

Zionism & Greater Israel

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Objective: Provide a balanced overview of Zionism and the “Greater Israel” concept.

Scripture: Zionism & Greater Israel

- **Genesis 12:1-3** – “Go from your country... I will bless those who bless you...”
- **Genesis 12:7** – “To your offspring I will give this land.”
- **Genesis 13:14-17** – “All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.”
- **Genesis 15:18-21** – “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.”
- **Genesis 17:7-8** – “The whole land of Canaan... as an everlasting possession.”
- **Deuteronomy 11:24** – “Every place where you set your foot will be yours: from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean Sea.”
- **Joshua 1:3-4** – “I will give you every place where you set your foot... from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the land of the Hittites—to the Mediterranean Sea.”
- **1 Kings 8:65** – Solomon’s kingdom “from Lebo Hamath to the Wadi of Egypt.”



Zion – The City & Symbol

The word **Zion** (Hebrew: צִיּוֹן, *Ṣiygôn*) first appears in the Bible in **2 Samuel 5:7**: “David captured the fortress of Zion—which is the City of David.”

Its origin is uncertain and likely pre-Israelite (Canaanite/Jebusite origin). Possible meanings include “fortress” or “stronghold,” “dry place,” or “raised place/monument.” Originally a Jebusite hill fortress in Jerusalem conquered by King David, it became synonymous with the City of David, Jerusalem, the Temple Mount, the Land of Israel, and symbolically God’s dwelling place and the Jewish homeland.

- **2 Samuel 5:7** – “David captured the fortress of Zion—which is the City of David.”
- **Psalms 137:5-6** – “If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.”
- **Isaiah 2:3** – “The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”
- **Zechariah 8:3** – “I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem.”

Return to the Land (Aliyah / Restoration)

Aliyah (Hebrew: עלייה, “ascent” or “going up”) is the term for Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel. It is a foundational pillar of modern Zionism.

- **Biblical Roots:** Restoration after exile (e.g., Jeremiah 31:8-9, Isaiah 11:11-12, Ezra 2:1).
- **Modern Significance:** Waves since the late 19th century brought Jews fleeing persecution. The Law of Return (1950) grants any Jew worldwide the right to immigrate and gain citizenship.

- Connection: Practical fulfillment of return; for religious Zionists, a step toward prophetic restoration.
- **Isaiah 11:11-12** – “The Lord will... assemble the exiles of Israel... from the four quarters of the earth.”
- **Jeremiah 31:8-10** – “I will bring them from the land of the north... they will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion.”
- **Ezekiel 36:24** – “I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.”
- **Ezekiel 37:21-22** – “I will take the Israelites out of the nations... and bring them back into their own land.”
- **Amos 9:14-15** – “I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted.”

Blessing & Warning (Evangelical Emphasis)

- **Genesis 12:3** – “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse.”
- **Numbers 24:9** – “Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you.”

Greater Israel

- Core Covenant: “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates’” (Genesis 15:18; see vv. 19-21).

- Additional borders: “Every place where you set your foot will be yours: Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea” (Deuteronomy 11:24; also Joshua 1:4).
- Historical extent: “from Lebo Hamath to the Wadi of Egypt” (1 Kings 8:65).
- Greater Israel (*Eretz Yisrael HaShlema*) draws from these maximal descriptions versus narrower ones (“from Dan to Beersheba”). It inspires some religious nationalists but is not official Israeli policy.

Modern political Zionism

- Emerged in the late 19th century with **Theodor Herzl** amid European antisemitism. **Rothschild** philanthropic support for settlements. The 1917 **Balfour Declaration** to Lord Walter Rothschild endorsed “a national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine.

Revisionist Zionism

- An ideological movement founded by Ze’ev Jabotinsky in the 1920s. It advocated territorial maximalism—Jewish sovereignty over the entire historic Land of Israel on both sides of the Jordan River. Revisionism influenced Israel’s political right, shaping Likud, Menachem Begin, and Benjamin Netanyahu’s worldview prioritizing security and sovereignty.
- The image below shows an Israeli soldier’s uniform patch displays a map outline resembling “Greater Israel” with Hebrew text referring to the “Promised Land of Israel.” Such patches are unofficial, worn by some far-right or messianic soldiers, and illustrate expressions of maximalist vision.



Summary

The Abrahamic Covenant (including the land promise in Genesis 15:18-21 shown on the map) was originally given to Abraham and his physical descendants through Isaac and Jacob (the nation of Israel). However, the New Testament expands this to include spiritual descendants — all who have faith in Christ, whether Jewish or Gentile. The Bible holds both dimensions together rather than replacing one with the other. Interpretations differ significantly across traditions on how the physical land promises apply today.

Modern Israel

In Israel, Judaism is shaped more by self-identified religious lifestyle categories than formal Western denominations, with Orthodoxy holding official state recognition.

Main Religious Groups (per Pew and recent data):

- **Hiloni (Secular):** ~40-45% — culturally Jewish, minimal ritual observance.
- **Masorti (Traditional):** ~25% — observe some traditions selectively; a broad middle ground.
- **Dati (Religious/Modern Orthodox):** ~10-16% — observant but engaged with modern Israeli society and Zionism.
- **Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox):** ~13-14% (~1.45 million in 2025) — fastest-growing; strict observance, often insular. Includes **Hasidic** communities (e.g., in Jerusalem, Bnei Brak) emphasizing mystical prayer and rebbes, alongside Lithuanian yeshiva-focused groups. en.idi.org.il

Reform and Conservative (Progressive/Masorti): Very small (~3-8% identify); limited official recognition for marriage/conversion, though growing in urban areas.

pewresearch.org

Ethnic/Cultural Lines (heavily mixed in the “melting pot”):

- **Mizrahi/Sephardi:** Largest (~40-50%+ ancestry) — roots in Middle East/North Africa; influence “traditional” practices.
- **Ashkenazi:** ~30-45% — European heritage; historically dominant in institutions.
- **Ethiopian (Beta Israel):** ~2-3% — unique ancient traditions; integrated since 1980s-90s immigrations.

- Others: Russian-speakers, Yemenite, Bukharan, etc. Over 50% of younger Jews have mixed heritage. pewresearch.org

The **Chief Rabbinate** (Ashkenazi + Sephardi) oversees Orthodox standards for personal status. Ethnic and religious lines overlap and blur through intermarriage and Israeli identity. Haredi growth poses key social/economic debates.

Major Christian Theological Views

- **Jewish Perspective** (and some Christian views):
The land and national promises remain primarily for the physical descendants of Jacob/Israel (the Jewish people). The covenant is viewed as eternal and irrevocable in its national and territorial aspects. Physical descent, combined with covenant faithfulness, is central. Modern Israel is often seen as a partial fulfillment of God’s faithfulness to Abraham.
- **Covenant Theology / Fulfillment or Supersessionist (Replacement) Theology** (common in many Reformed, Catholic, and mainline Protestant traditions): The New Covenant in Christ fulfills the Old Testament promises, so the Church becomes the “true Israel.” The land promise is understood spiritually (e.g., as the new creation, heaven, or the worldwide spread of the Gospel) rather than as a literal future territory for ethnic Israel. “Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel” (Romans 9:6).
- **Dispensationalism** (common in evangelical, fundamentalist, and many charismatic/Pentecostal circles): Strongly distinguishes between **physical/national Israel** (to whom the literal land promises, including a future “Greater Israel” fulfillment, still apply) and the **Church** (which receives the spiritual

blessings now). A future restoration of national Israel in the Promised Land is expected during the end times or millennial kingdom.

- **Dual or “Both/And” Perspectives** (held by many evangelicals and others): Both physical and spiritual descendants matter. God remains faithful to ethnic Israel (Romans 11:29 — “God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable”), with a future hope for widespread Jewish turning to the Messiah (“all Israel will be saved,” Romans 11:26). At the same time, all believers in Christ are Abraham’s spiritual seed and co-heirs (Galatians 3:29). The Church participates in the blessings now, while distinct promises to national Israel may still await literal fulfillment.

Native Christian Concerns

- “Zionism” as an ideological force behind anti-Christian actions, such as settler violence in places like Taybeh, seeing it as expansionist hostility conflicting with Christian presence and theology.
- Palestinian Christian villages, particularly Taybeh (the West Bank’s last fully Christian community), report experiencing escalating Israeli settler violence that threatens their ancient presence (both Muslim and Christian). Incidents include arson on olive groves/fields, Molotov cocktails, vandalism of churches/property, physical assaults, threats, and blocking access to land — particularly around outposts linked to Greater Israel ideology. They characterize these incidents as part of a deliberate campaign of intimidation and ethnic cleansing linked to settlement expansion and occupation. This has led to emigration, economic hardship, and fear for the survival.

Evangelical (Christian Zionist) Vision

- Many evangelicals, dispensationalists, view Israel's restoration as prophecy fulfillment:
 - "I will bless those who bless you..." (Genesis 12:3). They link 1948/1967 events and Aliyah waves to end-times scenarios *and strongly support secular Israel.*

Discussion Points:

- What does God say in Scripture about Greater Israel?
- In what ways do "Zion" and Aliyah, shape modern Zionism?
- Distinguish between God's promises and secular national self-determination.
- Distinguish between Secular and the various Jewish sects understanding of Zionism.
- Scripturally, balance Jewish security, Native Palestinian (Christian & Muslim) 'rights', and Holy Land Christian heritage.