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Christian Hebraism in John Witherspoon's Sermons

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Abstract

The use of Christian Hebraism as a political language of religious discourse has not been thoroughly explored for the eighteenth-century transatlantic sphere. John Witherspoon's works, such as Prayer for National Prosperity (1758) and The Dominion of Providence (1776), are no exception. This article argues that Witherspoon's application of covenant theology and biblical Israel, as a template for the ideal state, conveys a consistency of his perception of the ecclesiastical election of a nation, the responsibilities of monarchs, and the justification of public upheaval in Scotland and the North American sphere.

A thorough examination of the Prayer for National Prosperity delves deep into how Witherspoon uses biblical motifs to address the political and ecclesiastical accountability of the people and the monarch in a covenant with God. Moving on to The Dominion of Providence written on the Eve of the Revolutionary War, this survey addresses Witherspoon subscription to the national interpretations of covenant theology that perceived the North American sphere as the sole covenanted, proto-democratic Israel in a sea of other Protestant nations.

Introduction

John Witherspoon's Scottish and American writings, such as *Prayer for National Prosperity* (1758) and *The Dominion of the Providence of Men* (1776), remain underexplored within the recent academic interest in political Christian Hebraism as a lingua franca of the eighteenth century American political sphere.[1] Christian Hebraism, as a political language, is rooted in

[1] John Witherspoon, *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men: A Sermon preached at Princeton, on the 17th of May, 1776. Being the general fast appointed by the Congress*

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the exegesis of prominent biblical motifs and episodes from the Hebrew Bible, applied in sermons, newspapers, and literature from the fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth century.[2] The Hebrew Bible provides patriotic allegories, motifs, and narratives through its recounting of the history of biblical Israel. As a result, the Hebrew Bible was embraced as part of the national history for Reformed nations such as the Netherlands and Scotland.[3] Thus, motifs from the Hebrew Bible serve as allegories that bridge the gap between an imagined past and contemporary reality in various texts, such as sermons. Through these allegories, authors of ecclesiastical writings engage with their audiences in discussions about shared political and ecclesiastical opinions, as well as religious and political convictions. Thus, Christian Hebraism acts as a democratizing rhetorical element, bridging communication between various religious and ecclesiastical spheres and between the elite and the emerging public sphere.[4] Christian Hebraism thus provides the vocabulary to construct shared national identities, such as national anthems or myths, through which collectives such as nations define unifying civic, proto-ethnic, and religious cohesiveness.[5] However, the mechanics of Christian Hebraism as a democratizing and political language in sermons by Scottish and American

through the United Colonies. To which is added, an address to the natives of Scotland residing in America (Philadelphia, 1776); John Witherspoon, *The Works of John Witherspoon: Containing Essays, Sermons, &c., On important Subjects ... Together With his Lectures on Moral Philosophy, Eloquence and Divinity, his Speeches in the American Congress, and many other valuable Pieces, never before published in this Country* (Edinburgh, 1815); John Witherspoon, *An address to the Natives of Scotland residing in America. Being an appendix to a sermon preached at Princeton on a general fast* (London, 1778). For a discussion on *The Dominion of Providence* as a Jeremiad refer to Richard B. Sher, 'Witherspoon's Dominion of Providence and the Scottish Jeremiad Tradition' in Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten (eds), *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1990), 46–64.

2 Christian Hebraism see Alison Coudert and Jeffrey Shoulson, *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia, 2004), here 106–17. The term 'Hebrew Bible' is used here in accordance with Gordon Schochet's critique of the term 'Old Testament' in Fania Oz-Salzberger, Gordon Schochet and Meirav Jones, *Political Hebraism: Judaic Sources in Early Modern Political Thought* (Jerusalem, 2008). It refers to the original text of the Tanakh, which is also known as 'The Old Testament' in Christian theology. By using the term 'Hebrew Bible,' we can gain a broader understanding of the texts, encompassing both Judeo-Christian traditions and independent Jewish and Christian interpretations of the text itself.

3 Theodor Dunkelgrün, 'Neerlands Israel: Political Theology, Christian Hebraism, Biblical Antiquarianism and Historical Myth' in Laura Cruz and Willem Frijgoff (eds), *Myth in History, History in Myth. Proceedings of the Third International Conference on the Society for Netherlandic History* (Leiden, 2009), 201–36.

4 Fania Oz-Salzberger, Gordon Schochet and Meirav Jones (eds), *Political Hebraism* (Jerusalem, 2008), xi.

5 A more comprehensive explanation of Christian Hebraism and nationhood is needed. For an introduction to how biblical Jews and biblical Israel constituted archetypal nations, refer to Benedict Anderson's seminal work Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*

clergymen during the American Revolution remains a significant academic lacuna. This gap is particularly notable given that both Scotland and America, as Alexander Murdoch and Ned Landsman highlight, share Presbyterian heritage.[6] Thus, analysing the texts of Presbyterian clergymen active in both Scotland and North America can address this gap, enhancing our understanding of Christian Hebraism as a transatlantic political language in the eighteenth century Anglo-American political sphere.

Thus, to ignite the analysis of continuities and shifts in transatlantic Christian Hebraism between the North American and Scottish sphere, the person to start with is one of the seven Founding Fathers born in Europe and a Scotsmen by birth: John Witherspoon. Recent research still debates the continuities of Witherspoon's ecclesiastical writings.[7] The main question is how the content and vocabulary of his ecclesiastical writings changed during his voyage to America, where he was confronted with emerging revivalist traditions that are perceived as the first uniting ecclesiastical event in America and an elevated status of the Hebrew Bible as a political patriotic text imbuing sermons, newspapers, and political writings of Founding Fathers such as Thomas Jefferson.[8] Hence, a method to trace continuities and shifts in his writings is to analyse two texts for vocabulary and motifs of Christian Hebraism.

This article aims to answer two questions: What tropes and motifs of Christian Hebraism imbue Witherspoon's text in Scotland and the North American sphere? What changes can be observed in Witherspoon's application of covenant theology, a constituent trope of Christian Hebraism, during his voyage from Scotland to America?

The continuant application of the term covenant in Witherspoon's ecclesiastical and political writings indicate a consistency in his Calvinistic Orthodox beliefs and his political conviction in the transatlantic British sphere. Through his writings Witherspoon discussed the boundaries of civic obedience, the continuity of national covenants, the justifiability of resistance, and the role of the monarch within a nation in the classroom and on the pulpit.[9] Hence to

(London, 2006) and Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood. Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1997).

6 Alexander Murdoch, *Scotland and America, c.1600–c.1800* (London, 2004); Ned Landsman, *Scotland and its first American Colony*, 1683–765 (Princeton, 1985).

7 On the question concerning Witherspoon's consistencies refer for instance to Gideon Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2017), here 80 (pos. 1745) [Kindle Edition].

8 A comparative and conclusive analysis of the application of Christian Hebraism among the Founding Fathers still needs to be included in the academic discourse. However, Shalev, *American Zion* (New Haven, 2014), esp. 53–81 refers to speeches of Founding Fathers such as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. Seth Perry offers an excellent overview on the application of the Hebrew Bible as a political text in the North American Sphere, refer to Seth Perry, *Bible Culture and Authority in the Early United States* (Princeton, 2018). For a more comprehensive overview of how Christian Hebraism imbued the Founding Fathers' language, it is advisable to refer to the Founders Archive: https://founders.archives.gov/.

9 Gideon Mailer, 'Anglo-Scottish Union and John Witherspoon's American Revolution,' *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 67 (2010), 709–46, here 710f.

understand the suggested continuities between his Scottish and American writings his sermon *National Prosperity*, initially delivered in 1758 in front of his congregation in Paisley, and *The Dominion of Providence over Men* (1776), presented on the eve of the Revolutionary war, are analysed for concepts of covenant theology and motifs of Christian Hebraism.[10] The former, *Prayer for National Prosperity*, aimed to remind his congregation of the imperative to remain faithful, linking irreligion to a decline of Britain's political power.[11] His *The Dominion of Providence* presented on the eve of the Revolutionary War, entails another crucial writing in its foreword: *An Address to the Natives of Scotland*. Through the combined publication of *An Address to the Natives of Scotland* and the *Dominion of Providence*, Witherspoon offers a fine crafted line of arguments to justify the American Independence, based on a distinct concept of covenant theology, specifically tailored to address the Scottish natives in the British Empire. Thus, before analysing the aforementioned publications, it is essential to examine the overarching concepts of American and Scottish covenant theology and how their application differed in the eighteenth century American and Scottish contexts. This foundational understanding will set the stage for a close reading of Witherspoon's texts.

Christian Hebraism and covenant theology in Scotland and the North American sphere

Covenanting Presbyterians identified Scotland as an ecclesiastical and Protestant nation with a broader mission grounded in Calvinist principles; one which aimed to establish Presbyterianism in Scotland, England and Ireland.[12] Central to the Scottish Presbyterians who identified as Covenanters was their commitment to various bonds or covenants, notably to the National Covenant (1638) and to the Solemn League and Covenant (1643), in which they pledged to maintain their chosen forms of church government and worship and swore to abolish Episcopacy.[13] The narrative of covenant theology is deeply entwinned with biblical motifs, particularly those associated with the covenantal relationship between God and His people, drawing parallels with apparently elected religious or

[10] John Witherspoon, *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men: A Sermon preached at Princeton, on the 17th of May, 1776. Being the general fast appointed by the Congress through the United Colonies. To which is added, an address to the natives of Scotland residing in America* (Philadelphia, 1776); John Witherspoon, *The Works of John Witherspoon: Containing Essays, Sermons, &c., On important Subjects ... Together With his Lectures on Moral Philosophy, Eloquence and Divinity, his Speeches in the American Congress, and many other valuable Pieces, never before published in this Country* (Edinburgh, 1815); John Witherspoon, *An address to the Natives of Scotland residing in America. Being an appendix to a sermon preached at Princeton on a general fast* (London, 1778).

[11] Thomas P. Miller, 'John Witherspoon and Scottish Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy in America,' *Rhetorica*, 10 (1992), 381–403, here 386.

[12] Stephen, *Scottish Presbyterians and the Act of Union 1707*, 24.

[13] Bowie, 'A 1706 Manifest for an Armed Rising against an Incorporating Union,' 258f.

national groups like the ancient biblical Jews.[14] Alongside covenanting Presbyterians who utilised the biblical covenant to defend the National Covenant and the Solemn League, other Presbyterian sermons emerged using episodes from the Hebrew Bible to safeguard the position of the Church of Scotland within the Union with England. In *A Gentleman in the City* dated February 4th, 1703, Robert Wylie, for instance, underscored the indigenous nature of Presbyterian Church governance, noting that every Scottish Civil War stemmed from attempts to introduce Episcopacy or Catholicism onto Scottish soil. Wylie vehemently asserted that wishing for the reinstatement of prelacy in Scotland contradicted loyalty to the Scottish nation and undermined the nation's well-being, likening it to inviting the kingdom's ruin and enslavement to England.[15]

From the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, covenant theology and Christian Hebraism remained a prominent political language in both the civic and ecclesiastical spheres of Scotland, as the history of biblical Israel was seen as the perfect legal codex and blueprint for an ideal state.[16] In Scotland, motifs of Christian Hebraism, such as references to the priesthood or presbyters in the temple of Jerusalem, were used to debate the indulgence of Episcopalians in the Scottish context after 1707.[17] In North America, narratives of rebellion against King David or King Solomon were utilized to justify resistance against the monarchy in sermons and pamphlets after 1765.[18] Thus, Christian Hebraism provided a language to accommodate changes in the relationship with England in the two cultural provinces of the Anglo-centric Empire.[19] It offered linguistic tools for the public sphere and the political elite to address and navigate America's detachment from England and Scotland's alignment with the Anglo-Scottish Union in the eighteenth century. The other combining element of Christian Hebraism in Scotland and the North American sphere is covenant the-

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14 Daniel J. Elazar, 'The Political Theory of Covenant: Biblical Origins and Modern Developments,' *Publius* 10, no. 4 (Autumn 1980), 3–30, here 5f.

15 Robert Wylie, *Letter from a Gentleman in the City to a Minister in the Country* (n.a.1703), 17–8.

16 Fania Oz-Salzberger, 'The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism: Then and Now,' in Fania Oz-Salzberger, Gordon Schochet and Meirav Jones (eds), *Political Hebraism: Judaic Sources in Early Modern Political Thought* (Jerusalem, 2008), 232.

17 Similar to research on Christian Hebraism and its application throughout the American Revolution, a systematic approach to Christian Hebraism as a political language is still missing. However, refer to a short overview of this topic in Alison Coudert and Jeffrey Shoulson, *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia, 2004); and compare the reprinted sermons of Andrew Cant, *A Sermon preached at Edinburgh on Thursday the Thirtieth of January M. DCC.VII* (n.a. 1707); Anonymous, *An Historical Account of the Union, Betwixt the Egyptians and Israelites* (n.a. 1710); John Dickson, *A Sermon Preached in the Church of Air* (n.a. 1713); Robert Wylie, *A Speech without Doors concerning Toleration* (n.a. 1703).

18 Shalev, *American Zion*, 25f.

19 John Clive and Bernard Bailyn, 'England's Cultural Provinces: Scotland and America,' *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 11(1954), 200–13.

ology.[20] Covenant theology, emerging predominately among Reformed Protestant nations during the seventeenth century, creates collective national and ecclesiastical identities by defending a binding set of agreements between God, the nation and the ruling power and a historical lineage to the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew Bible constitutes here the patriotic text of the first covenanted biblical nations: the Israelites.[21] As both an ecclesiastical and political group, Covenanters resist simplistic definitions, according to Chris R. Langley, because the theological frameworks these groupings adhered to have not yet been sufficiently studied for Scotland.[22] To secure Scotland's ecclesiastical position in the Union and to find a way to embrace a more inclusive British identity, the 'Two Kingdom doctrine' and the covenants that exalted the Scottish Presbyterian Church over the Church of Scotland needed to be redefined. Despite the small number of radical Covenanters, the emotional impact of the Covenants remained strong in the political imagination of both the audience and the clergymen. Moreover, those among the Covenanters who adhered to the idea that each individual played a part, and that Scotland resembled ancient Israel and constituted a chosen nation advocated for Presbyterianism as the only true form of Church government.[23]

In Scotland, covenanted theology significantly shaped debates on the Union with England after 1707. It became a focal point in discussions about Northern British national identity, the place of the Scottish people and the Church of Scotland within the Union.[24] The identification of Scotland with the society and covenant of biblical Israel conferred upon it a distinct national mission: the propagation of Presbyterianism throughout the British Isles. Scotland's national identification with biblical Israel in the years leading up to the Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707, was exclusive in character and confined to discussions concerning the inclusion of different Protestant groups and the opposition to Episcopacy in the overarching concept of Scottish Israel. After the Union with England, nationally inclusive interpretations that

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20 For an introductory overview of the term covenant theology see Mark Jones, 'The Old Covenant,' in Michael Haykin and Mark Jones (eds), *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen, 2011); Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading its Theology in Historical Context. The Westminster Assembly and the Reformed Faith* (Phillipsburg, 2009) and Harrison Perkins, *Reformed Covenant Theology. A Systematic Introduction* (Bellingham 2024). For Scottish covenant tradition see Chris Langley, *The National Covenant in Scotland 1638–1689* (Woodbridge, 2020); Laura A.M. Stewart, *Rethinking the Scottish Revolution. Covenanter Scotland, 1637–1651* (Oxford, 2015) and David George Mullan, 'A Hotter Sort of Protestantism? Comparisons between French and Scottish Calvinisms,' *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 39, no. 1 (2008), 45–69.

21 Miriam Bodian, 'The Biblical Jewish Republic and the Dutch New Israel in Seventeenth Century Dutch Thought,' in Fania Oz-Salzberger, Gordon Schochet and Meirav Jones (eds), *Political Hebraism: Judaic Sources in Early Modern Political Thought* (Jerusalem, 2008), 149.

22 Chris Langley, *The National Covenant in Scotland 1638 -1689* (Woodbridge, 2020), 1–21.

23 Jim Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom, 1660–1800* (London, 2001), 41.

24 Colin Kidd, 'Conditional Britons: The Scots Covenanting Traditions and the Eighteenth-Century British State,' *The English Historical Review*, 117, no. 474, 1147–76, here 1155.

emphasised Scotland's elected status or highlighted the ancestry of Presbyterian identity, challenging the status of the Church of England's Episcopacy, were pushed to the fringes of society.[25] Conversely, a second, more universal reading of covenants, influenced by the Dutch double-coded interpretations of covenant theology existed in Scotland. This interpretation existed outside of ideas of national electiveness and emphasised that every country could be the source of religious regeneration and participate in a chosen covenant with God. This second interpretation seems to be the prominent and more accepted one in Scotland after the Act of Union, since it is not exalting Scotland's ecclesiastical status over England.[26] However, the Act of Union did not lead to the disappearance of national interpretations of the covenant in Scotland, it remained prominent in sermons by those criticizing the toleration of Episcopalians in Scotland or the merging of the 'Two Kingdoms' advocated by the Church of England, as seen for instance in the writings of Thomas Boston.[27] Another vital aspect of Covenant theology is the second kingdom doctrine, which distinguishes between the spiritual and earthly realm based on the covenant of grace and the covenant of works. The Church represents the spiritual realm, while the earthly realm, along with the covenant of works, is associated with the civil kingdom on earth.

Different Calvinist traditions offer various interpretations of this doctrine. In the Scottish Calvinist tradition, it is commonly understood that the ecclesiastical and civil kingdoms should remain separate, with each member of the covenanted realm—particularly those in the civil kingdom—being accountable for their actions. The relationship between these two kingdoms remained a subject of debate in the eighteenth century; however, for covenanting Scottish Presbyterians, this doctrine provided a basis for justifying rebellion against the monarch in instances where the monarch either supported an established Church or threatened the spiritual well-being of the earthly realm due to a lack of faith.

Additionally, the exclusivity of this doctrine is also a topic of discussion. Staunch covenanting Presbyterians viewed the 'Two Kingdom doctrine' as a national framework tied to a specific people and territory. This meat that there was a significant challenge looking to reconcile English Reformed views of the 'Two Kingdom doctrine' with the Scottish perspective. The Church of England was after all an established Church, which had a universal approach that did not favour national exclusivity. Hence, the extent of the application of the 'Two Kingdom doctrine' and covenant theology needed to be discussed in sermons surrounding the Union.[28]

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25 Karin Bowie, *Scottish Public Opinion and the Anglo-Scottish Union* 1699–1707 (Rochester, 2007).

26 Daryl C. Cornett, 'The American Revolutions Role in the Reshaping of Calvinistic Protestantism,' *The Journal of Presbyterian Historical Society*, 82 (2004), 244–57, here 253.

27 Jeffrey Stephen, *Scottish Presbyterians and the Act of Union* (Edinburgh, 2007), 116–11 and Thomas Boston, *Memoirs of the Life, Time, and Writings of the Reverend and Learned Thomas Boston* (London, 1899).

28 David Vandrunen, 'The Two Kingdoms Doctrine and the Relationship of Church and State in the Early Reformed Tradition,' *Journal of Church and State*, 49 (2007), 743–63.

In contrast to Scotland, early American covenant theology seems to be attached to a distinct geographical territory. In the emerging provincial and later national American public sphere covenant theology was used to define the parameters of national independence from Great Britain and Europe. Hence, by identifying America as the sole physical embodiment of covenanted biblical Israel America constituted the sole elected nation in direct contrast to a multitude of Pharaonic European Egypt's.[29] In other words, for covenanting Presbyterians in Scotland, the possibility existed that each Reformed Protestant nation could embody the new Israel at one point, since the favour of God could wane and alternate between nations.[30] American covenant theology, however, perceived America as the sole covenanted Israel. Thus, American covenant theology endorsed politicians like James Madison in remodelling the new American nation after the Republic of biblical Israel.[31] These nationalised interpretations of covenanted theology endow America with a missionary character and lead to the assumption that similar to biblical covenanted Israel in the Hebrew Bible America was bound to disseminate the principles of liberty, Protestant identity, and concepts of a people-led governance to other nations. This missionary character was later transferred into concepts of American Imperialism, and Manifest Destiny, designed to shape not only America but Europe after the image of the ancient, covenanted nation of Israel.[32] In essence, America's identification with Israel encompassed both national and universal themes of covenant theology. However, in contrast to Scotland, there existed universal interpretations of covenant theology next to national interpretations that deemed America the sole defender of Protestantism in the world.[33] Furthermore, the interplay between universal and national interpretations supported the detachment of the North American sphere from Britain, supporting the self-identification of the North American sphere as the new Israel. The new Israel, or American Israel combined universal, hence missionary, and national interpretations of covenant theology. This prompts the question to what extent clergymen like Witherspoon, who were trained and educated in Scotland, subscribed to the concept of American Israel and the amplified American nationalised interpretation of Scottish covenant theology? How did his perspectives on covenant theology evolve within the American context?[34]

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29 Shalev, *American Zion*, 54. On American national capital refer furthermore to Carol Berkin, *A Sovereign People: The Crises of the 1790s and the Birth of American Nationalism* (New York, 2017), especially 81–152 and Elliot Grosby, *Hebraism in Religion, History and Politics: The Third Culture* (Oxford, 2021), 52.

30 Daniel J. Elazar, 'The Political Theory of Covenant: Biblical Origins and Modern Developments,' *Publius* (1980), 3–38, here 5f.

31 James H. Smylie, 'Madison and Witherspoon: Theological Roots of American Political Thought,' *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* (Spring 1961), 118–32.

32 Shalev, *American Zion*, 18 and 51–8. More nuanced and coherent research is needed, however, to explore the relationship between covenant theology, American Imperialism, and Manifest Destiny.

33 Douglas W. Kennard, *Biblical Covenantalism, Vol. I: Biblical Covenantalism in Torah: Judaism, Covenant Nomism, and Atonement* (Eugene, 2021), 55–62.

34 Shalom Goldman, *Gods Sacred Tongue: Hebrew and the American Imagination* (Chapel Hill, 2004), 70.

The next pages will answer the following questions: What continuities of covenant theology and motifs of Christian Hebraism exist in Witherspoon's writings on Revolution? How does he employ allegories of biblical Jewish history in his texts? To what degree did John Witherspoon adhere to the concept of American Israel? A close analysis of his writings provides an overview of how biblical tropes related to biblical Israel function in the works of this Presbyterian Scotsman in America and it will give insights on how biblical covenanted Israel became a trope of a common comprehensible language in the politicalized public sphere on the eve of the Revolution.

Concept of national revival and biblical Israel in John Witherspoon's Scottish writings

In his earlier Scottish sermons, such as *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* or *The Arcana of Church Policy* (1753), Witherspoon skilfully incorporated motifs from the Hebrew Bible to criticize the Church politics associated with the Moderate Party of the Church of Scotland and its involvement in the Anglo-Scottish Union.[35] These sermons predominantly featured conventional expressions of biblical Jewish history, effectively delineating the boundaries of acceptable individual and collective behaviour in a Christian society. In referring to anti-Jewish stereotypes like the alleged 'unpeaceable, unsocial spirit of the Jews', Witherspoon utilized a common language, in which biblical episodes of Jewish history receive a double-coded reading in the public sphere.[36] This double-coded reading endowed all protagonists of the Hebrew Bible with interchangeable characteristics of virtue and vice.[37] These motifs were frequently intertwined with idealized interpretations of biblical Jewish character, elevating biblical Judaism whilst simultaneously portraying modern Judaism as an 'unnatural and stagnated religion'.[38] Witherspoon's application of both negative and positivistic readings of biblical Jewish motifs in his texts is a common trope in pan-European forms of Christian Hebraism and is not changing in his Scottish and American writings. Indeed, the terminology of biblical covenanted Israel and references to biblical monarchs such as Moses as the perfect lawgiver remains prominent in sermons in the European and Scottish sphere among most Presbyterians in the first decades of the eighteenth century.[39] References to biblical Jewish covenants in Witherspoon's Scottish writings primarily focus on national revivals, prosperity, and the relationship between national liberty and maintaining the covenant with God. This systematic application of the concept of

35 Walter McGinty, *An Animated Son of Liberty: A Life of John Witherspoon* (Bury St. Edmunds, 2012), 16 (pos. 529), [Kindle-Edition].

36 See John Witherspoon, *The absolute necessity of salvation through Christ. A sermon, preached before the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, in the High Church of Edinburgh, on Monday, January 2. 1758. By John Witherspoon, A. M. Minister of the Gospel at Paisley. To which is subjoined a short account of the present state of the Society* (Edinburgh,1758), 10.

37 Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2003), 36.

38 See as cited in Ibid.

39 Coudert and Shoulson, *Hebraica Veritas*, 51–8.

biblical Israel and the idea of a national covenant, outlining the relationship between governing power, God, and citizens, is prominently found in Witherspoon's *Prayer for National Prosperity and the Revival of Religion* (1758).[40] In this sermon, Witherspoon utilized the story of Israel to remind his congregation in Paisley that only constant religious regeneration could lead them out of the dire economic situation after the Seven Years' War.[41] Witherspoon compared their despair with the despair of Israel in the Exodus story, commanding them to 'review the History of his [God's] Conduct to the Church and People of Israel, how, with a mighty hand and outstretched Arm, he delivered them from bondage'.[42]

The Exodus story is a recurring theme in covenant theology, suggesting a narrative where religious devotion leads society out of material and national dependence.[43] Witherspoon translated the motif of religious revival as the catalyst for God's favouring of specific nations throughout world history. His hope was that through religious regeneration, Great Britain would once again find favour in the eyes of God.[44] Moreover, Witherspoon emphasised that a resurgence of faith would bring divine favour and renewed prosperity to the British nation.[45]

Notably, in this application, Witherspoon did not envision his congregation, the Church of Scotland, or even the broader national ecclesiastical body as direct embodiments of biblical Israel. However, he employed Israel as an allegory to bolster his argument, asserting that, akin to Israel, the nation would experience commercial and national prosperity anew upon the revitalization of the faith.[46] In this interpretation Israel is an imagined metaphorical place of memory, a *Lieu de Memoire*, symbolizing a metaphorical history Scotland could retreat to, in the hope for national improvement. Scottish covenanting sermons indicate that clergymen continued to draw upon biblical references to Israel, the Hebrew Bible and biblical forms of the imagined Jew to create *Lieux de Memoires* for the covenanted and uncovenanted Presbyterian clergy in Scotland. These *Lieux de Memoires* allowed the Presbyterian clergy, and in this case Witherspoon, to retreat to an imagined past rooted in biblical Jewish history, navigating social, religious, and national discussions on the design of the Union and giving them a way to safeguard Scottish Presbyterian identity within the Anglo-Scottish Union. However, this *Lieu de Memoire* is not exclusively binding Scotland to Israel on a national level.[47]

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40 John Witherspoon, Prayer for National Prosperity' in Idem *On Essays on Important Subjects: Intended to Establish the Doctrine of Salvation by Grace, and to point out its Influence on Holiness of Life* (Edinburgh,1765), 241–79.

41 Witherspoon, 'Prayer for National Prosperity,' 276.

42 See Ibid., 277.

43 Shalev, *American Zion*, 18f and Jan Assmann, *The Invention of Religion* (Princeton, 2020), 334. For a detailed account on the importance of the Exodus story in political though refer to Ibid. 11–25.

44 Goldman, *God's Country*, 73.

45 Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution*, 27.

46 Witherspoon, 'Prayer for National Prosperity,' 274.

47 On the term *Lieu de Memoire* as a place of memory shaped by those eligible to influence the public opinion could retreat to refer to Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,' *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), 7–24.

Witherspoon's Biblical Israel: On eternal and everchanging covenants

A recurring theme of Witherspoon's American sermons are references to biblical stories found in the books of Samuel and the book of Judges.[48] In his sermons and pamphlets disseminated within the American colonial sphere, he offered a distinctive discussion on the place of the people as a political unit in a nation. Within his sermons Witherspoon discusses the merits of monarchy versus the rightfulness of upheaval. These sermons furthermore introduce debates on the position of the people as a political unit in the nation.[49] Within this framework Witherspoon engages the nation in discussions about the legitimacy of monarchies and establishes ecclesiastical and political criteria for his readers to define the parameters of just rulership and governance. The metaphorical *Lieu de Memoire* Witherspoon draws from to make his readers understand what just regency entails, are allegories from King Ahab's and King David's stories.[50]

King Ahab, according to the Book of Kings, brought Israel close to disintegration and lost his right to rule due to prohibiting his citizens from praying and by re-introducing idolatry. Consequently, Ahab's violation of the covenant with God resulted in profound suffering for his people, as his religious transgressions directly influenced both the ecclesiastical and physical aspects of the national body.[51] In Witherspoon's perspective, societal turmoil and revolutions against unfaithful and unjust rulers are inevitable and a civic duty for the citizens of a nation.[52] The aim is to restore a nation to God's favour and prosperity. Witherspoon underscored that the catharsis following revolutions and other crises is pivotal, guiding a nation to renew its faith and reclaim prosperity:

> We have a very remarkable national instance of this imperfect reformation in the Jews. They were at first shamefully and amazingly prone to idolatry. They continued so under repeated strokes till the terrible desolation they met with at the Babylonish captivity: from that period, however, notwithstanding their great guilt in other particulars, they never returned to idolatry.[53]

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48 See for instance John Witherspoon, *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men*, 37.

49 Christoph Pearl, 'Pulpits of Revolution: Presbyterian Political Thought in the Era of the American Revolution,' *The Journal of Presbyterian History*, 95 (2017), 44-17, here 11.

50 For utilizations of King Ahab's story refer for instance to Witherspoon, *On Essays on Important Subjects*, 163. For King David as a perfect monarch refer for instance to John Witherspoon, *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men*, 38.

51 On the utilization of King David and King Ahab's in Christian Hebraism refer for example to Shalev, *American Zion*, 27 and Grosby, *Hebraism in Religion, History and Politics*, 67.

52 Pearl, 'Pulpits of Revolution,' 9.

53 See John Witherspoon, 'A Practical Treatise on Regeneration,' in John Witherspoon, *The Works of John Witherspoon: Containing Essays, Sermons, &c., On important Subjects ... Together With his Lectures on Moral Philosophy, Eloquence and Divinity, his Speeches in the American Congress, and many other valuable Pieces, never before published in this Country* (Edinburgh, 1815), 92–241, here 102.

Witherspoon identifies the exile of the Israelite nation to Babylon—a place that represents idolatry in Christianity—as the metaphor of national decline.[54] In this interpretation, Britain represents Babylon, but America, the repented Israel, is bestowed with a higher moral value.[55] The recurring themes in Witherspoon's application of biblical Israel in the North American sphere are the necessity of national religious regeneration that will lead to national independence, national prosperity and the conceptualization of socio-political accountability. For Witherspoon, the collective nation is the agent delivering the covenant with God. It is not dependent on individuals such as heroes or kings. Witherspoon's viewpoint is that the chosen status of nations is not permanent; it can be forfeited and must be regained through repentance and faithfulness in society. This distinctive status can shift among different governments over time, as no king or country permanently holds the position of the chosen nation.[56] Hence, the form of covenant theology Witherspoon is utilizing speaks of a temporary understanding of covenant theology, since nation being elected or chosen by God can alter and move towards another Protestant state. Thus, Witherspoon gave reasons and explained the conditions for when a covenant and elected status of a nation was terminated.

Hence, Witherspoon's sermons printed before 1775 persisted in being infused with allegories drawn from periods of Jewish history wherein monarchs either lost faith or placed trust in dubious ministers, thereby jeopardizing the faith and prosperity of their nation.[57] Hence before the discarded Olive Branch Declaration of 1775, Witherspoon interpreted the Revolution as predominately caused by disloyal and unfaithful ministers and politicians who worked against the interest of a just monarchy.[58] Even though his *The Dominion of the Providence of Men* was printed on the eve of the Revolutionary war, Witherspoon primarily denounced the British Parliament for letting the crisis that started in 1765 escalate into a military conflict. He equated the wrong doings of the British parliament to Haman's action in the Book of Esther. Haman is a dominant trope to describe unjust and evil ministers since he denied the biblical Jews an open demonstration of their faith and manipulated his king to wage war on the religion of biblical Israel. Similar to Witherspoon's use of the story of Ahab, Haman's storyline functions as a warning and a self-fulfilling prophecy for irreligious and cruel politicians:

> The most mischievous designs of Haman, the son of Hamedatha the Agagite against Mordecai the Jew, and the nation from which he sprung, turned out at last to his own destruction, the honour of Mordecai and the salvation and peace of his people.[59]

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54 Hays Morrisson, 'The Public Interest of Religion,' 557–8.

55 Daryl Cornett, 'The American Revolutions Role in the Reshaping of Calvinistic Protestantism,' *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 82, no. 4 (2004), 244–57, here 251.

56 Hays Morrisson, 'The Public Interest of Religion,' 555.

57 Daniel N. Robinson, 'The Scottish Enlightenment and the American Founding,' *The Monist*, 90 (2007), 170–81, here 177.

58 Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution*, pos. 5746 [Kindle – Edition].

59 See Witherspoon, *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men*, 21–2.

Yet while Witherspoon's support for the Revolution did not waver, his chosen villain and scapegoat for the imperial crisis changes in his sermons after 1775. Once the British monarch's involvement in the military conflict became undeniable, Witherspoon seemed to turn away from the story of Haman as the story of an advisor conspiring against the king and the nation, to rationalize public upheaval and the imperative of rebellion by a righteous nation, and returned to allegories using King Ahab and non-covenanted, failed Israelite kings as allegories for the British throne. By using these kings as allegories for condemning the actions of the monarch in the imperial crisis, he identifies King George III with biblical kings that betrayed the Israelites and were responsible for ecclesiastical condemnation.[60]

In the year 1775 Witherspoon decided that the monarch deviated from his religious and moral obligations to uphold the free exercise of religion, spiritual revival, and the nation's prosperity—concepts all validated by imagined biblical Jewish past. This, led directly to his convincement that the people needed to take up arms against the monarch to uphold the covenant with God. Hence, it was not the parliament as an institution advising the monarch, but the monarch as the source of political power that was now thought to be the main covenant breaching agent.[61] Hence, for Witherspoon to uphold the Protestant covenant between God and Christianity, the people needed to take up arms and rebel against the king. Nevertheless, the revolutionary upheaval, as the subsequent paragraph emphasises, is for Witherspoon not an American but a Christian duty. Witherspoon refrains from conferring a chosen identity exclusively upon a single realm or nation since every nation could mirror biblical Israel in its supposed status as a chosen nation and national design.

Witherspoon and American Israel: A new elected Nation

Another motif in Witherspoon's contemplations on national regeneration and the justification for American independence is the story of David and Goliath's fight in the book of Samuel 17. According to Witherspoon, God favoured David not because he was bestowed with a unique covenant but due to his religious virtue. Despite Goliath's military superiority, David's religiosity and virtue rendered him the triumphant favourite.[62] However, in other sermons, David is depicted as facing warfare and disaster, illustrating that, in Witherspoon's Calvinistic perspective, covenants must undergo constant renewal. Hence God, by testing David and the biblical Israel's religious conviction demonstrates that his favour can transcend various covenanted nations. Whenever the nation of Israel or King David became less observant, God chastised them with the loss of independence.[63] According to Witherspoon, the dispersal of Israel and David's regal decline symbolized a

60 Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution*, pos. 5390 [Kindle – Edition].
61 Witherspoon, *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men*, 23.
62 Ibid., 37f.
63 Ibid., 37.

cautionary lesson for Americans – a warning that they would forfeit God's favour and lose the Revolutionary War if they failed in their religious duty.[64] In this episode, David symbolizes the colonial armies, favoured by God due to their religious awakening, entering the arena against a far more powerful enemy.

Witherspoon's use of this episode of biblical Israelite history underscores the distinctions between himself and other advocates of American independence.[65] In his *An Address to the Natives of Scotland* (1776), Witherspoon emphasises that God currently favours America due to Britain's increasing irreligiosity.[66] However, he emphasises that the catharsis and repentance of the British nation and state would pave the way for a renewed covenant between God and Great Britain.[67] Consequently, he urges the Scots in the *Dominion of Providence* to support American independence. The victory of the American rebels would reform the British and force the people and the monarch to revive their Christian faith. Hence, the American independence would be a catalyst for Britain to rebuild its Reformed Protestant identity and enter a joint covenanted Reformed Protestant Empire with the North American sphere.[68]

Witherspoon's universal understanding of Israel's covenant diverges from the more popular understanding of an American Israel as a unique, eternally covenanted nation, seen for instance in Ezra Stiles application of biblical Israel in his sermons. Ezra Stiles (1727–95), a Congregational minister, applies solely nationalised forms of covenant theology in his sermon *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor* (1783).[69] In this sermon Stiles refers both to pre-Israelite (Jacobean) and Noahic covenants.[70] This new covenanted American Israel embodies the principles of just theocracy and democratic virtues and constitutes the sole defender of Protestant identity.[71] Hence Stiles, is different from Witherspoon in the exclusiveness of the covenant, since for Stiles America is the eternal chosen nation. Stiles monop-

64 Shalev, *American Zion*, 84.

65 Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution*, pos. 5412 [Kindle-Edition].

66 Witherspoon, *An Address to the Natives of Scotland residing in America*, 14.

67 Ibid., 15.

68 Ibid., 17.

69 See Ezra Stiles, *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor: A sermon, preached before His Excellency Jonathan Trumbull, Esq L.L.D, governor and commander in chief, and the Honorable the General Assembly of the state of Connecticut, convened at Hartford, at the anniversary election, May 8th, 1783* (New Haven, 1783). On Ezra Stiles refer to Goldman, *Gods Sacred Tongue*, especially chapter three 'Ambivalence and Erudition in New Haven: Ezra Stiles, Yale College, and the Jewish Tradition,' 52–74, and Melvin Yazawa, 'Ezra Stiles (1727–95),' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, available at https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-68751, [last accessed 8 October 2023].

70 On the Noahic Covenant and Natural Law see David Vandrunen, 'Natural Law in Noahic Accent: A Covenantal Conception of Natural Law Drawn from Genesis 9,' *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* (2010), 131–49 and Ronald J. Engel, 'A covenant Model of Global Ethics,' *Worldviews*, 8 (2004), 29–46.

71 Stiles, *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor*, 10.

olizes the duality of covenant theology, making the adherence to true religion the binding national factor above every other aspect of proto-national belonging, and by referencing to Noah's story, evaluating Protestant faith as an integral component of American national identity by constructing a solidified territorial Judeo-Christian past that resulted in Americas emergences as the new Israel:

> Europe was settled by Japhet; America is settling from Europe; and perhaps this second enlargement bids fair to surpass the first: for we are to consider all the European settlements of America collectively as springing form; and transfused with the blood of Japhet. (…) The United States may be two million souls Whites, which have been an increase upon perhaps fewer than twenty or thirty thousand families from Europe. Can we contemplate their present, and anticipate their future increase, and not be struck with astonishment to find ourselves in the midst of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Noah?[72]

However, in contrast to Stiles is the experience of biblical Israel, for Witherspoon, of universal significance, describing constant renewals of faith and religion to uphold a universal Protestant Christian Empire.[73] For Witherspoon, a covenant is the binding force that ties a nation in its faith to God, emphasizing the continual restatement of religious commitment. Witherspoon views covenants not as agents of historical change but as agents of national regression and progress. Consequently, he does not align with the recurring millennial idea within American Christian Hebraism, which tends to nationalize the covenant and identifies America as the harbinger of the Second Coming of Christ.[74] In Witherspoon's perspective, America and Britain are integral to an enduring Israel-like covenant encompassing God, the Anglo-British sphere, and Christianity.[75]

Witherspoon thus remains an intellectual descendant of a universalised Scottish covenant ideology that neither places Scottish identity over English identity but accepts the possibility that the favour of God depends on the national commitments to the faith. For him Scottish, English, and British were interchangeable terms in his sermons on national election. This apparent interchangeability is demonstrated in his covenant theology that is not appointing one nation above all other.[76] In America Witherspoon continues to employ Christian Hebraism and the imagined Jew to craft a universal but comprehensible language to convey his ecclesiastical convictions to the political and congregational sphere. Consequently, Witherspoon inherited a core concept of covenant theology from his Scottish upbringing tied to the notion of a universal Christian Empire, yet not necessarily originating from America. For Witherspoon, following Israel's example is to advocate for religious freedom and true religion universally by mirroring the spiritual virtues of biblical Judaism and biblical

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72 See Ibid., 9.

73 Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution*, 27.

74 Ibid., 267.

75 Gordon L. Tait, 'John Witherspoon and the Scottish Loyalists,' *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 61 (1983), 299–315, here 313.

76 Tait, 'John Witherspoon and the Scottish Loyalists,' 314.

Israel. Even after 1776 and the Declaration of Independence, Witherspoon was convinced that Britain could regain spiritual regeneration and remain part of the awakened Protestant Empire.[77]

Revivalism and Covenants as proto-national concepts in America

The distinctive nature of Witherspoon's application of biblical Israel can be illustrated by contrasting it to the religious Revivalism or Great Awakening in the early American colonies.[78] Religious Revivalism and the Great Awakening in America were profoundly individualistic about piety. This individualistic interpretation of faith also advocated ideas on human agency, which contradicts Calvinistic Orthodox ideas of predestination.[79] Furthermore, since the North American sphere is a place where revivalist and non-revivalist thought coexisted, the place of Israel altered within the coexisting millenarist ideas of New Light and Old Light traditions: Individualistic concepts of faith and religion that endorse faith as personal and emotional experience seem to highlight the faith-based covenant of Israel and the requirement of the faith-based conversion of Jews.[80] Traditional millenarian thought, rooted in scripture and prominent in America in the eighteenth century, directs attention to the tangible diaspora of Jews as a precursor to the Second Coming of Christ. In other words, the Great Awakening in the American colonies in the 1740s emergences of nationalised forms of Christian Zionism and American Israel that emphasised the unique instances of Gods favour.[81] Notably, pivotal covenants such as the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants were reframed to integrate seamlessly with the forging of American national missionary character. The biblical episodes of Abraham, Noah, and Moses were not merely allegorical but became integral parts of the American narrative.[82]

The reason for this is that Revivalism laid the groundwork for developing a distinct national religious American covenant identity associated with biblical Israel, one that could operate independently of European and Scottish traditions of Christian Hebraism. The biblical covenants were reshaped to align with the establishment of American national identity.[83] The

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77 Ibid.

78 Ned C. Landsman, *From Colonials to Provincials: American Thought and Culture 1680–1760* (Ithaca, 1997), 93f.

79 Landsman, *From Colonials to Provincials*, 100.

80 Elisheva Carlebach and Jacob J. Schacter, *New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations* (Leiden, 2012), 531.

81 See for instance, Shalev, *American Zion*, 93–114.

82 On the difference between providential national covenants (Abraham) and universal covenants (Noah) refer to Steven Elliot Grosby, *Hebraism in Religion, History and Politics: The Third Culture* (Oxford, 2021) and Ronald J. Engel, 'A covenant Model of Global Ethics,' *Worldviews*, 8 (2004), 29–46.

83 Landsman, *From Colonials to Provincials*, 97.

notion of American Israel, championed by clergy figures such as Ezra Stiles and John Murray revolved around the conviction that Israel's moral and religious identity must be woven into a national fabric that distinguishes the American nation both territorially and spiritually from Great Britain.[84]

John Murray is one of the awakened Presbyterian ministers who, similar to Witherspoon, received education in Edinburgh and emigrated to America in 1763 but advocated for national interpretations of covenant theology. Murray started his Thanksgiving sermon *Jerubbaal* (1783) by identifying America as the new promised land and the singular territory of a renewed covenant with God.[85] Within this sermon Murray links the American nation with the story of the biblical patriarch Noah. After saving those adhering to true religion during the Great Flood, Noah, the first covenanted pre-Abrahamic patriarch received a sign from a dove carrying an olive branch. This sign signifies the sealing of a new territorial and spiritual covenant between Noah's lineage and God. Murray states, 'the long wished arrival of that beauteous dove, which expanding her wings of silver, and glittering in feathers of gold, hath hasted across the Atlantic, to plant her olive branch in our land'.[86] The identification of America's society with the prophetic figure of Noah and his descendants is crucial since it territorially and spiritually extends Noah's covenant to his descendants and the nations they establish. However, there is an additional national component within the concept of American Israel in connection with the story of the Noahic covenant.[87] This nationalised reading links Noah's positions as the proto-patriarch with the missionary religious character of the young American state that champions the distribution of new values of democracy and understandings of religious and social liberty on a national level. Furthermore, America is identified with Noah since America represents the nationalised territorial location of true religion after the Great Flood, creating a dichotomy between Britain representing a failed and unjust state and America as the new covenanted realm of true religion and a newly universal but missionary and national divine covenant.

Murray continues to identify the eight-year-long armed conflict from 1775 to 1783 between the British loyalists and American rebels with the eight-year Meridian rule over Israel that entailed cruel episodes of war. Just as the American revolutionaries did, Israel experienced deliverance in the eighth year of Meridian's rule through their 'their swords (…) and the Lord doing.'[88] Murray aligns recent events in American History with Israel's biblical narrative,

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84 Katherine Carte, *Religion and the American Revolution: An Imperial History* (Chapel Hill, 2021), 9f. Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *The Making of Eretz Israel in the Modern Era* (Berlin, 2020).

85 John Murray, *Jerubbaal; or, Tyranny's Grove Destroyed, and the Altar of Liberty Finished: A Discourse on America's Duty and Danger* (Newbury Port Mass., 1783), digitalized on https://www.logcollegepress.com/authors-memu#/john-murray-17421793/ [Last accessed 8 September 2023] and Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New Haven, 2004), 50f.

86 See Murray, *Jerubbaal*, 5.

87 Ibid., 5f.

88 See Murray, *Jerubbaal*, 8f.

identifying America as the new chosen nation – a missionary state that should stand as an example of religious regeneration and religious renewal.

Hence, according to the perspective of Murray and Stiles, American policymakers had the duty to structure a state mirroring the political, religious, and social virtues of biblical Israel.[89] However, Witherspoon took a different stance. In his view, the concept of Israel transcended specific borders, embodying a universal essence that dynamically traversed different nations. Therefore, his conceptualization of the covenant between God and America referred to the establishment of a system of accountability and the emergence of a Protestant Empire rather than the revival of an American Republic.[90] Hence, Witherspoon, utilizes biblical Israel, especially episodes pointing to Kings and prophets and covenants to create a common comprehensible language, that justifies the renewal of transatlantic British-American covenanted identities.

Conclusion

This article explored the profound influence of Christian Hebraism and covenant theology as political languages in John Witherspoon's Scottish and American writings. An examination of his *Dominion of the Providence of Men* (1776) and *Prayer for National Prosperity* (1758) revealed a significant consistency in Witherspoon's Scottish and American writings and a transfer of the unique concept of Scottish covenant theology to the North American sphere. Witherspoon applies a universal interpretation of the covenant in both sermons, sidelining national election and speaking of a universal Protestant Empire that dominated Scottish Presbyterian thought after the Act of Union in 1707.

An analysis of Witherspoon's Scottish writings revealed a systematic application of biblical Israel as a blueprint of a perfect civic society and nation, predominantly in texts addressing national prosperity and religious awakening. Witherspoon did not view Scotland or America as eternally chosen nations like biblical Israel; instead, he attributed America's potential victory in the Revolution solely to the religious awakening of its people. Witherspoon, furthermore, refrained from interpreting the Revolution as part of a sacred millennial course and emphasised in his *An Address to the Natives of Scotland* (1776) that America's fight for freedom could religiously awaken Great Britain, leading it back to its former glory and into the Protestant Empire.

89 Shalev, *American Zion*, 51.

90 On the discussions concerning America conceptualization as an Empire and early concepts of American *Lieux de Memoires* refer to David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill, 1996), 1–14 and 53–108; Robert G Parkinson, *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2016), 1–26 and 264–324 and Jeremy Black, *Crisis of Empire: Britain and America in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2008).

In contrast to John Murray's and Ezra Stiles's writings, Witherspoon did not emphasise a territorial or spiritual sameness between America and biblical Israel. He did not identify the North American sphere as the place where Noah's ark harboured after the Great Flood. Hence, he did not embed American geography or history into the history of biblical Israel. For Witherspoon, biblical Israel remained an allegory, not America's reality.

Instead, Witherspoon viewed biblical Israel as transcending specific borders, embodying a universal essence that dynamically traversed different nations. Thus, his conceptualization of the covenant between God and America referred to establishing a system of accountability and the persistence of the Protestant Empire, cherishing British-American transatlantic alliances once Britain underwent a religious awakening. Hence, Christian Hebraism and universal Scottish interpretations of covenants and biblical Israel create a consistent theme in his writings.

While Witherspoon's use of biblical Israel as a trope to justify the American Revolution is significant, it is important to note that he is just one of many Presbyterians who did so. This fact underscores the need for further research to understand how prominent Presbyterians used the concept of Israel as a blueprint to discuss American independence and create new ecclesiastical hierarchies. This research is crucial in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the influence of Christian Hebraism and covenant theology in Witherspoon's Scottish and American writings.