Christian Zionism in America initially emerged during the colonial era with the arrival of the Puritans, and it persists to this day as a formidable political force in the United States. Over the intervening years, the prospect of a Jewish return to the “holy land” has captured the imaginations of a strikingly diverse set of American Christians. These include theologically liberal and theologically conservative supporters, along with both prominent political and religious leaders and countless women and men in the pews. The ever-changing political and religious milieu in the colonies and in the United States also helped foster numerous iterations of Christian Zionism, as proponents articulated a wide array of justifications for, and anticipatory visions of, a Jewish state. Considering the complexity and sheer scope of this history, it should come as no surprise that most scholarly assessments of Christian Zionism in the United States isolate very specific facets of the story.

Samuel Goldman has clearly spent significant time poring through primary sources as well as the relevant secondary literature. Yet he makes it clear right from the start that offering a thoroughly novel interpretation of the history of American Christian Zionism was never his primary goal. Rather, Goldman hopes to improve Americans’ religious literacy on the topic and thereby enhance the quality of public discourse. Much of his research complements and reinforces the best existing scholarship on Christian Zionism in the United States. The signal contribution of God’s Country involves Goldman’s skillful narration of the full history of American Christian Zionist thought stretching from the 1600s through the present.

Whereas Goldman makes the history of Christian Zionist thought accessible to the general reader, he also writes with at least one specific audience in mind, namely, more secular-minded academics who view explicitly religious forms of
support for the nation of Israel as nothing more than a holdover from “the be-
nighted past” (p. 12). On the contrary, his analysis stresses Christian Zionism’s
long history as a respected expression of “political theology.” God’s Country il-
 luminates how this discourse flourished in the mainstream of American political
life for centuries, and how overlooking this history will inevitably lead to an un-
derestimation of Christian Zionism’s appeal in the present.

Goldman takes direct aim at several widespread but inaccurate assumptions. A
number of contemporary observers of the movement, for instance, reflexively
associate Christian Zionism with prominent figures on the Religious Right, and
with the strain of end-times prophecy interpretation called premillennial dispensa-
tionalism that has informed many evangelicals’ perspectives on Jews and Israel.
Whereas premillennial dispensationalism grew out of the teachings of John Nel-
son Darby in the nineteenth century, Goldman leaves no doubt that other forms of
Christian theology supported a robust tradition of Christian Zionist thought dating
back to Puritan New England. And despite the tremendous amount of attention
paid in recent decades to vocal supporters of Israel such as the evangelical pastor
John Hagee, much of the pro-Zionist action in American public life over the
course of the twentieth century emanated from liberal Protestant circles.

Written primarily as an intellectual history of Christian Zionism, Goldman
parses the thinking of major figures ranging from Increase Mather to Jonathan
Edwards, William Blackstone, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Jerry Falwell, not to men-
tion multiple lesser-known religious leaders. Throughout, he acknowledges the
seemingly ubiquitous Israel-themed references that were used to describe God’s
activity in the colonies and new nation. But Goldman also consistently stresses
the fact that such analogies did not automatically “make New England or North
America a substitute for the Promised Land of the Bible” (p. 45). Time and time
again, he argues, prominent voices drew direct connections between ancient Israel
and North America without relinquishing a commitment to Jewish restoration and
a Jewish state. And by the mid-twentieth century an emphasis on the “Judeo-
Christian” underpinning of American society helped buttress the religiosity of
Americans in the face of “godless Communism” even as it reinforced for many
the perceived spiritual ties linking the U.S. with the state of Israel. While it is less
clear how many rank-and-file parishioners carefully fused notions of America-as-
Israel and America-for-Israel, Goldman successfully underscores the continual
presence of prominent pro-Zionist Christian voices in American public life.

In the concluding chapter Goldman chronicles the recent past and highlights
several crucial developments: widespread fears on the political Left that an
“American theocracy” would pursue doomsday policies rather than world
peace; a noticeable decline in support for Israel in certain evangelical circles
coupled with a reduced emphasis on end-times prophecy, and the rapid global
spread of Christian Zionism (p. 174). Goldman’s treatment of these topics is re-
grettably brief, and given his historical focus, he does not explore in any detail the
practical significance of the book’s findings for contemporary political and legal
thought. However, his observations shine a bright spotlight on key twenty-first
century developments deserving further analysis in future studies.
In sum, God’s Country convincingly demonstrates just how mistaken it is to view contemporary Christian Zionism as solely the province of wild-eyed prophecy enthusiasts. In succinct, well-written prose, he calls readers’ attention to key figures and turning points without ever losing sight of the complex interplay of theology and politics or the fine-grained distinctions that frequently existed within various pro-Zionist Christian communities. Interested observers as well as academics whose research intersects with Christian Zionism will benefit from his nuanced exploration of Christian Zionism in America.