

JOSHUA (6) – Joshua and Christian Zionism (4)

Covenant Fellowship Church

Wednesday, April 1, 2026

Nelson D. Kloosterman

The Land, The People, and The Promise A Five-Week Exploration

Week 4: The History and The Heroes (How we got here)

Goal: To move from the “what” of Christian Zionism to the “who.”

Sidebar 1: We need to distinguish between *Zionism*, which is the political program of establishing the nation-state of Israel in 1948 and thereafter, and *Christian Zionism*, which is the adoption and assimilation by “evangelical” Christians of the religious commitment to the survival, protection, and prosperity of the “people of Israel” currently identified with the nation-state.

Sidebar 2: We need to distinguish *Dispensationalism*—which is a comprehensive *system of Bible interpretation* that separates Old and New Testaments, Israel and the Church, the Law and the Gospel, and ethnic Jews and non-Jews—and *Christian Zionism*, which is a specific *application or stance regarding biblical prophecy and the return of Israel*, focusing on “the people” and “the land.” Bottom line: the Church is a parenthesis, an interruption, in God’s plan for Israel.

The Zionist Side

- **Theodor Herzl (1860–1904):** The secular Austro-Hungarian Jewish journalist who promoted the political side of Zionism.
- **John Nelson Darby (1800–1882):** The “Father of Dispensationalism.” He popularized the idea of the “Rapture” and the distinct future for Israel. No church father, medieval theologian, or Reformer ever taught a “Pre-Tribulation Secret Rapture.” It was virtually unheard of until the 1830s. So we ask: “If the Church didn’t believe this for 1,800 years, should we be skeptical?”
- **C.I. Scofield (1843–1921):** His *Scofield Reference Bible* put these notes right next to the Scripture, making them “gospel” for millions of Americans.
- **John Hagee (1940–):** A modern representative who connects prophecy to current geopolitical events.

The Covenantal Side

- **John Calvin:** Argued that the Old Testament promises were “spiritualized” and fulfilled in Christ.
- **Stephen Sizer / Gary Burge / R. C. Sproul / John Stott / O. Palmer Robertson:** Modern scholars who argue that Christian Zionism can sometimes lead to injustice against Palestinian Christians.
- **The Westminster Confession:** While not explicitly “anti-Zionist,” its focus on the **Covenant of Grace** leaves little room for a separate, land-based covenant for ethnic Israel.

The Scofield Reference Bible (1917) provided the theological architecture for modern **Christian Zionism** by formalizing the distinction between Israel and the Church. While **Covenantal Eschatology** views the Church as the “New Israel” (continuity), Scofield’s notes emphasize a sharp discontinuity between God’s earthly and heavenly people.

Here are the three most critical notes illustrating these differences.

(over, please)

1. Genesis 12:3 – The “Blessing and Cursing” Principle

This note is the cornerstone of Christian Zionism’s geopolitical stance. Scofield interprets the Abrahamic Covenant as a permanent, divinely enforced rule for all nations.

Scofield’s Note: *“It has invariably fared ill with the people who have persecuted the Jew—well with those who have protected him. The future will still more remarkably prove this principle.”*

- **The Difference:** In *Covenantalism*, the “blessings” of Abraham are spiritualized and inherited by the Church through faith in Christ (\$Galatians 3:29\$). In *Christian Zionism*, this note suggests a literal, ongoing physical protection and political obligation toward the ethnic Jewish people that remains independent of the Church’s existence.

2. Romans 11:1 – The Distinction of Two Peoples

In this note, Scofield directly addresses the core of Covenantal Theology—the idea that the Church has replaced or “fulfilled” Israel’s role.

Scofield’s Note: *“That the Christian now inherits the distinctive Jewish promises is not taught in Scripture. The Christian is of the heavenly seed of Abraham . . . and partakes of the spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant . . . ; but Israel as a nation always has its own place, and is yet to have its greatest exaltation as the earthly people of God.”*

- **The Difference: Covenantal Eschatology** argues for one “People of God” across both testaments. Scofield’s note creates an ontological wall:
 - **Israel:** An **ethnic** people with earthly promises (physical land, kingdom, throne).
 - **The Church:** A **universal** people with Christ-fulfilled promises (heaven, grace, the Body of Christ).

3. Ephesians 3:6 – The Church as a “Mystery” (Parenthesis)

Scofield uses the “mystery” mentioned by Paul to argue that the Church was entirely unknown to Old Testament prophets. This is often called the “Parenthesis Theory.”

Scofield’s Note: *“The ‘mystery’ is that, during the interval of Israel’s rejection, Gentles should be made fellow-heirs. . . . This mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ was not revealed to the Old Testament prophets.”*

- **The Difference:** This is the ultimate “timeline” clash. The *Covenantal* approach sees the Church as the organic expansion and climax of the Old Testament. Scofield’s note asserts that the Church is a temporary “interruption” in God’s primary timeline for Israel. Once the Church is removed (the Rapture), Scofield argues God will resume His literal, national dealings with Israel.

Feature	Scofield (Christian Zionism)	Covenantal Eschatology
Israel & Church	Two distinct peoples with separate destinies.	One people of God (The Church is the true Israel).
Land Promises	Unconditional, literal, and yet to be fulfilled.	Fulfilled in Christ and the New Earth.
Old Testament	Primarily concerns the earthly Kingdom of Israel.	Primarily points to Christ and His Church.
Modern Israel	A miraculous fulfillment of prophecy.	A geopolitical event without specific salvific status.