard-line (no compromises re: territory, settlements) – 11%
- Negotiated two-state solution – 56%
- One-state solution – 6%
- No specific solution – 8%

4. What do you think Messianic Jews can contribute to reconciliation and peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict? How can they do this?⁶⁶

⁶⁶ “In hindsight, the questions should have retained the “Israel-Palestine” focus throughout. Only one respondent noted this, but all answered with the Israel-Palestine conflict in mind” (Richard Harvey’s comment).

7% - no special contribution
“Majority” — a part to play

Harvey compares general Israeli and Israeli Messianic Jewish views on various options for future scenarios (described in detail in his paper). Of particular note, Harvey finds that one segment of Messianic Jews combines a “dispensationalist eschatology” with a view that allows “no compromise on territory” — perhaps an accurate description of current facts on the ground but not a necessary theological corollary of being a dispensationalist.

2. North American Messianic Jews

Viewpoints in this part of the world are most currently represented by **“A Profile of North American Messianic Jews: A Study Conducted by Jews for Jesus,”**⁶⁷ prepared by Andrew Barron and statistician Beverly Jamison. However, views of the Israel-Palestine situation were not included in the survey. One only sees that after becoming a believer, interest in going to Israel rose among most age groups. One is therefore left to anecdotal evidence that most American Jewish believers are supportive of Israel (not surprising given the widespread informing of American theology by a dispensational or at least Israel-friendly hermeneutic). Furthermore, one suspects that younger Messianic Jews will be more open to considering a wider variety of solutions to the conflict than older generations, given the interest in justice issues that characterizes many in the younger demographic.

3. A Messianic Jewish Voice About the Palestinians

Viewpoints regarding Israel and Palestine can, for evangelicals, hardly be separated from the issue of relating to Arabs in general and to our Arab Christian brothers and sisters. **Judith Mendelsohn Rood**, in “A Reflection Upon our Witness in the Muslim World,”⁶⁸ offers a unique perspective as a Messianic Jewish professor teaching at Biola University whose expertise is in Islam and the Arab world. She cites the Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 60 that “there are ‘many parallels and similarities’ between the experiences of those engaged in Jewish-Christian and Muslim-Christian dialogue.” Rood notes the ostracization that MBBs (Muslim Background Believers) often face, the importance of contextualizing for the Arab context, and the need to recognize Orthodox Christians and Catholics as believers.

⁶⁷ Latest revision dated October 9, 2014.

⁶⁸ *Mishkan* 54 (2008), pp. 39-53.

Addressing the specific issue of political Zionism (pp. 47 ff.), Rood observes that opinions on both side can be “one-sided, reflecting opinions in the secular world.” She further notes that “there is as yet no sustained study of what may be called Christian Arabism to balance [Donald] Wagner’s work [his book *Anxious for Armageddon*] and others in the same vein.” Indeed, she writes as follows, speaking of “the determination of Arab Christians to remain committed to Arab and Palestinian nationalism in the face of radical Islam.”

Yet the day may have come when Arab Christians have to think through the consequences of this position: while secularized Christian Arabs have founded, joined, and indeed led Palestinian militant groups since the 1960s, it gives one pause to read that Christian Arabs have joined the “Islamic” al-Aqsa Brigade in response to the failure of the Oslo Peace Process to end the occupation of the future Palestinian state. By weakening Palestinian Christians, the policies of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority have drive them away in search of safety and a future — and radicalized those who stay.

Furthermore, “one of the most difficult problems that Palestinian Christians have with American evangelicals is premillennial dispensationalism . . . Christian Arabism and Christian Zionism thus divide the body and inflame the political conflict.” However, “Christian Arab condemnation of Christian Zionism is disingenuous, as it ignores the serious injustices permitted by Arab governments. . . . It is difficult to convince American evangelicals to be concerned about Arabs and Muslims because of their perception of the latter’s unrelenting hatred of Israel.” She concludes this part of her article: “In defending the failings of Israel and Palestine, we do no one any favors. It is critically important that we bring these issues to the forefront, so that with prayer and intercession we can find effective ways to fight the rabid anti-Semitic images and rhetoric disseminated throughout the world by the Islamist media, and seek justice for both Palestinians and Israelis.”⁶⁹

⁶⁹ See further Judith Mendelsohn Rood, “*Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes—A Review Essay*,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, April 2015, pp. 81-83. The journal is available at no cost at <http://www.internationalbulletin.org>.

Part V: Arab Christian Views

1. Voices of Dialogue, Balance and Reconciliation: An Arab Christian and a Messianic Jewish Viewpoint

Recently **Salim J. Munayer** and **Lisa Loden** co-authored the book *Through My Enemy's Eyes: Envisioning Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine*.⁷⁰ Munayer is an instructor at Bethlehem and Galilee Bible College and Director of Musalaha Reconciliation Ministries.⁷¹ Loden is Head of Leadership Development Program at Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary and has served as Director of the Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies. Even though one is an Arab Christian and the other a Messianic Jew, each contributor speaks in separate chapters. Therefore the book affords an opportunity to hear an Arab Christian viewpoint.

Through My Enemy's Eyes combines history, a survey of identity issues, differing ways of approaching Scripture, and the theology of both viewpoints. A key issue dividing believers on both sides of the conflict include a differing narrative — with narrative being of key importance in forming group as well as personal identity. There is debate on whether a shared narrative is even possible, or whether we are only left to criticize the weaknesses in each. Following the views of Robert I. Rothenberg, the authors suggest that:

The first step is to learn the opposing narratives, the second step is to bring them together and bridge them as much as is possible, and the third step is to ‘assist both sides to acknowledge and hopefully to even respect the legitimacy of the opposing narrative.’

Munayer, the author of chapter 4, “An Introduction to Palestinian Christianity,”⁷² notes that

Significant challenges face this [Palestinian Christian] community. First, Palestinian Christians need to find a way of **dealing with the Jewish people and the state of Israel** in a way that does not invalidate the historical and religious attachment the Jewish people have to the Holy Land but that also confidently asserts Palestinians’ legitimate attachment. Second, Palestinian Christians

⁷⁰ Salim J. Munayer and Lisa Loden, *Through My Enemy's Eyes: Envisioning Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine* (Paternoster, 2014). A pre-publication copy was available for the purposes of this paper.

⁷¹ <http://www.bethbc.org/academics/faculty/dr-salim-j-munayer>

⁷² “Each co-author is responsible for those sections that represent their individual and community views, and those views are not necessarily shared by both authors.”

need to learn to **relate to Islam** in a way that addresses the differences between Christianity and Islam frankly, but that also avoids ‘Islamophobia’ and hatred of Muslims. Third, Palestinian Christians need to address **the hermeneutical threat** posed by the Christian Zionist and some Messianic Jewish approaches to the Bible that claim exclusive, ethnically Jewish ownership of the land. Finally, Palestinian Christians need to **re-evaluate their communal identity**, especially in light of the growing numbers of Muslim-background believers and the increasing ethnic diversity of the Christian population in the Holy Land, due to the influx of immigrants from Russia and Ethiopia, along with other foreign national workers. [boldface added]

This self-critique comes with assertions that some — but not all — Christian Zionists would take exception to. Thus, says Munayer, “Throughout their history, Palestinian Christians have identified with the Holy Land and its sacred sites, along with an inherited sense of stewardship for the task of the sites’ maintenance and preservation. There can be no separation between Palestinian Christians and the Holy Land.” Supporters of Israel, however, whether they agree or not must reckon with this sense of attachment regardless of their theology and not simply write it off as of no consequence.

Loden similarly offers challenges for the Israeli Messianic Jewish community, which is included in this section (“Arab Christian Views”) because she wrote in close partnership with Munayer, though we could have incorporated this into one of the sections above. One challenge relevant to the topic of this paper is, according to Loden, “the issue of the eschatological challenge of modern Israel. The majority of the Messianic community has immigrated to the country and, as such, they are ideologically and theologically motivated to see themselves as having a place in God’s design to restore Israel. Modern Israel is for them the heir of biblical Israel and is undifferentiated from it. This understanding often leads to apathy when it comes to issues of justice, ethics and morality.” Related to this is the fact that

Given the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict, it is understandable that the Messianic community should choose to identify itself as a part of the nation of Israel. The difficulty is that national identity can become confused with the principal spiritual identity of being members of the trans-national, trans-ethnic, trans-cultural body of Messiah of which there are also members from the ‘enemy’ community.

Indeed, Loden says straight out:

In the main, the Israeli Messianic community is apathetic regarding issues of injustice that are the daily fare of their Palestinian brothers and sisters. Messianic Jews' preoccupation with their own community and its issues tends to overshadow active engagement with the volatile issues of justice, human rights and peace that are vital for their Palestinian brothers and sisters. . . The predominant eschatological understandings of the Israeli Messianic Jew (referred to earlier) can preclude any realistic grappling with difficult issues . . . [boldface added]

Differing approaches to Scripture also divide the two groups. “Palestinian Christian interpretation of Scripture is influenced by four major factors: 1) a sense of special inheritance due to dwelling in the land of the incarnation; 2) the arrival and continued influence of Islam; 3) relationships between Palestinian churches and institutional centres elsewhere, primarily in Europe; and 4) the emergence and success of Zionism with its Jewish and Christian theological justifications.”

Interestingly, because of the influence of the British Brethren movement, “there are Palestinian evangelicals in these areas who hold to classic dispensationalism. As dispensationalism became a more prominent theological expression with political influence, it became more Zionist in nature. The Zionist aspect of dispensationalism is a later expression of this theology, and is largely absent from the theology and ideology of most Palestinian evangelicals.” Through the Southern Baptists and the Assembly of God, apologetics became important, and “after the first intifada, an apologetic theology began developing among Palestinian Christian evangelicals to challenge the state of Israeli and Christian Zionism, as well as Palestinian liberation theology,” the latter of which fails to pay enough attention to the Old Testament.

One thing that emerges from *Through My Enemy's Eyes* is the need to closely listen to others, especially others who share our faith, and if possible to see through their lenses, and certainly not to neglect or write off the views of others as simply “unbiblical” — nor to stereotype those with whom we disagree. The jointly authored book models one way forward, which is that of dialogue, listening, and attempting as best as possible to walk in the other's shoes—or to see through their eyes. In addition, both authors are self-critiquing, pointing out failings and weaknesses among adherents to their own viewpoints.

We note the characteristics of the voices of Munayer, Loden and Rood: (1) listening to others; (2) being will to self-critique; (3) moving beyond common and stereotypical statements into underexplored facets of the

situation (e.g. the place of narrative; Arab Christians vis-à-vis Arab nationalism, etc.)

2. Other Arab Christian Voices

Munayer also explores the theology of **Naim Ateek**, a Palestinian liberation theologian who founded the **Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center** in Jerusalem, and whose hermeneutic is Christ-centered to the point that the Old Testament is not allowed to function as a lens through which to discern moral truth. This is not something peculiar only to liberation theologians, but to many Palestinian Christians who “avoid” reading the Old Testament. Many evangelicals would conclude that this is a non-evangelical or sub-evangelical hermeneutic. Sabeel is a partner with the PCUSA, and “Friends of Sabeel” chapters can be found in several countries internationally. Sabeel has influenced the divestment decisions of the PCUSA and other resolutions passed by the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ.⁷³

Munayer also mentions the **Kairos Palestine** document,⁷⁴ which he cites approvingly: “While addressing the unique strengths of Palestinian Christianity, the document is notable for also raising the community’s weaknesses, such as the failure among Palestinian Christians to address Jewish religious and historical attachment to the land they claim as their own.” But also, “It is hard to overstate how deeply pained Palestinian Christians are over biblical fundamentalism and especially the ideological tenets of Christian Zionism. The Kairos Palestine document gives voice to that pain and challenges its source. . . . Those involved in writing the Kairos Palestine document confront the biblical hermeneutics of Christian Zionists, not just their stated political vision.”

The Kairos Document has birthed the Kairos Palestine movement. The latter’s web site suggests that this Kairos Document was born of a similar one put forth in South Africa in 1985. Like many (all?) organizations on both sides, Kairos Palestine also proves controversial as indicated, for example, in an article on its web site titled “Kairos Palestine call on South African Churches to join Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW).”⁷⁵

⁷³ For many links to materials pro and con regarding Sabeel, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabeel_Ecumenical_Liberation_Theology_Center#cite_note-Paulson-10

⁷⁴ <http://www.kairospalestine.ps>

⁷⁵ “Kairos Palestine call on South African Churches to join Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW),” March 3, 2015, <http://www.kairospalestine.ps/content/kairos-palestine-call-south-african-churches-join-israeli-apartheid-week-iaw>

The depth of differences is summarized:

The lack of any space for Palestinian Christians and their distinctive witness within most articulations of a Messianic Jewish theology is to some extent mirrored in Palestinian Christian theology concerning Israeli Messianic Jews. For example, many Palestinian Christians reject Christian Zionism, which most Messianic Jews perceive as a rejection of their own theology. These factors are the source of much misunderstanding and hurt, which makes reconciliation difficult, and for many, nearly impossible to countenance.

4. Christ at the Checkpoint

Mention must be made of the **Christ at the Checkpoint** (CATC) conferences, of which three have already taken place with a fourth scheduled for March, 2016. CATC is sponsored by **Bethlehem Bible College** (BBC). The name of the conference comes from their slogan, “What would Christ say and do if he is to stand in front of a checkpoint today?” According to their website,⁷⁶ “The mission of ‘Christ at the Checkpoint’ is to challenge Evangelicals to take responsibility to help resolve the conflicts in Israel/Palestine by engaging with the teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom of God.”

Few would argue that Munayer, Loden, and Rood model a way forward in the conversation. CATC has also positioned itself as a dialogue that will advance the conversation, but it has been highly controversial, drawing charges that an anti-Israel agenda underlies the conferences. Harsh criticism has come from the Israeli government, certain Israeli Messianic Jews, and organizations such as NGO Monitor, which associated CATC with the BDS movement. Among Messianic Jews, the participation of Jewish believers such as Richard Harvey generated a firestorm of response, with some arguing that CATC ought to be boycotted and others that participation gave a much-needed voice to the proceedings. Controversy included the participation of (among others) Lynne Hybels, of the Willow Creek movement, who did not attend the 2014 conference (whether because of criticism or not is unclear).⁷⁷

As a side note, **Alex Awad** is Dean of Students at BBC. He himself was involved in controversies such as including a widely-circulated but fabricated quotation from David Ben-Gurion in a DVD sold during the

⁷⁶ <http://www.christatthecheckpoint.com/>

⁷⁷ For all this, see <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/march/israel-blasts-evangelical-bethlehem-christ-at-checkpoint.html>

2012 CATC conference. He has since removed the quote.⁷⁸ He also supported a failed resolution for the United Methodist Church to participate in the BDS movement.⁷⁹ (Alex's brother **Bishara Awad** is founder and president of BBC.) Thus, the sponsorship by Bethlehem Bible College has not been without controversy.

Highly negative and detailed evaluations of the CATC conferences can be found by e.g. CAMERA (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, a pro-Israel group also not without its own controversy)⁸⁰ and in an article in *The Jewish Press*⁸¹ (the latter written by an evangelical Christian). Conversely, a positive report was given by the Lausanne movement's coverage of CATC,⁸² which noted that, "However, CATC and its attendant controversies highlighted the fact that evangelicals are taking in more and more of the Palestinian narrative and theological perspective, and are seeking a more balanced take on the conflict." The Electronic Intifada also covered some of the controversies surrounding CATC from an Arab Christian perspective.⁸³

The internal conflict among Messianic Jews generated by CATC underscores the depth of division present in the Middle East conflict among believers. CATC will be expected to continue offering annual conferences (one is now planned for 2016), and the conflicts generated by it will continue as well.

5. Other Conferences

December 2014 saw Philadelphia host the "**Impact: Holy Land**" conference. The convener was **Evangelicals for Social Action** (ESA) along with the **Mennonite Central Committee** and **World Vision**. ESA was founded by Ron Sider, who is frequently identified with the "evangelical left," and the organization is described on its web site as "the premier project of the Sider Center on Ministry and Public Policy at Palmer Theological Seminary of Eastern University."⁸⁴ *World* magazine reported on the conference as "stacked in favor of the 'Palestinian'

⁷⁸ http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=118&x_article=2256

⁷⁹ http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=118&x_article=2256

⁸⁰ http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=118&x_article=2221

⁸¹ <http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/bethlehems-christ-at-the-checkpoint-conference-a-personal-report/2014/03/18/>

⁸² <http://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2014-05/christ-at-the-checkpoint-an-evangelical-shift-in-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict>

⁸³ <http://electronicintifada.net/content/palestinian-christians-attacked-challenging-christian-zionism/11049>

⁸⁴ <http://www.evangelicalsforsocialaction.org/about/who-we-are/>

cause.”⁸⁵ According to the Institute on Religion & Democracy (IRD), the conference

featured the who’s-who of Palestinian Christian outreach to Evangelical America, prominent names of the Evangelical Left, and a handful of pastors from various Messianic Jewish congregations. While most presenters spoke broadly of peace, love and reconciliation the fellowship hall of the historic Friends Center in the heart of Philadelphia was lined with pro-Palestinian activists pushing books on Israel as an Apartheid state and hoping to enlist people for the latest boycott, divest, sanction (BDS) campaign.

The IRD also found “troublesome” the “expectation for the Messianic Jews to speak to their fellow Jews about Palestinian suffering,” as articulated by Jack Sara, president of Bethlehem Bible College, and also by Lisa Loden. The IRD article concluded, “Just below the surface were the usual expectations that all Christians should embrace the nationalistic Palestinian Liberation cause. It is this expectation that limited the effectiveness of the event and fosters the very distrust many hope to overcome.”⁸⁶ Once again, controversy and mistrust characterizes some responses to the conference.

We also note the **Lausanne Initiative for Reconciliation in Israel/Palestine** (LIRIP). Meeting in Cyprus in January 2015, the conference’s vision was “to promote reconciliation within the body of Christ and our wider communities in Israel and Palestine by creating a network that encourages, under the auspices of the Lausanne Movement, models of gospel-based, Christ-centered reconciliation that will have prophetic impact in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”⁸⁷ The conference included a read-through of the book *Through My Enemy’s Eyes* (see above; Munayer and Loden participated in LIRIP). The co-chairs were **Richard Harvey**, a British Messianic Jewish theologian, and **Munther Isaac**, professor at Bethlehem Bible College. This conference was much more “under the radar” than CATC; future conferences may be planned.

Finally, we note the **Borough Park Symposium**,⁸⁸ whose 2015 meeting treated the topic of “Messianic Jewish Perspectives on the Israeli-

⁸⁵ Andrée Seu Peterson, “Disparate ‘Impact’,” *World*, January 25, 2014, http://www.worldmag.com/2014/01/disparate_impact_0

⁸⁶ Luke Moon, “Great Expectations and Subtle Messaging of Impact: Holy Land,” <http://juicyecumenism.com/2013/12/12/great-expectations-and-subtle-messaging-of-impact-holy-land/>

⁸⁷ <http://www.lausanne.org/about/blog/messianic-jews-and-palestinian-christians-envision-reconciliation>

⁸⁸ <http://www.chosenpeople.com/symposium/index.html?time=12345678>: “The purpose of the symposium is to provide a forum for members of the broader Messianic

Palestinian Conflict.” The papers from the nineteen contributors, a few of whom are mentioned elsewhere in this paper can be downloaded online.⁸⁹ This conference is distinctly different from the others mentioned since it reflects intra-Messianic Jewish dialogue—which can sometimes seem as intractable as when Jews interact with non-Jews on the subject of Israel/Palestine! It is true, however, that in this case, a good pastrami sandwich shared at a local deli can cover a multitude of sins, or at least opinions.

Part VI: The (Mostly) Secular World

1. Future American Leaders

The pro-Israel organization **The Israel Project**⁹⁰ (TIP) produced the booklet *America 2020: How the Next Generation Views Israel*, compiled by **Frank I. Luntz** in 2005. TIP was founded in 2003, and states that it is “a non-partisan American educational organization dedicated to informing the media and public conversation about Israel and the Middle East” which “does not lobby.”⁹¹ Luntz is a conservative political consultant known among other things, for developing “talking points” for Republicans, and in this booklet, for the pro-Israel movement. Of particular value in this booklet are the results of Luntz’s conversations and interviews with emerging American leaders.

Write Luntz, “This report is based on face-to-face group interviews with almost 150 randomly selected students under age thirty attending the top graduate schools in America—including the top business school, the top law school, the top school of government and the top school of journalism.” The booklet included snapshots of views, quotes from students, and recommendations for advancing the cause of Israel.

In terms of attitudes towards Israel-Palestine, some key findings included the following, in the booklets actual words but condensed from the original:

Jewish community to articulate their beliefs with an expectation that they will receive a respectful hearing, but without the expectation that agreement concerning these beliefs will be achieved. The Symposium is designed to provide an internal platform for leaders to better understand each another and the various positions held within the Messianic movement.”

⁸⁹ <http://www.chosenpeople.com/symposium/page8.html?time=12345678>

⁹⁰ www.theisraelproject.org

⁹¹ The CEO is Joshua S. Block, formerly of AIPAC and the Clinton administration. The Board of Advisors consists entirely of U.S. Representatives and Senators while the Board of Directors includes those who have been involved in politics, academia, and the media.

- Support for Israel was described as a vestige of one's upbringing, a sense of allegiance that used to exist widely in American culture. . . . Virtually every student we interviewed said he or she had drifted away from Israel and toward the Palestinian point of view over the past few years.
- What are the messages that will turn the tide? In a word: peace. Above all else, tomorrow's leaders want an end to the violence—permanently.
- The problem is, they make little distinction between the violence inflicted by Arab terrorists and the preventive efforts and/or retaliation of the Israeli army.
- The only way for Israel to evoke sympathy is to be the side working hardest for peace. The best case for Israel is to demonstrate that she is willing to go twice as far as her neighbors to establish peace.
- First and foremost, they know nothing about the history of the Middle East. Nothing.
- The “facts” they do “know” are often wrong and work against Israel.
- They believe that Palestinians don't have a homeland because of Israel.
- Support for Israel is intellectual, while support for the Palestinians is emotional. . . . In the end, the Palestinians are winning hearts and minds because they have humanized the conflict.
- They're sure the Palestinians are suffering unjustly . . . and it's easiest to blame Israel.
- The pro-Palestinian attitudes among these students originate with their professors.
- The “cycle of violence” is a code word for Israeli culpability.
- They consistently refer to Israel's security fence as a “wall,” and so what is entirely a defensive measure is now seen as offensive and aggressive.
- There is a direct correlation between presidential preference and attitudes toward the Middle East.

- There is growing support among elite graduate students for a “one-state solution” to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.
- Israeli spokespeople need to sympathize with the Palestinian people when condemning their leaders. How? Hold them accountable for the lack of freedom, democracy, openness and justice.

2. The German Public: The Bertelsmann Foundation Surveys

Note also the polls taken by the **Bertelsmann Foundation**,⁹² which in 2007 surveyed Israelis, Germans, and U.S. Jews, making for an interesting three-way comparison (although the German sample was apparently mostly non-Jewish Germans).⁹³ An updated survey was taken in 2013–14, this time taken only among Germans and Israeli, and entitled *Germany and Israel Today: Linked by the Past, Divided by the Present*.⁹⁴

Here come a lot of statistics, but it is not hard to see the overall trends. As reported in Bertelmann’s press release of 2015,⁹⁵

36 percent of the Germans have a positive attitude towards Israel. However, 48 percent of their compatriots say that their opinion of Israel is poor. This figure rises to 54 percent among the age group between 18 and 29 years. Attitudes towards the Israeli government are especially critical, with 62 percent of Germans expressing a negative opinion. Thus the Germans’ attitudes to Israel are more negative than the opinions of Israeli Jews about Germany.

Specifically on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

According to the study, the perception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has an increasingly dominant impact on the way Germans view Israel as a whole. While a majority of both Israelis (74 percent) and Germans (61 percent) believes that Germany has a special responsibility as a result of its history, opinions diverge about how this responsibility should be reflected in German policy. 84 percent of Israelis hope that the German government will provide political support for Israel in the Middle East conflict, but

⁹² <http://www.bfna.org>

⁹³ Reported in “The Other Side of Memory, *Haaretz* (February 12, 2007), from which the statistics and quotations for the 2007 survey are taken.

⁹⁴ https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/Studie_LW_Germany_and_Israel_today_2015.pdf

⁹⁵ Bertelsmann Stiftung, “Germans take skeptical view of Israel,” January 26, 2015, <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/presse-startpunkt/press/press-releases/press-release/pid/deutsche-blicken-skeptisch-auf-israel/>.

one in two Germans opposes such support. Similarly, 82 percent of Israelis want Germany to supply weapons to Israel, but 68 percent of Germans reject this idea.

Results are perhaps not much different than in the earlier 2007 survey:

The [2007] survey's most disturbing finding actually relates to the present. To the statement, "What the State of Israel is doing to the Palestinians is not different in principle from what the Nazis did to the Jews," 30 percent of the Germans responded "agree strongly" or "agree partially" (59 percent said "somewhat disagree" or "strongly disagree").

To a parallel statement, "Israel is waging a war of extermination against the Palestinians," 30 percent of the Germans responded "agree strongly" or "agree partially" (59 percent said "somewhat disagree" or "strongly disagree"). **Thus, 62 years after the end of World War Two, one out of three Germans believes that the forced exile of millions of people, their concentration in camps and their systematic killing "is not different in principle" from Israel's policy toward the Palestinians.** [boldface added]

To this add the German perception of Palestinians:

"The Germans see the Palestinians as a nation that is suffering from colonialism," explains Ulrich Gutmaier, a journalist who writes for Net-Zeitung. "That is a traditional left-wing-intellectual approach that can be found more in the left than in the right today. In terms of voting, there is more support for Israel from the right than from the left...."

Conclusion

We do not wish to end on a negative note! Despite the disquieting results of the surveys conducted by TIP and the Bertelsmann Foundation, we are encouraged by efforts among both Messianic Jewish and Palestinian Christians towards dialogue and understanding. Yet much remains to be done among believers to foster a way forward in a situation where controversy and dispute seems to mark every step of the way. So let us end with an encouraging story.

During a recent trip to Israel, upon arriving at Ben Gurion airport I (David) checked in my location on Facebook. Before I had even exited customs I had a Facebook message from Jack Sara, President of

Bethlehem Bible College, wanting to know if I could meet him for coffee. I didn't even know that Jack and I were Facebook friends and hadn't remembered ever meeting him. Nevertheless I agreed to meet him near his home in Jerusalem.

The college had come under fire for posting on their web site "man on the street" interviews from Bethlehem during the war in Gaza that (surprise, surprise) were deemed derogatory and offensive to Israel and to Israeli believers in Jesus. I wasn't aware of the controversy and hadn't even seen the offending material. But I listened to his explanation and the steps the college had taken to remove the interviews from their web site.

But after that initial subject Jack began to tell me more about his own story of growing up in Jerusalem. He spoke of his rebellious youth and how he had often been arrested or detained by Israeli police; how he suffered during these encounters and developed a hatred for Jews. But when the Lord got hold of his life his heart began to change.

It hasn't been easy but Jack has struggled to develop a love for Israeli Jews. He currently lives with his wife and children in a Jewish neighborhood in Jerusalem. During our fellowship over a cup of coffee Jack and I were able to establish the basis for a further relationship. There was no great breakthrough at that moment; but imagine that kind of thing happening over and over and over again. If we begin to understand one another perhaps we can together begin to make a difference in this intractable problem.