Part 1

Part 2

Part 3

Part 4

Part 5

By Gary Taphorn

This article is the third of a five-part serial on the phenomenon of Christian Zionism in England and the United States. In Part One, we examined the origins of Christian Zionism in Protestant England and its early spread to America through the fanatical Puritans. Last month, in Part Two, we focused on the "founding fathers" of *pre-millennial dispensationalism*, which forms the theological basis of modern Christian Zionism. We first addressed the roles of the Englishmen Edward Irving and John Nelson Darby, who concocted the notion of a *rapture* virtually out of thin air. We then surveyed four key Americans who, inspired by Darby, began to popularize and institutionalize the precepts of Christian Zionism by the early twentieth century. In particular, we considered the evangelical preacher Dwight Moody, who pioneered the novel entity of the "bible institute," which revolutionalized the training of Protestant ministers, as well as the former politician Cyrus Scofield, whose *Scofield Reference Bible* (first published in 1909) seamlessly integrated the ancient sacred scripture with Scofield's personal and highly selective commentary. Just as Moody created the structure of academic institutions, Scofield provided the theology (borrowed heavily from Darby), to include the now generally accepted list of seven *dispensations*. In the Christian Zionist universe, the "church" of the current (and sixth) dispensation will be imminently *raptured* to heaven, leaving God free to pursue His separate and distinct plan for the Jews in the seventh and final dispensation, which coincides with the so-called *great tribulation*. Finally, we noted the contributions of William Blackstone, whose political activism, including an 1891 petition to President Harrison on behalf of Russian Jews, foreshadowed the heavily politicized nature of Christian Zionism today. As mentioned previously, this article is written as a companion piece to the three-part article entitled "Why is There a Gaza Strip?" published last year in *Catholic Family News*, which addressed the tragic history of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine.[1]

As the twentieth century dawned, the conservative, so-called "fundamentalist" strain of American Protestantism felt itself under attack (as did the Catholic Church) by at least two sources of modernism. First, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution threatened to undermine

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

the timeless Judeo-Christian axiom that man was created directly by God and infused with an immortal soul. A second threat, known as Higher Criticism, was emerging about the same time, particularly from German universities. Higher Criticism treats the Bible "as a text created by human beings at a particular historical time and for various human motives, in contrast with the treatment of the Bible as the inerrant word of God."[2]

Along with other sources of modernism, evolution and Higher Criticism threatened to overthrow the traditional understanding of God, man, and truth – and still do today. The Catholic Church reacted strongly, notably with the issuance of the 1907 papal encyclicals *Lamentabili* and *Pascendi* by Pius X, the former including the Syllabus of Errors. The Protestant world, fragmented in its doctrines and having severed its links to authority and tradition, proved a much easier target for the novel influences of modernism. Seen in this context, Christian Zionism was simply a reaction to modern forces which Protestants did not fully appreciate, crafted by half-educated, self-assured, and charismatic men such as Darby, Scofield and Blackstone.

The Impact of World War I

So long as the Jews remained in their world-wide and centuries-long diaspora, Christian Zionism remained, for most, an arcane and curious theory. All that changed with the sudden onset of the Great War in 1914. When Ottoman Turkey (long considered the "Sick Man of Europe") joined the ranks of the Central Powers, the advent of war and earth-shaking changes in the Middle East were virtually assured and widely anticipated. Premillennialists began publicly speculating. *Will the Jews finally be able to return to their ancient home? Will the map of Europe be redrawn to resemble the ancient Roman Empire, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel? Is the Kaiser the Antichrist?* By early 1917, *The Weekly Evangel*, the newspaper of the Assemblies of God USA, saw the world at the threshold of the end times: *"We are not yet in the Armageddon struggle proper, but at its commencement, and it may be…that Christ will come before the present war closes…"* Cyrus Scofield too was convinced that the war marked the death throes of the world system, which would be replaced by the Kingdom of God. The dean of the Moody Bible Institute declared that "the trouble with the whole gentile world today is attributable to the treatment of the Jew."[3]

The key events of late 1917 – the issuance of the Balfour Declaration in November and General Allenby's capture of Jerusalem in December – set the Christian Zionist universe abuzz. (For the Catholic, their significance may have more to do with the fact that they immediately followed the final appearance of Our Lady at Fatima.) The onset of such momentous developments – seemingly in fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, led dispensationalists to an attitude of passive acceptance of a future guaranteed by the will of

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

God. "Dispensationalists knew there was nothing anybody could do to stop the prophecies from happening and there was nothing they had to do to ensure their fulfillment."[4]

As the carnage of the Great War finally ceased in late 1918 and a new world order emerged under the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations, dispensationalists drew some satisfaction in knowing that their predictions about the post-war world were, as author Timothy Weber notes, "amazingly accurate." While secular observers had made similar predications, the dispensationalists "had come to their conclusions through the use of the Bible alone" based on "the scheme they had constructed from biblical prophecies long before the war began."[5] Among the most notable was the legal foothold, however murky, that the Jews gained in Palestine under the British Mandate.[6]

The war also had a few surprises for the dispensationalists, especially the demise of Czarist Russia. According to their prophetic scenario, drawn from the books of Daniel and Ezekiel, the Russian Empire was destined to lead a "northern confederacy" which would challenge the Antichrist's revived Roman Empire by an invasion of Israel. Eventually, the dispensationalists reasoned that the czar's empire had collapsed because of Russia's persecution of the Jews and that a communist Russia would be "just as serviceable" in fitting their prophetic scheme. As Timothy Weber observes, "It did not take long for dispensationalists to forget about the czar and turn their attention to the threat of atheistic communism as the ultimate fulfillment of biblical prophecy."[7]

Twin Errors of Communism and Zionism

Indeed, it is curious that Christian Zionists have held such radically inconsistent views about Israel and Russia, particularly during the era of the Soviet Union. Author Dwight Wilson has noted that "While madly cheering the restoration and expansion of the state of Israel at the expense of her neighbors, premils [premillennarians] have bewailed the expected aggression of Russia toward her neighbors. Both of these phenomena are predestined, prophetic situations, according to most premils' scheme of events."[8]

A close look at Communism and Zionism does reveal striking similarities. If Communism was officially atheistic, Zionism was led by overwhelmingly atheist, agnostic, or secular Jews from the lands of the Russian Empire. Russian Jews also had a strong presence in the early leadership of Bolshevik and Soviet ranks, far out of proportion to their number in the population.[9] If Communism divided people by class, Zionism does so by race (as did Nazism). Finally, both movements have seemed to derive their energy on the need to confront and crush their enemies, while continually proclaiming their desire for "peace." For Communism, the great foe was at various times the bourgeoisie, the czar, capitalism, Nazi Germany, the United States, NATO, and, of course, always Christianity. For Zionism,

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

the enemy has been the British, the Palestinians, the Arab states, the United Nations, Iran, the entire Muslim world, and most recently, anti-Semitic Europe. The Israeli general Moshe Dayan famously remarked that Israel *"must see the sword as the main, if not the only, instrument with which to keep its morale high and to retain its moral tension. Toward this end it must invent dangers and to do this it must adopt the method of provocation and revenge."*[10] With these obvious similarities between Communism and Zionism, how can Christian Zionists despise the one and embrace the other? To the Catholic, Zionism is simply one of the "errors" which Russia would spread around the world, as warned by the Blessed Virgin at Fatima.

The Inter-War Years to Independence

The tragic story of Britain's Mandate for Palestine is told in our companion article.[11] Briefly, the British bias in governance towards the immigrant Zionist settlers at the expense of the Arabs was by the 1930's exacerbated by the increasing exodus of Jews from Nazi Germany. When Britain, which had done more than any other power to make the Zionist aspirations a reality, attempted to control Jewish immigration, it found itself accused of intransigence by very Jews it had helped. The native Palestinian Arabs quickly learned to fear the Jews, with their terrorist groups such as Irgun and Lehi, while the British learned that they had grossly mistaken Zionist intentions and resolve.[12] Meanwhile, Christian Zionists began speculating whether Adolph Hitler, or possibly Benito Mussolini, was the anti-Christ. Mussolini was the better fit because he came from the home of the ancient Roman Empire, whereas Hitler's origins in Austria and Germany were outside its ancient boundaries. If dispensationalists had been largely on target in their predictions about World War I, the results of World War II, especially the Holocaust, largely mystified them. As Victoria Clark notes, the Holocaust *"had to be fitted into the jigsaw puzzle of bible prophecy. But here the Divine Mind proved exceptionally hard to fathom. According to the premillennial dispensationalists' understanding of the prophecies, such a mass culling of Jews was not scheduled to take place until the Battle of Armageddon, after the Rapture and the Tribulation. And the Second World War could not be the Battle of Armageddon…because Armageddon was in Palestine* [which had not remotely been involved in the war]."[13] Since they could do little or nothing to avert the Holocaust (whose full scope was not revealed until after the war), dispensationalists such as Blackstone concluded that the Nazi persecution was a divinely ordained warning to Europe's Jews. One commentator in *Moody Monthly* (1940) suggested that "By driving the preserved people [the Jews] back into the preserved land [Palestine], Hitler, who does not believe the Bible and who sneers at the Word of God, is helping to fulfill its most outstanding prophecy."[14] Yet, in that same interpretation of prophecy, Hitler's monstrous actions were merely paving the way for an even more horrific persecution of the Jews under the Antichrist.

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

The eventual British and United Nations proposal for a partition of Palestine between Arabs and Jews also caught Christian Zionists off balance. The maps of the proposed partition circulated in early 1948 did not look remotely like the great kingdom of Solomon which they had been led to expect. Israel, even with its expanded boundaries after a series of armistices with Arab states, was a long way from spanning the "river of Egypt to the Euphrates" (Gen 15:18). Because a partition of the Holy Land was never in their scenarios, Christian Zionists were left with a feeling of incompleteness after Israeli independence, especially because its borders did not include old Jerusalem. That situation would be "rectified" by the Six Day War in 1967.

The proposed unilateral declaration of Israeli independence, scheduled for May 14, 1948, created a major quandary for the Truman administration. The Pentagon and the State Department were anxious to avoid American entanglement in what they rightly saw was an intractable conflict between Arabs and Jews. But American Zionists waged a powerful campaign calling for recognition of the Jewish state, flooding the White House with over 900,000 postcards and other mail. Well aware of his potential role as a new "Cyrus" for the Jews, and less than six months before his pending election as President in his own right, Truman sided with public opinion. Thus, even before the birth of the Jewish state, American policy toward Israel was inextricably linked with public pressure, thanks principally to the Christian Zionists. Although Truman had made his decision, there is evidence that he feared the consequences. As he told Eleanor Roosevelt, *"The actions of some of our American Zionists will eventually prejudice everyone against what they are trying to get done. I fear very much that Jews are like all underdogs. When they get on top, they are just as intolerant and cruel as the people were to them when they were underneath."*[15] America's dance with the devil had begun.

Results of Independence

The emergence of a nation-state for Jews, incomplete though it appeared, thrilled Christian Zionists and prompted them to expand their influence from the realm of theology into that of politics and international affairs. They were obsessed with "end times" scenarios which the "ingathering" of Jews was now fulfilling. They further identified with Israel as it was surrounded by hostile Arab states (the Arabs, after all, were the offspring of Ishmael, not Isaac). The "David versus Goliath" analogy enthralled them, especially Israel's dramatic and "miraculous" victory in the 1967 war. Of note, it did not surprise the Central Intelligence Agency which had long anticipated such a result.[16] Author Timothy Weber has neatly summarized the impact of the state of Israel for Christian Zionists: *"Before the founding [1948] and expansion [1967] of Israel, dispensationalists were more or less content to teach their doctrine, look for signs of the times, and predict in sometimes great detail*

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

what was going to happen in the future…They had the 'sure word of Bible prophecy' to help them interpret world events and show how such events were leading to Christ's return. As future premillennialists, they believed that they would be raptured before most end-times events actually took place, but they expected to be here long enough to see history moving decisively in a predetermined direction. In essence, they sat high in the bleachers on history's fifty-yard line, watching as various teams took their positions on the playing field below and explaining to everyone who would listen how the game was going to end. For the first one hundred years of their movement, then, they were observers, not shapers of events. But all that changed after Israel reclaimed its place in Palestine and expanded its borders. For the first time, dispensationalists believed that it was necessary to leave the bleachers and get onto the playing field to make sure the game ended according to the divine script. As the world edged closer and closer to the end, dispensationalists became important players in their own game plan. When they shifted from observers to participants, they ran the risk of turning their predictions into self-fulfilling prophecies." ***[17]***

The Gospel According to Hal

Israel's victory in the 1967 Six Day War, which tripled the size of the land which it controlled, came at a momentous juncture for American Christians. The late 1960's and early 1970's was an era of declining morality, increased drug abuse, dissent from authority, and rising popular interest in the supernatural. It was the heyday of hippies and Jesus freaks, a time of stalemate in the Cold War, and increasingly disturbing news from Vietnam. America was hungry for good news and it was supplied for millions of people by one easy-to-read book – *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Christian Zionist Hal Lindsey. A graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary where he drank the Kool-Aid of premillennial dispensationalism from the likes of John F. Walvoord, Lindsey was working for the Campus Crusade for Christ at UCLA by the late 1960's. Gifted with a captivating writing style and a sincere desire to win souls for Christ, Lindsey found a huge market niche with *The Late Great Planet Earth* in 1970. The book has sold over 30 million copies in 50 languages and was released as a movie narrated by Orson Welles in 1976. Lindsey has recycled and modified his prophecies in various works repeatedly over the last 40-plus years, functioning, in the words of one observer, as a one-man publishing conglomerate. Now 86 years old and married to wife number four, following three divorces, Lindsey shows no signs of slowing down, and broadcasts a weekly report with the byline, "yesterday's prophecies, today's headlines."

While there are numerous other Christian Zionists publishing and broadcasting their messages, Lindsey remains indisputably the best known. With a track record of almost a

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

half century, Lindsey has had some prophecy "successes," such as anticipating the expansion of the European Economic Community, but also an embarrassing number of failures. Dispensationalists such as Lindsey claim to follow a literal hermeneutic, as opposed to the traditional *allegorical* and *typological* methods of interpretation. However, like most Christian Zionists, Lindsey has trouble retaining the so-called "literalist" approach to scripture while trying to fit its prophecies into a contemporary scenario. For example, in his 1973 book *There's a New World Coming*, he speculates that the locusts of Revelation 9 *"might symbolize an advanced kind of helicopter."*[18] However, in *The Apocalypse Code* (1997), Lindsey became more confident and more specific in his interpretation: *"Just exactly how could a first Century prophet describe, much less understand, the incredible advances in science and technology that exist at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries? Yet he* [John] *testified and God bore witness that he actually saw and heard things like: supersonic jet aircraft with missiles… advanced attack helicopters…intercontinental ballistic missiles…"*[19]

In the light of dramatically changing world events since the late 1960's, Lindsey has also had to change his eschatology. In *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* (1980), Lindsey writes: *"Today, the Soviets are without question the strongest power on the face of the earth. Let's look at recent history to see how the Russians rose to the might predicted for them thousands of years ago."* However, in *Planet Earth 2000 AD* (1994), Lindsey found himself having to account for the unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union: "*We see Russia as no longer a world threat, but a regional power with a world-class military – exactly what Ezekiel 38 and 39 predicted it would be."* By 1999, Lindsey was referring in his *International Intelligence Briefing* to a "Muslim-Russian alliance,"although even today there is no evidence for such a claim.[20]

Lindsey has been similarly flexible in his expectations of the second coming. Consistent with the Christian Zionist mantra that events involving the Jews are milestones in the divine plan, he was initially fixated with the creation of Israel in 1948. In *The Late Great Planet Earth*, he addressed the discourse of Christ about the end times as told in Matthew 24: *"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."* (Mt 24:32-34). For Lindsey, the fig tree referred to modern Israel, which "put forth its first leaves" after nearly 2000 years of exile "on 14 May 1948," and the "generation" that would see "these things" was typically forty years in duration. *"If this is a correct deduction, then within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could take place. Many scholars who have studied Bible prophecy all their lives believe that this is so."*[21] When the second coming did not occur in 1988, Lindsey was

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

forced to revise – and generalize – his prediction, suggesting that a generation could be as long as a hundred years and that the starting date of the prophetic clock might be 1967, rather than 1948.[22]

Prophecy or Fantasy?

At least two other authors published works about this time with similar prophetic warnings. Dr. Grant Jeffrey, a Canadian whose books sold seven million copies, calculated in *Armageddon* that the "seventieth week" of Daniel would occur in 1993 and the millennium would begin in the autumn of 2000. As author Stephen Sizer has noted, Jeffrey's subsequent writings, including a revised 1997 edition of *Armageddon*, have avoided these specifics.[23] More familiar to Americans may be Edgar Whisenant, a former NASA engineer and Bible devotee who predicted that Jesus would return to rapture His church sometime during the

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

Jewish holiday of Rosh-Hashanah in September, 1988. Whisenant's booklet, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could be in 1988* was published by the World Bible Society and sold over four million copies. Whisenant, who cited Scofield's notes in the *Scofield Reference Bible* among his sources, was so confident of his prediction that he stated, "Only if the Bible is in error am I wrong."[24] Whisenant was forced to concoct alibis for his failure, as well as alternative predictions, and eventually dropped off the media radar in the late 1990's. Jeffrey and Whisenant have joined the long list of failed prophets reminiscent of Baptist preacher William Miller, whose failed prediction about the return of Christ in 1844 resulted in America's "Great Disappointment."[25]

Lindsey has avoided the humiliating fate of Jeffrey, Whisenant and others, perhaps because he has not declared a specific date for a prophetic event. However, he has continued to proffer incredible claims; perhaps the most amazing is that the United States is mentioned in the Bible. In Revelation 12:14, John states that *"the woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness…"* As noted by Stephen Sizer, *"Lindsey suggests that this describes 'some massive airlift' that will transport escaping Jewish believers from the Holocaust of Armageddon to the safety of places like Petra."* Lindsey's justification for this astonishing conclusion is that the eagle is the national symbol of the United States. Sizer also cites several other problems with Lindsey's speculative interpretation, which hardly conforms to a literal hermeneutic.[26] Like other dispensationalists, Lindsey was caught off-guard by Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. *The Late Great Planet Earth* had made no mention of Iraq, and in Lindsey's later work, *1980's: Countdown to Armageddon*, he had forecast that Iraq would become part of Syria and strategically unite with the Soviet Union. Such critically flawed predictions did not prevent authors such as Lindsey from reaping huge profits in sales from America's two Persian Gulf wars. Indeed, the emergence of Iraq onto the Christian Zionist radar screen gave more grist to their publishing mill. Iraq, after all, was the home of ancient Babylon, mentioned in both the Old Testament and in Revelation 17:5 as "Babylon the Great, the mother of all prostitutes."[27] Indeed, one of Lindsey's colleagues, Charles Dyer, published a book after Operation Desert Storm in 1991, projecting that "Babylon would be rebuilt by Saddam so that it could be destroyed by the returning Christ."[28] Finally, we note that Christian Zionists cannot agree even among themselves on their so-called literalist interpretations. For example, Stephen Sizer has noted the inconsistencies about Revelation 9:16, the verse which is typically translated referring to an "army of 200 million mounted troops." Pre-millennialist preacher M. R. DeHaan considered this as "a supernatural army of horrible beings, probably demons, who are permitted to plague the unrepentant sinners" while Lindsey believed that they were Chinese troops, accompanied by other allies.[29] Such are the pathetically inaccurate results of Christian Zionist "prophecy."

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

Jerry Falwell – Israel's Cheerleader

Hal Lindsey may have excited a wide base of Americans to pay attention to the Middle East and expect an imminent "rapture." But he did not mobilize them into political participants in the tragic saga of modern Israel, as Timothy Weber noted above. That job would be filled by others, first and most notably by Southern Baptist Minister Jerry Falwell from Lynchburg, Virginia. Falwell was the founder and architect of a vast religious empire, which included the Thomas Road Baptist Church (1956), Liberty University (1971) and the Moral Majority (1979). He also became one of America's first high-profile "televangelists" with his nationally syndicated "Old-Time Gospel Hour." An artful fundraiser, Falwell once noted in an interview that "it takes us a little over a million dollars a week just to break even."[30]

Jerry Falwell did not begin his ministry as an advocate for Israel. As late as 1964, his writings showed that he shunned the world of politics: *"Believing the Bible as I do, I would find it impossible to stop preaching the pure saving gospel of Jesus Christ and begin doing anything else, including fighting communism, or participating in civil rights reforms. Preachers are not called on to be politicians but to be soul winners. Nowhere are we commissioned to reform the externals."*[31]

However, the sudden Israeli victory in the 1967 war proved an elixir for Falwell, as it had for Lindsey and millions of other Americans. With the U.S. military mired in Vietnam, much of the country was delighted to hear good news from America's "ally" in the Middle East. Israel was now the home of "muscular" Jews, which drew the admiration of Americans nurtured on the heritage of hardy western pioneers and spunky cowboys. It became easy to identify with the Jews and to oppose the sinister Arabs, who were also portrayed as Soviet clients. (While the client claim was partly true, the Soviets did not control the Arabs any more than the United States controlled Israel, which initiated the war with pre-emptive air strikes.) As Dr. William Goodman (co-author of an unauthorized biography of Falwell) has noted, *"Many Americans, including Falwell, turned worshipful glances toward Israel, which they viewed as militarily strong and invincible. They gave their unstinting approval to the Israeli takeover of Arab lands because they perceived this conquest as power and righteousness."*[32]

By 1971, Falwell was participating in a major prophecy conference in Jerusalem, in conjunction with attendees from 32 countries. In October, 1974, he repeated a gesture made by William Blackstone in 1888, almost a century before. Blackstone had arranged to store thousands of copies of his book *Jesus is Coming* in a cave in Petra, in modern Jordan. As Victoria Clark notes, Blackstone *"believed that the Jews suffering the seven-year Tribulation under the Antichrist after the Rapture would flee there from neighboring Palestine and be eternally grateful for some literature to teach them the way to*

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

salvation."[33] In Falwell's case, he arranged to deposit a Bible in Petra, with an inscription urging its finder [presumably Jewish] to "prayerfully and publicly read" certain selected chapters of scripture.[34]

Such bizarre behavior, combined with Falwell's questionably anti-Semitic remarks and the Christian Zionist mantra about the upcoming tribulation for the Jews, understandably led the government of Israel – and Jews in general – to keep Falwell at arm's length. However, by 1977 the new right-wing government of Prime Minister Menachem Begin saw the value of Falwell as an advocate for Israel. Begin had been a disciple of the radical Zionist Vladimir "Ze'ev" Jabotinsky and a former leader of the Irgun terrorist organization. In 1979, Begin gave Falwell his own Learjet aircraft to promote his increasingly frequent trips to Israel, a move that fit well with Falwell's self-promoting life-style. The following year, Begin awarded Falwell with the Jabotinsky medal for "Zionist Excellence" at a gala dinner in New York. Falwell, the first Gentile to receive the award, presumably had no objection to receiving an honor named after an avowed Jewish racist who had worked for the "ethnic cleansing" of Palestine.

The Begin government did not take long to recoup its investment in Falwell. In 1981, Israel launched a highly controversial, pre-emptive air strike on the Iraqi nuclear research facility at Osirak. In his damage control efforts, Prime Minister Begin telephoned Falwell even before President Reagan, seeking his support. An enthusiastic Falwell congratulated Begin "for a mission that made us very proud that we manufacture those F16s." Falwell then "preached an upbeat sermon on the subject at his Thomas Road church and urged 80,000 Moral Majority pastors to do the same, despite condemnation of the Israeli actions by President Reagan and the United Nations."[35] With Falwell's actions, American Christian Zionism expanded its scope from a novel theological system to a source of moral support for Israel to a mischievous political force in international affairs. We will consider other examples next month in Part Four.

The Perversion of Pilgrimage

A prominent part of Falwell's legacy (he died in 2007) was his creation of Christian Zionist "pilgrimages" to Israel. Just as Hal Lindsey had found a market niche in the 1970's for dispensationalist literature, so Falwell pioneered the obvious next phase of Christian Zionist activism. A fascinating glimpse of Falwell "pilgrimages" was captured by veteran journalist Grace Halsell in her 1986 book *Prophecy and Politics*.[36] Halsell was a talented and inquisitive writer who had previously worked as a speechwriter for President Lyndon Johnson and had separately impersonated a black woman in the American South, recording her adventures in her book *Soul Sister*. In *Prophecy and Politics*, she chronicled her experiences on two Falwell-sponsored trips to the Holy Land. The two tours, in 1983 and

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

1985, numbered collectively almost 1500 "pilgrims."

Halsell's book is peppered with conversations with her fellow travelers who had placed their trust and their travel dollars with Falwell. For many, the trip to the Holy Land was a highlight of their lives – a chance to see the land of the mighty ancient Jews and the site of the imminent battle of Armageddon. The sites related to the life of Christ were almost a sideshow. For example, one of Halsell's companions was Clyde, a World War II veteran and widower from Minneapolis. During the mandatory visit to Megiddo, site of ancient ruins in northern Israel, Clyde explained that the surrounding plain will be the site of the final battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:16) between the forces of good and evil. *"A 200-million man Oriental army will be moving westward for one year. This army will move through and destroy the most populated area of the world before arriving at the River Euphrates. Revelation 16 tells us that the River Euphrates will be dry and this will permit the kings of the East, the Orientals, to cross into Israel."*[37] [Clyde, who adheres to the literal interpretation of the Bible, is oblivious to the consequences of his statement. For example, a 200-million man military force is preposterously too large to even conceive, let alone assemble, control, and support; the entire manpower of China's People's Liberation Army today is only 2.3 million troops. Likewise, the Euphrates River, mentioned in Revelation, is already an insignificant obstacle for a modern army, as the U.S. military proved in 2003 in Iraq.]

As Clyde and his fellow travelers surveyed the surrounding Plain of Esdraelon (or Jezreel Valley), which is only 25 miles in length, Halsell commented that it looks very small for such a great, climactic battle. Replied Clyde, *"You can get a lot of tanks in here…you've got to remember that this will be the greatest battle ever fought. Several million will die right here."* Clyde then elaborates that the coming battle will involve nuclear weapons, citing the book of Ezekiel as his source. When the prophet refers to "a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire and brimstone" (Ez 38:22), says Clyde, he "could scarcely have been referring to anything other than an exchange of tactical nuclear weapons." Halsell continued her probing, asking Clyde if "Jesus as Supreme Commander will destroy forces allied against Him by the use of nuclear weapons?" Clyde responded, *"Yes…In fact we can expect that Christ will make the first strike. He will release a new weapon. And this weapon will have the same effects as those caused by a neutron bomb."*[38] [Jerry Falwell's Christ is not the suffering Servant or the meek Lamb of God, but a militant warrior like Begin or Jabotinsky. One of Falwell's biographers notes that he admires Israel precisely because it is militarily aggressive and has a large standing armed forces.[39] One of the many ambiguities in Christian Zionist eschatology is why Israel, with such a powerful military and nuclear weapons of its own, would not pre-emptively attack the forces of evil which are descending upon it. In any event, Clyde is not worried about these details because he knows he will be

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

"raptured" in advance.]

Halsell then shifted the conversation to the fate of the Jews during the Tribulation. Clyde responded, *"Two-thirds of all the Jews living here will be killed. You read that in Zechariah 13:8-9. There are about 13 and a half million Jews in the world today. So God is telling us that nine million Jews will be killed in this battle – more than all the Jews killed by the Nazis."*[40] [Like other Christian Zionists, Clyde accepts the pending slaughter of the Jews as divinely ordained, hence he has no remorse. Among its many inconsistencies, Christian Zionism cannot explain why the United States has a moral imperative to support Israel at all costs when heaven has destined the Jews for such a tragic and imminent fate.]

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

When Halsell questions Clyde about the certainty of his predictions, he patiently explains. *"You must understand that prophecy was a closed book until recently because God had instructed Daniel to seal the book 'until the time of the end.' That you find in Daniel 12:4…But we have men like Hal Lindsey and Jerry Falwell who have been given special insight into the prophetic word."* [41]

Throughout *Prophecy and Politics*, Halsell also reveals the Christian Zionist mindset through the itineraries crafted by Falwell and his staff. Three themes become apparent. First, there was almost no attention to the life of Christ. Taking the first tour as an example, Clyde and his 600 fellow pilgrims made no stop at Bethlehem. A visit to Nazareth was not scheduled until the last minute when the Israeli guide announced that they would stop for twenty minutes "to use toilet facilities." Halsell noted acidly in her book that she could not imagine Muslims stopping in Mecca "to use the toilet facilities." On a Sunday in Jerusalem, a suggestion was made to attend a service in one of the local churches, to which Falwell replied that the group would have a church service in their Israeli hotel.[42] A second, related theme is that contact with local Palestinians, in particular Christians, was virtually non-existent. Halsell concluded that it was part of the Christian Zionist strategy to focus on the Jews as the sole rightful residents of the land. "*…because of Falwell's presumption that the Palestinians were not there, our group was encapsulated, as in a space ship, and unaware of the reality outside our air-conditioned bus. By not recognizing one party to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Falwell-sponsored Christians ignored the reality of the war between the Palestinians and the state of Israel that raged around us…I felt we could have been helped by meeting Christians who, for over a century, since the first stirrings of Arab nationalism, have been at the center of the internal politics of the Middle East."*[43] Near the end of the tour, possibly in response to Halsell's requests to meet local Christians, Falwell produced a solitary Palestinian named Naim Khoury to the group. Khoury offered some brief scripted remarks about preaching the Gospel to fellow Arabs. In a later private conversation with Halsell, Khoury admitted that Israeli policy would not permit him to proselytize to Jews. Secondly, he acknowledged that the hefty $7000 collection which Falwell took up that day would go to his church, the First Bible Baptist Church of Bethlehem.[44]

Finally, if there was no time for New Testament sites or visits with local Christians, there was ample opportunity to hobnob with Israeli government officials. On the first tour, Falwell scheduled his 600 "pilgrims" for a meeting with Moshe Arens, the Israeli Defense Minister and former ambassador to the United States. In a hotel auditorium festooned with Israeli and American flags, Arens described the recent Israeli invasion of Lebanon, calling it "a great victory, not only for Israel, but for the free world." Arens then launched into a pep talk against Lebanon and Syria and discussed a possible follow-on Israeli attack with

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

American help. Halsell notes that Arens drew no fewer than eighteen standing ovations from Falwell's "pilgrims," compete with *"Amens!"* and *"Hallelujahs!"*[45] No mention was made of the thousands of Lebanese and Palestinian civilians already killed by Israeli field artillery and airstrikes, or the Shiites and Palestinians massacred by Israel's Lebanese allies. Today, Christian Zionist tours of Israel, sponsored by dozens of ministers and evangelists, follow the model set by Jerry Falwell.

Next Month: Christian Zionism and the Churches, Pat Robertson, Chuck Missler and John Hagee, the third temple, the prophecy industry, and the dangers of Christian Zionism.

---

[1] See *Catholic Family News*, Vol. 22, Issues 2-4 (February-April 2015).

[2] http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Biblical_Criticism

[3] Dwight Wilson, Armageddon Now! (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pp. 37-38. Also available online at http://www.garynorth.com/freebooks/docs/pdf/armageddon_now.pdf.

[4] Timothy P. Weber, On the Road to Armageddon (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 67.

[5] Ibid., pp. 73-74.

[6] The Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate were both structured to provide a "homeland" (not a state) in Palestine for Europe's Jews. The obvious problem is that a "homeland" does not specify who holds the levers of power. The British naively envisioned that they could govern indefinitely and placate differences between native Arab and immigrant Jew. The Jewish Zionists, however, wanted nothing less than a state of their own, with the British ousted and the native Arabs expelled.

[7] Weber, op. cit., p. 74.

[8] Wilson, op. cit., p. xxv.

[9] http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v14/v14n1p-4_Weber.html

[10] http://www.wrmea.org/1992-march/repeating-history-israel-derails-the-peace-train-again.html

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

[11] See Footnote 1.

[12] See for example http://www.cjpmo.org/DisplayDocument.aspx?DocumentID=45

[13] Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 139.

[14] Weber, op. cit., p. 148.

[15] Clark, op. cit., p. 141.

[16] CIA Library Online. https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol49no1/html_files/arab_israeli_war_1.html

[17] Weber, op. cit., p. 15.

[18] Hal Lindsey, *There's a New World Coming* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1984), p. 8.

[19] As quoted in Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), p. 124.

[20] Ibid., p. 125.

[21] Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), pp. 53-54).

[22] Sizer, op. cit., pp. 125-126.

[23] Ibid., p. 126.

[24] http://www.equip.org/article/88-reasons-what-went-wrong; see also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_C._Whisenant

[25] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Disappointment

[26] Sizer, op. cit., p. 133.

[27] Weber, op. cit., p. 208.

[28] Ibid., p. 209.

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

[29] Sizer, op. cit., p. 129.

[30] Dr. William R. Goodman Jr. and Dr. James J.H. Price, *Jerry Falwell: An Unauthorized Profile* (Lynchburg, VA: Paris & Associates, 1981), p. 15.

[31] Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1986), p. 72.

[32] Ibid., p. 73.

[33] Clark, op. cit., p. 93.

[34] Ibid., pp. 189-190.

[35] Ibid., p. 192.

[36] Halsell wrote two other books on Israel and Christian Zionism: *Journey to Jerusalem* (1981) and *Forcing God's Hand* (1999). Both are worth reading.

[37] Halsell, op. cit., p. 23.

[38] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

[39] Ibid., p. 75.

[40] Ibid., p. 26.

[41] Ibid., p. 36.

[42] Ibid., p. 57.

[43] Ibid., p. 58.

[44] Ibid., pp. 62-64.

[45] Ibid., pp. 60-61.

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.