

Evangelicals see Israel-Hamas war in light of End Times

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DALLAS (RNS)—The End Times are not a topic Robert Jeffress needs much prompting to talk about.

When war broke out between Israel and Hamas on Oct. 7, the senior pastor at First Baptist Church in Dallas, quickly prepared a sermon series on the Apocalypse, which would be accompanied by a forthcoming book on the subject.

On Nov. 5, as the last notes of “Redemption Draweth Nigh,” a hymn about Jesus’ return, resonated in First Baptist’s 3,000-seat sanctuary, Jeffress asked his audience, “Are we actually living in what the Bible calls the End Times?”



The war in Gaza is not the only sign Jeffress submitted as evidence that the period presaging Jesus’ Second Coming, detailed in the Bible’s Book of Revelation and other Scriptures, is coming closer.

He noted, too, rising crime rates, the proliferation of nuclear weapons and natural disasters before announcing, “We are on the verge of the beginning of the End Times.”

“Things are falling into place for this great world battle, fought by the super powers of the world, as the Bible said. They will be armed with nuclear weapons,” Jeffress said.

Looking at current events as fulfillment of prophecy

Other prominent evangelicals have taken up the theme in their sermons. The day following Hamas' attack, in which Israeli cities were barraged and some 1,200 people were massacred, Greg Laurie, senior pastor at the Harvest Riverside Fellowship in California, framed the violence in terms of End Times prophecy.

"The Bible tells us in the End Times that Israel will be scattered and regathered," Laurie said. "The Bible predicted hundreds of thousands of years ago that a large force from the North of Israel will attack her after she (Israel) was regathered and one of the allies with modern Russia, or Magog, will be Iran or Persia."

Before calling the church to pray for peace in Jerusalem, Laurie added, "If you get up in the morning and read this headline 'Russia Attacks Israel,' fasten your seatbelt, because you're seeing Bible prophecy fulfilled in your lifetime."

While apocalyptic theology is threaded throughout the Bible and came to America with the Puritans, End Time prophecy has gone through cycles of popular acceptance among Christians. It has different strands, but in its most widely known version, known as dispensationalism, Israel is a linchpin to the events of the last days, when, after the Rapture, a coterie of 144,000 Jews are to be converted to Christ before eternity begins.

Israel's supporters 'on the right side of God'

Evangelical Christian pastors such as Jeffress have long prompted the

United States to be an actor in these events. In his second sermon in the End Times series, on Nov. 12, Jeffress quoted the speech he gave at the ceremony dedicating the new U.S. embassy in Jerusalem in 2018: “For America to be on the right side of Israel is the same as being on the right side of history, and the right side of God.”

The embassy’s move from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was the fulfillment of a promise Donald Trump made in 2016 as he ran for president for the first time, one applauded by pro-Israel evangelicals. In August 2020, as he ran for reelection, then-President Trump told a campaign rally in Wisconsin: “We moved the capital of Israel to Jerusalem. That’s for the evangelicals.”

Also present the day Jeffress spoke in Jerusalem was the televangelist John Hagee, who in 2006 founded Christians United for Israel, now the largest pro-Israel organization in the United States. On Oct. 22, Christians United hosted a “Night to Honor Israel” rally at Hagee’s Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, with Israeli public figures on hand, as well as U.S. Senators Ted Cruz and Tom Cotton.



Pastor John Hagee, Christians United For Israel founder and chairman, speaks during a CUFI Night to Honor Israel event, during the CUFI Summit 2023, Monday, July 17, 2023, in Arlington, Va., at

the Crystal Gateway Marriott. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin)

Hagee was also a speaker at the giant pro-Israel rally held Nov. 14 in Washington, where he reaffirmed his commitment to Israel.

“There is only one nation whose flag will fly over the ancient walls of the sacred city of Jerusalem. That nation is Israel, now and forever,” he said, greeted by cheers.

Claiming some 10 million members, Hagee’s organization has become powerful politically, according to Daniel Hummel, author of *Covenant Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews and U.S.-Israeli Relations*.

“It is quite a large group, but it’s even more significant that they are organized and have demonstrated over the years that they can actually focus their energy on a local level and a national level to advocate their position,” Hummel said.

The group’s gatherings have become an obligatory stop for GOP presidential hopefuls wishing to articulate their support for Israel in front of Christian Zionists.

“Most of them don’t get into the prophecy stuff,” said Hummel. “They’ll talk more about the national interests that the U.S. has in supporting Israel and about the cultural values that Israel and the U.S. share.”

But Hagee often speaks about the prophecies that drive his support for Israel. A week after Hamas’ attacks, Hagee’s Sunday sermon detailed the unfolding of the End Times, while a timeline illustrating every step from Jesus’ resurrection to the renovation of Earth by fire was displayed in the background.

The recent Hamas attacks draw us closer to the church’s Rapture, he

claimed.

“The Bible blessed the Jewish people directly and through the Jewish people blesses us, the Gentile people,” he said.

Hagee added: “Israel is God’s prophetic clock; when the Jewish people are in Israel, the clock is running. When the Jewish people are out of Israel, the clock stops.”

Some view Christian Zionism as insensitive

This logic scandalizes some scholars as well as Jews, who see evangelical support for Israel as compromised by its cosmic hope for their conversion.

“They (Christian Zionists) believe a tiny minority of living Jews will, in the End Times, convert to Christianity, and the rest will be damned to hell for their disbelief,” wrote Steven Gardiner, research director at the Political Research Associates, in a 2020 essay titled, *End Times Antisemitism*.

In a 2005 sermon, Hagee himself claimed God sent Adolf Hitler to perpetrate the Holocaust to push European Jews toward Israel. He later made clear he didn’t view either Hitler or the Holocaust as positive.

But End Times theology need not be raw to come across as insensitive to the violence suffered by both sides in the long-running Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

On Nov. 12, Jeffress began his sermon by asking the congregation if they knew what could explain the numerous attacks against Israel.

“Spiritual reasons,” he said.