



*Who is right or which position should be chosen?*

## **MAKING ISRAEL RELIGIOUSLY SPECIAL IS A CONTROVERSIAL CHOICE**

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*Murdering and capturing innocent people followed by massive destruction and indiscriminate killing in Israel-Palestine have shocked the world and affected public opinions. It has confused many, including Christians, or polarized their views into often opposing views. Who is right or which position should be chosen? The following 12 points are intended as a guide for reflection.*

1. The Christian faith focuses on Christ *only*, according to the famous adage that summarizes the pillars of the Reformation: ‘solus Christus’ (*Acts 4:12*). So, this does not provide for a focus on Christ *plus* anything or anyone else. He is the second Person of the divine Trinity and He does not tolerate the worship of anything or anyone beside Him or instead of Him. The Old Testament refers to this with the first two commandments of the *Decalogue* (*Exodus 20:3, 4; Deuteronomy 5:7, 8*). The New Testament illustrates this in, for example, *Matthew 17:8* and *Hebrews 12:2*.

2. God chose Abraham and then the nation of Israel (*Deuteronomy* 7:6-8; *Psalms* 147:20; *Isaiah* 41:8) to serve as a demonstrative model for His loving plan of salvation for all nations and all people.<sup>i</sup> The people of Israel had 12 tribes. After the exiles, most of them were absorbed by the multitude of nations, beyond recognition. However, God continued to show His plan of salvation through the returned Judean (Jewish) remnant of Israel, which through Mary was the instrument for Him to give birth to His Son as Saviour of the world (*John* 3:16, 17, 4:42; *1 John* 2:2, 4:14).

3. There has been no ethnic or national restoration of the entire Old Testament people of that name for thousands of years. In any case, prophecies about the gathering of the 'whole house of Israel' as in *Ezekiel* 36 and 37 cannot refer to the establishment of the modern state of Israel, which is secular in nature.

4. The name of the modern state of Israel does not cover biblical Israel, but was chosen by representatives of the Jewish people in 1948 to designate the Jewish state. International law recognizes the state's right to exist under that name. Friend and foe of Israel must respect that.

5. The Jewish people primarily exist because of the survival of the Jewish faith, *Judaism*. It is a religion that, unfortunately, distances itself from Jesus Christ. It is regrettable, however, that Western 'Christian' culture, ignoring Jesus' command to also love the Jews and make them jealous (*Matthew* 22:34-40; *Romans* 10:19, 11:14), considered this as a reason for expressing anti-Semitism and replacement theories that led to it. At the same time, the Christian faith does not allow to make Israel religiously special, and to elevate or idolize Israel.<sup>ii</sup>

6. Scholars have not been able to provide conclusive evidence for the proposition that the entire Jewish people of today would be descended via DNA from the Jews in the time of Jesus.<sup>iii</sup>

7. The assumption that God has promised a lasting exceptional religious position and future to the Jews as His specific people in His plan for the world and mankind did not arise until around 1600, first among English and Scottish Puritans and then in North America among Evangelicals, in the Netherlands within the 'Further Reformation' and in Germany within the 'Pietismus'.<sup>iv</sup>

8. From a Christocentric hermeneutic principle, the Bible does not provide any foundation for the abovementioned interpretation of the Old Testament promises for Israel.<sup>v</sup> Moreover, if one continues to insist on that interpretation, one should also apply particularly to the Jewish people the judgment threats announced in the Old Testament. But that would extraordinarily punish Jews for the sin of unbelief in Christ, making pogroms, the Holocaust and the Hamas murders theoretically (theologically) explicable or acceptable. Few Christians want to draw that nasty consequence from their desire of making Israel religiously special.

9. The assumption of an enduring religious status of separateness for the Jewish people has been developed by some Christians into a hermeneutical principle, a key to the interpretation of certain individual biblical texts and ultimately of the entire Bible.

10. Other Christians think this is wrong. They appeal to the Ancient Church and the Reformation, which interpreted Scripture on the principle that God's promises and announcements of judgment for Israel in the Scriptures have received their essential meaning and fulfilment in Christ and are therefore only explainable from Him and valid in Him for all nations.<sup>vi</sup> God's 'irrevocable' faithfulness (*Romans* 11:29) and all His promises are in Christ 'yes and in Him amen' (*2 Corinthians* 1:20) for all mankind (*Matthew* 28:19). So it is with God's judgments (*Romans* 14:10-12; *2 Corinthians* 5:10).

11. With this interpretation, they want to do justice to the coherence of the whole of Scripture.<sup>vii</sup> It follows that the name 'Israel', as used by Paul in, for example, *Romans* 11:26,<sup>viii</sup> refers to the 'Israel of God' (*Galatians* 6:16; *Ephesians* 2:14, which consists of all believers of Christ of all times and places, of all nations, including, of course, all of the Jewish people who believe in Him (*Romans* 11:1). The true children of Abraham are Jews and Gentiles for whom the promises of God's covenant of grace have become effective through faith in Christ (*Matthew* 3:9; *Romans* 9:6-8; *Galatians* 3:7, 14, 26-29).

12. There are, therefore, two principles of interpretation (Christ-*plus* or Christ-*alone*), which are mutually exclusive. The choice to be made has spiritual, theological, ecclesiastical and political consequences.<sup>ix</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Steven Paas, 'Chosen in Christ to Salvation and to Participation in His Work' [<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/chosen-christ-salvation-participation-his-work-steven-paas/>]; Idem, 'In Christus uitverkoren tot behoud en tot deelname aan Zijn werk', 2023 [<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/christus-uitverkoren-tot-behoud-en-deelname-aan-zijn-werk-steven-paas/>]

<sup>ii</sup> Idem, 'The Idolization of Israel is Harmful to Jews and to Christians', 2023 *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal*, 2023, vol. 7.2, p.53-66, [2023-72a-SEI-Journal-Summer.pdf \(secureserver.net\)](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/idolizing-israel-harmful-jews-christians-steven-paas/?published=t). See: [<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/idolizing-israel-harmful-jews-christians-steven-paas/?published=t>]. Idem, 'Het idoliseren van Israël schaadt Joden en Christenen', 2023 [<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/idoliseren-van-isra%C3%ABl-schaadt-joden-en-christenen-steven-paas-2e/>]

<sup>iii</sup> Jits van Straten, *The Origin of Ashkenazi Jewry: The Controversy Unraveled*, De Gruyter, 2011; Idem, *Asjkenazische Joden en de Bijbelse Israëlieten: De vroege demografische ontwikkeling van de Oost-Europese Asjkenazische Joden*, Bennekom, 2022; Idem, 'Joods DNA', 'Famillement' lecture in Amsterdam 2022 [<https://www.nljewgen.org/jits-van-straten-over-asjkenazische-joden-en-bijbelse-israelieten/>]; Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, Verso, 2010; Abraham A. van Kempen, *Christian Zionism*,

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*Enraptured Around a Golden Calf: Stuck between Morality and Idolatry - Evangelicals Rediscovering New Testament Revelations*, FastPencil Publishing, 2018.

<sup>iv</sup> Steven Paas, *Christian Zionism Examined: A Review of Ideas on Israel, the Church, and the Kingdom*, Wipf & Stock 2020, p. 51-98 [<https://wipfandstock.com/9781725254541/christian-zionism-examined-second-edition/>]. Idem, *Israëlvisies in beweging: Gevolgen voor Kerk, geloof en theologie*, Brevier 2014, p. 99-131 [<https://www.brevieruitgeverij.nl/auteur/417/paas-steven.html>].

<sup>v</sup> Idem, (Editor), *Israelism and the Place of Christ: Christocentric Interpretation of Biblical Prophecy*, LIT Verlag, Berlin, Munster, Vienna, Zurich, London, January 2018 [<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/does-bible-focus-israel-jesus-christ-steven-paas/?published=t>]; Idem (red.), *Het Israëlsme en de plaats van Christus: Christocentrische interpretatie van Bijbelse profetie*, Boekencentrum-Boekscout, 2017 [<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7087744626152873984/>].

<sup>vi</sup> Johannes (Hans) van Oort, 'Augustine on Israel and Jerusalem', in: *Journal of Early Christian History*, volume 13-3, p.115-129, 1 February 2024 [<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/2222582X.2024.2311924>]; Steven Paas, Idem, *Luther on Jews and Judaism: A Review of his 'Judenschrifte'*, LIT Verlag, 2017 [<https://www.lit-verlag.de/isbn/978-3-643-90947-3>]. Johannes van Oort, 'Voor Augustinus is wereldlijke staat Israël ondenkbaar', in: *Reformatorisch Dagblad* 22-1-24 [<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/prof-dr-johannes-van-oort-voor-augustinus-wereldlijke-steven-paas-zcbie%3FtrackingId=TPg1eklnTL%252BKDGE7rLhSMA%253D%253D/?trackingId=TPg1eklnTL%2BKDGE7rLhSMA%3D%3D>]; Jos M. Strengtholt, *Gezegend Mijn Volk (dat woont) in Egypte: Het vroege Jodendom en de Vroege Kerk over Jesaja 19*, Nijlvallei, 2023 [[Stichting Nijlvallei - Stichting Nijlvallei](https://www.stichtingnijlvallei.nl/)]; Steven Paas, *Israëlvisies in Beweging*, p. 82-98; Idem, *Liefde voor Israël nader bekeken: Voor het Evangelie zijn alle volken gelijk*, Brevier, 2015, p. 31-114 [<https://www.brevieruitgeverij.nl/auteur/417/paas-steven.html>];

<sup>vii</sup> Steven Paas, 'The Message of the Bible: Wasp or Funnel?', 2023 [<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/message-bible-wasp-funnel-steven-paas/?published=t&trackingId=YWBP410okXicpfrKmKo6YA%3D%3D>]; Steven Paas, 'De Bijbelse boodschap: wesp of trechter?', 18-1-23 [<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/de-bijbelse-boodschap-wesp-trechter-steven-paas/>]; Bram Maljaars, *Het getuigenis van Jezus: De sleutel tot het verstaan van de profetieën*, Boekscout, 2018. [<https://www.boekscout.nl/shop2/boek/9789402248371>];

<sup>viii</sup> Bram Maljaars, 'And so all Israel will be saved', in: Steven Paas, *Christian Zionism Examined*, 2020, pp. 148–60. [<https://wipfandstock.com/9781725254541/christian-zionism-examined-second-edition/>] The article is a summary of Maljaars' in-depth study (in Dutch) of the key verse Rom. 11.26: *Heel Israël zal behouden worden: Een kritisch onderzoek van de gangbare exegese van Romeinen 11, speciaal vs. 26* (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2015); Piet Guijt, 'De bedoeling van Paulus met Israël in Romeinen 9-11, in het licht van de hele Schrift', 2021 [<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/romeinen-9-11-het-licht-van-de-schrift-door-piet-guijt-steven-paas/?trackingId=L60jmdA9Ykz4YLxEvmWXpQ%3D%3D>];

<sup>ix</sup> Click for the two preceding articles in this series. Use Google translate if you cannot read Dutch: ' Hamas en het christelijke [Israëlsme](#)' and 'In Jezus Christus lijdt elke religieuze [Israëlverheffing](#) schipbreuk'. Also see this collection of publications on the issue: 'Does the Bible focus on Israel or on Jesus Christ?' [<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/does-bible-focus-israel-jesus-christ-steven-paas/?published=t>]