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Abraham, Armageddon and the Antichrist - How Christian Zionists in the United States Take Their Stance Toward Israel

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Abraham, Armageddon and the Antichrist – How Christian Zionists in the United States Take Their Stance Toward Israel

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Introduction

"The alliance between our governments is unbreakable, yet the source of our friendship runs deeper than any treaty. It is grounded in the shared spirit of our people, the bonds of the Book, the ties of the soul." Those were the words of George W. Bush when he addressed the Israeli Knesset in May 2008 (The White House, 2008). The friendship between the United States and Israel has always been great – Bush declared he was proud that 'America was Israel's best friend in the world' in the same speech – but especially in times of instability in the Middle East, the relationship is questioned.

The escalation of violence between Hamas and Israel since October 7, 2023, has reignited interest in academia and society for the Israel-Palestine conflict. Every day, articles, opinion pieces, and videos are published that deal with one or more of the aspects of the war. That is not surprising, as the conflict touches upon many areas of life, especially within the field of Middle Eastern studies. Religion is one of those components. Jews, Muslims, and Christians all around the world are drawn into the news because of the origins of their respective religious traditions, which are rooted in Palestine. In this research, I concentrate on the circumstances that gave rise to the unconditional support for Israel by a group of American Christians, despite the fact that the countries are thousands of kilometers apart.

The United States is thus one of Israel's greatest allies. More aid is given to Israel annually by the United States than to any other nation, and as of 2022, 55% of Americans had a favorable opinion of Israel. Numerous Christians are included in this group. Under Protestants especially, support is high. The percentage of white *evangelicals* is most notable: eighty percent view Israel positively (Silver & Fagan, 2022). Evangelicalism is a trend within Protestant Christianity that is centered around being 'born-again', Jesus Christ as the Savior of humankind, and the Bible as the ultimate authority. Around a quarter of the roughly 200 million Christians in America belongs to this group (Pew, 2021). The evangelical community is home to one of the most vocal groups of Israel supporters. They go by the term 'Christian Zionists' and are part of the larger, politically focused Christian Right (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, p. 132).

Previous research

According to political scientists Mearsheimer and Walt, the so-called 'Israel lobby' is a 'loose coalition of individuals and organizations that actively works to move US foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction' (2007, p. 5). The lobby presses the case of the Jewish state in high circles and wants to encourage a special relationship between the United States and Israel. American

politicians are supportive of Israel because of the political power of the lobby. Mearsheimer and Walt contribute quite some power to the lobby. They claim that both Democrats and Republicans are afraid of the authority of the lobby and that anyone who opposes its agenda has little chance of becoming president (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, pp. 5-6).

The authors are realists. This is an approach in the study of international relations that argues that states' main motivators are security, national interests and the desire for power (Korab-Karpowicz, 2023). The authors thus believe that the goal of US foreign policy is to guarantee the safety and prosperity of the American people at all times. They name three main interests for US involvement in the Middle East: access to oil and natural gas, discouraging the region from producing weapons of mass destruction, and reducing anti-American terrorism. In their eyes, the United States wants to have a base in the Middle East because they are concerned for their own safety and would like the best access to global energy resources (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, pp. 337-338). Despite this, Mearsheimer and Walt (2007, p. 50) do not support the stance of the American government and argue that its policy has become a strategic liability. While it is said to protect Americans, it has made them more vulnerable and has hindered other foreign policy goals.

In the book, the writers admit that the non-Jewish voice of the Christian Zionists is indeed part of the pro-Israel lobby. They do not, however, think that the movement is the most crucial part of it. They believe that Christian Zionists are incapable of analyzing national security issues or influencing legislation. Furthermore, they are neither very powerful financially nor represented well in the media when it comes to news from the Middle East (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007, pp. 138-139). In conclusion, the authors believe that the impact of the Christian Zionists on American foreign policy should not be overstated.

However, I think that there is a significant role for religion when forming policy on Israel, which I want to explore further. Not every scholar is a realist, and it could be that authors like Mearsheimer and Walt are too focused on security that they might overlook the importance of religion to society and underestimate how much influence it has on people's day-to-day behavior, as well as on policy-making. For this reason, it is worthwhile to investigate how and why evangelicals use religion to justify their position. Moreover, I want to look beyond oil and other material interests that the United States could have.

Research question

Previously, researchers and scholars have asked the why-question, such as: *Why is American foreign policy toward Israel the way it is?* To answer this, they have looked at reasons the United States could have for being present in the Middle East, such as trade or making the world more secure. I believe that there can never be a completely satisfactory response to this question because it is impossible to know with certainty why specific policy decisions were made. It is inefficient to pose this question in my research again.

Therefore, I want to change the debate by asking a how-question. I believe, in line with Doty (1993), that it is more effective to look at the behavior of the social actors involved and how they framed policy the way that they did. Then, we discover how the worldview of a group, in this case the Christian Zionists, is constructed and the reason for their belief that Israel should be supported unconditionally. I try not to focus on *why* the United States created their policy, but on *how* a reality was created that enables US foreign policy toward Israel, and how some people even deem it necessary (Doty, 1993, pp. 289-299). Given this research method and the existence of the voice of the Christian Zionists, my research question becomes: *How does the content of the Christian Zionist community make support for US foreign policy toward Israel possible?*

Methodology

As mentioned above, my aim was to examine the discourse of the evangelical Christian Zionist community to figure out how the immense American support for Israel is substantiated in those circles. To do this, I conducted qualitative research.

The first part contains a close reading of the existing literature on Christian Zionism to provide an initial view of the movement before going to the current situation and the content analysis. For learning about the historical background of the movement, I mainly consulted books by Weber (2004) and Clark (2007) because they are thorough and appraised works. Literature on the influence of Christian Zionism on American politics was found with the help of Google Scholar and the University Library Catalogue. Unfortunately, I was not able to find literature that was published after the 7th of October, 2023. However, I predict that that will not make a large difference as the discourse of Christian Zionists has stayed the same throughout the years.

The second part of the thesis is centered around the content analysis. I watched online content of John Hagee, a popular American evangelical pastor and so-called televangelist whose sermons can be found on his website and YouTube. Choosing Hagee was the most obvious

because of his fame and prestige within the community and because his content was easily accessible. In total, I watched five sermons. One lasted 57 minutes, the other four were around 25 minutes long. All sermons were given after October 7, 2023. Even though the date is not provided under the videos on Hagee's website, from his language it is clear that they were recorded after October 7. Before watching the sermons, I did not make a definite code list to avoid excluding codes or themes in advance. Throughout watching the videos, I marked by hand how many times every theme, concept, or Bible verse was mentioned. After examining five of Hagee's sermons, the language and discourse were getting similar to such an extent that I decided that I did not need to watch further. Nothing new was introduced; the themes, Bible verses, and arguments were all repeated. After that, I copied my notes from paper to a table in an online document. The result can be found in the code list in the Appendix.

Finally, I adopted a 'hermeneutic' approach to discuss the biblical Scripture that Hagee and other Christian Zionists mention. In this chapter, my aim was to demonstrate that reading the Bible to clarify modern geopolitical events is a particular interpretation of Scripture, which in this case is used to push a political agenda. With the help of articles by Bible scholars and the English translation of passages from Genesis, Ezekiel, Daniel, 1 Thessalonians, and Revelation, I showed the historical and political contexts in which these books were written.

At the end of the thesis, I conclude the following. Although American politics specialists believe religion does not have a major impact on policy, the Christian Zionist voice is evident, and a discourse such as John Hagee's influences how Americans look at Israel and its right to exist. His instrumental reading of the Bible affects what is considered to be normal and justifiable. I argue that religion thus can have an impact because from that worldview, foreign policy is being made. As mentioned above, Chapter 1 will describe the history of the Christian Zionist movement from its emergence until the twenty-first century. Then, I explore the impact of the movement on American politics in Chapter 2. The discourse of John Hagee and its biblical foundation will be the topic of Chapters 3 and 4. The thesis ends with a conclusion and discussion.

Chapter 1: Historical background

In this chapter, I will explain the emergence of the Christian Zionist movement. This is crucial to this research for two reasons. Firstly, it helps to understand the behavior and statements of influential Christian Zionists today, because one knows where they originated. Moreover, I define the term premillennial dispensationalism and describe its background. This term will return throughout the thesis and it is important to understand what it means to know why Christian Zionists behave the way that they do. This chapter shows how the ideology of Christians regarding the Jews and an independent Jewish state started in the seventeenth century in England, how it moved to newly discovered America, and how it got shaped by figures like John Darby, Lord Balfour, and Tim LaHaye.

To do this, I mainly use two seminal works on this topic: *Allies for Armageddon: the Rise of Christian Zionism* by Victoria Clark (2007) and *On the Road to Armageddon* by Timothy Weber (2004). These books provide the reader with a detailed overview of the history of the movement, which makes it easier to understand this complicated and occasionally very theological topic in a clear way. Besides that, book reviewers are positive. According to them, Clark's work is an 'astonishing, well-told story', 'a provocative inquiry', and 'an intimate portrait' of the movement, described in detail and with a 'persuasive argument' at the center (Mayer, 2008, p. 581; Christensen, 2007, p. 7; Brown, 2008, pp. 192-193). Furthermore, Weber has received praise for writing 'the best overview of dispensational premillennialism to date' (Lindley, 2006, p. 287). 'Highly qualified' and like an 'expert', he has constructed 'phenomenal' research on the relationship between evangelicals and the Jews (Ariel, 2005, pp. 37-38). Although another reviewer argues that Weber takes too much time before getting to his point, he writes that it is a 'a timely, engaging history', which 'presents Christians with cautionary lessons' (Ostrander, 2006, pp. 232-234).

1.1 Seventeenth-century England and settling in America

The emergence of Christian Zionism as we know it now started in the early 1600s in England. King James I of England and IV of Scotland, who would soon approve his version of the Bible, did not agree with what his commentators were writing in the margins (Clark, 2007, p. 31). He did not read the Bible literally but acknowledged its ultimate authority. It provided him with the divine claim to rule over England and Scotland and therefore disliked that his writers wrote that Jews would return to Jerusalem and 'rule as kings and monarchs over the world' (Clark, 2007, p. 28). The English translation of the Bible made its contents more accessible to normal Englishmen. As a result, they could formulate their own ideas about God and the expectations

that Christians should have for him (Clark, 2007, p. 29). People thus not only started reading the Bible on their own but also started to *interpret* it. This is still central in the evangelical communities that embrace Christian Zionist ideology.

At the same time, this period's religious fundamentalists were looking intensely at the Old Testament. They found that prophetic sections in this section of the Bible were key to discovering God's plan for the future of the Jewish people and the world, which is a motive that still drives contemporary Christian Zionists. They were called Puritans, and they were the people who later became one of the first European communities to settle in America. There are several reasons why the Puritans came to be so fascinated by the Jews.

Firstly, the Puritans saw a comparison between Protestant Christians surrounded by their enemies of the Catholic Church and English bishops and rulers, and the ancient Israelites, who had been surrounded by enemies and betrayed by rulers. In addition, they feared that God would punish them for falling short of his standards like he had punished his people when they were removed from their homeland in the year 70 (Clark, 2007, p. 31). The biblical Old Testament therefore became a weapon against the Church of England and the monarchy.

Their interest in the Old Testament's text was caused by a revival of fascination for classical learning. This involved not only ancient Greek and Latin, but also ancient Hebrew. Knowing that this must have been the language in which God communicated with the first humans, and the language in which Jesus had read the Old Testament, led to a new interest in Jewish history, law, and literature (Clark, 2007, p. 32).

In 1630, a thousand Puritans sailed for what was then known as New England, later the United States. For them, it felt as if they were the Israelites fleeing from the Egyptian pharaoh. One of the main figures aboard the ship, John Winthrop, started the rhetoric of America being the place where they would enlighten the rest of the world. They would be as 'a City upon a Hill' for everyone to see, referring to Jesus' sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:14). This meant that if they were to act wrongly, everyone would know. This idea is still visible, as Chapter 4 will also demonstrate, illustrating the tendency among certain Christian Zionists to emphasize the special role that America plays in Israel's statehood.

1.2 Spread of evangelicalism in England

Back in England, the Puritan revolution had failed and the monarchy had been restored under Charles II. The Church of England stood strong again (Clark, 2007, p. 46). Throughout the 1700s, a specific strand of Christianity, evangelicalism, bloomed. In a politically uncertain time,

the notions of being 'born-again' and the yearning for the return of Jesus Christ (Clark, 2007, p. 55). Interest in the Jews had been picked up by scientists and philosophers. They were the ones looking for signs of the end times in biblical prophecy (Clark, 2007, p. 58).

This end time thinking gave rise to premillennialism, the belief that holds that Jesus Christ will reign peacefully for a millennium after his Second Coming to the Earth. Before this can happen, humanity will experience a period of severe suffering and tribulation. This concept is drawn from the last book of the New Testament, Revelation. The majority of early Christians, influenced by Augustine, believed that Jesus Christ's resurrection had already marked the beginning of this peaceful kingdom that would last for a thousand years. Others were convinced of postmillennialism, which holds that Jesus will return *after* a 1000-year period in which Christians will prosper (Weber, 2004, p. 10).

The desire to design the world according to God's plan to bring the end times closer intensified among the proponents of premillennialism. Part of his plan, according to them, was that the Jewish people should return to and have control over Palestine. Only if everything was in order the way God intended, Jesus would come back. As a consequence, some Christians made every effort to speed up his return, which often took the form of unconditional support for building the state of Israel (Clark, 2007, p. 59). In other words, the reason behind the success of this theory was a mix of hope for the future but also a fear of provoking God's punishment (Clark, 2007, p. 286).

1.3 Premillennial dispensationalism until the twentieth century

In the 1820s, Irishman John Nelson Darby founded the Plymouth Brethren, a sect that kept occupied with biblical prophecy and influenced Christian Zionist thinking until today. Darby is seen as the inventor of the concept 'premillennial dispensationalism'. The concept adds to premillennialism that all of history is divided into eras (dispensations). In each period, humankind failed the responsibility it had received from God, which then started a new era, until that one would also lead to failure. Most followers of this movement settled on seven eras in total (Weber, 2004, p. 20). An example is the Jewish era before the year 70, or the Christian church era afterwards (Clark, 2007, p. 61). Dispensations could not overlap. Before God can start the dispensation with the final plans for Israel, the one of the Church would have to end. For this to happen, Darby developed a concept called 'the Rapture': faithful believers would be taken up to heaven by Jesus Christ. He based this on the first letter to the Thessalonians, written by Paul. The concept of the Rapture will return and be explained in Chapter 4.

In contradiction to other premillennialists, Darby believed that the Rapture and the Second Coming were two separate events. Between the two events, a period of extreme suffering would occur (Weber, 2004, p. 24). The concept appealed to many already afraid of the end of time. Although Darby's ideas were not entirely his own, he could connect the themes in the past, present, and future so that people thought they could see history from God's viewpoint (Goldman, 2018, p. 90). After the Civil War, Darby taught his idea of premillennial dispensationalism but the theory was not received well instantly (Weber, 2004, p. 26). Nowadays, however, the power of premillennialism is hard to miss in the evangelical community. This is caused by a special relationship between the two movements.

Firstly, prominent and respected figures within evangelicalism were premillennialists, and followers of the doctrine came to be represented in the administration of Bible institutes and schools. Furthermore, premillennial dispensationalists and evangelicals could find each other on two theological grounds. Dispensationalists knew the Bible well, stayed loyal to it, and defended it. Nobody could 'out-Bible' them. Premillennialists stood firm in their conviction that the Bible was infallible and of the highest authority, and they were not happy with the emergence of historical-critical scholars in the nineteenth century who questioned the authorship and dating of biblical books. One of the main reasons evangelicals were drawn to the movement and began to accept the theory more and more was because of this attitude (Weber, 2004, p. 36).

An example of their fascination for the Bible was the *Scofield Reference Bible*, which first appeared in 1909. This was a version of the King James Bible, annotated by a lawyer and self-proclaimed Doctor in Divinity Cyrus I. Scofield. To the regular text of the Bible, he added annotations, cross-references, and statements that contributed to many people's belief in the premillennial, dispensationalist view on the future. In the first half of the twentieth century, the *Scofield Reference Bible* was the most popular Bible among fundamentalist Christians. Scofield thereby helped spread Darby's message and emphasized once again how important it was for Christians to fight for the return of the Jewish people to Palestine (Clark, 2007, pp. 91-92).

A second feature of both groups was the loyalty to apostolic doctrine. More liberal thinkers of the time cast the beliefs of Jesus' apostles aside and looked at existence from a contemporary viewpoint. Evangelicals and premillennialists disagreed. Both believed that it was important to stay true to the teaching of the Bible and act as the apostles did (Weber, 2004, p. 41). Lastly, the evangelicals as well as the dispensationalists believed in literalistic supernaturalism and emphasized concepts such as angels, demons, and lakes of fire. Many evangelicals were drawn

to this discourse because of their belief that God stands outside of history and would intervene when necessary (Weber, 2004, p. 42).

Put differently, the fascination that both dispensationalists and evangelicals had with the Bible and the conviction that one should stay true to its original teachings made them compatible. As a result, premillennial dispensationalism produced a subcultural movement and had the components needed to survive, which is why it was accepted and stayed. The changing global landscape and world events of the late 1800s made premillennialism even more attractive to follow than postmillennialism. The outbreak of, for instance, the American Civil War gave people the impression that the Second Coming was nearby (Goldman, 2018, p. 88). While staying true to the primary notion, sometimes adjustments were made to fit drastic events into the story. This premillennial explanation of the world and the Bible was appealing to many people (Weber, 2004, pp. 34-43). Some argue that Christian Zionism can be based on both premillennial as well as postmillennialism. They argue that the point is not the timing of the Second Coming, but what kind of millennium it will be. They doubted, for example, if there would be a spiritual or physical kingdom of God throughout the thousand years (Goldman, 2018, p. 87).

1.4 Christian Zionism in America in the twentieth century

By the 1890s, premillennial dispensationalism had become the dominant form of premillennialism and one of the biggest religious movements in America (Goldman, 2018, p. 90). Restorationist voices also became louder: multiple initiatives were set up for Jews to settle in Palestine. Moreover, political Zionism had taken off since Theodor Herzl had organized the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897. This worried Christian Zionists: modern Jewish emigrants to Palestine seemed ‘nonchalant’ and did not keep the practices that traditional orthodoxy prescribed. Furthermore, Herzl focused more on diplomacy based on realism and the gain of power than on what the Scripture described for the Jews (Goldman, 2018, p. 95). Because of this, political and religious Zionism became more intertwined in the twentieth century.

In the United States, Christian Zionist William E. Blackstone proposed that America should help the Jews secure their place in the biblical homeland. This petition was signed by 81 prominent Christian figures, from different denominations. This emphasized that Christian Zionism was not only associated with apocalyptic thinking of a marginal group but with actual politics. Although Woodrow Wilson, the American president at the time, never signed the

petition, it is said that he was passionate about bringing the Jewish people back to the land of Palestine. It is therefore not surprising that he approved of publishing the Balfour Declaration in 1917, in which the British government endorsed 'establishing a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine' (Goldman, 2018, p. 98; Clark, 2007, p. 121).

Christian Zionists across the West saw this as the beginning of a new era: it was a sign that God was interfering with affairs in the human world and that the period leading up to Jesus' Second Coming was near. Clergymen in the 1910s told their audience that world events were parallel to biblical prophecy, just as Christian Zionists do today (Clark, 2007, pp. 123-124). The League of Nations officially assigned the mandate for Palestine to Great Britain in 1922, but the United States was not part of the League of Nations. In the American Congress however, a resolution was introduced to make sure the US would remain committed to the Balfour Declaration (Merkley, 1998, p. 98).

Following the successful British invasion of Jerusalem in 1917, premillennialism became increasingly popular and biblical prophecy became more important. Suddenly, everything felt possible (Weber, 2004, p. 156). American fundamentalists started to 'out-patriot' the liberals, who did not feel for giving the United States a special, supernatural status such as comparing it to heaven. After the First World War, American and British believers of premillennialism were looking to find out what the next step toward the Second Coming would be. They started to think about the future map of Europe because of a literal reading of the prophetic book Daniel (Clark, 2007, p. 126).

In 1937, the British *Peel Commission* suggested a plan to divide the land of Palestine into two parts. Today, American Christian Zionists see this as a betrayal of the Balfour Declaration, when Britain promised to construct an independent Jewish state. It cursed the Jews and it is a reason why the British empire fell apart, they argue (Clark, 2007, p. 136). Here, one can already see the hyper-fixation on cursing and blessing the Jews, which will become prevalent in later chapters.

1.5 The interwar period and World War II

During the interwar years, antisemitism increased in both Europe and the United States. The Jews were blamed for the economic depression and believed to be in control of the world's banks, media, politics, and even religions (Clark, 2007, pp. 136-137). The basis of this was the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a collection of fabricated texts first published in Russia. The Protocols were translated into multiple languages and became popular in the years between the

two World Wars. Some prominent premillennialists also embraced the theory that there would be 'wrong Jews' who would not convert to Christianity and also not return to Palestine. They were out to destroy America and Christianity. Antisemitism continued to grow in the 1930s and some American Christians saw Hitler solely as a threat to Soviet Russia and to the 'wrong Jews' (Clark, 2007, p. 139).

After the war, Christian Zionists tried to make sense of the Holocaust. A mass murder of Jews like the one that happened in the Second World War was part of the end time event, but that event could not take place in Europe and Hitler was not believed to be the best Antichrist. Was it a warning of God then, to leave Europe and return to their ancient homeland? This discussion made their determination to fight for an independent Jewish state stronger (Clark, 2007, p. 139).

The horrors of the Holocaust helped Christian Zionists add an even bigger moral layer to their argument. Zionists expected American support for a Jewish state more and more. Franklin D. Roosevelt had held this off, but the president that followed in 1945, Harry Truman, got himself occupied with the Zionist issue again. This was not necessarily because he wanted to establish a Jewish state, but because he did not know what to do with all the Jews that survived the concentration camps and longed to leave Europe. He recognized Israel as a *de facto* state on the 15th of May, 1948.

American Christian Zionists saw God's hand in this 'fulfillment of biblical prophecy' (Clark, 2007, pp. 140-144). They were excited because without a restored Israel, there could be no Antichrist, no end time event, and therefore no Second Coming. Therefore, the establishment of Israel was the next step toward the return of Jesus Christ (Weber, 2004, p. 155). Many prominent Christian Zionists called it the greatest event of the twentieth century, the greatest event since the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or 'perhaps even since 70 AD, when Jerusalem was destroyed' (Clark, 2007, p. 144; Weber, 2004, p. 173).

1.6 The establishment of the state of Israel until now

The British Mandate in Palestine ended and the British empire fell apart, which meant that the role of Great Britain in the history of Christian Zionism decreased massively. Smaller roles are played by Christians in the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, and France. However, the Christian Zionist story from 1948 until today is dominated by the Americans and Israelis. The United States provides moral and practical support and has created a strong alliance with Israel throughout the eventful years of the second half of the twentieth century (Clark, 2007, p. 145).

Although the Christian Zionists were amazed that the Jews finally had an independent state in Palestine, its borders were not exactly what they imagined. They quickly argued that Israel could be geographically bigger, from 'the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates' (Gen. 15:18, NIV). An even greater concern was the fact that the Jewish state did not control the entirety of Jerusalem, but they also believed it would be next up in the fulfillment of prophecy (Weber, 2004, pp. 173-174).

The opportunity for increasing Israel's territory came in 1956 with the Suez crisis. The relationship between the surrounding Arab countries and the Jewish state was not as peaceful as Israel had hoped. Israel was bothered by the rise of the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser because of his support of military groups on Israel's territory and because he did not let Israeli ships pass through the Suez Canal. Together with Britain and France (who had their own interests), Israel decided to attack Egypt. Most dispensationalists approved of the attack and did not like that the United States supported a resolution in the United Nations Security Council that called for a ceasefire. They believed the US had made its interest in Middle Eastern oil a priority over supporting Israel in the divine plan that had to be fulfilled (Weber, 2004, pp. 175-177).

Just like the year 1948, the Six-Day War in 1967 was a miraculous event for the Christian Zionists. The Middle East region was destabilized, partly because of growing Soviet influence. Nasser was still determined to oppose Israel and closed down the Strait of Tiran to Israeli ships. Israel interpreted this as an act of war and made Egypt, Syria, and Jordan retreat from territory they believed was theirs. The most incredible outcome for the Israelis was the capture of Jerusalem. Even for secular Jews, Jerusalem was the symbol of Jewish identity and peoplehood, and they were happy that Israel had control in the city (Weber, 2004, pp. 179-183).

The Six-Day War was a great victory for the Israelis: compared to the other countries, they lost relatively few men and increased their land mass so that their country became three and a half times its original size. Because of this, it was obvious to dispensationalists that the war was God's miracle. Jewish control in Jerusalem and the expansion of territory was, again, a fulfillment of prophecy. For them, it was also a necessary event in the time leading up to the end times and the return of Christ. Christian Zionists answered the hostility and hatred of Arab nations following the war by claiming that they were acting against God's plan and siding with Satan and the Antichrist (Weber, 2004, pp. 183-186).

1.7 Usage of media

After the Six-Day War, Christian Zionists were convinced that more of the world needed to hear their message. Their breakthrough to the secular world happened through printed media, and in particular with Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970). This was a fictional work that combined biblical prophecy with 'real-time events'. In 1990, 28 million copies were sold. The big success could probably be attributed to him incorporating 1948 and 1967, which made people believe they were reading tomorrow's newspaper (Weber, 2004, pp. 188-189). In the middle of the 1990s, the *Left Behind* books by Tim LaHaye were published, also of the genre 'prophecy fiction'. The series followed Lindsey's success story, selling tens of millions of copies (Weber, 2004, pp. 192-194).

During the 1980s, dispensationalists also entered the political arena to be part of the decision-making process while the 'heavenly plan' was being played out. Dispensationalism even reached the American army because Hal Lindsey visited them to consult them on how to deal with the Middle East and the Third World War. On the other hand, there were also political events that did not fit in the timeline of people who were waiting for the end times – Anwar Sadat's peace initiatives or the Camp David Accords of 1978, for example. And then there was the issue of interpreting the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989. According to a literal interpretation of the Bible book Ezekiel, people were sure that Russia would take part in a large-scale invasion that would prelude the end time event (Weber, 2004, pp. 196-205).

People who tried to explain the Bible literally were thus flexible in their point of focus. In the 1990s, the attention switched from Russia to the Middle East and Islam. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait or the Gulf Wars led to new ways of interpreting biblical prophecy because Russia was long seen as one of Israel's biggest enemies at the end of time (Weber, 2004, p. 209). The Middle East increased to be the center of attention because of 9/11, Bush's War on Terror, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the possibility of Iran becoming a nuclear threat (Clark, 2007, p. 146). The point that Christian Zionists seem to make with this is that the 'crown jewel' of biblical prophecy, Israel, always seems to be in danger and that everything needs to be done to protect it (Weber, 2004, p. 212).

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I illustrated the Christian Zionist movement from when it first flourished in England in the 1600s until the twenty-first century. While the idea started in England because the Bible became accessible to more and more people, it gained massive popular support in

America among the evangelical community. Also, I have shown that Christian Zionists have always had a fascination for reading and interpreting the Bible and the Jews, their language, and their ancient homeland. Moreover, the term premillennial dispensationalism is important to take to later chapters. Premillennialists believe that Jesus will return before his 1000-year peaceful reign on Earth. Dispensationalists add that history is divided into dispensations, and that the Jews will hold a special place in this reign, separate from Christianity.

As a result, we have seen how Christian Zionists created and normalized for themselves a particular worldview and an instrumental way of reading the Bible, for example by interpreting world events related to Israel as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. In the next chapter, I will move to the domain of American politics to explain if and how Christian Zionism has had an impact there.

Chapter 2: Christian Zionism and American foreign policy

Throughout history, Christians have turned to the Bible for guidance on political questions, and the political situation regarding Israel is no exception. Christians have used the Bible to develop a theological view on politics and relate to politics from that perspective (Morris, 2017, p. 289). The petition by William Blackstone, mentioned in Chapter 1, is a clear example of this. Furthermore, I have shown that Christian Zionists in America make sense of questions regarding the state of Israel from their premillennialist outlook because they see the establishment of Israel as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, which brings them one step closer to the Second Coming of Christ (Morris, 2017, p. 294).

Among evangelical Christians especially, Israel is important because it is the 'Holy Land' of the Bible, and is therefore exclusively favored in God's eyes (Saiya, 2022, p. 133). Besides that, Christian Zionists have compared the United States to Israel: both nations share a common religious heritage, were supported by refugees fleeing religious intolerance in Europe, and value democracy, particularly in regions of the world where that is less common. Israel's enemies are often also America's enemies (Amstutz, 2013, p. 133). Many American Christians moreover believe that God works through mankind by choosing nations, empires, and political leaders, and that the United States has been chosen by God for an exceptional mission in the world (Saiya, 2022, p. 128). Lastly, there is the argument that will be seen in pastor John Hagee's rhetoric: if America stops blessing Israel, America will stop being important in God's eyes (Saiya, 2022, p. 138). The United States and Israel are connected according to this line of argumentation.

Many American believers see support for Israel as an obvious Christian obligation for the above-mentioned reasons (Saiya, 2022, p. 145). Evangelical support for Israel in America is increasing, and the largest pro-Israel lobby group – Christians United For Israel, John Hagee's foundation – is made up of evangelical Christians (Waxman, 2012, p. 96). It can therefore seem that they have an influence on American foreign policy toward the Middle East and Israel in particular. In this chapter, I explore how Christian Zionists look at world politics and if they had any influence on various aspects of American politics.

2.1 Evangelicals and politics

The presence of evangelicals in the geopolitical sphere, and in particular those who believe in dispensational premillennialism, has been translated into passionate support for Israel. This is a result of seeing the state as the fulfillment of God's covenant with the Jews for a homeland

(Dittmer & Sturm, 2010, p. 212). On top of that, many evangelicals believe that working for peace in the Middle East and between Israel and the Palestinians is pointless because violence is part of the end times, and the end times being here means that prophecy is unfolding. This is thus a fatalist approach to geopolitics in the Middle East: they believe a war is inevitable and every war could be a 'potential prophetic marker of the end times' (Dittmer & Sturm, 2010, p. 214). Furthermore, evangelicals who believe in dispensationalism are opposed to the division of Jerusalem. They do not want Palestinians to have control over the Temple Mount, but for it to be in Jewish hands because they believe Jesus will build his throne there when he returns to reign on Earth for a thousand years. Lastly, within evangelical geopolitics, people are suspicious of internationalism. International organizations such as the United Nations are, in their view, the 'one world government' that the Antichrist will use to exercise political power all around the globe. This viewpoint has resulted in lobbying for the United States to leave the UN and not seek approval for the UN in military actions (Dittmer & Sturm, 2010, pp. 212-215).

On the other hand, evangelicals are occupied with the optimistic field of missionary work. Evangelical work has increased across Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East since the 1970s. This is most likely because evangelicals believe they can both benefit the local communities and at the same time potentially make a difference for converts' souls. This presents a paradox: there is the idea that Christians should not stand in the way of prophecy and that war is inevitable, but that collides with the efforts to go on missions to save the unsaved (Dittmer & Sturm, 2010, p. 211).

However, evangelical missionaries in the field do not experience this paradox as much. Even though they believe that we are living in the end times, that does not change the aim of the mission to bring Middle Eastern people to the faith, as was prescribed by Jesus in the New Testament (Dittmer & Sturm, 2010, p. 220). It could occur that missionaries have a certain geopolitical worldview when they are in America, but upon arrival on the ground, that can change. That comes from being confronted with checkpoints, travel restrictions, poverty, and discrimination in the Levant region (Dittmer & Sturm, 2010, p. 225). In conclusion, evangelical Christians have a clear geopolitical view that they derived from the Bible, but that does not restrict them from performing missionary work. Compared to influential evangelical leaders in America, evangelical missionaries appear less 'blindly supportive' of Israel and are also less apocalyptic (Dittmer & Sturm, 2010, p. 230).

2.2 Foreign aid

The Middle East has been a central part of American foreign policy, especially over the last twenty years. The region is crucial for global economic stability because of its supply of oil. Since 9/11, it gained even more relevance for American policy-makers because of issues like terrorism, political Islam, the Arab Spring, the Islamic State, the resurgence of the Taliban, and Iran's nuclear program (Saiya, 2022, p. 131).

The state of Israel has been the largest recipient of US foreign aid in history regarding the cumulative amount (Wang, 2021, p. 664). The majority of it was given after the Camp David Accords in 1978 (Miller, 2014, p. 17). Since 2001, the country received approximately $3 billion per year, with the highest amount in 2003 and the lowest in 2009 ($3.74 billion and $2.24 billion respectively). 70% of the money is meant for military purposes (FA.gov, n.d.). The amount accounts for circa 2% of Israel's Gross Domestic Product, and if we look at it per capita, it results in around $345 for every Israeli (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2008, p. 26).

The Middle East's geopolitical climate has been transformed as a result of this constant money flow, which also had wider effects on social, economic, and security issues. Scholars have asked themselves before whether deciding this amount is solely based on US interests in Israel and the broader region or if it is also influenced by pro-Israel lobby groups (Wang, 2021, pp. 664-665). According to Mearsheimer and Walt (2008, p. 355), the latter would result in a policy that would only support the interests of Israel but would go against America's own interests and core values. Now, I will explore further if scholars believe that the Israel lobby influences policy-making for religious reasons, or if their role is much exaggerated.

2.3 Shared customs and values

Political scientist Mark R. Amstutz states that the role of religion in foreign politics should not be oversimplified and overdrawn. According to him, Christian Zionists are not a cohesive movement but a group of people who all interpret their beliefs differently. Moreover, he believes that the initiatives taken by Christian Zionists, like summits or organizing trips, are too sporadic to actually be transferred into policy. Lastly, Amstutz considers the role of evangelicals in creating US policy on Israel as limited because evangelicals did not become politically active until the end of the Cold War, which was decades after the establishment of the Israeli state (2013, p. 134).

Amstutz's alternative suggestion is that the strong bond between America and Israel is based on 'shared ideals and common values' (2013, p. 130). First are the religious values. Americans

identify strongly with the Israelis, whose religion was the foundation for the Christian faith because the United States was founded on Christian ideals. This is for example displayed in President Jimmy Carter's discourse at the time of the Camp David negotiations. He stated that Americans have 'profound moral commitments' which are a significant part of their 'values as a people' (Mitelpunkt, 2018, pp. 231-232).

The countries also share political aspirations. Being a democratic state with a strong constitutional tradition is important to both states, says Amstutz. The importance of democratic institutions and traditions and human rights causes a feeling of sympathy between the two nations. Lastly, Israel and America can find each other in shared security concerns. America helped Israel with threats from neighboring countries. Cooperation between Israeli and American intelligence services has grown stronger because of the 9/11 attacks and the threat of terrorism (Amstutz, 2013, p. 131). America has thus always believed that Israel and the US are committed to democracy and respecting human rights, and Amstutz sees that as the main reason for American support for Israel in their foreign policy.

Mearsheimer and Walt (2007) believe that the realist strategy, which is the idea that states base their policy on their own interests, is the biggest reason behind the making of American foreign policy. Amstutz argues that that is only an incomplete perspective, however. Because political analysts have always assumed that realism is what drives American policy-makers, they have failed to see the ideals that shaped American politics (Amstutz, 2013, p. 15).

2.4 Elected leaders

Foreign policy decisions can still be influenced by the moral principles and religious convictions of American elected officials and government officials. There are examples of this regarding policy on Israel. For instance, it is likely that President Harry Truman was influenced by his belief that the Jewish people had a special place in God's plan and deserved humanitarian support when he supported the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Also, President George W. Bush stated that Jesus is his favorite political philosopher and mentioned the fight between good and evil in over 300 of his speeches (Amstutz, 2013, p. 28). Another impactful presidential decision was President Donald Trump's move of the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2017, pronouncing that Jerusalem is Israel's capital city (Pollak, 2018). Whether this decision was influenced by pro-Israel John Hagee, as will be described in Chapter 3, or if it was based on American interests, it nonetheless implies that the values that the American president holds can have a direct impact on the Israel-Palestinian dynamic.

2.5 The (in)significant role of religion in American politics

The United States has a legally separate church and state: according to the American Constitution, the state grants the freedom to exercise all religions, but it partners with none of them (Saiya, 2022, 127). However, this distinction is sometimes not as clear anymore. According to Saiya, many American Christians have tried to transform the United States into a Christian nation (2022, p. 128). Furthermore, the church-state separation does not mean that religiously informed arguments can be excluded from the public debate entirely (Miller, 2014, p. 14).

American sociologist Robert Wuthnow claims that since 9/11, religion has played a bigger role in American policy because of the international focus on Islam, and that religion is of a wider relevance within policy-making than was previously assumed. Also, scholars tend to take into more account what it means for global politics when religious communities start to be more active (Wuthnow, 2009, p. 190).

However, Wuthnow argues that the influence of religion should not be magnified. He says there are other, more significant factors that determine policy. Examples are, for example, issues regarding power, national security, law, and economic interest (Wuthnow, 2009, p. 191). At the same time, Christians have widespread support among the population, well-financed organizations, and connections to high offices. It would be surprising if they did not influence American foreign policy. Also, American politicians do not hesitate to use biblical language in their speeches. In 1984 for instance, then American President Ronald Reagan responded to a question about nuclear war with the following words: “No one knows whether Armageddon is 1,000 years away or the day after tomorrow.” (Weber, 2004, p. 201). In 2019, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez defended her proposed cap on interest rates saying that unethical loaning is ‘explicitly denounced in the Bible’ or presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg referred to a verse from Proverbs to argue for a higher minimum wage. Apparently, Christian ideas can be found at the highest levels of American politics, and politicians seem to think it will help their future electoral successes (Saiya, 2022, p. 130).

Important to note is that Christian rhetoric alone does not mean that religious institutions had an actual impact on shaping foreign policy. Religious leaders like to emphasize as well that they were invited at the table, that they made statements, and that they were heard (Wuthnow, 2009, p. 197; 232). The role of religion in negotiations is almost never completely clear, and with a few exceptions, religious leaders’ claims do not directly result in legislative or policy changes.

It is possible that voters will be more inclined to support a particular candidate or political party if their religious leader has had contact with them. Finally, religious leaders like to align themselves with a president, policy, or initiative to show their supporters that they have a voice and support 'goodness, decency, and moral principle' (Wuthnow, 2009, p. 232-234).

International relations scholar Paul Miller gives the individual policy-maker more agency. He does not worry about a too big impact of religion on decision-making. Civil servants can recognize themselves that there is theological disagreement on the topic of Israel as a fulfillment of prophecy. Too often, he says, the predictions of dispensationalists have proven wrong over time (Miller, 2014, p. 16). Therefore, he is certain that American policy-makers create policy for the Middle East based on more 'traditional' grounds, such as security and humanitarian interests (Miller, 2014, p. 9). He does admit however that policy-makers are sometimes religious themselves, and might turn to their religious convictions to make decisions regarding justice and equality (Miller, 2014, p. 15). Like Wuthnow, Miller does not exaggerate the role of religion but concludes that American foreign policy toward the Middle East has often been created for a mix of reasons: straightforward realism regarding oil, humanitarian ideals, and lastly, theological interests (2014, p. 23).

2.6 The how-possible question

One issue with reading the above-mentioned literature on this topic is that it has placed an excessive amount of emphasis on the *why-question.* So far, authors like Mearsheimer and Walt (2007), Wuthnow (2009), and Miller (2014) have discussed *why* the United States would spend money, time, and effort on supporting Israel. The approach will always be to investigate the precise impact of US foreign policy, but it is difficult to determine a sufficient response. In this case, the answer would be that the impact of religion is at least minimal but also not large or explicit and that there are other factors and interests at play in making foreign policy.

Roxanne Lynn Doty (1993) suggests an alternative: posing a how-possible question, which leaves a different outcome. We can look at the case differently, that is to say, if we examine *how* a particular worldview is constructed so that certain policy is made possible. If the United States indeed only focused on material interests in the Middle East, that would make some decisions impossible to explain, for example, the US embassy move or the support of an independent *Jewish* state. These are decisions that cannot necessarily be clarified based on economic reasoning (Doty, 1993, p. 298). There is thus a whole reality around policy, which does not only include money but also a discourse. By paying attention to Christian Zionist discourse, we can

analyze how the 'reality' is produced, and how that makes policy decisions regarding Israel possible (Doty, 1993, p. 303). In other words, not only the specific decisions matter when foreign policy is discussed, but also everything that is said by various actors on the topic. Based on this reasoning, the voice of Christian Zionists in America has an impact on politics, because they have socially constructed a world view based on theology and biblical prophecy. This leads to a way of thinking that makes unconditional support for Israel not only possible but also necessary, as people want to fulfill biblical prophecy to bring the Second Coming of Jesus Christ closer.

2.7 Conclusion

Admittedly, there is a special bond between Israel and the United States. Israel has received the highest amount of American foreign aid in history, and some American Christians see a special relationship because of shared religious heritage and political outlook. And even though dispensationalists believe the end time event is unfolding in the Middle East, they continue to send missionaries there to convert the local people.

In this chapter, I reviewed the relevant literature to determine whether academics think Christian Zionists have an effect on US foreign policy. That does seem the case, but the part that religion plays in politics should also not be exaggerated. Multiple reasons attribute to the fact that America has seen Israel as a good friend since its establishment: shared political, religious, and security interests, and the personal beliefs of American politicians in high offices, for example (Amstutz, 2013). But rhetoric alone of religious and political leaders is not a good reason to believe that what they did actually shaped policy (Wuthnow, 2009).

Although scholars recognize the Christian Zionist movement and their accomplishments, they do not seem to be convinced that they have a large impact on American policy. If an influential evangelical figure declares to have had a say in a policy change, that can also be explained by their will to be associated with the 'good side' or prestige. The scholars mentioned in this article think the Christian Zionist community is too diverse to have a continuous influence on American foreign policy toward Israel. However, this is only a sufficient response to the question of *why* the United States creates policy in the way that it does. However, I strive to take another response, following Doty (1993). If we look at the reality that made American foreign policy toward Israel possible, we can conclude that the Christian Zionist voice is evident and has shaped the worldview of many people. Within this reality, American policy-makers have to create guidelines. It is likely that these are influenced by Christian Zionist arguments

that they hear in, for instance, media. The point of further chapters is to dissect the discourse within the community, to learn how their argumentation is constructed.

Chapter 3: Case study

"Jerusalem is the future of the world. Jerusalem is the shoreline of eternity." Those are the words of American pastor John Hagee upon answering questions about the move of the American embassy to Jerusalem in 2018 (Pollak, 2018). He regularly expresses his opinion on Israel and its right to exist by looking closely at biblical scriptures. In this chapter, I step away from viewing the complete Christian Zionist movement, and instead zoom in on one case: the discourse of Hagee. After analyzing five sermons, I conclude five themes that are the base of Hagee's argument for unconditional support for the state of Israel. A detailed list of codes and their frequency can be found in the Appendix.

3.1 Biography

John Charles Hagee is a prominent figure in the American evangelical community. He is the founder and senior pastor of Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas, and a recipient of multiple bachelor's degrees and a master's degree. He has also written 45 books, some of which became New York Times bestsellers.

According to their website, Cornerstone Church is a 'non-denominational' evangelical church with over 22 000 active members (Hagee Ministries A, n.d.). To telecast his teachings to America and the world, Hagee launched Hagee Ministries. Anyone who has access to the Internet can watch his sermons, as well as those of his son Matt, who is also a pastor.

Hagee makes no secret of his admiration for Israel. Through Hagee Ministries, he has donated more than $100 million to humanitarian causes in Israel. He strives to help Jews in the former Soviet Union financially to immigrate to Israel and has spent more than $3 million to do so (Hagee Ministries B, n.d.; Weber, 2004, p. 227). All his work is a result of his belief that biblical prophecies are true and that they will literally unfold as is described in the Bible. He is a dispensationalist – he believes that history is divided into dispensations and that the final dispensation will start with the end time event – and this can be taken from his teachings, which are posted on his website (Weber, 2004, p. 227). Hagee's commitment to Israel is also visible on the website of Cornerstone Church, as it says that they 'believe Christians should bless and comfort Israel and the Jewish people' and that Christians have a 'Bible mandate to combat anti-Semitism' (Cornerstone Church, n.d.).

Moreover, Hagee is the founder of the lobby group Christians United for Israel (CUFI), which according to their website has more than 10 million members. They 'aim to empower millions of Americans to speak and act with one voice in defense of Israel and the Jewish people' (CUFI,

2024). Lastly, for Israel's 70th anniversary of statehood, Hagee received an award for being one of the 70 greatest contributors to Israel since the establishment of the state (Hagee Ministries B, n.d.).

3.2 The political influence of John Hagee

John Hagee is not only influential in the evangelical community. As mentioned above, he is the founder of Christians United for Israel, the largest pro-Israel organization in the United States. This group aims to maximize its impact in all domains of society, but also in 'the nation's capital' (CUFI, n.d.).

Besides that, there are some remarkable political achievements. To start, he was involved in the move of the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2018. In an interview with the far-right news website Breitbart News, Hagee enclosed that he told Donald Trump, the American president at the time, that he would gain 'political immortality' by moving the embassy because he would have 'the courage to do what other presidents did not have the courage to do' (Pollak, 2018). It would show to the rest of the world that the US really supports Israel, Hagee said. In this instance too, he referred to the Bible. Moving the US embassy to Jerusalem relates, according to him, to Deuteronomy 28:13, where Moses tells the Israelites: "The Lord will make you the head, not the tail." (Pollak, 2018).

Secondly, Hagee is in close contact with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. As previously mentioned, he got a place on the list of the 70 greatest American contributors since Israel was founded (Hagee Ministries B, n.d.). Moreover, in one of his sermons, Hagee reads a letter that he received from Netanyahu after the rise in violence in the Israel-Palestine conflict on October 7th, 2023. Netanyahu thanks Hagee for his condolences but also for the 'long-standing support of Christians United for Israel' (Hagee Ministries C, n.d.). Not only does this demonstrate Hagee's political involvement with the Israel question, but he also combines it with information about world events that are too complicated to explain in just a few sentences, and his audience will take it as the truth. I assume that this will influence the political views of those listening.

3.3 The sermons of John Hagee

The sermons given by Hagee and his son at the Cornerstone Church are uploaded on their website every week. There is a wide range of topics, and they seem to discuss subjects that any other church would touch upon. Examples are unfailing hope, peace, gaining control over your life, salvation, mercy, and more. But given Hagee's work for Israel, sermons on that topic can

also be found on the list. For this part of my research, I watched and analyzed five sermons that were given and uploaded after October 7, 2023. Since the Israel-Palestine conflict had returned to the forefront of international news, I was interested to see what kind of language a world-famous pastor – who is known for his support of Israel – would display. Doing this research teaches us more about the discourse in these circles, which then gives us a better understanding of how certain world views and policy choices are made possible (Doty, 1993, p. 298).

The main theme of the sermons I chose was Israel. Four of them were circa 25 minutes long, but *Israel: God's Prophetic Clock* (2023) was 57 minutes long. These recorded sermons make it evident how Hagee views Israel, which is that it has the right to exist and should do so freely without interference from other population groups.

3.4 The set-up

The set-up of the sermons is almost the same in every video. The senior pastor, John Hagee, stands in the center of a big stage in a space that resembles a theatre or a cinema. No cross, baptismal font, or other signs of the Christian faith can be seen. The camera quality of the videos is excellent, and it is common that people sometimes yell to show their agreement or applaud throughout the sermon. Occasionally, John will say "*Give a shout of praise in the house of the Lord!*" or "*All of God's children say 'Amen'*" to back up his words, and it is not uncommon to see a standing ovation or yelling as a result. Regarding ethnicity, the audience seems to be quite diverse. Regularly, you can see people of color among the spectators.

3.5 Common threads

Multiple common threads can be discovered in the words of John Hagee as to why we should support the state of Israel and the Jewish people at all times. Below, I will work out five recurring themes in the content of his sermons.

3.5.1 The Jewish people

The most prominent type of discourse is how he describes the uniqueness of the Jewish people. The first part of this argument rests on the Jewish people being distinct from the rest of the world because they are, among other things, 'the apple of God's eye', 'chosen by God', and 'loved and blessed by God'. He then touches upon antisemitism, talking about it more than thirty times. He calls it 'a cancer', 'Jew-hatred', 'a sin', and 'a denial of the Christian faith'. According to him, antisemitism is displayed on university campuses and all over the United States. He disapproves of it. He implies that any criticism of Israel is antisemitic and is, thus, a sin, a cancer, et cetera. Besides that, he mentions events such as the medieval crusades, the

Spanish Inquisition, and the Holocaust to emphasize his point that the Jews, as God's people, have endured much persecution in the past. Hagee makes no clear distinction between current Israel and 'the Jewish people' in his sermons as they are used interchangeably. This seemingly leads to the argument that any criticism of Israel is equivalent to criticism of Jews and is therefore antisemitism.

3.5.2 God's promise

The second argument is an all-encompassing Bible verse that, in Hagee's eyes, makes it obvious why America should support Israel in any way possible. The verse is from the Old Testament of the Bible and can be found in Genesis 12. There, God promises Abraham that he will 'bless those who will bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you' (Gen. 12:3, NIV). Hagee translates this to the modern world. If your country blesses Israel, your people will receive blessings in return. On the other hand, God will punish anyone who torments the people of Israel.

Therefore, America should continue to support Israel in every way possible, and not allow antisemitism to have a voice in the education system or in the government. According to Hagee, modern-day politicians 'torment Zion' and are 'pompous', 'antisemitic', '(morally) corrupt', and 'godless'. He points out that they do not love America. In Hagee's eyes, Joe Biden and his son Hunter are traitors and are under the influence of foreign countries and committed to America's destruction. Hagee worries that according to, Genesis 12:3 they are not rewarding Israel enough and thereby bringing a curse onto the United States.

In Hagee's view, not only on the national level, but also in your personal life will you see miracles happen once you start actively supporting Israel. He mentions the blessings in his life: his family and the success of the Cornerstone Church and the other initiatives that belong to it, such as Bible schools or 'The Night to Honor Israel'. When your church takes the initiative to bless Israel, God will bless your church, he repeats a few times.

All in all, the American people and American politicians should support Israel in every way they can, and make sure that antisemitism does not exist, he says. Because "the day America will turn its back on Israel, will be the day God will turn his back on the United States" (Hagee Ministries C, n.d.). Genesis 12:3 was mentioned in every sermon that I watched, and also often appears in other Christian Zionist texts or speeches. Because it is a promise made by God, it is a powerful quote that convinces many Christian Zionists of their belief. In chapter 4, I will dissect this verse further with the help of additional scholarship.

3.5.3 Literal interpretation

The third point follows logically from the first: from the sermons, it is clear that Hagee reads and interprets Bible passages as literally as possible to our time. In other branches of biblical scholarship, scholars have argued that prophetic parts should be seen in the political and historical context in which they were written and that they should therefore rather be interpreted metaphorically or mythically (Clark, 2007, p. 3). However, a Christian Zionist like Hagee does not subscribe to the notion that the words in, for instance, Genesis, Ezekiel, or Matthew were intended for the Israelites of biblical times rather than for the twenty-first century European or American. This allows Christian Zionists to draw on biblical texts to support their worldview.

This is again reflected in the website of his church: Cornerstone Church believes in the Bible as the 'complete revelation of God's will for mankind' and in the 'absolute authority of the scripture to govern the affairs of mankind' (Cornerstone Church, n.d.). Put another way, Hagee and the attendees of his sermons support the widely held evangelical belief that the Bible is the highest authority and that Scripture can be used to explain events in modern times.

An example is Hagee's interpretation of Isaiah 31:5, where the prophet describes what God said to him: "Like birds hovering overhead, the Lord Almighty will shield Jerusalem." (Isa. 31:5, NIV). Hagee connects this to the Battle of Jerusalem in 1917, where the British used airplanes – 'birds' – to scout Jerusalem before they captured the city the next day from the Ottomans (Hagee Ministries D, 2023).

In another sermon, he speaks on the history of the nation of Israel. He believes that Israel's past was foretold in for example Genesis, Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, and 2 Chronicles. In his words the history was predicted 'very vividly' and 'very clearly' (Hagee Ministries E, n.d.). This way of reading the Bible also has indications for how Christian Zionists read the prophetic books, which will be discussed now.

3.5.4 Biblical prophecy

Fourthly, Hagee dedicates large portions of his sermons to biblical prophecies, written in books such as Ezekiel or Revelation. Biblical prophecies are difficult to read and interpret. They are full of imagery, big scenarios, and names and creatures unknown to the twenty-first-century reader. As said before, many scholars of the Old Testament and biblical prophecies have concluded that they should not be taken literally, but in a more metaphorical sense. Though it is possible to identify people and places in ancient texts, the commentary in the New Oxford Annotated Bible states that they are part of the literary framework and should rarely be taken

literally (Metzger, 1991, p. 1109). Hagee does the opposite of this - he applies them to modern times directly. An example is from the book Ezekiel, one of the prophetic books in the Old Testament:

> This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshek and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks in your jaws and bring you out with your whole army—your horses, your horsemen fully armed, and a great horde with large and small shields, all of them brandishing their swords. Persia, Cush and Put will be with them, all with shields and helmets, also Gomer with all its troops, and Beth Togarmah from the far north with all its troops—the many nations with you. (Ezekiel 38:3-6, NIV)

Hagee has taken these words in his sermons and translated them directly to modern times. In his view, Gog is Russia, Cush is Sudan, Put is Egypt, Persia is Iran and these modern countries and 'other Islamic nations' will plan a large-scale invasion to invade Israel in the future (Hagee Ministries F*,* n.d.). As described in Chapter 1, Christian Zionists' interest in Russia as the main adversary declined when the Middle East gained more attention, but it is still visible here.

He furthermore draws on Matthew 24 in the New Testament. In 24:3, Jesus' followers ask him about the end of times while they are on the Mount of Olives: "Tell us, they said, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (NIV). In Hagee's eyes, the answer comes some verses later: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (NIV). He then tells the audience in one sermon, that people from 101 nations were watching a live stream of one of his teachings and that the gospel was therefore preached, quite literally, in the whole world (Hagee Ministries D, 2023).

Another example is the so-called Battle of Armageddon. The location of the end time event is named after a verse in the last book of the New Testament, Revelation. In chapter 16 verse 16 it is written: "Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." (NIV). The 'kings' described here will be the leaders of the armies of the enemies of Israel, according to Hagee. He connects the King of the South (Dan. 11:5) to current Egypt and the King of the North (Dan. 11:9) to Russia. Then,

> the king of the South will engage with him in battle, and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. He will also invade the Beautiful Land. (Dan. 11:40-41, NIV).

Instead of questioning seeing these 'kings' in the light of ancient prophecy, Hagee connects them to contemporary geopolitical powers Russia and Egypt (Hagee Ministries F, n.d.). By subsequently making the connection to modern-day geopolitical threats to Israel and the Western world, the prophecy seems to have direct relevancy for today.

Hagee thus tells his audience about the killing of millions of people, invasions of an unimaginable scale, warriors on horses, and the Antichrist (Hagee Ministries D, 2023). Without Hagee pointing out the subtleties that need to be considered when reading these texts, it is possible that those who are listening to him will act in the manner he says because they are afraid that biblical prophesies will become reality. The suspicion could arise that he uses emotional manipulation to push people in a particular direction.

3.5.5 Other actors in the Middle East

A fourth element of Hagee's discourse is his rhetoric about other actors in the Middle East and American politics. The main enemy in the Middle East is Iran, he says. He has called Iran 'the head of the snake in the Middle East', he thinks Iran 'has or will make a nuclear weapon' and is therefore appalled that 'American governments funded Iran'. They also 'planned the October 7th Attacks', 'fund Hamas', who are 'Iran-sponsored', 'enemies of God's kingdom', and 'ISIS-like' (Hagee Ministries C, n.d.).

Furthermore, as above-mentioned, he says that Joe Biden is asking for 'America's destruction', and that American leadership 'is playing with a socialist religion', referring to Nazism right before that (Hagee Ministries F, n.d.). But Hagee does not only stay away from criticizing the past or present American governments, but it also is a discourse that is well-received by the audience. When rejecting trans- and homosexuality, abortion clinics, and public schools, he can expect shouts of agreement and applause from the audience, even though these aspects do not directly relate to the topic of Israel. But the loudest response came after he pointed to the American flag and said "If you can't salute it, you have to leave!" (Hagee Ministries F, n.d.). It can be concluded that besides supporting Israel, emphasizing conservative political views and patriotism are important to Hagee and the people who visit his church.

3.5.6 Jews founded the Church

The final argument that can be found in Hagee's discourse is how crucial the Jewish people were in founding the Christian Church. Without the Jewish people, there would be no Bible, no patriarchs, no prophets, no first family of Christianity, no disciples, no Paul, and obviously, no Jesus Christ who brought salvation. He mentions this explicitly in three sermons. Jesus was and

is a Jew *and* loved by all Christians and is the core of their beliefs. Hagee gives the impression that this is one of the main reasons why the Jews should be appreciated and cared for (Hagee Ministries D, 2023; Hagee Ministries E, n.d.; Hagee Ministries G, 2024).

Moreover, it is emphasized that Jesus Christ and his early followers were Jews themselves. For Christian Zionists, one of the primary reasons why the state of Israel requires unconditional support and why antisemitism should not be tolerated in the United States is because Christianity was founded by the Jewish people in the Ancient Near East (Hagee Ministries G, 2024). To base this, John Hagee brings up a verse from the first gospel of the New Testament. This is what Jesus said to his disciples in this chapter: "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40, NIV).

When reading this chapter, one can notice the relationship with the rest of the passage. Jesus, the 'King' in this verse, seems to refer to the good deeds that his followers have done to those in need: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger. However, Hagee interprets 'my brothers and sisters' as the Jewish people – since Jesus was a Jew himself – and connects this to the support Americans should have for the Jews in the modern state of Israel. Do not provoke God, treat his people well and you will be blessed, he says (Hagee Ministries D, 2023; Hagee Ministries G, 2024). However, when intepreting the Bible literally, this seems like selective reading. What Hagee does not mention in his sermons is that a chapter earlier in the book, Jesus tells his disciples that 'about that day or hour [Christ's Second Coming] no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.' (Matt. 24:36, NIV). Calculating the day of the Second Coming or telling your audience exactly how it will happen therefore contradicts this statement.

3.6 Conclusion

After watching several sermons from Hagee Ministries, I could derive five prominent topics within John Hagee's discourse about support for Israel. Although John Hagee is one of the most prominent Christian Zionists with an immense reach, his language is not new. First, he points out Jewish uniqueness, mentioning what the Jewish people have been through throughout history and strongly rejecting antisemitism. Christians see Jews as the unique and first people of God, believe they play a special role in the divine plan and therefore have a special form of respect for them. On the other hand, Christians and evangelicals in particular have always insisted that the Christian faith is the only way to truly fulfill God's commands (Ariel, 2013, p.

245). Besides that, there is another thing that drives Christian Zionists: the Jews being back in Palestine is a condition for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the beginning of the end times (Clark, 2007, p. 59).

The next point is the, in Hagee's eyes, undeniable promise in Genesis 12:3: God will bless those who bless the Jewish people and curse those who curse them. In Chapter 1, I have shown that Christian Zionists throughout history worked hard to create the conditions necessary for God's plan to unfold. Christians believed that it was their job to recognize and accommodate the Jews' fate. Moreover, American Christians saw the good things that they enjoyed themselves as a result of them blessing Abraham and his descendants (Goldman, 2018, p. 172).

Also, from Hagee's words, it is clear that he interprets sayings in the Bible literally and translates them to modern times. Although there are strands in Christianity that argue that the Bible should be seen in its particular historical context, it is typical for evangelical Christianity to regard the Bible as the highest authority and read it as *inerrant* – the belief that the Bible contains no errors (Clark, 2007, p. 3; Goldman, 2018, p. 147). This also results in the fourth point, which is the focus on the prophetic books in the Bible.

Hagee spends a long time speaking on biblical prophecy and explaining the connections between what is written and what will happen in the future. This is in line with what has been done since the emergence of Christian Zionism: already back in the 1600s in England, religious fundamentalists looked at the prophetic sections in the Bible to discover God's plan for the future (Clark, 2007, p. 31). This trend continued through the centuries, and can be seen in for instance the Plymouth Brethren and the Scofield Reference Bible, and again with the massive success of 'prophetic fiction' books in the second half of the twentieth century. Likewise, Christian Zionists believe that the establishment of the state of Israel is a fulfillment of biblical prophecy, and describe it as the greatest event since the resurrection of Jesus (Goldman, 2018, p. 151; Clark, 2004, p. 144).

The last and most essential argument is that the Jews need all the support the Western world can give them because without the Jewish people, the fundaments of Christianity would have never existed. This gratefulness can be drawn back to earlier Christian Zionists' behavior. An example is their interest in the ancient Jewish world or seeing the Bible as the ultimate source of wisdom and authority (Clark, 2007, p. 31).

Having done this research, I can conclude that discovering Christian Zionist discourse is different than reading about it. I have heard what genuinely motivates people instead of just

reading about their behavior. As a result, I found new information that I did not obtain from the literature before, such as the repeated emphasis on Genesis 12:3. Together with the other four arguments, this produces the viewpoint that Jews should be supported unconditionally in creating their own state. Not only because it is believed they are God's special people, but also because they made Christianity possible, which is of the greatest importance in Christian Zionists' lives.

Chapter 4: Biblical foundation

From the dissection of Hagee's sermons in the previous chapter, one can learn that Christian Zionists often use Bible verses to back up their claims. As stated before, despite the fact that scholars have long maintained that the Bible should be interpreted historically, evangelicals in particular have a tendency to regard the Bible as a flawless source of authority and read it literally (Clark, 2007, p. 3). All translation is interpretation, and reading the Bible in English instead of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek means realizing that Bible translators at one point had to choose between using certain words and not others. As a result, some meanings or intentions of the authors of the Bible have gotten lost, but the texts are nevertheless applied to modern times. In this chapter, I explore how Christian Zionists read and use scriptures like Genesis, Daniel, Ezekiel, 1 Thessalonians, and Revelation, and demonstrate how these passages fit into the worldview of Christian Zionists.

4.1 Genesis 12:1-3

> [1] The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.
>
> [2] "I will make you into a great nation,
> and I will bless you;
> I will make your name great,
> and you will be a blessing.
> [3] I will bless those who bless you,
> and whoever curses you I will curse;
> and all peoples on earth
> will be blessed through you." (Gen. 12:1-3, NIV).

God's promise to Abram in Genesis 12 appears to be the common theme in most Christian Zionist content. It became one of the main arguments: if your government supports Israel, you and your country will experience miracles. If not, you can expect 'curses' in return (Weber, 2004, p. 227).

Genesis is the first book of Jewish and Christian Scripture. Many famous stories are described in the eleven chapters that come before this one, such as the creation of the universe, the fall of man, and the story of Noah's Ark. The promise in Genesis 12 thus does not stand alone but is interwoven with a large part of Jewish history. In Genesis 11, Abram – who would later be

called Abraham – is introduced as the son of Terah, descending from Noah (Gen. 11:26, NIV). His family is said to leave their place of residence Ur to go to Canaan – the Promised Land. They settled on the way, in Harran, where Abram's father Terah passed away (Gen. 11:31-32, NIV). What follows is the famous promise of Genesis 12:1-3.

Two things stand out regarding the actions of Christian Zionists surrounding this text. First, they categorically make the connection between the 'you' in Genesis 12 and modern-day Israel, even though a close reading of the text shows that Abram is central in these verses. Abram is the 'you' to whom the promise is addressed, and the verse itself does not mention whether it is a promise to all of humanity (Grüneberg, 2003, pp. 165; 179). Therefore, seeing these pledges as addressed to all descendants of Abram – despite them ending in ךָ, Hebrew for the masculine second person singular – is a form of interpretation.

However, the Israelites could be implied here, as Abram is promised many descendants. Therefore, the benefit of the promise cannot be limited to just Abram, and it will have implications for all the people who come from him. The Hebrew word גּוֹי, meaning nation, could also suggest that God was speaking to Abram about a place with political sovereignty, not just an influential family. While the promise is primarily addressed to Abram, it arguably has implications for the Israelites as a people as well (Grüneberg, 2003, p. 166). To equate Israelites with modern-day Israel, however, seems a stretch. Present-day Jewish people, even though they are descendants of Abram, do not necessarily all acknowledge the Israeli state as the manifestation of their identity. Moreover, not all Israelis are Jews and not all Jews are Israeli.

Secondly, Christian Zionists today quickly make the connection between Israel and their own country, often the United States. They see America as the center of Judaism's contribution to the world. For example, they argue that Judeo-Christian values were the inspiration for the Founding Fathers of America. Therefore they see the Bible as a great contribution to the democratic government and human rights in the US. Moreover, Hagee argues that Jewish people helped discover America by funding Christopher Columbus (Durbin, 2018, p. 181). Since Christian Zionists see the United States as a blessed country, Jews in this line of argument become 'material representations of the validity of biblical truth claims' (Durbin, 2018, p. 182). Saying that America became great with the help of the Jews, confirms the last part of Genesis 12:3: 'and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you'.

4.2 Biblical prophecy

In John Hagee's sermons, we have seen that he uses a literal reading of prophetic books to explain to the audience what the end times are going to look like. Additionally, in the turbulent years after the Second World War, many people felt they could compare the books of Ezekiel and Revelation to their newspapers. In the next part, I will attempt to explain what the texts say and if they can be translated into modern times.

4.2.1 Ezekiel

Because of the Cold War and the animosity between the United States, which favored Israel, and the Soviet Union, which supported Arab states, people turned to Ezekiel for an earlier telling of the relationship between Israel and 'Russia'. Ezekiel is one of the longer prophetic books of the Bible and describes the fall and rise of the Israelite people. The book is largely made up of prophecies and visions (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

In chapters 38 and 39, the prophet predicts an invasion of Israel. At its head is Gog, of the land of Magog, who leads many nations in the invasion:

> [1]The word of the LORD came to me: [2] "Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshek and Tubal; prophesy against him [3] and say: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshek and Tubal. [4] I will turn you around, put hooks in your jaws and bring you out with your whole army—your horses, your horsemen fully armed, and a great horde with large and small shields, all of them brandishing their swords.

The word 'chief' in verse 2 is translated from the Hebrew ראֹשׁ (*rosh*). This means 'head' or 'chief', thus it seemed obvious to read Gog as the ruler of the lands Meshek, Tubal, and Magog. In the nineteenth century, some scholars began to interpret 'Rosh' as Russia, and Meshek and Tubal as Russian cities Moscow and Tobolsk. Both in Britain and the US, this theory gained popularity, even though not many traditional Bible scholars agreed on this claim (Weber, 2004, pp. 71-72). As a result, Russia was thought to be leading the northern coalition of powers in the future invasion of Israel. Consequently, a confrontation between the USSR – which was used interchangeably with Russia – and Israel had to happen as it was described in Ezekiel. Those who believed in this prophecy hoped that America would not try to prevent this confrontation so that it could bring the world closer to the end time event and the Second Coming of Christ (Goldman, 2018, pp. 165-166).

4.2.2 Daniel

Like Ezekiel, Daniel is a prophetic book full of visions and prophecies about the 'apocalypse'. The author describes 'four great beasts coming out of the sea' (Dan. 7:1, NIV), with the fourth looking different and more dangerous than the rest (Dan. 7:19-22, NIV). Verse 16 clarifies that the four beasts represent 'four kings that will arise from the earth'. The fourth beast, that impressed Daniel, will defeat the other three kings and

> [25] he will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time. (Dan. 7:24-25, NIV).

Later, the writer refers to this king as 'king of the north' (Dan. 11:6, NIV), who will defeat the king of the south, come into Israel and make thousands of victims (Dan. 11:40, NIV). Hagee and the like have interpreted this 'king of the north' as modern-day Russia, who will lead an invasion against the state of Israel in the end times (Hagee Ministries D, 2023). However, Daniel was written for the people of ancient Judaism in the second century A.D., and in that context, the meaning of the verses is completely different: they were living under the yoke of the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes. He was a deceitful ruler and plundered Palestine, specifically the treasury in Jerusalem (Metzger, 1991, p. 1145). Moreover, he made the inhabitants leave their own customs, laws, and identity to adopt Greek culture and religion. The book of Daniel ends with the king of the north destroyed and God ruling again (Ehrman, 2023, pp. 103-104).

The meaning of Daniel 7 makes sense when one knows the historical background and understands that the Jews were persecuted by a king who came from the north of them. Daniel was likely written as a message of hope to Jews who were suffering under an unknown king. Also, it shows the reader that God is in control of time and human affairs. In other words, rather than it being a foretelling of horrific events in the future, it was a *forth*telling of the good things that would happen when God would stand central in the lives of the ancient Jews again (McKenzie, 2005, pp. 89; 137).

4.2.3 The Rapture

In Hagee's sermons and in other Christian Zionist content, one will often hear the concept 'the Rapture'. The term was coined by John Darby, the founder of premillennial dispensationalism, and is based on two verses from the New Testament. In one of his letters, Paul writes to his acquaintances in Thessalonica:

> [16] For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thess. 4:16-17, NIV)

Darby interpreted this as an early coming of Jesus, before his Second Coming, where he would take up all faithful believers to heaven so that they could escape the period of Tribulation. This Rapture could happen any moment, and it would be soon, Darby believed (Ehrman, 2023, p. 13). This interpretation has been, and continues to be, appealing to those who are afraid of the sufferings that are reserved for unbelievers in the end times. But there is more to it: another important concept for evangelicals is 'being saved'. When the Rapture happens, it will become clear who is saved and who is not (Frykholm, 2004, p. 146). With that, a new concern has now emerged: people are scared of being 'left behind' because of their unbelief (Clark, 2007, pp. 62-63; Weber, 2004, pp. 48-50).

Multiple issues arise when one derives the Rapture from 1 Thessalonians. First of all, the word 'rapture' is never mentioned in the Bible. No notable Bible scholar, such as Irenaeus, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, or even a regular Bible reader, claimed that this scripture explained an event like the Rapture before Darby came along. Furthermore, nothing is said in the Bible about Jesus' followers being taken away before the rest of the world endures the end times. As we could also see with the interpretations of Genesis, Ezekiel, and Daniel, the concept cannot be derived from Scripture, but fundamental Christians have projected their interpretation *onto* the Bible (Ehrman, 2023, p. 19). And this is done for a political aim: proving that current-day Israel deserves unconditional support.

When read in its historical context, a different meaning emerges. The letter was intended for first-century Thessalonians, who would have had no trouble understanding it. In Antiquity, it was usual for a king or high official to be greeted with festivities during visits. The city would send out its lead figures to meet him and then escort him back with excitement and celebration. It is likely that Paul meant this when he wrote the letter: Jesus' followers will 'meet him in the air' when he comes from heaven, but will also accompany him down to earth, where he will then rule (Ehrman, 2023, p. 22).

The idea really became popular in the 1990s when the book series Left Behind was a bestseller. The narrative of the Rapture has become one of crashed cars, half-empty airplanes, and bundles

of clothes on the floor, all because loved ones vanished and were taken up to heaven. The most passionate American Christian Zionists are firm believers of this theory, and it is not uncommon to hear it in mainstream churches. The marketing of the Rapture has thus been very successful, even if the meaning of the verse is far from how it was intended (Clark, 2007, p. 63). Teachers of the Bible advise their listeners to be good Christians and to turn away from sin because they will be rewarded by being included into this group when the Rapture comes. We have also seen it in Hagee's sermons, where he mentioned the topic 15 times and where it was received with applause and yells of agreement. In fact, he describes the event as something that his audience can look forward to, because they do not have to doubt that they are included (Hagee Ministries D, 2023).

4.2.4 Revelation

The book that for many Christians contains the most cryptic and puzzling prophecy, is the Book of Revelation. In the book, Christian and Jewish elements are mixed into an 'eschatological prophecy of great poetic power' (Cohn, 1970, p. 24). Despite this feeling of discomfort, it is essential to not set this book apart from its prophetic predecessors or its historical context. There are other apocalyptic stories to be found in ancient Jewish and Christian scriptures, particularly from 200 B.C. until 200 A.D. An example is the aforementioned Daniel or stories derived from manuscripts that did not end up in the final canon of the Bible. The meaning of this text changes entirely when the reader knows of the historical context in which Revelation was written (Ehrman, 2023, p. 99).

The author, who calls himself John, was very concerned with the state of the society in which he lived. In the first century, the Roman empire had taken control of the world as John knew it through economic and military domination, 'false' gods, and persecution of Christians. In response to this, John wrote the book of Revelation to let his readers know that God would intervene and that the end of suffering was coming. He does this by describing visions and prophecies about, among other things, a destroyed Earth, slaughter, and riders on horses (Ehrman, 2023, p. 109).

Of particular interest here is Revelation 13, where the author describes a beast coming out of the sea:

> [6] It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. [7] It was given power to wage war against God's holy

people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. (Rev. 13:6-7, NIV)

The traditional interpretation in biblical scholarship is that the beast in Revelation, God's greatest adversary, has to be interpreted as Rome. The scene which John described was to happen soon (Ehrman, 2023, p. 108). For that reason, most modern scholars believe the book was written to bring hope to the early Christians who experienced sociopolitical problems because of their beliefs. The message that John tried to bring across was that those people would be avenged when God would intervene and remove his enemies from the world (Weber, 2004, p. 10; 80; Ehrman, 2023, p. 122). A New Jerusalem would come, replacing the then dominating power: Rome (Rev. 21:1-2).

The notion of the book thus becomes clearer when placed in the historical context in which John wrote Revelation. In chapter 16, 'Armageddon' is mentioned for the first time:

> [13] Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. [14] They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. (…) [16] Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. (Rev. 16:13-14;16, NIV)

Armageddon is the name for 'the mountains of Megiddon' in Hebrew, and is a central place in Israel where several decisive battles were fought in the Old Testament (Metzger, 1991, p. 380; Ehrman, 2023, p. 46). It is plausible that the author would pick a location that was symbolic for him to describe an event that posed the greatest threat to Christians at the time. Any interpretation of the Book of Revelation which refers to modern-day geopolitics to explain exactly how the end time event will occur, fails to acknowledge the time and place in which the book was written.

4.3 The consequences of instrumental reading of scripture

In Chapter 3, we have seen how the Bible is incorporated into the discourse of the famous Christian Zionist John Hagee. In this chapter, I showed how far his interpretation of texts stands from their original meaning. But what is the effect of using the texts in that way, given that an understanding of the ancient Jewish background reveals that the content can have entirely different meanings? Applying biblical prophecy to our time helps people make sense of the world they live in. It combines random events like wars, earthquakes, floods, and impactful

political situations into a coherent narrative. As a result, people will feel like they are living in a special time in world history, and will constantly feel ready: in their eyes, the end times could even be tomorrow. For some people, it becomes a passionate desire to be taken away before the period of the Great Tribulation begins. For others, it is hopeful and comforting to know that they will definitely be saved when they accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior (Frykholm, 2004, pp. 106-107; 148).

The instrumental reading of prophecies and dispensationalism has had political consequences. It changes people's views on world politics. For example, many people believe unrest in the Middle East and multi-nation wars, even nuclear ones, are inevitable. This reading of present-day geopolitical tensions contributed to US foreign policy through which Israel received full support. Lobbying in the US government made possible a pro-Israel policy, the financing of Israeli settlements, the organization of trips to Israel, and the promotion of immigration of Jews from around the world to Israel (Weber, 2004, p. 266).

Though outside the scope of this thesis, it is important to mention that the effects of a prophetic reading of the Bible are not limited to Israel policy alone. Also in the environmental field, it has an effect. Believers who tend to interpret the Bible literally are more likely to deny the existence of serious climate problems, the possibility that humans are to blame, or the necessity of solving them. In fact, those people believe that since God created the world, he also has a plan for it and that mankind cannot change that plan. In a 2006 survey, political scientists found that almost half of the Christian voting public believes Jesus will return by 2050. From that perspective alone, it does not make sense to advocate for long-term plans to fight climate change (Ehrman, 2023, pp. 93-95).

4.4 Conclusion

From the content analysis, I concluded that John Hagee interprets biblical prophecies instrumentally in order to tell his view on the end times. This is a characteristic that is common in Christian Zionist and evangelical communities. In this chapter, I explored the most central concepts of his teachings: Genesis 12, the books Ezekiel and Daniel, 1 Thessalonians, and the book of Revelation. In all cases, the literature on this topic seems clear: ancient Jewish and Christian scriptures are written in a specific social and political context. Hagee's interpretation reflects his political views, not their original meaning. To be able to read the Bible in support of their political goals, Christian Zionists ignore the historical and political context in which the books were written. The biblical references in their discourse however add a deeper layer to

their reading of ongoing geopolitical developments and they undoubtedly work to reassure people that the ongoing conflict in the Middle East has a deeper meaning and purpose. This is not without consequence, as these world views have an impact on political and social issues.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine how a reality within the Christian Zionist community is constructed to enable current American foreign policy toward Israel. My research question was as follows: *How does the content of the Christian Zionist community make support for US foreign policy toward Israel possible?* To answer this, I studied existing literature on the topic, and in particular, I took the sermons of pastor John Hagee of Cornerstone Church in Texas as my case study.

In Chapter 1, I explored how Weber (2004) and Clark (2007) set out the history of the movement from its emergence until now. Christian Zionism arose in the early 1600s in England because of greater accessibility to the Bible and an interest in Judaism and biblical times, but remarkable is that the role of Great Britain in the issue has declined. Important in this chapter is also the term premillennial dispensationalism, which is the belief that once Jesus would return to Earth, a millennium of perfect peaceful reign would be established and that a new era for the Church would begin. The idea that Jews were to be assisted in returning to their biblical homeland became popular in America at the end of the nineteenth century. With the establishment of the state of Israel and the wars and geopolitical events that followed, Christian Zionists were fixated on the idea that biblical prophecy was being fulfilled.

In Chapter 2, I took this background and attempted to find out if the importance of the land of Palestine in the end times is indeed a motivation for American foreign policy, or if it is just the belief system of a present but powerless group of Christians in the United States. Scholars on American policy believe it is not religion, but other factors that result in great American support for Israel. Examples are shared customs and values, or security and economic interests. Moreover, religious rhetoric used by political and religious leaders does not mean religion is taken into account when making policy; it could also be a way to receive popular support.

After that, I stepped away from the broader context and zoomed in on my case study in Chapter 3. I concluded that John Hagee uses arguments derived from the Bible to support Israel unconditionally. He uses the ancient texts to make a case for modern-day Israel and the Jewish people. In the fourth and final chapter, these passages are dissected to find out what other meaning they could have had. It can be concluded that Hagee uses an instrumental reading of the Bible to convince his audience to also support the political aim of unwavering American support for Israel. He does not acknowledge the historical contexts in which the texts were written, but instead projects his interpretation onto the Bible.

This research challenged the conventional notion that influence on policy-making is only measurable in numbers. By examining the discourse of one of the most well-known Christian Zionists in America, this research has shown that a particular view on the Israel-Palestine conflict is constructed within the evangelical community. Besides material or economic reasons that America could have for being present in this part of the Middle East, John Hagee demonstrated to his listeners that unconditional support for Israel is necessary because of its importance in the fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

Discussion

Before starting this research, there was already literature available on the influence of Christians on policy-making. As discussed, scholars like Mearsheimer and Walt (2007), Amstutz (2013), or Whutnow (2009) argued that there are factors besides religion that are more significant in shaping American foreign policy. This perspective can now be expanded upon with the help of Doty's methodology (1993) and my content analysis because this is the first time that the Christian Zionist movement was examined by taking sermons as a case study. Rather than merely reading about the movement – for instance, in the writings of Clark (2007) and Weber (2004) – we can now directly hear what is being said and observe how an instrumental reading of the Bible influences the worldview of the audience. As a result, we can understand the ideological message that Hagee is trying to spread more clearly, which holds that the land of Palestine is supposed to be under Jewish control to fulfill biblical prophecy, speed up the Second Coming of Christ, and the ultimately, the end of times. This idea could have an impact on Americans who are looking to take a stance regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Recommendation for further research

To further explore the role of Christian Zionist discourse, more research is needed in a number of areas. The method of this research was a good way to become familiar with the discourse of John Hagee. To learn about his arguments regarding American support for Israel, watching five sermons was enough. However, for more extensive research, I would recommend involving the teachings of other pastors with a similar following in the case study. One could also take sermons or speeches from a broader time frame or observe if American politicians use the same biblical terminology to make their point. Finally, for future research, I would be interested in how Israelis view American foreign policy. Do they recognize the 'shared customs and values' that Amstutz (2013) describes? And how do they interpret the Bible passages that are cited?

While this research was to explore the Christian Zionist movement and its goals, it has also become a warning to be careful when religious leaders interpret Scripture to use it for a political goal. Looking at it broadly, Hagee formed his own opinion and projected it onto the Bible. It is therefore important to remind each other of the religious and historical background of the texts, which provides the reader with a more layered meaning. Together with the value the texts already bring, this knowledge can enrich the lives of believers all around the world.

Furthermore, the US-Israel friendship that is ‘deeper than any treaty’ and ‘grounded in a shared spirit’ that Bush talked of in 2008 is undoubtedly interwoven throughout this research. The alliance between the two countries has once again become evident, but it remains important to look into the political and religious reasons behind it. That will help in holding befriended states, no matter how strong the friendship, accountable to legally binding agreements. Additionally, if we do not educate ourselves and our fellow citizens about the discourse that is used by our religious and political leaders, the likelihood increases that more and more people may take action out of fear that prophetic visions will become reality.

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Appendix: Code List

Discourse

"With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." (2 Pet. 3:8)	2
A prayer known as 'the Blessing' (Num. 6:24-26)	3
Abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15) - 1/3 of Jewish people flee to Petra - Jewish conversion - 144 000 Jewish believers - Messiah is coming	1 1 3 1 1
Abraham - Abraham - descendants of - Isaac - Jacob - Sarah - Twelve tribes	 10 2 3 3 1 1
Accept Jesus as Lord and Savior - Most important decision	3 1
Acts 10:1-22	1
America - America - Stumbling in the darkness - Dark place - Moral corruption - Our great nation - In danger - Collapse of the traditional family - The absent father is a great problem - Homosexuality is insanity - Global warming is nonsense	 2 1 1 2 1 2 1 1 1 1
Antichrist - Antichrist - Imitator of Jesus Christ - 7-year treaty with Israel - Mark of the Beast - Lord of scoffers - Produces war - Leader of Western army	 18 4 3 4 1 1 1
Anti-refugee rhetoric against refugees at Southern American border	1
Antisemitism - Antisemitism - Is a sin - In schools - In America - In the world - Jew-hatred - A cancer	 35 3 4 5 2 4 1

- "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free"	1
- A prayer for	1
- In universities	2
- Will send you to hell	1
- God will judge	1
- Regarding Matthew 25:40	1
- Evil	1
- Poison	1
- Denial of Christian faith	1
- Council of Nicaea (325 AD)	1
- Medieval crusades	5
- Spanish Inquisition	2
- Martin Luther	1
- Adolf Hitler	2
- Holocaust	2
Arab	
- Arab people	2
- Arab states	2
- Oil-rich	1
- No claim to the land	1
Armageddon	3
Battle of Armageddon	4
- 1/3 of the world's population gets killed	1
- Napoleon	1
- King of the East	1
- King of the West	1
- Global supremacy	1
- Jesus Christ returns	2
- Revelation 16:12-16	1
Biblical prophecy	
- Biblical prophecy	7
- History of Israel was foretold	1
- Proof of Gods existence	1
- Predicted	6
- Clearly predicted	2
- Predicted very vividly	1
- Pertain only to Israel	1
- Banner in Isaiah 11:11-12 is flag of Israel	1
- Written by the Holy Spirit	1
- Absolutely accurate	2
- God's exact plans for the future	2
- Hosea 6:1	3
Blood covenant	1
- Genesis 15:9-21	1
- Unbreakable	1
- Sign that the land belongs to the Jewish people	1
- Animation of	1
Born again	2
China	
- China	6

- Communists	1
- King of the East (Rev. 16:12)	1
Christians United for Israel (CUFI)	
- CUFI	3
- Establishment of	1
- Member count	1
- In letter from Benjamin Netanyahu	1
Church	
- Church	3
- Victorious	2
- Roar like a lion	1
- Lukewarm	1
Contracts	3
- Salt contract	1
- Blood contract	1
Cornerstone institutes	1
- No socialist garbage like American public schools	1
- Women do not butcher their babies in abortion mills	1
- Honor Israel	1
Covenant	
- Covenant	6
- Genesis 17:7	2
- Everlasting	1
- Right now	1
- Israel owns the land	1
COVID-19	2
Cults	2
- In universities	1
Deuteronomy 1:8	1
Devil	1
Eternal hell	1
European Union	1
Exodus 4:22-23	1
Fight	2
- The good fight (1 Tim. 6:12)	2
- “Don’t whine and run”	1
- Soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:3)	1
Flag of the United States	2
- “If you can’t salute, you have to leave”	1
Genesis 1:1	1
Genesis 12:3	
- Reading the verse	2
- God will bless your church	1
- Miracles will happen	3
- God blessed Cornerstone Church	1
- When you bless Israel, you will receive blessings personally	3
- No middle ground	1
- Includes America	2
- Law of God	1
Glory of God	

- Impacts humans	1
- Overpowering	1
- Brings power	1
- Brings confidence	1
- Brings hope	1
- Breaks chains	1
God	
- God	56
- Spoke to me	1
- Almighty	4
- Owner of the land and the earth	1
- Has rights	1
- Of heaven	3
- Makes his will happen	1
- The Father	1
- Heavenly Father	1
- Most gracious heavenly Father	1
- Most High	1
- In absolute control over the world	1
- Awesome	1
- King of the universe	2
- Father of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob	2
- Just	1
- There is no other	1
- Powerful	1
- Lord	2
- Of all hope	1
- Greater than greatest	1
- Higher than highest	1
- Wiser than wisest	1
- Limitless love	1
- Limitless grace	1
Gog-Magog	
- Gog-Magog	6
- Invasion of Israel is closer than you think	3
- Libya, Turkey, and other antisemitic nations	3
- Antisemitic, Islamic nations	1
- God-hating nations	1
- Great Tribulation	3
- Third temple in Jerusalem	4
- Jew hatred	1
- Israel hatred	1
- Ezekiel 38-39	1
- Hailstones	1
- God will slaughter majority of the army	3
Great Tribulation	3
- Heatwave	1
- Rich will crawl in caves	1
- Trumpets	1
- Euphrates river dries up	1

Hamas	
- Hamas	4
- Iran-sponsored	2
- Terrorists	4
- ISIS-like	1
- Tunnels	1
- Murderers	1
- Enemies of God's kingdom	1
Heaven	6
- Home	1
- "Everybody here is going to heaven."	2
Hebrews 10:25	1
Holy Spirit	1
Idolatry	4
Individualism	1
- Breaks down loyalty of the family	1
Iran	
- Iran	1
- Funded by American governments	2
- Will make or has a nuclear weapon	1
- Planned the attack on October 7, 2023	2
- Persia	1
- Hezbollah and Hamas	3
- Head of the snake in the Middle East	2
Israel [the nation state]	
- The state of Israel	10
- Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu	2
- Establishment in 1948	2
- Born by eternal covenant	1
- Borders of	3
- Miraculous	2
- Surrounded by Arab nations	1
- Blessed by God	1
- A great nation	1
- The most powerful	1
- A Bible issue	1
- Epicenter of the world	1
- Shocking	1
- Fulfillment of prophecy	1
- Shoreline of eternity	1
- Greatest miracle since the resurrection of Jesus Christ	3
- Reborn	1
Israels 70th anniversary	1
- Award for John Hagee	2
- 70 people most helpful to the nation of Israel	1
Jerusalem	
- Jerusalem	23
- Holy city	1
- Western wall	2
- Peace in	5

- Psalm 122:6	2
- God-chosen	1
- Constantly watched by God	1
- God's name is there forever	1
- Mentioned 811 times in Scripture	1
- City of God	3
- Eternal and undivided capital of Israel	1
- Second Temple	1
- Destroyed twice	1
- Capital city of Earth's last empire	1
- New Jerusalem	1
- Besiege of (70 AD)	1
Jesus	
- Jesus	48
- King of Kings (Matt. 25:40)	3
- King of glory	1
- Biggest contribution from Israel to human kind	2
- Salvation of the Jews	4
- Was Jewish	2
- Is still Jewish	1
- Will be a Jewish rabbi	1
- Lord of Lords	3
- Chainbreaker	1
- Burden bearer	1
- Light of the world	3
- Son of God	4
- Peace that surpasses understanding	1
- Crucifixion	2
- Prince of Peace	3
- Prince of Glory	2
- Never fails	1
- Only savior	2
- The answer	2
- Only way to heaven	1
- Hope to hopeless	1
- Counsellor	1
- The Way, the Truth, the Life (John 14:6)	2
- Champion of the cross	1
Jewish people	
- Jewish people	6
- Israelis	1
- A covenant people	1
- A cherished people	1
- Chosen by God	1
- Apple of God's eye	4
- Driven out of land by Romans	1
- Extermination of	1
- Blessing of	1
- Adoption of	1
- Crucial	1

- Part of God's plan for the future	1
- Fighting for their survival	1
- Loved by God (1 Chron. 17:21; Deut. 7:6)	2
- Blessed by God directly (Gen 12:3)	1
- Israel (the people)	16
- My first-born son (Ex. 4:22)	5
- Matthew 2:13-18	1
- Objective of prayer	1
- God's prophetic clock	2
- A friend of the US	1
- An ally of the US	1
Jewish people and the Church	1
Joe and Hunter Biden	2
- Under influence of foreign countries	1
- Committed to America's destruction	1
- Traitors	2
- Corrupt betrayal	1
Josephus	1
King David	2
Knowledge explosion	2
- Daniel 12:4	1
- Invention of automobiles and airplanes	2
- Isaiah 31:5	2
- Edmund Allenby	1
- Industrial, medical, and communicational revolution	1
- This generation is corrupted by socialism, paganism, sex trafficking, and satanism.	1
Marriage Church and Christ	1
- Grand	1
- Glorious	1
- Imminent	1
Messiah	2
- Second Coming	1
- Son of God	2
Middle East	1
Millennium reign	7
- Book of life	4
- Lake of fire	2
- Matthew 7:13-14	1
- Lamb with the lion (Isaiah 11:6)	1
Modern day American politicians	
- Modern day American politicians	17
- Pompous	1
- Antisemitic	2
- Tormenting Zion	1
- Godless, secular, and humanist	1
- Corrupt	2
- Washington	2
- Do not love America	1
- Funded Iran and Hamas	1

- Abuses Israel	1
- Incompetent leaders	1
- Need to be galvanized	1
Moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem	5
- Praying a historical prayer	2
- Supernatural fulfillment of prophecy	3
- Major moment in history of Israel	1
- Jubilee year to move it	1
- President Trump	1
- The head, not the tail (Deut. 28:13)	3
New World Order	
- New World Order	7
- Established by Satan	3
- Genesis 3	1
- Genesis 7	1
- Genesis 1-11	1
- Genesis 12	2
- Matt. 4:9	1
- Tower of Babel	1
- Nazism	1
- Adolf Hitler	1
- American government playing with socialist religion	1
Nimrod	
- Nimrod	2
- Rebel against God	1
- Satan's dedicated disciple	1
- Tyran	1
- Total control	1
October 7th, 2023	
- October 7th, 2023	2
- Massacre	1
- Deadliest day for the Jews since the Holocaust	1
- In letter from Benjamin Netanyahu	1
Old Testament	1
- Hint for Christians	1
Patriarchs	1
- All Jewish	1
- Saved people from starvation	1
Preaching the Gospel to the whole world (Matt. 24:14)	3
- A prophecy	1
- Matthew 24:3	1
- People from more than 100 nations watch Hagee's sermons	1
Public schools	
- Public schools	1
- Socialist teacher unions	1
- Brainwash children	1
- Abandoned the 10 commandments	1
Radical Islam	1
- Great Satan	1
- Little Satan	1

The Rapture	
- Rapture	15
- Meeting in the air	1
- "Come Lord Jesus!"	3
- "Are you ready?"	4
- Judgment of sinners	2
- Only Christians	1
- 2 Corinthians 5:10	1
- Soon	2
- Exactly like this	2
- 2 Thessalonians 4:16	1
- Like Elijah	1
- Economic crash	1
Refuting replacement theory	3
Return of Jesus Christ	4
- Could happen any day now	3
- Sign of scoffers (2 Pet. 3:3)	2
Revelation 11:3-6	1
- Elijah	2
Roman Catholic Schools	1
- Mentally poisoning	1
- The statement 'Jesus was killed by the Jews' is a lie	1
Royal land grant	2
Russia	
- Russia	8
- King of the North (Dan. 11:6)	2
- 10-nation invasion of Israel (Russia, Iran, Germany, Sudan, and other Islamic nations)	3
- Gog-Magog war	2
- United with Iran	1
- Ezekiel 38:15	4
- Ezekiel 39:2	2
- Hooks in jaw (Ezek. 38:4)	2
- New source of oil	2
- Prophecy is happening now	1
- Can control Europe	1
Ruth	2
- Shoe contract	1
- Ruth 4:7-8	1
- Ruth 4:13-17	1
- Boaz	1
- Gentile	1
- Jesus' genealogy	1
- Obad	1
- King David	1
- Jesus	2
Salt covenant	3
- Valuable	1
- Salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13)	1
- Demonstration of it	1

- permanent	1
Satan	4
- Prince of darkness	2
Second Coming	1
- In near future	2
- Seven years after the Rapture	1
Second World War	1
Seven years of millennial reign	1
- Judgment of nations	1
The Bible	
- Bible	3
- God's truth	1
- Authority	1
- Their [Jews'] book	1
- Word of God	1
The new heaven and new earth	1
- Garden of Eden	4
- Everlasting punishment	1
- Eternity	2
- Forever	1
Third World War	2
Transsexuality	1
- Madness	2
- "You were born to be man or woman"	1
Two-state solution	1
- impossible	1
United Nations	2
White throne of judgment	1
Winds of war	2
Without the Jews, there would be no Bible, no Jesus Christ, no patriarchs, no disciples, no early Christianity, no Saint Paul, and no salvation.	3
World Health Organization	1
Zion	1
Zionism	3
- In Hagee's personal life	1
- History Christians and Jews	1

Physical content

A map of Israel with no reference to Palestinian territories	1
A projection of the Western wall in the background	1
AI imagery of the end of times, for example Jesus Christ on horseback with a sword	1
Flag of Israel	1
Flag of United States	1

Separate Bible verses

2 Chronicles 7:16	1

2 Peter 19	1
Acts 10:1-22	1
Exodus 4:22-23	1
Genesis 1:1	1
Genesis 13:14-17	1
Genesis 15-18	1
Genesis 17:19-21	2
Isaiah 40:1-2	1
Isaiah 62	2
Isaiah 66:8	1
Luke 1:35	1
Luke 7:1-10	1
Matthew 25:40	2
Philippians 2:10-11	1
Proverbs 14:34	1
Psalm 102:13	1
Psalm 121:4	1
Psalm 122:6	1
Romans 9:4	1
Zacheriah 2:8	1