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978-1-107-00912-7 - Messianic Religious Zionism Confronts Israeli Territorial Compromises

Motti Inbari

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## Messianic Religious Zionism Confronts Israeli Territorial Compromises

The Six Day War in 1967 profoundly influenced how an increasing number of religious Zionists saw Israeli victory as the manifestation of God's desire to redeem His people. Thousands of religious Israelis joined the Gush Emunim movement in 1974 to create settlements in territories occupied in the war. However, over time, the Israeli governments decided to return territory to Palestinian or Arab control. This was perceived among religious Zionist circles as a violation of God's order. The peak of this process came with the Disengagement Plan in 2005, in which Israel demolished all the settlements in the Gaza Strip and four settlements in the West Bank. This process raised difficult theological questions among religious Zionists: What supreme religious significance could be attributed to these events? Was the State of Israel no longer to be considered a divine tool for the redemption of the Jewish people? This book explores the internal mechanism applied by a group of religious Zionist rabbis in response to their profound disillusionment with the behavior of the state, reflected in an increase in religious radicalization because of the need to cope with the feelings of religious and messianic failure. The research also compares the American Christian Evangelical response to Israeli territorial compromises.

Motti Inbari is the author of *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who Will Build the Third Temple?*, which won the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise Best Publication Award in Israel Studies (2008) and The Ben Shemesh Best Dissertation Award for the Study of Zionism and the State of Israel (2007). His work has appeared in *Israel Studies*, *Hebrew Union College Annual*, *Nova Religio*, *Modern Judaism*, *Journal of Church and State*, and *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*. Prior to his appointment as an Assistant Professor of Religion at the University of North Carolina, Pembroke, he served as a Post Doctoral Associate at the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University.

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MOTTI INBARI

*University of North Carolina, Pembroke*



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*To Aliza, Shani, and Shir – the loves of my life*

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## Acknowledgments

The idea to write a book on the messianic religious Zionist response to Israeli territorial compromises came to me in 2005 as Ariel Sharon, Israel's Prime Minister at that time, announced his Disengagement Plan to evacuate all settlements in the Gaza Strip and four settlements in Samaria. The religious-Zionist community was shocked and the debate over the path of resistance was starting to develop. I paid careful attention to the rabbis' comments, and I realized that there is great diversity of opinions. At that time, it was unclear if the settlers' response would lead to violence and bloodshed. Eventually, the events of the evacuation went smoothly without almost any physical resistance. The only path of struggle used was of civil disobedience.

For more than fifteen years, I have been studying active messianic movements in modern-day Israel. The implementation of the Disengagement Plan triggered me to deepen my studies into the patterns of activities that are the result of prophetic failure. I was interested to examine how the settler's theology would face the changing political realities. After the Disengagement, I decided to examine historically other times when messianic religious Zionism had to deal with Israeli territorial compromises, such as the result of the Israel-Egypt peace process (1982) and the Oslo Accords (1993). The book you are holding now is the product of this research.

I wish to express my gratitude to many people who have taught and assisted me in the years in which I prepared this work.

I am grateful to have Yaakov Ariel as a colleague and friend. He shared with me his expertise, critical insights, and friendship. I used his great wisdom to analyze this complex and dynamic religious movement. It is an honor for me to thank Asher Cohen, Dov Schwartz, and Isaac Hershkovitz for reading parts of the draft manuscript. Their advice was essential to the success of this work. I am also fortunate to have the support of generous colleagues including Eric Flisch, Kenneth Wald, Maria Leppakari, and Jason Olson, who shared their expertise, critical insights, and friendship, as well as dedication and devotion to my research. I am grateful also to the anonymous readers of the manuscript

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