

“Remember What Amalek Did to You”: The Political Power of Religious Narratives

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Abstract: This article offers a critical analysis of how religion is used on African American Christian Zionist tours of the State of Israel to advance the goal of bringing African American Christians and Black churches into the religious-political project of Christian Zionist advocacy. It draws on participant observation data from a 2016 African American denominational delegation to Israel to analyze the racial and political salience of religious narratives about ostensible “enemies” and “others” – especially the biblical Amalek narrative. Since October 7, 2023, such Biblical narratives of elimination and annihilation have been deployed by Israeli political and military leaders and some of their American Christian supporters to defend and undergird support for extreme and sustained state violence directed at Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere. This article shows that this rhetorical strategy is not an innovation post-October 7, but rather a longstanding feature of efforts to build global solidarities linking American Christians and the State of Israel. In focusing specifically on the dissemination and reception of biblical narratives of annihilation among African American Christians visiting Israel, the article further explores the role of race in these processes and analyzes the interpretive malleability of religious narratives to serve political purposes across racial, religious, and national lines.

Keywords: African American Christianity, Christian Zionist advocacy, Amalek, Israel

On the morning of October 7, 2023, Palestinian militants from Gaza, representing Hamas and other groups, launched an attack on Southern Israel in the largest incursion into Israeli territory since the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Later that day, in a televised speech, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared, “We are at war and we will win it,” further pledging, “We will turn all the places that Hamas hides in and operates from into rubble.”¹ In the weeks and months that followed, and as Palestinian civilian casualties mounted at alarming rates into the tens of thousands, widespread debates ensued about the appropriate language to describe the ongoing violence. Following Netanyahu’s pronouncement that Israel was “at war,” most major news outlets started referring to the “Gaza war,” the “Israel-Hamas war,” the “Israel-Gaza war,” etc. And as “war” became the most common label, further fiercely debated questions emerged about the fundamental character and specific conduct of that ostensible war – Is it a *religious* war?

1. Benjamin Netanyahu, “Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu,” Prime Minister’s Office (Israel), October 7, 2023, <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/statement-by-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-7-oct-2023>.

If so, what does that mean?² And did the escalating violence include acts or intentions of specific legal and moral terms, like *ethnic cleansing*, *genocide*, and/or *crimes against humanity*?³

Importantly, it was not just outside observers who were staking out positions on the character and conduct of the conflict. Three weeks after his pledge to turn Gaza into rubble, Netanyahu and other senior Israeli officials escalated their use of religious rhetoric to contextualize and justify the increasing use of deadly force against Palestinians in Gaza. On October 28, 2023, in a joint statement with Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and Minister Benny Gantz, Netanyahu announced what he called a “second stage” of military operations in Gaza, three weeks after Israel’s initial invasion.⁴ Deploying distinctly religious language to explain and justify the ongoing violence in Gaza, he described Israeli forces as having “entered the gates of Gaza, at the doorstep of the fortress of evil.”⁵ Netanyahu further declared, “This will be a victory of good over evil, of light over darkness, of life over death.”⁶ And, elaborating on the religious impetus for the ongoing Israeli military assault, he said that members of Israel’s forces were “committed to eradicating this evil from the world, for our existence, and I add, for the good of all humanity. The entire people, and the leadership of the people, embrace them and believe in them. ‘Remember what Amalek did to you’ (Deuteronomy 25:17). We remember and we fight.”⁷ After this somewhat obscure biblical reference to “Amalek,” Netanyahu went on to argue that Israel’s escalation of its military campaign in Gaza was in line with over 3,000 years of efforts to destroy its enemies – “from Joshua, Judah Maccabee and Bar Kochba, and up to the heroes of 1948, the Six Day War, the Yom Kippur War and Israel’s other wars.”⁸

It is beyond the purpose and scope of this article to adjudicate among or even to systematically compare the wide range of perspectives on what terminology best or most accurately describes the Israeli state violence directed towards Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere since October 7, 2023. But these questions clearly matter in the context of this special issue’s goals of understanding religious nationalism “in its diverse and evolving forms,” and in examining the central role that religious nationalism plays “in shaping public life, state ideologies, and intercommunal relations across the globe.” In response to the editorial call to “explore the theological, historical, sociological, and political roots of religious nationalism” in this special issue – and to ask “how religious symbols, traditions, and identities are mobilized in service of national ideologies and how such configurations impact pluralism, minority rights, and global conflict” – this essay will focus on a particular manifestation of religious rhetoric expressed as a form of religious nationalism within the wider context of Palestine and Israel as a transnational political

2. See Caroline de Gruyter, “Israel and Palestine Are Now in a Religious War,” *Foreign Policy*, July 15, 2025, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/03/07/israel-palestine-hamas-gaza-religious-war/>, and Thomas Lecaque, “Israel-Hamas Is Not a Religious War and This Is Not Your Rapture,” *Religion Dispatches*, October 18, 2023, <https://religiondispatches.org/israel-hamas-is-not-a-religious-war-and-this-is-not-your-rapture/>.

3. See Amnesty International, “Amnesty International Concludes Israel is Committing Genocide against Palestinians in Gaza,” December 5, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/amnesty-international-concludes-israel-is-committing-genocide-against-palestinians-in-gaza/>, Omer Bartov, “I’m a Genocide Scholar. I Know It When I see it,” *New York Times*, July 15th, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/15/opinion/israel-gaza-holocaust-genocide-palestinians.html>, William Christou, “Israel Accused of Ethnic Cleansing after More than 140 Killed in Gaza in 24 Hours,” *The Guardian*, May 17, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/17/israel-gaza-ethnic-cleansing-palestinian-death-toll>, Human Rights Watch, “Israel’s Crimes Against Humanity in Gaza,” November 14, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/11/14/israels-crimes-against-humanity-gaza>.

4. Benjamin Netanyahu, “Statement by PM Netanyahu.” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 28, 2023. <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/statement-by-pm-netanyahu-28-oct-2023>.

5. Netanyahu, “Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu,” October 28, 2023.

6. Netanyahu, “Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu,” October 28, 2023.

7. Netanyahu, “Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu,” October 28, 2023.

8. Netanyahu, “Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu,” October 28, 2023.

issue, namely the weaponization of religious identities, symbols, and discourse to orient African American Christians towards solidarities in Israel and Palestine. More specifically, it will explore the contemporary use of biblical narratives like the Amalek narrative as a source of moral and religious authority with respect to Israel's violence against Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank to claim a religious mandate for the total destruction of the ostensible enemies of God and of God's people.

While terms like “genocide” and “ethnic cleansing” are uniquely modern terms that arose in the context of the early 1940s and later post-World War II efforts to identify and prevent the mass scale extermination or displacement of whole nations or ethnic groups, the Amalek narrative is an example of ancient Israelite and early Jewish sources (including the Hebrew Bible) that convey genocidal imperatives or impulses of interethnic or international violence.⁹ Recent attention to these kinds of religious narratives (including the Amalek narrative) have come from scholars, journalists, and within the realm of international law. For example, Atalia Omer¹⁰ has recently argued that the “Amalekization” of the Palestinians extends beyond religious discourse into the realm of the realpolitik of Christian, Jewish, and secular Zionist movements, while Donald Wagner has argued that such Jewish and Christian Zionist narratives “facilitate political policies that undermine international law and ethical values once held sacred by Christians, Muslims, and Jews.”¹¹ This concern is echoed in journalistic reporting on the contemporary significance of the Amalek narrative in the religious politics of supporters of the State of Israel since October 7, 2023.¹² Notably, the term “Amalek” also appears within the context of the ongoing proceedings before the International Court of Justice brought against Israel by South Africa.¹³

This article examines the dissemination and reception of applications of the biblical Amalek narrative on African American Christian Zionist tours of the State of Israel. From 2013 to 2018, I explored spaces within American Black churches and wider contexts within Black religious politics where Black clergy and activists were working to build solidarities with Jewish Israelis or Palestinians, or to build bridges between those groups in conflict. I consistently found that members of groups that participated in my research drew on religious, historical, social, and political aspects of their shared identity as African American Christians to stake out positions of solidarity with either Jewish Israelis or Palestinians based on their understanding of what it means to be an African American Christian or to be part of “the Black Church.”¹⁴ Based on these divergent visions of Black Church identity and the specific religious-political solidarities that emerged from them, participants asked questions and pursued answers about what they

9. T. M. Lemos, “Genocide in Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish Sources,” in *The Cambridge World History of Genocide, Volume 1: Genocide in the Ancient, Medieval and Premodern Worlds*, ed. Ben Kiernan, T. M. Lemos, and Tristan S. Taylor, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 198–222, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108655989.009>.

10. Atalia Omer, “Turning Palestine into a Terra Nullis: On Amalek and ‘Miracles,’” *Journal of Genocide Research*, published online May 22, 2025, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2025.2504737>.

11. Donald Wagner, “Challenging Biblical Justifications for Genocide,” *Journal for the Study of Christian Zionism* 1, no. 1 (2025): 23.

12. See, for example: Siobhan Marin and Andrew West, “Why a Biblical Story Is Central to South Africa’s ICJ Case against Israel?” *ABC News*, January 30, 2024, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-01-31/biblical-story-amalek-south-africa-icj-genocide-case-israel/103403552>, and Aidan Orly, “Christian Right Cites Violent Biblical Amalek Trope to Justify Israel’s Tactics,” *Truthout*, October 22, 2023, <https://truthout.org/articles/christian-right-cites-violent-biblical-amalek-trope-to-justify-israels-tactics/>.

13. *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)* (International Court of Justice, December 29, 2023), <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/192>.

14. Roger Baumann, *Black Visions of the Holy Land: African American Christian Engagement with Israel and Palestine* (Columbia University Press, 2024).

should be doing in the world as African American Christians who understand themselves as taking up the political and social mantle of the Black Church. And later, after my field work in these spaces within the world of Black religious politics had ended, I continued to pay attention to how the Black clergy, lay leaders, church members, denominational officials, activists, and scholars were responding to new developments in Palestine and Israel – especially after October 7, 2023. In this context, I argue that competing notions of collective African American Christian identity and social witness under the mantle of “the Black Church” are at work within efforts to align that identity with the cause of Palestinians or the State of Israel in its efforts to, as Netanyahu put it, destroy its purported enemies – in Gaza, in the broader Middle East, and across the globe. Based on divergent notions of Black Church identity and purpose, the African American Christians in my research variously wrestle with these efforts and, at times, prescribe their acceptance or rejection, particularly where such efforts seek to weaponize African American Christian solidarities via biblical narratives of the total destruction of enemy nations.

American Black Churches and the Issue of Israel and Palestine Since October 7, 2023

Since the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led attacks on the State of Israel and Israel’s protracted violence towards Palestinians in Gaza that followed, position-taking on the issue of Israel and Palestine has become more fraught and polarizing than it has been in recent memory. Among those staking out positions and making politically charged statements in the context of the current escalation of conflict and violence have been African American clergy, civil rights leaders, and activists. For example, some Black Christian clergy have organized around calls for an immediate ceasefire and release of hostages.¹⁵ Other Black Church leaders have called attention to the role of American military support for the State of Israel, demanding an end to U.S. financial support¹⁶ for what they labeled a “mass genocide.”¹⁷ Similarly, the prominent civil rights organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), issued a call for the Biden administration to immediately end U.S. weapons shipments to Israel.¹⁸ Other Black clergy have lent their voices to supporting the State of Israel, decrying “the appalling silence of the Black Church” with respect to “standing with unwavering support for Israel during these difficult days,”¹⁹ and exhorting “all of the millions of black Americans who are for Israel, who are praying for Israel, and who choose to bless Israel, this is not a moment to be silent.”²⁰

15. Maya King, “Black Pastors Pressure Biden to Call for a Cease-Fire in Gaza,” *The New York Times*, January 28, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/28/us/politics/black-pastors-biden-gaza-israel.html>.

16. Audra D. S. Burch and Maya King, “Prominent Black Church Leaders Call for End of U.S. Aid to Israel,” *The New York Times*, February 17, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/16/us/ame-church-us-israel-aid.html>.

17. Adelle M. Banks, “African Methodist Episcopal Church Leaders Call for Halt to All US Funding of Israel,” *RNS*, February 16, 2024, <https://religionnews.com/2024/02/16/ame-church-amid-ongoing-mideast-war-urges-halt-of-all-u-s-funding-of-israel/>.

18. NAACP, “NAACP Urges Biden-Harris Administration to Stop Shipments of Weapons Targeting Civilians to Israel, Push for Ceasefire | NAACP,” June 6, 2024, <https://naacp.org/articles/naacp-urges-biden-harris-administration-stop-shipments-weapons-targeting-civilians-israel>.

19. Michael A. Stevens, “The Appalling Silence of the Black Church During Israel’s Time of War,” *Charisma News*, October 22, 2023, <https://www.charismanews.com/culture/93597-the-appalling-silence-of-the-black-church-during-israel-s-time-of-war>.

20. Steve Warren, “COGIC Bishop to CBN News: After Centuries of Enemies, There’s Only 1 Reason Israel Is Still Here,” *CBN*, October 24, 2023, <https://www2.cbn.com/news/us/cogic-bishop-cbn-news-after-centuries-enemies-theres-only-1-reason-israel-still-here>.

This intense polarization of positions within American Black religious politics and civil rights spaces raises important question: How can we interpret the wide range of positions claiming the legacy and mission of “the Black Church” to speak to the issue of Israel and Palestine? And how do we understand the religious and political significance of African American clergy and activist engagement with Palestine and Israel? For example, backlash to Israel’s assault on Gaza has strained interfaith relationships between African American Christians and American Jews²¹ and tested alliances between Black and Jewish racial justice activists in new ways,²² threatening the bonds of a durable coalition that goes back to the civil rights era.²³ And in the context of the 2024 presidential election, these developments disrupted an important part of the coalition that the Democratic party was relying on to attempt to maintain control of the White House. As one commentator framed the stakes for the American electoral landscape in 2024: “Gaza turned everything upside down for the Black church and Biden.”²⁴

“Remember what Amalek did to you”

When Benjamin Netanyahu declared, on October 28, 2023, “Remember what Amalek did to you,” to whom was he speaking? In following that with, “We remember and we fight,” and referring to “Our brave soldiers who are now in Gaza,” he was clearly addressing the Israeli public (he was speaking in Hebrew, which was translated into English – on television, online, and in print.²⁵ But we can infer that Netanyahu was also speaking to a wider global audience of Christian supporters of the State of Israel and supporters of Zionism more broadly – in the United States and elsewhere – for whom the Amalek narrative is legible as a religious trope in support of the goal of total destruction of God’s ostensible enemies. This global Christian audience of supporters fall under the broad category of Christian Zionists, which the religious historian Robert O. Smith defines as Christians who engage in “political action, informed by specifically Christian commitments, to promote or preserve Jewish control over the geographic area now comprising Israel and Palestine.”²⁶ The role of theology and biblical hermeneutics looms large in Christian Zionist rhetoric and political action.²⁷ And both defenses and critiques of Christian Zionism – in its

21. Jonathan Shead, “Interfaith Relationships and the Impact of the Israel-Hamas Conflict,” *One Detroit*, November 1, 2023, <https://www.onedetroitpbs.org/american-black-journal/interfaith-relationships-and-the-impact-of-the-israel-hamas-conflict-american-black-journal/>.

22. Noreen Nasir and Aaron Morrison, “Black American Solidarity with Palestinians Is Rising and Testing Longstanding Ties to Jewish Allies,” *Associated Press News*, December 17, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/black-palestinian-solidarity-support-blm-protest-966a5eb8f0fb5b34beced29c4dda7331>.

23. Daniel Bergner, “Black and Jewish Activists Have Allied for Decades. What Now?” *The New York Times*, January 18, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/18/magazine/black-jewish-activists-palestine.html>.

24. Will Bunch, “How Gaza Turned Everything Upside down for the Black Church and Biden - A Mideast Peace March from Philly to the White House Reveals Growing Unrest among Black Clergy and Other Key Groups on the Left,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*; February 15, 2024, <https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/biden-black-churches-gaza-rift-20240215.html>.

25. Netanyahu, “Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu,” October 28, 2023.

26. Robert O. Smith, *More Desired than Our Own Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.

27. See Caitlin Carenen, *The Fervent Embrace: Liberal Protestants, Evangelicals, and Israel* (NYU Press, 2012); Sean Durbin, *Righteous Gentiles: Religion, Identity, and Myth in John Hagee’s Christians United for Israel* (Brill, 2018); <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303220924078>; Gideon Elazar and Miriam Billig, “Concrete Holiness and Place Attachment: Christian Zionist Agricultural Volunteers in Samaria,” *Social Compass* 69, no. 1 (2022): 41–58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00377686211062427>; Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: The Secret Alliance Between Israel and the U.S. Christian Right* (Lawrence Hill & Co., 1989); Robert O. Smith, *More Desired than Our Own*

historical and contemporary manifestations – tend to focus extensively on the role of the Bible and theology in expressions of Christian support for Jewish Zionism.²⁸ But only a few studies of either Jewish or Christian Zionism as contemporary political movements specifically deal with – or even mention – the biblical trope of Amalek.²⁹ Yet a number of essays in prominent Christian publications have introduced or debated the significance of the Amalek narrative since October 7, 2023.³⁰

In what follows, I recount some of my experiences, observations, and conversations with African American Christians who participated in a Christian Zionist tour of Israel and were confronted with biblical narratives – including the Amalek narrative – provoking them to interpret these narratives in the context of their travels in “the Holy Land” and as they tried to understand and relate to the political conflict between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians in the land.³¹ I ask: What kind of religious and political power do these narratives have? Are there limits to the interpretive malleability of biblical narratives for Zionist applications? And how closely are African American Christian perceptions of Palestinians tied to these narratives of enmity and destruction?

“Remembering Amalek” on African American Christian Zionist Tours of Israel

In 2016, I traveled with a group of denominational leaders, clergy, and lay leaders from the Black Pentecostal Church of God in Christ (COGIC) denomination for what was described as a “mission” to the State of Israel. One of the unifying motivations for the trip among its Black Pentecostal participants – including first-time and return visitors – was the religious significance of traveling to and experiencing “the Holy Land” or “the land of the Bible.” This religious significance informed much of the trip’s itinerary, with significant time spent touring traditional Christian pilgrimage sites – like, the Mount of Beatitudes, the Sea of Galilee, the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem, and the Shepherds Field near Bethlehem. For various stakeholders contributing to the mission of the trip, sites like these afforded opportunities to extend the

Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism (Oxford University Press, 2013); Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

28. Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis and Maurine Tobin, eds., *Challenging Christian Zionism: Theology, Politics and the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (Melisende, 2005); Goran Gunner and Robert O. Smith, eds., *Comprehending Christian Zionism: Perspectives in Comparison* (Fortress Press, 2014); Munther Isaac, *Christ in the Rubble: Faith, the Bible, and the Genocide in Gaza* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2025); Gerald R. McDermott, ed., *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land* (IVP Academic, 2016); Faydra L. Shapiro, *Christian Zionism: Navigating the Jewish-Christian Border* (Cascade Books, 2015).

29. Durbin, *Righteous Gentiles*, 2018; Steven Leonard Jacobs, “Rethinking Amalek in This 21st Century,” *Religions* 8, no. 9 (2017): 9, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8090196>; Nur Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Palestine-Israel* (Zed Books, 2006); Omer, “Turning Palestine into a Terra Nullis,” 2025; Wagner, “Challenging Biblical Justifications,” 2025.

30. E.g., Jürgen Bühler, “The Spirit of Amalek and the War on Israel,” ICEJ, 2023., <https://www.icej.org/understand-israel/biblical-teachings/the-spirit-of-amalek-and-the-war-on-israel/>; Jayson Casper, “For Messianic Jews, Debate Over Hamas Gets Biblical,” *Christianity Today*, December 15, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2023/12/amalekites-today-israel-hamas-war-messianic-jews-bible/>; Ian M. Giatti, “Remember What Amalek Has Done to You: Netanyahu Compares Hamas to Rival of the Israelites,” October 31, 2023, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/netanyahu-compares-hamas-to-amalek-rival-of-the-israelites.html>; James Lasher, “Is Hamas Fulfilling the Biblical Prophecy of Amalek’s War on Israel?” *Charisma Magazine Online*, February 25, 2025, <https://mycharisma.com/spiritled-living/spiritual-warfare/is-hamas-fulfilling-the-biblical-prophecy-of-amaleks-war-on-israel/>; Peter Leithart, “Hamas Is Borrowing Tactics from the Amalekites,” *The Gospel Coalition*, October 13, 2023, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/hamas-tactics-amalekites/>.

31. Quotations from participants in the following sections draw on my research field notes and transcriptions of recorded interviews conducted after the trip.

group's enthusiasm for being in the land into concern for the land, not only in terms of its religious significance as "the land of the Bible," but also its contemporary significance as God's "chosen land" for a "chosen people." This was an effort to politicize (or even *weaponize*) religion (specifically African American Christianity) with significant theological, political, and ethical implications.

On the first day of the trip, we met one of these stakeholders who would significantly engage in these efforts to deploy religion in the service of Christian Zionist advocacy – one of the Jewish Israeli partners and coordinators for the trip, Ruben (a pseudonym).³² On the first day of the trip, Ruben, a charismatic man in his 60s, led his remarks to the group with the promise that the trip would both shed light on the political situation in Israel and that participants would come away with a deeper understanding of the scriptures. "We're in the most important piece of real estate in the world," he said, with some ambiguity over whether he was referring to the land's historical or contemporary significance – or maybe both.

The following day, Ruben shared more about himself and how he had come to particularly focus on partnerships to bring African American Christians to Israel. He said that people who visit Israel with him "go back messengers of goodwill." He exhorted, "Just go back and tell them what you saw. Don't lie. Tell the truth. Tell the story." The entire trip was significantly structured around telling a specific story that drew on African American history and collective identity to develop a particular religious-political narrative that organizers hoped participants would tell when they returned home. In his introduction, Ruben further promised an impactful session later in the trip when he would teach about the Middle East and Bible prophecy. "I would like to teach you the Middle East," he said, "and how we can fight the *spirit of Amalek*." This teaser of sorts and what it meant came up several times in the days that followed, as members of the group tried to understand its significance. For example, on the bus one day, Carol, a female lay leader on the trip sitting near me, began asking a small group around her about the differences between "Israel" and "the West Bank," eager to connect the dots between the political situation in Israel and the Bible. She took her Bible out of her bag. And curious about Ruben's cryptic mention of "the spirit of Amalek," she looked up passages about the Amalekites. She said that Ruben seemed, to her, to "take a warrior's perspective that simply seeks to kill the enemy and is incapable of finer distinctions." In questioning the meaning and significance of what she called "biblical genocides," she struggled in the moment to discern Ruben's imperative and seemed eager for alternative points of view.

A few days later, at the end of a day spent touring Israeli military sites, memorials, and museums, Ruben finally offered his full narrative linking the biblical significance of the land to its contemporary political significance – the story (and the *truth*) that he wanted trip participants to carry with them and share with their churches and wider communities in the United States. Before Ruben spoke, he was introduced by a Black Ethiopian Jewish leader who pastored a congregation of Ethiopian Jewish "believers" (in Jesus) affiliated with the Church of God in Christ. "We are one in Yeshua," he declared. "This is the kingdom of God. This is why you are coming here. There are many countries, but God has a purpose for you to come here to encourage the Jewish people – to love the Jewish people. The one who blesses the Jewish people will be blessed, the one who curses them will be cursed – that is the word of God!" Turning to Ruben, he said, "What you are doing is God's work. To make a bridge – especially with African Americans – is a blessing!"

Next, Glenn Plummer, the trip's COGIC leader, further spoke to the connection between African American Christians, the Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel, and the overall mission for COGIC in Israel. In 2016, when I traveled with the COGIC delegation to Israel, Plummer's pro-Israel advocacy work

32. Throughout, where only first names are used, they are pseudonyms.

was based out of his home and ministry center in Detroit. In 2020, he moved to Israel represent COGIC there full-time as the denomination’s “Bishop of Israel.” Plummer spoke about the importance of African American Christians connecting with and supporting the Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel. “I believe God has placed us – God has brought us for such a time as this – We’ll pray for them. And because we’re from America we can use some other political leverage to help.” And broadening the scope of the discussion, Plummer emphasized, “This trip has just been introductory. Now we build.” Before turning to Ruben, Plummer added, “The Amalekites were these ungodly people living up in the mountains. As Israel was coming into the land of promise, they would wait and come down towards the end of a battle and come down and rob and kill. God pronounced through Moses a destruction of these people.”

From there, Ruben took over and launched into his promised lecture, linking the Bible and the modern history and politics of the region. He began to narrate the biblical story of the Exodus from slavery in Egypt and into God’s plans for the Israelites in the land of promise. He asserted that the first charge that God gave the Israelites was to eliminate the “spirit of Amalek.” “So, the first thing God said to do was to annihilate Amalek from the face of the earth – not go to Jerusalem, not build a temple – go destroy Amalek!” For more than twenty minutes, Ruben continued, offering a fast-paced narrative summary of Jewish history through the lens of this fundamental lesson about the need to annihilate “the spirit of Amalek” in order to allow for the fullness of God’s promises to the Jewish people to be realized. The underlying message was that the prevalence of Antisemitism in the world could be traced back to the failure of the Israelites to completely eradicate the Amalekites, allowing the “spirit of Amalek” to live on. “God told us to do something and we didn’t do it. If you don’t kill them, they’ll kill you!” The COGIC group responded to this with shouts of “yes” and “amen!” Ruben invoked the biblical story of Esther and the threat of Jewish destruction under the Persian King Cyrus. He continued the story of historical Antisemitism, linking Persia with the Huns and later Germany. As he continued, he paused to reframe the conversation: “God promised the Jewish people the land of Israel. Any question about that?” “No,” he added, answering his own question. “This nation, from the get go, was given to a group of people. Joshua did not finish the job. He didn’t conquer everything,” Ruben explained, returning to the Amalek imperative for total destruction of Israel’s enemies.

Moving into the twentieth century, Ruben invoked anti-Jewish pogroms in Europe, the economic and geopolitical significance of the discovery of oil in the Middle East, and the role of the Ottoman Empire as an ally of Germany. He then emphasized how, following World War II and the Holocaust, Muslims in the Middle East became the primary threat to the newly founded State of Israel and the Jewish people more broadly. “What we have today is not a weapon warfare, we have a *spiritual* warfare. What we have here is half a billion people who are trying to annihilate six million here in Israel.” As another segue, Ruben asked, “Whose God is right? Allah or the God of Israel?” Explaining that nowhere in the world outside of Israel was safe for Jews, he continued, “Here’s the stem of Israel’s problem: Palestinians. Who are they? Where did they come from? If you understand this you understand everything.” He described Palestinians as “illegal immigrants” to the land of Israel – migrant workers who had arrived recently because their labor was needed by Jewish Zionists to help cultivate the land. “People came from Iraq, Jordan, Syria. Why? Because there were jobs to be had. So, Jews allowed these people to come in to work the land and they were happy to have help with the land.” He went on to explain that when the State of Israel declared its independence in 1948 and neighboring Arab armies attacked, some Arabs stayed and became equal citizens in Israel. “They have less obligations and all the privileges and rights,” he noted. “What happened to the people that left? We call them Palestinian refugees... What year is it now? 2016. What year did they become

refugees? 1948. Is it possible that they could still be refugees nearly 70 years later?” With skepticism in his voice, he added, “They started with a hundred thousand refugees and now they’re 22 million?”

After working his way through his account of the twentieth century as context for understanding the State of Israel in relation to its Arab neighbors and to Palestinians, Ruben emphasized: “If the Arabs laid down their weapons tomorrow, there would be peace tomorrow. If the Jews laid down their weapons tomorrow, they would be massacred.” “To give land for peace is so asinine that it doesn’t make any sense,” he added. “Remember how it started,” Ruben went on, “Amalek. Who was Amalek? From the hills of the dessert. Who are the Arabs? From the hills of the dessert. The fact that they accepted Mohammed at some point doesn’t matter. Amalek is here!” “What you have here is warfare that has nothing to do with militant powers. It’s two Gods – one is real and one is false. There’s only one God – and that’s the God of Israel. This country’s not going anywhere.” Then Ruben ended abruptly and opened the conversation to his COGIC audience: “Questions?” he asked. One of the lay COGIC leaders on the trip who helped coordinate the delegation asked: “Where is Amalek today? Ruben answered, “What you see around us – The nations of Islam. ISIS is Amalek.” “But you said it’s Germany,” she noted, inviting clarification. “It’s a *spirit*,” Ruben replied. “They’re now everywhere in the world. That’s the spirit of Amalek and it’s still alive and kicking. Why? Because we didn’t listen. The commandments of the Bible are not suggestions.” The question asker nodded her head and seemed satisfied with Ruben’s clarification. But it was difficult for me to tell how this extensive lecture linking the Bible to the contemporary politics of Israel and Palestine was more widely received by the COGIC group. There were many nodding heads in the room and voices raised in appreciation and agreement throughout the talk. But I continued to wonder how this message and its underlying imperative to “finish the job” of eliminating God’s enemies in the land resonated or failed to resonate with the COGIC visitors.

I later got some clues, as I heard from various members of the trip as we continued our itinerary that linked Bible-focused Holy Land tourism as a kind of spiritual pilgrimage with more visits to sites of political significance. My roommate on the trip, Martin, later said to me about Ruben’s lecture on Amalek: “That would make a good course for college students, and I can see how you’d have to prove the point to them that it’s all about spiritual warfare – I just don’t think you have to prove that point to this group.” The point he was making was that charismatic Pentecostal African American Christians – like those traveling to Israel from the Church of God in Christ – did not need much convincing of the realities of “spiritual warfare” that ostensibly animate global politics. But how did this shared spiritual outlook translate into potential political solidarities with the State of Israel and the kind of political actions that trip members were consistently asked to take – from “telling the story,” to lobbying their members of congress, to signing a statement demanding that Jerusalem remain the undivided capital of the State of Israel, to supporting anti-BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) legislation in the United States?

On the last day of the trip – before a visit to the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem for a communion service – trip members were asked to take specific political action in support of the State of Israel. We visited the Knesset (Israel’s parliament) and met for a briefing with a member of the Knesset Christian Allies Caucus – an organization that mobilizes political support for the State of Israel through building and maintaining relationships between elected members of the Knesset and Christian leaders and institutions around the world. Invoking Bible prophecy (as Ruben did the night before in his own briefing on “the spirit of Amalek”), the representative of the Christian Allies Caucus explained that “for people who believe in the Bible, Jerusalem is the most important issue of our time. People say it’s a political issue, but it’s a *biblical* issue.” He went on to emphasize that Jews and Christians are coming together because they see that the Bible is real. “Churches that read their Bibles and understand the prophecies stand with Israel,” he declared.

The group then watched a video that highlighted political support from a number of countries for a document called “the Jerusalem Covenant” – a call to establish and maintain Jerusalem as an “eternal and undivided” capital of the State of Israel and of the Jewish people. Following the video, Glenn Plummer signed the covenant ceremoniously at the head of the table. And several other COGIC leaders followed suit.

Ruptures in the Narrative: What to make of Palestinians?

As I observed these kinds of meetings and listened to the questions that COGIC visitors asked (both in public and private settings on the trip), I thought about the question raised above: What kind of religious and political power do these narratives have? Especially when it came to processing and acting on the imperative for total annihilation of God’s ostensible enemies, embodied by the Palestinians in the land. On the surface, it sometimes seemed like the consistent message of the trip – linking biblical prophecy, the Amalek imperative, and a reverence for the Bible as God’s word as a call for political action and solidarity on behalf of the State of Israel and its policies towards Palestinians – was taking effect. This seemed especially apparent as many trip members signed the Jerusalem Covenant document, for example.

But I also saw COGIC members interrogating, questioning, and wrestling with the assumptions of the trip’s overarching narrative about Palestinians as an obstacle to God’s purposes in the land and I came to understand some of this as potential ruptures in the dominant trip narrative. Within these ruptures, some trip participants invoked other understandings of Black Church identity and mission in how they interpreted what they were hearing and how they were thinking about how their Black Pentecostal Christian identity and spirituality should inform their actions. Along with Carol – the lay leader on the bus who leafed through her Bible in search of alternatives to Ruben’s “warrior perspective” on the ongoing need to reenact what she called “biblical genocides” – I met others who drew on their African American Christian identity to question or reject the political imperative to “stand with Israel.”

Even as we were walking out of the Knesset Christian Allies Caucus briefing, one COGIC pastor walked up next to me, leaned over, and said: “That seemed like a *political* document to me!” I asked him if that made him more or less supportive of the Jerusalem Covenant. “Less,” he said, in a tone that suggested that that was obvious. “Because it’s political, it can restrict freedom in education,” he added. When I asked what he meant, he explained, “If you say the wrong thing when it comes to Jerusalem you could be accused of being Antisemitic.” At this point, it seemed clear to me that he had not signed the document. But I asked anyway. “Oh no,” he said. “I try to stay away from that. I know the leader and others signed it but I try to stay away from politics.”

Similarly, my roommate Martin, a deacon in his home COGIC congregation, told me about how he felt about the visit to the Knesset and the briefing: “I thought that was very political. I didn’t sign it. I think our covenant [with Israel] is spiritual... I think it’s good that they have their land here, but God is going to do what God is going to do, no matter what we do.” And then, invoking a point of comparison drawing on his own African American identity, he said: “Black folks in America certainly don’t have that option to go home. We can’t just go to Africa and say we’re home.”

Throughout most of the trip, Palestinians seemed to exist as some kind of powerful, impersonal, nameless, faceless, and abstract entity standing in opposition to Jews, the State of Israel, and God’s plans for humanity. When Palestinians were more personalized, they were presented as threats to the immediate personal safety and security of trip members. They were the potential pickpockets one Jewish Israeli tour guide warned about in our brief stop at a souvenir shop in Bethlehem and on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem. And when one trip member complained about an unpleasant encounter with an aggressive

souvenir seller in the Old City of Jerusalem, a trip leader explained, in spiritualized terms, that this was evidence of “powers and principalities” at work in the land.

Towards the end of the trip, as we drove seamlessly through the West Bank on one of the highways available to Israeli vehicles but not Palestinian ones, unimpeded by the checkpoints and roadblocks that limit the mobility of Palestinian vehicles, we heard about the Judean Desert, the fertile Jordan River Valley, and the biblical significance of the city of Jericho. When we stopped at another tourist shop in Jericho – with a chance to buy dates and take pictures on a camel – there was no mention that this was a Palestinian city in the West Bank and what that political geography meant for those that called the biblical city home today. We also had a restful and rejuvenating stop at the Dead Sea, where we visited a beach and had the chance to float in the salt water, and purchase Dead Sea health and beauty products made in Israel. Palestinians did not feature in these stories or experiences. But it stood out to me when Martin mentioned to me later that evening that he had met a family of Palestinians from Jerusalem during our time at the Dead Sea beach resort. He explained, “I felt a change in my heart today about the Palestinians. We’re all claiming to descend from Abraham and just want a share of the Holy Land.”

On our drive back to our Jerusalem hotel, as we drove past the ubiquitous thirty-foot-high concrete barrier that even the most curated encounters with the West Bank (“Judea and Samaria” as it was generally called on the trip) can hardly avoid altogether, Bishop Glenn Plummer took the opportunity to offer some commentary. He noted that former President Jimmy Carter had become well-known for labeling Israel an Apartheid state because of the wall. “I personally disagree,” he said. “When Israel put up the wall, almost one hundred percent of suicide bombing stopped. Carter compared Israel to South Africa, saying putting up the wall is doing the same things to Palestinians that South Africa did to Blacks.” And then he paused and pivoted to sharing more about COGIC’s role in Israel. He said that COGIC’s then Presiding Bishop, Charles E. Blake, Sr., met with him before the trip to share his concern that COGIC not be perceived or give any message that the denomination is against the Palestinians. “We love everyone,” Plummer said. “We are the people of God. We represent the kingdom of God. We don’t want to get mired in the politics. But it’s important that we understand the facts on the ground.” Plummer didn’t explain what he meant specifically by “facts on the ground.” And then he reiterated, “The closest concern of Bishop Blake is that we are not perceived as adversarial to Palestinians. We are not standing *against* anybody. Personally, I don’t have a problem saying I stand with Israel, but I don’t stand against anyone.” Plummer went on to explain that there are, in fact, Palestinian Christians. And he noted that had Bishop Blake come on the trip, he was scheduled to speak at the largest Palestinian church in the country. Bishop Blake, he clarified, was supposed to join the trip but had a scheduling conflict. This conversation stood out as one of the few times that I saw Palestinians talked about explicitly as anything other than a nameless, faceless, spiritual and political enemy of Jews and of the State of Israel. I wondered, was this conversation and its acknowledgement of Palestinians a potential rupture in the dominant trip narrative – undergirded by Ruben’s Amalek imperative – that cast Palestinians as outsiders, enemies, trespassers, and Antisemites that deserve to be eliminated or exiled from the land? But the conversation on the bus shifted away from even a brief interrogation of the label “Apartheid” and the significance of the wall and on towards the next stop on our itinerary. Ultimately, I wondered if a brief encounter with a Palestinian (in a souvenir shop, or floating in the Dead Sea) could possibly compete with the consistent and persistent message about Palestinians as other, as threat, as deserving of elimination.

“The Weapons of our Warfare”: Visiting the Temple Mount

In between our visit to Jericho and the Dead Sea and the day that culminated in Ruben’s Amalek lecture, we spent a day in the Old City of Jerusalem that began with a visit to a highly contested and polarizing focal point of the Old City – *Har haBayit* (the Temple Mount) for Jews, where the two ancient Jewish temples stood, and the *Haram al-Sharif* (Noble Sanctuary) for Muslims, the site of the Dome of the Rock shrine and the al-Aqsa Mosque. Our first introduction and preparation for the visit, on the bus that morning, came from a COGIC national music and worship leader, who had traveled to Israel on a previous COGIC leadership delegation. She offered what she described as a prophetic word from God for the group that day:

The weapons of our warfare, they’re not carnal but they’re mighty through God for the pulling down of strongholds... God instructed me to anoint my feet, that every place our feet trod he would give to us. So, as we go into this territory that is not necessarily a territory that acknowledges Jesus Christ as savior, we go as agents today because we are ambassadors... Let’s understand and know that we have been sent here on a mission... an opportunity for us to take back some ground for the kingdom. Amen?!

Next, Ruben and our professional Jewish Israeli tour guide, Nora, continued the preparation for ascending what they referred to exclusively as the Temple Mount from there. They warned the group that they would be under constant and invasive scrutiny from the members of the Islamic Waqf – the religious caretakers of the Islamic holy site. Nora emphasized, “The Muslim Waqf are the ones who control how you dress here, how you behave here, and will throw you off if they don’t like you.” “You may not have a worship service, you may not pray here,” she added. “A couple taking pictures while holding hands would be stopped. If you whisper as if praying you would be harassed.” As we passed through the security checkpoint, Ruben pointed out a group of Jews who had also just entered the sacred space in the company of armed guards – about a dozen civilians (men and women) and as many guards. “They are not here to provoke,” Ruben said. And he went on to explain that they were being protected by guards because they are not safe here.

After our entire group had cleared the entrance, Nora gathered us together into a tight circle and she stood in the middle of the group. She took out a small, folded piece of paper and explained that it was a transcript of a radio call from Lt. General Mordechai (Motta) Gur when the Israeli forces he was commanding took control of the Temple Mount during the 1967 Six Day War. She read with hushed enthusiasm, “The Temple Mount is in our hands! I repeat, the Temple Mount is in our hands! All forces, stop firing! This is the David Operations Room. All forces, stop firing!” After reading the transcript, she tucked it away again, noting that the paper had been given to her on another tour of Israel she had led by a Christian woman who had kept it in her Bible since 1967. The message to the group was one of the deep religious, political, and historical significance of this site to the State of Israel and the Jewish people. At this formative moment in the trip narrative, Ruben added, “The reason you came to Israel is not only to be a COGIC representative to Israel, but to be an Israeli representative when you go back.”

Next, we took a group photo on a set of stone steps, with the Dome of the Rock in the background and then followed Nora up the steps and around the shrine. As we walked past the Dome of the Rock, one trip participant came up beside me and asked if Nora had said anything about the style of the building. “I don’t think so,” I answered. “It’s too bad,” she said, looking up at gilded roof and the intricate mosaic

surfaces. “It’s so interesting!” We continued to walk around the open plaza between the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque for a while and the group scattered to explore the space in small groups without our guides. When the time to leave came, Nora called us together again and led us out of one of the exit gates, onto a narrow street in the Old City. As the group filed passed her through the exit, she announced sarcastically, “You can smile and hug each other and take off your clothes and put on your bikinis!” The laughter of the group seemed to confirm the reception of the message that we had passed out of a space of danger, harassment, and enforced and uninvited modesty into a more safe and welcoming space.

The consistent message from Nora, Ruben, and Bishop Plummer about our visit that morning was that it was a site of the highest religious significance to Jews but one that has been usurped by Muslims and Palestinians. We did not meet or speak to any of the many Muslims we saw in that space. But their presence signaled threat, harassment, and the rigid enforcement of modesty. As I processed this and had the chance to hear some reaction from trip participants throughout the day, as the trip continued, and even following the trip, a stark contrast stood out to me. It had been just a few days before we ascended the Temple Mount when we visited the Kotel (the Western Wall of the Temple Mount) to mark the beginning of the sabbath on Friday evening. During that visit, our guides and trip leaders emphasized the deep spiritual significance of the site as a place of Jewish (and Christian) prayer and worship. We were gently reminded that because of the sacredness of the Kotel in Judaism, and out of a sense of respect for the place and the people who cherish it, it was our responsibility and our duty to maintain modesty in dress and conduct and to refrain from taking pictures or otherwise interrupting the religious observance of the welcoming of the sabbath. Further even, we were encouraged to partake in the celebration as welcome guests. By contrast, it seemed far outside boundaries of the dominant narrative that set the tone and provided a framework for our ascent to the top of the mount, which was controlled by Palestinian Muslims, and where it did not seem equally possible that the Haram al-Sharif should also be respected, revered, or appreciated as a holy site and a place of prayer and worship. It felt like there was no possibility here of even the kind of brief humanizing encounter that my roommate Martin described, meeting a family of Jerusalem Palestinians as they floated together in the Dead Sea.

But I continued to wonder about the potential of these kinds of brief humanizing encounters and other potential ruptures in the dominant trip narrative in contrast to the emphasis on the Amalek imperative for total destruction and dispossession. Later that day, over lunch in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, Joyce, a lay member of COGIC on the trip and visiting the land for the first time told me about how hearing Nora and Ruben speaking so passionately on the Temple Mount about reclaiming it and controlling the whole city of Jerusalem from the Palestinians had made her question Ruben’s earlier claim that, “If the Arabs would lay down their weapons, there would be peace the next moment. But if Israel would lay down its weapons, they would be slaughtered the next moment.” “Hearing how passionately they talk about reclaiming what they feel is theirs,” Joyce said, “I wonder how it would really go if the Palestinians gave up.”

Another small moment of rupture came a few months later when I visited the home church Maureen, a leader of COGIC women’s ministries and of overseas missions, and the wife of a COGIC Bishop. We were talking about our visit to the Temple Mount, and it was not a sense of fear or harassment that she recalled, but rather a feeling of reverence and respect that the space left her with. In visiting a sacred site, she explained, “You didn’t come up any kind of way. You didn’t come up dressed any kind of way. The women had to be covered.” Maureen also talked about her ambivalence about the restrictions put on entrance the space for non-Muslims. But she also emphasized, “I believe that there are things in life that should be revered and that you don’t approach God any kind of way. And if you have something that

you consider to be holy and you call it holy, treat it as such.” “We don’t agree with how they worship, who they worship,” she added, “[But] I understand the premise. I understand why it is so important. And if we can understand and respect how someone else holds their high holy places holy, then we can regather or reconnect with what we should be holding in high esteem.” So, while our guide Nora made light of the requirement to dress modestly and to maintain a quiet respect for the place, Maureen clearly saw it differently. “I was taught to give respect. And so, for me, it was a plus because I understand where they’re coming from. And I would want someone to do the same for me. I wouldn’t want somebody to go to Mason Temple [the world headquarters of COGIC in Memphis, Tennessee] and just go in there and do whatever they do in a club. I would want them to reverence that place.”

Conclusion: Dominant Narratives, Ruptures, and the Potential of Rehumanizing

As I have returned to thinking about the significance of this experience of traveling with the Church of God in Christ in “the Holy Land” in the days, weeks, months, and years following October 7, 2023, I have wondered about the lasting impacts of the dominant dehumanizing narratives prescribing total destruction and annihilation of Palestinians that were consistently offered as pillars of the trip experience that organizers and Israeli stakeholders asked participants to carry with them. And I have also wondered about the kinds of moments of rupture and dissonance that I describe above – moments that, at the time, seemed perhaps small and insignificant.

I have thought about the people I shared this trip with – like Martin, Joyce, and Maureen – and I have wondered, what are they reading or seeing in the news or on social media about the plight of Palestinians in Gaza? What are they hearing from their pastors as they sit in the pews of their COGIC churches? What are they hearing from COGIC leaders about Gaza? Are they seeing images of the violence, destruction, and starvation in Gaza? And if they are, I wonder what frameworks for meaning making they are drawing on when then think back to the formative time they spent in the Holy Land – what so many of them described as a life changing encounter with the land of the Bible. Are they drawing on Ruben’s Amalek imperative? Or have some of the brief moments of rupture in that dominant and often reinforced trip narrative provoked something else in them?

The political imperative to “stand with Israel” – and the more religiously inflected version of this, to “bless Israel” – was certainly a ubiquitous part of the overarching framework for making meaning out of the experience. And this overlaps with broader white American evangelical support for the State of Israel that emphasizes attention to a Christian Zionist hermeneutic approach to scripture that links God’s promise to Abram (see Gen. 12:3) with material and political support for the state of Israel today. But African American expressions of Christian Zionism, like those of the COGIC group, are also rooted in also rooted in collective memories of Black American Christians where religion and politics converge – like the historic civil rights movement. I saw African American Christian Zionist leaders, like Glenn Plummer, consistently point their followers toward what they identify as a key lesson of the civil rights era – American Jews stood alongside African Americans in the twentieth-century struggle for civil rights, and so African American Christians today should stand in political solidarity with the State of Israel in its conflict with Palestinians and other enemies. So, overlapping religious and political narratives that provide the context for meaning making on trips to Israel both emphasize a particular reading of African American history overlaid onto a Christian Zionist biblical hermeneutic imperative to support the state of Israel as a “biblical issue.” And this leads to highlighting the unique capacity of African American Christians to “bless Israel” based on a recognition of parallel histories of enslavement and oppression. But this also opens up the question of *who*

is oppressed in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, with the possibility that Black Christians will identify with Palestinians based on parallel experiences of oppression.³³

In the context of this dominant narrative framework supporting Christian Zionism – a framework which often insists that Palestinians are standing in the way of God’s plans for Israel and need to be killed or removed – I also saw an opening towards the possibility of seeing Palestinians from alternative perspectives. From conversations with first time and repeat COGIC visitors to Israel, I eventually got the sense that there was some ambivalence within the group about the significance of the dominant trip narratives about Palestinians and the Amalek imperative to ensure their destruction. I found a perception among several people on the trip that there are two sides to every story. But it is hard to know or even confidently predict the after-effects of something like Martin reevaluating his thinking about Palestinians after floating with a few of them in the Dead Sea. Or of Joyce giving a second thought to the ubiquitous axiom offered by many Jewish Israelis about what would happen if Israelis laid down their weapons compared to if Palestinians did. Or of Maureen pushing back on the sardonic emphasis on Muslim modesty. So, while I can elaborate on the shared experiences I had with COGIC visitors to Israel on a multifaced and complex “mission” in the Holy Land, drawing out the religious and political power significance of the narratives that dominated that trip, it is much harder to project the limits to the interpretive malleability of biblical narratives like the Amalek narrative for global support for Netanyahu’s imperative to “remember Amalek” in the service of carrying out the slow annihilation of Palestinians and the annexation of their territory within that religious/political framework. And this is – at least in part – because their meaning making of the experience of traveling to Israel in 2016 is ongoing in the context of continuing destruction, violence, and dispossession in Gaza.

33. Roger Baumann, “Black Christians’ Competing Solidarities with Israelis and Palestinians,” *The Christian Century*, June 2025, <https://www.christiancentury.org/features/black-christians-competing-solidarities-israelis-and-palestinians>.

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