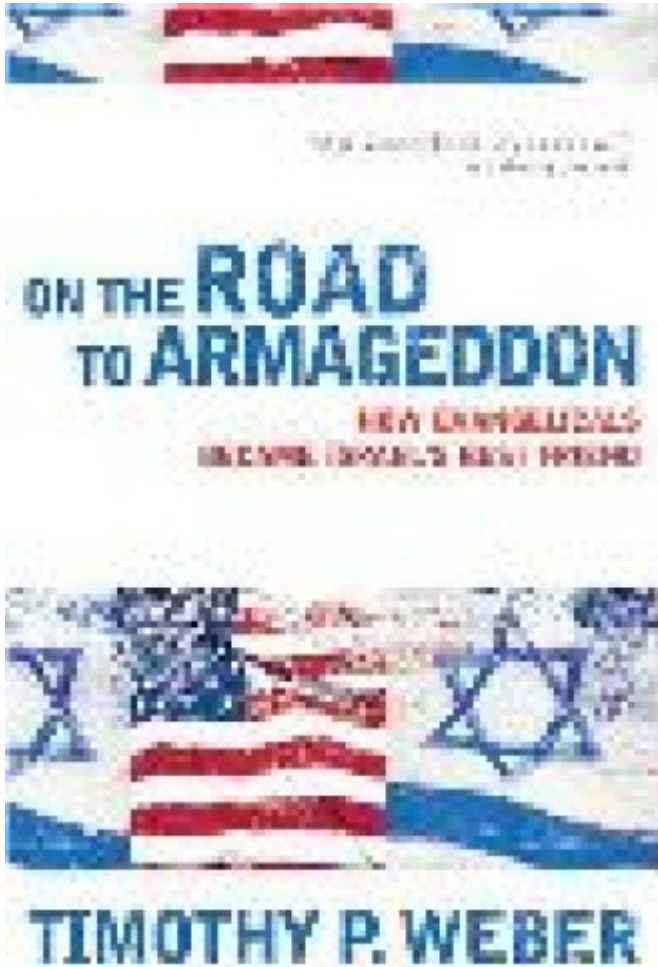


On the Road to Armageddon

reviewed by [Yaakov Ariel](#) in the [July 26, 2005](#) issue

In Review



On The Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friends

Timothy P. Weber
Baker

The alliance between conservative Christians and Jews seems bizarre, even surreal, to many people. Christians and Jews alike have noted that such a development would have been unfathomable throughout most of Christian history. Timothy Weber explores the theological roots and historical evolution of the premillennialist Christian involvement with the Jews and Israel and offers a compelling explanation of the relationship.

Few people are as qualified as he is to write on the subject. An outstanding scholar of the evangelical messianic faith, Weber was one of the first to examine the connection between evangelicals' day-to-day life and their messianic theology. In *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming* he offered brilliant insights into how premillennialist Christians reconcile their messianic faith with the demands of life in the late 20th century. That book is a classic, having gone through numerous editions and made its way into the bibliographies of many students of evangelical Christianity and messianic groups. *On the Road to Armageddon* starts where *Living in the Shadow* left off.

Weber begins the book with an analysis of dispensational premillennialist theology and the manner in which the Jews fit into the dispensationalist biblical exegesis and messianic faith. Originally a belief of a small, elite group in Britain, messianic dispensationalism arrived in America in the later decades of the 19th century and became part and parcel of the worldview of many conservative Protestants in this country. Breaking away from the traditional understanding that the Christian church inherited God's promises for Israel, dispensationalists have differentiated between the church and Israel. They consider the Jews to be continuers of historical Israel and heirs to the covenant between God and his people, and define the church as the body of true believers, those persons who have undergone genuine experiences of conversion and have accepted Jesus as their personal savior.

Dispensationalists assert that true Christian believers will be removed from earth to heaven at the beginning of the apocalypse, will be spared the turmoil of that tumultuous time, and will come back to earth at the end of the millennial period. For the Jews, however, that period will be "the time of Jacob's trouble" prophesied by Jeremiah (30:7). They will encounter a period of persecutions launched by the Antichrist, a tyrannical Jewish leader and messianic imposter who will rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and reinstate the sacrificial system. Following an international battle at Armageddon, a site in northern Israel, the Antichrist's reign will come to an

end, and Jesus will come back to earth with the true believers and establish a global righteous kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital.

Weber expertly explores the dispensationalist faith, showing how the newly acquired messianic hope motivated conservative evangelicals to take interest in the Jews and stirred a passion to evangelize them and to support the Zionist movement.

Conservative Protestants believed that they must educate the Jews about their real mission in history, and American and British evangelicals promoted diplomatic initiatives intended to restore Palestine to the Jews even before the formation of the Zionist movement.

Weber follows the evangelical premillennialist engagement with the Jews and Israel through the 20th century, bringing the saga up-to-date and offering a background to evangelicals' current political backing of Israeli policies. The developments in the life of the Jewish people in the past century have fitted nicely into evangelical messianic expectations. Evangelicals interpreted the rise of the Zionist movement, the rejuvenation of the Hebrew language, the establishment of Jewish settlements in Palestine, the birth of the state of Israel in 1948, and the Israeli conquest of historical Jerusalem in 1967 as "signs of the time," indications that history is unfolding according to God's plans. In addition, they have seen the Israeli endeavor as preparing the ground for the arrival of the messiah.

Since the Six-Day War of 1967, premillennialist evangelicals have anticipated the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem as the next stage in the advancement of the messianic timetable. They have been encouraged by the formation of Orthodox Jewish groups that work toward this and related aims, including the reconstruction of the temple utensils and artifacts and the reinstatement of the sacrificial system. At the turn of the 21st century, evangelical Christians have found themselves supporting right-wing Israeli causes and distancing themselves from Israeli peace efforts.

Weber's research is phenomenal. It seems as though every time an evangelical leader or thinker has spoken or written about or taken an action regarding the Jews, Weber has been there to record it. The book is also well constructed and well written, so it makes for good and even entertaining reading. Weber lets us know what he thinks about persons, events and ideas in a subtle, almost humorous manner. That he is no fan of dispensational premillennialists comes out in his choice of words. He remarks, for example, that "most of the evangelicals who read and

believe the outline of the Left Behind series assume that its plotline is taken more or less out of the Bible,” and he dedicates an entire chapter to “dispensationalism’s dark side,” recording the less-than-favorable opinions that premillennialist evangelicals have had about Jews. “Dispensationalists could use the same argument as anti-Semites, but claim that they were not being anti-Semites,” Weber asserts. He considers the premillennialist evangelical wish to help Jews build the temple dangerous and warns that belief in the apocalypse can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Weber’s lack of admiration for dispensational premillennialists notwithstanding, his evaluations are fair, his analysis splendid, and his style lucid and convincing. I highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in evangelical Christianity and messianic ideas, and in the way they shape popular opinions and policies. *On the Road to Armageddon* is an excellent book, and its author deserves every praise and possible prize for his achievement.