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“In Keeping with the Teaching of Scripture”:
Jimmy Carter, Religion, and the Pursuit of Middle East Peace”

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Abstract

It is argued here that President Jimmy Carter’s role as facilitator, partner, and mediator in the Camp David peace process between Israel and Egypt was based upon his own ideas about what might be done. And these ideas were largely rooted his profound personal religious convictions.

To illustrate the utility of religious faith for the purpose of peacemaking, this paper examines President Carter’s use of and appeal to religious faith in three major ways. First, Carter’s motivation for peace in the Middle East is explored. Like most other evangelicals, President Carter saw the region through a religious lens. For him, it was “the Holy Land,” a place of profound significance because of what happened and for what is prophesied to happen there. Carter’s faith-based interest and preoccupation with Israel and the wider region explains his direct involvement in the peace process, his decision to make Middle East peace a cornerstone of his foreign policy agenda, and his willingness as president to take risks—risks that his advisors feared would jeopardize his political standing and reelection prospects.

Second, Carter believed that politicians of sincere Christian faith were under Biblical command to pursue peace. In his speeches and writings on the Middle East, Carter often invoked biblical images of peace; he cited both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian New Testament. This section explores and documents the religious justifications Carter cited in his pursuit of Middle East peace.

Third, to accomplish the task of peace, it is argued that Carter’s faith and reading of the Bible provided him with an appreciation for “the Other,” the diversity within the Western faith traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. His reading of the Bible, for instance, particularly narratives surrounding the life of Abraham and his sons Ishmael and Isaac, provided him a means of “crossing boundaries,” reaching out to both Jews and Muslims, and forging interfaith dialogue, especially with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. In this issue area, future presidents could learn from Carter’s example.

“I will do everything in power to make our nation an agent of peace in the Middle East;
a just and lasting peace that will be in keeping with the teaching of Scripture.”¹
---Jimmy Carter

It is often said that Carter’s greatest accomplishment as president was his mediation of the 1978-1979 Camp David peace accords between two old enemies, Israel and Egypt.² It was characterized at the time as the first such peace agreement between these two old nations in “some 3,000 years.”³ Camp David, as Jack Germond and Jules Witcover explained, was a rare case of where presidential “words and good intentions” became a reality in “a remarkable achievement for peace.”⁴ “Camp David,” wrote Burton Kaufman, “was hailed throughout the world as a monumental diplomatic accomplishment,” a “personal triumph” for Carter and it was “his administration’s crowning achievement.”⁵

Democratic and Republican presidents, too, have acknowledged and praised Carter’s Middle East diplomatic success. In the coming years, President Ronald Reagan said he “hoped to build on the peace process in the Middle East that had been started by Jimmy Carter at Camp David.”⁶ While he praised George H.W. Bush for merely starting talks in the Middle East in the early 1990s and generically acknowledged Gerald Ford’s steady and “wise leadership” in the mid-1970s, President Bill Clinton described Carter’s

¹ Jimmy Carter, “Remarks on Middle East Policies in Elizabeth, New Jersey,” June 6, 1976, *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Jimmy Carter* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), p. 221.

² Bob Chaundy, “Profile: Jimmy Carter,” BBC News, October 11, 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/2296467.stm>; “President, peacemaker, peanut farmer,” CNN.com, October 10, 2002, <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/US/South/10/10/carter.profile/index.html>; Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr., *God in the White House: How Religion Has Changed the Modern Presidency* (New York: Collier Books, 1988), p. 127; Adam Clymer, “Camp David at Top in U.S. Policy Poll,” *New York Times*, April 1, 1985.

³ Aase Lionaes, “Presentation Speech at the 1978 Nobel Peace Prize Ceremonies in Oslo, Norway,” December 10, 1978, <http://nobelprize.org>.

⁴ Jack Germond and Jules Witcover, “It’s a shame Carter can’t play role in Middle East,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 8, 1985, A10.

⁵ Burton I. Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr.* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993), p. 117.

⁶ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life: The Autobiography of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 407.

Mideast peace efforts as having made a tangible contribution. In fact, despite the personal animus between them, Clinton called Carter's work a "miracle," and claimed that it was the foundation for the 1994 Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty.⁷

Richard Nixon described the 1978-1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace agreements as "one of the greatest American diplomatic achievements of the postwar [World War II] period," and he strongly recommended that future presidents follow Carter's example.⁸ Even foreign observers noted the importance of Carter's Mideast work. An advisor to British Prime Minister James Callaghan said the Camp David Accords represented "a great effort of personal diplomacy on the part of Jimmy Carter and one which will, I think, be seen as the high point of his Presidency."⁹

But what was the Carter example? What was Carter's peacemaking model that Nixon believed could perhaps be emulated by future presidents? To begin answering these questions, the following illustration may help.

In reflecting upon the Middle East in his memoirs, President Ronald Reagan observed that religion was a source of violence. In contrast, his predecessor, Jimmy Carter, was convinced that religion was a vital source of peacemaking and peacebuilding. Reagan often feared that events in the region could spiral out of control at any moment and lead to the fateful day of Armageddon foretold in the Bible. Carter, however, saw a region with a potential for peace, a place not so much where the next world war would break out, but a place where swords could finally be converted into plowshares and the

⁷ Bill Clinton, "Remarks at a Dinner Honoring Former Presidents," September 13, 1993, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book II*, p. 1484; "Remarks on Departure for the Middle East," October 25, 1994, in *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book II*, p. 1868; "Exchange with Reporters Abroad Air Force One," November 5, 1995, in *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book II*, p. 1721; "Remarks at the Opening of the Summit of the Peacemakers in Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt," March 13, 1996, in *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 436; "Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Former President Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn Carter in Atlanta, Georgia." Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, August 16, 1999, transcript from <http://www.findarticles.com> (accessed May 21, 2006). For a description of the difficult relations between Carter and Clinton, see

⁸ Richard Nixon, *1999: Victory Without War* (New York: Pocket Books, 1989), pp. 276-277.

children of Abraham, Jews and Arabs, Jews and Muslims, could live peaceably side-by-side. Confounding the conventional wisdom of these two presidencies, here was an instance in which the usually optimistic Reagan was perhaps more fatalistic, resigned to the inevitability of Mideast war and ongoing faith-inspired conflict. And it was Carter rather than Reagan who was the optimist, the visionary, and the president who was convinced that Middle East peace was the future foretold in the Bible.

It is argued here that Carter's role as facilitator, partner, and mediator in the Camp David peace process was largely driven by profound religious convictions. This was an instance where the faith of religious-styled president "moved mountains." While security and strategic concerns certainly were important and his position as president of the United States did set perimeters for action, Carter was motivated by a deeply held religious belief that it was his moral and biblical obligation to pursue not just peace, but peace in the Holy Land: "That is my prayer."¹⁰ It is additionally argued here that Carter's religious faith and inclusive reading of the Bible provided him with an appreciation for "the Other" and means of "crossing boundaries" to include Jews, Christians, and Muslims in his vision of Middle East peace. Though he shares with Christian Zionists the belief that the Jewish people are a chosen people and blessed by God and that the modern state of Israel fulfills in some way Bible prophecy, Carter also views Muslims as co-religionists, joint heirs of God's promises, and also blessed by God. Such a reading of Scripture aided Carter in his quest for peace and forging interfaith dialogue, especially with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. In this issue area and in the constructive use of religious faith, future presidents could learn from Carter's example.

⁹ Tom McNally, "The Carter Years," *International Affairs* 59.3 (Summer 1983): 468.

¹⁰ Carter, "Remarks at the 25th Anniversary Reunion of the Camp David Accords held in Washington, DC," The Carter Center, September 17, 2003, <http://www.cartercenter.org>.

“I Had My Own Ideas” for Middle East Peace

I’ve moved into areas that have been avoided for a long time in the past. I’m not criticizing my predecessors. But the Egyptians and the Israelis have been at war for 30 years. They’ve been filled with hatred for centuries. And to see now Sadat and Begin sitting down, working out a peace agreement between them, because of action that we took in this country, is gratifying, indeed.¹¹

It is often argued that Carter failed to articulate a broad political vision for his presidency. It is one of the lasting impressions of his four years. He promised too much and took on many issues that were unrelated to a cohesive and coherent program. However, this argument cannot be said of his views of the Middle East. But he had a vision, a vision in no small part inspired and informed by his reading of the Bible. And the success at Camp David proved to Carter that the application of religious principles “can be significant for peacemaking,” especially in the Middle East.¹²

As president, Jimmy Carter was under no illusion that peace in the Middle East would be easy. He recognized that no instant solution was available.¹³ As president, in May 1977, he said, “I don’t want to mislead anyone. The chances for Middle Eastern peace are still very much in doubt. We have a long way to go.”¹⁴ In August 1977, he said that when it came to the search for peace in the Middle East, “no one can expect miracles.”¹⁵ Later in October, he said, “This is one of the most complicated international questions which has ever been addressed, I guess, in the history of human beings.”¹⁶

¹¹ Carter, “Interview with Dick Leone of WNET-TV in East Rutherford, New Jersey,” October 25, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book II*, p. 2033.

¹² Carter, “Foreword,” in *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, eds. Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. vii.

¹³ Carter, “Interview with John Mashek of *U.S. News & World Report*,” May 24, 1976, *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Jimmy Carter*, p. 202; “Remarks and Interview with a Group of Editors and News Directors,” August 26, 1977, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book II*, p. 1516.

¹⁴ Carter, “The President’s News Conference,” May 12, 1977, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 862.

¹⁵ Carter, “ABC News Interview with Harry Reasoner and Sam Donaldson, Plains, Georgia,” August 10, 1977, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book II*, p. 1469.

¹⁶ Carter, “Remarks and Interview with a Group of Editors and News Directors,” October 14, 1977, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book II*, p. 1800.

Three years later, during his reelection campaign, Carter said, “In the real world we know that we cannot expect miracles on the Middle East peace negotiations. The issues are too emotional. The difficulties are too great. The obstacles sometimes appear to be insurmountable.”¹⁷ Carter, nevertheless, believed that peace must still be pursued.

On the campaign trail in 1976, Carter asserted, “Peace in the Middle East is not an impossible dream.”¹⁸ In an August 1977 interview, he said, “We may or may not be successful, but we’re going to continue to try in a very determined and tenacious way.”¹⁹ In spite of the daunting task and the seemingly interminable nature of the conflict, Carter said two weeks later, “We’re not going to slacken our effort.”²⁰ In fact, he boldly stated, “I intend not to fail.”²¹

Stubbornly, President Carter ignored, wrote Fred Greenstein, “the near-unanimous advice of his aides not to put his prestige on the line for such a high risk cause.”²² Given the risks to a president’s domestic and international reputation and to the prospects of reelection, Carter understood why “Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Ford had apparently tried to avoid any active involvement in Middle East disputes” and showed “restraint.”²³ However, with caution, but with his usual confident determination and stubbornness to touch what he politically probably should not, his often disregard for sound calls for pragmatism, and his repeated claim that he could prophetically foresee

¹⁷ Carter, “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the American Legion in Boston, Massachusetts,” August 21, 1980, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book II*, p. 1555.

¹⁸ Carter, “Remarks on Middle East Policies in Elizabeth, New Jersey,” June 6, 1976, *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Jimmy Carter*, pp. 221.

¹⁹ Carter, “ABC News Interview with Harry Reasoner and Sam Donaldson, Plains, Georgia,” August 10, 1977, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book II*, p. 1469.

²⁰ Carter, “Remarks and Interview with a Group of Editors and News Directors,” August 26, 1977, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book II*, p. 1515.

²¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983), pp. 254, 258.

²² Fred I. Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Clinton* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 137.

²³ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 282.

what others could not, Carter wanted to try his hand at brokering Middle East peace. “I had my own ideas about what might be done.”²⁴

[T]old by almost every adviser to stay out of the Middle East situation. It seemed that all the proposed solutions had already been tried and failed. However, I could see growing threats to the United States in the Middle East, and was willing to make another try—perhaps overly confident that I could now find answers that had eluded so many others.²⁵

Carter’s Religious Vision of Middle East Peace

Ever since losing his race for Georgia governor in 1966, religion became for Carter “the driving force” in his political and personal life.²⁶ Carter was a born-again evangelical Christian who pledged as president to pursue policies that he believed were compatible with his understanding of the Christian faith. In fact, in addition to being from the South and being a Washington outsider, Carter argued that his faith made him a different kind of president, providing him with “a different way of governing.”²⁷

Of all the faith-based or inspired policies he advocated, Carter’s search for peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors, particularly Egypt, was perhaps the clearest example. Though he clearly recognized that peace in the Middle East would serve U.S. interests in the region, Jimmy Carter believed that working for peace in the Middle East was not only good and practical policy, it was more importantly “sacred work,” a “sacred task,” and a “sacred cause.”²⁸ Finding peace between the Israelis and the Arabs, Carter

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 286; “Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Meeting in Queens, New York,” September 25, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book II*, p. 1751; “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Meeting in Nashville, Tennessee,” October 9, 1980, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book III*, pp. 2135-2136.

²⁶ Fred I. Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Clinton* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 131.

²⁷ Quoted in Erwin C. Hargrove, *Jimmy Carter as President: Leadership and the Politics of the Public Good* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), p. 15.

²⁸ Carter, “Remarks at Welcome Ceremony with Egyptian President Sadat in Cairo, Egypt,” March 8, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 406; “Remarks at Welcoming Ceremony with President Yitzhak Navon in Tel Aviv, Israel,” March 10, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 417; “Remarks at Departure Ceremony with Prime Minister Begin in Tel Aviv, Israel,” March 13, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 428.

said, was rooted in “a religious commitment,” rooted in the basic fact that he worships “the Prince of Peace, not war.”²⁹

Though Greenstein did not fully explore Carter’s motivation to pursue this high-risk adventure that had bedeviled previous administrations, he rightly notes that Carter was “spurred by the knowledge that it was the Holy Land in which he was seeking peace.”³⁰ Others have identified Carter’s faith as the fundamental source of his motivation as well.³¹

Those that knew Carter best or worked closely with him affirm this. For instance, one Carter assistant, Peter Bourne, said that Carter had long had an abiding interest in the Middle East region. According to Bourne, the source of this “passionate affinity” was “Carter’s religious beliefs and especially his deep knowledge of the Bible made the Middle East a region of unique consequence and interest to him.”³² Bourne added that Jimmy Carter was baptized by Royall Callaway, a minister who “held more fundamentalist views than his predecessors” at Plains Baptist Church and who “was a pre-millennialist who preached that the Jews would soon reclaim Palestine and that Christ’s return to earth

²⁹ Carter, “Interview with George C. Edwards,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 38.1 (March 2008): 3; “Interview with Larry King,” CNN’s *Larry King Live*, September 19, 2003; “Interview with Ayelish McGarvey,” The American Prospect Online, April 5, 2004, <http://www.prospect.org>; “Interview with Chris Matthews,” MSNBC’s *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, October 18, 2004; “Interview with Tavis Smiley,” PBS’s *Tavis Smiley Show*, December 15, 2004; “Interview with Larry King,” CNN’s *Larry King Live*, November 3, 2005; “Remarks at the Funeral Service for Coretta Scott King in Lithonia, Georgia,” February 7, 2006, <http://www.cartercenter.org>; “Remarks and Question-and-Answer Session at the Council on Foreign Relations,” March 2, 2006, http://www.cfr.org/publication/10024/peace_versus_democracy_in_palestine.html; “Interview with Jeff Fleischer,” *Mother Jones*, June 2, 2006; “Interview with Rich Cline,” Evangelical Alliance of the United Kingdom, November-December 2006; “Interview with Elizabeth Sams,” *Beliefnet*, March 27, 2007, http://www.beliefnet.com/story/214/story_21478.html.

³⁰ Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference*, p. 137.

³¹ See Hutcheson, *God in the White House*, p. 125; Robert Booth Fowler, Allen D. Hertzke, and Laura R. Olson, *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, and Strategic Choices* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), p. 118; J.J. Goldberg, *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1996), p. 209.

³² Peter G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Postpresidency* (New York: Scribner, 1997), p. 382.

was imminent.”³³ He also claimed that Carter’s high religiosity likely influenced his preoccupation with the Middle East:

Through his study of the Bible and his regular attendance at Sunday school, Jimmy acquired a broad familiarity with the Holy Land. By the time he was ten years old, he had a greater knowledge about Palestine than he did the rest of America. It seemed a fascinating, exotic place associated with an aura of deep religious reverence.³⁴

Jim Wright, the Democratic Majority Leader at the time, agreed. He said President Carter enthusiastically engaged the issue because he had a “lifelong interest in the region, stemming from his study of the Bible.”³⁵

Within his first 100 days in office, President Jimmy Carter stated that in matters of foreign policy he wanted his country to establish and follow “a standard of morality.”³⁶ He believed, “If we insist that the golden rule be applied in all public matters,” at home and abroad, “then potential inequities can be prevented, and wrongs can be righted.” For Carter, establishing and maintaining “such a government is the proper purpose of public service.”³⁷

Carter believes that working for “peace is everyone’s job” and responsibility.³⁸ For his part, as president, Carter “pledged to work tirelessly for peace.”³⁹ He said that the pursuit of peace was his “passion”⁴⁰ He even described it as a “crusade,” “a crusade to

³³ Ibid., p. 31.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 32.

³⁵ Wright, *Balance of Power*, p. 307.

³⁶ Carter, “Remarks and Question-and-Answer Session at Town Meeting in Clinton, Massachusetts,” March 16, 1977, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 385.

³⁷ Carter, *Why Not the Best?* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), p. 157.

³⁸ Carter, “Peace is Everyone’s Job,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1995.

³⁹ Carter, “Remarks at the National Conference for the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department,” April 1, 1980, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 579; “Transcript of News Conference Held by President-Elect Carter in Plains, Georgia,” *New York Times*, November 5, 1976, 14.

⁴⁰ Carter, “Foreign Policy Radio Address to the Nation,” October 19, 1980, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book III*, p. 2340; “Remarks at a Campaign Rally in Granite City, Illinois,” November 3, 1980, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book III*, p. 2663; “Remarks at a Campaign Rally in Portland, Oregon,” November 3, 1980, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book III*, p. 2675.

keep this Nation on the road to peace.”⁴¹ “Peace is what we want. Peace is what we have maintained. Peace is a prerequisite for progress. Peace is a policy of our country.”⁴² “Real moves toward peace demand bold actions by leaders.”⁴³ Carter sought to bring such passion and boldness to the Middle East. He aimed to pursue Middle East peace “aggressively” and “put his prestige on the line.”⁴⁴ Carter pledged he would “never let the fear of failure be an excuse for not trying.”⁴⁵

Carter insisted that promoting peace in the Middle East, “the land of the Bible,” was not a new vision, but an ancient one.⁴⁶ It was a fulfillment of “the finest ideals based on the Hebrew Scriptures,” including the pursuit of justice and righteousness.⁴⁷ It was a crucial part of “trying to find the ideal of Christ: peace on earth.”⁴⁸ As the prophet Isaiah foretold, Carter explained in his address to the Knesset (March 12, 1979)—the first ever delivered by an American president before the Israeli parliament—that the Camp David project and peace treaty were good-faith steps towards “pounding Middle East swords into plowshares.”⁴⁹ Upon his return to the United States, Carter praised Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat for “following the advice of the Biblical proverb, ‘When a man’s way pleases the Lord, he maketh even his

⁴¹ Carter, “Remarks at a Campaign Rally in Fort Worth, Texas,” November 1, 1980, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book III*, p. 2640.

⁴² Carter, “Address before the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia,” May 9, 1980, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 871.

⁴³ Carter, “Middle East Accord Offers ‘Best’ Chance for Peace,” *USA Today*, November 3, 2003.

⁴⁴ Carter, “Interview with Bob Edwards,” *National Public Radio’s Morning Edition*, February 25, 2003, available at <http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/transcripts/2003/feb/030225.edwards.html>; “Interview with Bob Edwards,” *National Public Radio’s Morning Edition*, September 17, 2003, available at <http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/transcripts/2003/sep/030917.carter.html>.

⁴⁵ Carter, “Interview on the 25th Anniversary of the Carter Center,” April 5, 2007, <http://www.cartercenter.org>.

⁴⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 280.

⁴⁷ Carter, *Beyond the White House: Waging Peace, Fighting Disease, Building Hope* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), p. 115; Carter, “Remarks at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts,” January 23, 2007.

⁴⁸ Carter, “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Religious Broadcasters,” January 21, 1980, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 181.

⁴⁹ Carter, “Address Before the Knesset in Jerusalem, Israel,” March 12, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 425.

enemies to be at peace with Him.”⁵⁰ In this, Carter said, “I believe that God has answered our prayers.”⁵¹

Beyond Christian Zionism: Carter’s Religious Vision for Jews, Christians, and Muslims

Jimmy Carter has confessed on many occasions that “the land of Israel has always meant a great deal to me.” The reason for this is because since his youth he has “read of the prophets and martyrs in the Bible.”⁵² He proclaimed, “The Jewish people are entitled to one place on this earth where they can have their own state on soil given them by God from time immemorial.”⁵³ Further, he acknowledged, “Our nation’s overwhelming support for Israel comes from among Christians like me who have been taught since I was three years old to honor and protect God’s chosen people from among whom came our own Christian savior, Jesus Christ.”⁵⁴ As both candidate and president, he affirmed, “The establishment of the nation of Israel is a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and the very essence of its fulfillment.”⁵⁵

Describing his first visit (or pilgrimage) to Israel in 1973, Carter wrote about being torn about how best to spend his limited time there: “I was torn between the pleasure of visiting the Christian holy places I had longed to see since I was a child and the knowledge that I should be preparing for a future career” and learning about the politics

⁵⁰ Carter, “Remarks on Arrival with Vice President Mondale at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland,” March 14, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 431.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁵⁴ Carter, “Remarks at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts,” January 23, 2007; “Letter to Jewish Community on Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid,” December 15, 2006, www.cartercenter.org; “Interview with David Postman,” *Seattle Times*, December 13, 2006; “Remarks at Mansfield College, Oxford University, United Kingdom,” June 21, 2007.

⁵⁵ James and Marti Hefley, *The Church that Produced a President* (New York: Wyden Books, 1977), p. 229; Carter, “Remarks Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the State of Israel with Prime Minister Begin,” May 1, 1978, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 813.

and political personalities of the country.⁵⁶ After leaving, Carter said, “I was excited and optimistic about the apparent commitment of the Israelis to establish a nation that would be a homeland for the Jews, dedicated to the Judeo-Christian principles of peace and justice, and determined to live in harmony with all their neighbors.”⁵⁷

In his presidential memoirs, *Keeping Faith*, Carter explained that he came to “realize that I spent more of my time working for possible solutions to the riddle of Middle East peace than on any other international problem.”⁵⁸ Bringing peace to Israel, specifically, was a constant “on my agenda, and on my mind.”⁵⁹ Before he mentioned any other reason for supporting Israel and regional peace, such as the shared democratic values between the United States and Israel or his admiration for their military courage and prowess, Carter cited religious justifications for doing so.⁶⁰

In my affinity for Israel, I shared the sentiment of most other Southern Baptists that the holy places we revered should be preserved and made available for visits by Christians, and that members of other faiths should have the same guaranteed privileges concerning their sacred sites.

The Judeo-Christian ethic and study of the Bible were bonds between Jews and Christians which had always been part of my life.

I also believed very deeply that the Jews who had survived the Holocaust deserved their own nation, and that they had a right to live in peace among their neighbors. I considered this homeland for the Jews to be compatible with the teachings of the Bible, hence ordained by God.

“These moral and religious beliefs,” Carter concluded, “made my commitment to the security of Israel unshakable.”

⁵⁶ Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1993; originally published in 1985), pp. 21-22; *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, pp. 22-24. During Carter’s ten-day visit, he traveled to Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho, Nazareth, the Mount of Olives, the Garden Tomb, Cana, Mount Carmel, the Sea of Galilee, the Mount of Beatitudes, Capernaum, Bethsaida, and the Jordan River.

⁵⁷ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, p. 34.

⁵⁸ Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 1995; originally published in 1982), p. 438.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

In *The Blood of Abraham*, an obviously religious title for his first book on the Middle East, Jimmy Carter asserted, “For me there is no way to approach or enter Israel without thinking first about the Bible and the history of the land and its people. The names and images have long been an integral part of my life as a Christian.”⁶¹ In *Living Faith*, he wrote, “The power of faith is a unifying bond between Christian and Jew and between the heroes of ancient Israel and those of New Testament times.”⁶² In a 2006 interview with Riz Khan of *Al Jazeera*, he said, like many Americans, “Ever since I was 3 years old, I’ve always looked upon Israel as a people that was blessed by God through his covenant by Abraham.”⁶³ Though such remarks make him theological kin with many evangelicals who view the Jewish people and their ties to the land of Israel similarly, it would be inaccurate to characterize Carter as a typical Christian Zionist. Unlike many pro-Israel evangelicals whose Zionism precludes virtually any positive divine recognition of the Arab people and lands, Carter believes that the Arab people, too, have been blessed by God, heirs to the promise through Abraham and his firstborn son Ishmael, “a founder of the Arab nations in general.”⁶⁴ Therefore, by Carter’s reckoning, Egypt, the largest and most powerful Arab country at the time of his presidency, deserved peace and to be at the center of the peace process.

In the Bible, Carter explained, Egypt was often a site of “biblical drama.”⁶⁵ In his chapter on Egypt in *The Blood of Abraham*, the first thing Carter noted was that Egypt is

⁶¹ Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, p. 29.

⁶² Carter, *Living Faith* (New York: Times Books, 1998; originally published in 1996), p. 37.

⁶³ Carter, “Interview with Riz Khan,” *Al Jazeera*, December 12, 2006.

⁶⁴ D. Jason Berggren, “Obstacles to an Alliance: Muslims and the Christian Right,” *Middle East Affairs Journal* 9.1-2 (Winter/Spring 2003): 95-114; “Interview with Riz Khan,” *Al Jazeera*, December 12, 2006. However, it should be noted that, despite their pro-Israel sympathies, most evangelicals have supported an independent Palestine. According to a 2003 Gallup poll, 58% of Americans supported an independent Palestinian state. But so did 53% of evangelicals. Gallup analyst Lydia Saad concluded that few Americans (6%) fit the profile of Christian Right leader Pat Robertson: “born again, consider Israel a holy land based on biblical prophecy, and oppose the creation of a Palestinian state.” Saad, “Holy Land, or Just Ancient?” *Gallup Poll News Service*, July 29, 2003.

⁶⁵ Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, p. 149.

home to Mount Sinai, “where Moses received the Ten Commandments from God” and where Sadat hoped to build a shrine as a “symbol of peace” for the three great religions of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.⁶⁶

Of particular interest to Carter was the biblical role Egypt played as a refuge to the heroes of the Bible. He observed that the Patriarch Abraham took refuge there, as did his grandson Jacob, later renamed Israel.⁶⁷ Even “the family of Jesus,” Carter observed, “was forced to seek refuge from the vassal King Herod the Great, who had ordered all male babies around Bethlehem to be killed.” The holy family “escaped into Egypt and stayed there until the death of Herod.”⁶⁸ Carter has also noted Egypt’s ties to historic Christianity. Specifically, he mentioned that St. Catherine’s monastery, “the oldest continuously occupied Christian monastery on earth,” is located on the Sinai and that the patron of the old Coptic Church in Egypt is “Saint Mark.”⁶⁹

In his 2002 Nobel lecture, Carter acknowledged the inspiring source of his Middle East policy and why he sought peace and why he sought to include Arab Muslims as equal partners in the process. For Carter, Christ was his inspirational model, because he “taught us to cross religious boundaries” and “repeatedly reached out” to others.

The unchanging principles of life predate modern times. I worship Jesus Christ, whom we Christians consider to be the Prince of Peace. As a Jew, he taught us to cross religious boundaries, in service and in love. He repeatedly reached out...I am convinced that Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and others can embrace each other in a common effort to alleviate human suffering and to espouse peace.⁷⁰

Following the spirit of Christ’s example, Carter aimed to be a Christian mediator and partner; he aimed to bring Jews and Muslims together.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.143.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 149.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 149-150.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 143, 148.

⁷⁰ Carter, *The Nobel Peace Prize Lecture* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), pp. 16-17.

During his first meeting with Prime Minister Begin in July 1977, Carter noted the words of Isaiah, “And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effects of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.”⁷¹ In November 1977, before the World Jewish Congress, Carter said, “The Old Testament offers a vision” of what peace in the region might entail. Quoting the Prophet Micah at length (1:1-5), Carter said,

But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow into it.

And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: and the law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it.

For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.⁷²

This vision, Carter concluded, would be his guide and ought to be that of all, Christian, Jew, and Muslim, who wish to see peace in the Middle East. In fact, he said, “it is our duty to walk together toward the fulfillment of this majestic prophecy.”

Later that month, in an exchange with reporters as he left the First Baptist Church in Washington, where he had offered a prayer for regional peace from the pulpit at the very time President Sadat made his historic visit to Israel to address the Knesset, Carter explained that his prayer echoed the will and hope of the world for peace, that Jewish and Muslim peoples in the region were exhausted from war and violence, and that

⁷¹ Carter, “Remarks at Welcoming Ceremony with Prime Minister Begin,” July 19, 1977, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Book II*, p. 1282.

“Christ, our Savior, is the Prince of Peace.”⁷³ He also noted that on this same day Prime Minister Begin, “a very deeply religious man,” had “worshipped God in a Jewish temple,” and President Sadat had “worshipped the same God in a Moslem mosque” and then “worshipped the same God in a Christian holy place where Christ was buried.”⁷⁴ One reporter asked, “You see the hand of God moving in all this, don’t you?” This shared faith in God, a faith that Christians, Jews, and Muslims all share, Carter characterized as “an avenue of communication and common purpose” among the disputing parties. Carter also mentioned to members of the press on this occasion that he had similar discussions with Saudi Crown Prince Fahd. In Middle East discussions, a “common religious bond,” he said, “provides a possible avenue for peace.”

During his visit with President Sadat in February 1978, Carter called his involvement in the Middle East peace process a “sacred mission for peace.”⁷⁵ He said that he and the Egyptian President shared the same vision for the region. “This is the vision that we share.”⁷⁶ Describing the search for regional peace a “calling,” citing the Bible’s authority and the Biblical honor of being a “son of God,” Carter proclaimed,

There is no nobler calling on this Earth than the seeking for peace. For it is that reason which caused the Bible to say that peacemakers shall be called the sons of God.

At the annual National Prayer Breakfast, in January 1979, looking back over the events of the previous year, Carter cited that several of “most interesting news events of

⁷² Carter, “Remarks at the Meeting of the General Council of the World Jewish Congress,” November 2, 1977, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book II*, p. 1957.

⁷³ Carter, “Remarks during Informal Exchange with Reporters on Departure from the First Baptist Church in Washington, DC,” November 20, 1977, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book II*, p. 2042.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2043.

⁷⁵ Carter, “Remarks on the Arrival of President Sadat,” February 3, 1978, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 274.

⁷⁶ Carter, “Remarks on the Departure of President Sadat,” February 8, 1978, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 290.

the year...had some religious connotation.”⁷⁷ Among the events the President cited was the signing of the Camp David Accords. Though conventionally the modern world is considered to be “highly secular,” Carter explained that events like Camp David showed that people were still motivated by faith. To begin their 13-day summit, which had been intended to last three days but no more than seven, Carter said that he, Begin, and Sadat prayed for peace and called upon the world to join in their “common prayer for peace.” Secretary of State Cyrus Vance explained that President Carter was determined “at the outset to put the summit on a high plane, reflecting the deep religious faith and humane purposes of the three leaders.”⁷⁸

In his memoirs, Carter reported that when he left for Camp David, “on Monday, September 4...I went...with all my maps, briefing books, notes, summaries of past negotiations, and my annotated Bible, which I predicted—accurately, as it turned out—would be needed in my discussions with Prime Minister Begin.”⁷⁹ After Camp David, Brzezinski noted, Carter even envisioned that a final peace accord could be signed at “the Monastery of St. Catherine in the middle of the Sinai,” the place traditionally believed to be where Moses received the Ten Commandments from God.⁸⁰

“In the Name of God”: Carter Comes Before the Arab Muslim World

Upon President Carter’s arrival in Cairo, Egypt, on March 8, 1979, he told Sadat that he was “determined to persevere” in concluding the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty because “our common dedication, our common determination is rooted in the soil of common religious truth.” The President pointed to their shared belief in the one, true God and in truth. Though the particular truths of their faith traditions may vary, Carter

⁷⁷ Carter, “Remarks at the Annual National Prayer Breakfast,” January 18, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 59.

⁷⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 220.

⁷⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 329.

explained, the “underlying message is the same—it’s a message of love, of faith, and of peace.” He asked his Egyptian partner to pray with him “in the words of the Christian gospel,” for God “to guide our feet into the way of peace.”⁸¹

Two days later on March 10, in his address before the People’s Assembly of Egypt, Carter began with the words, “I...come before you in the name of God” and “as a partner” and “friend” of the Egyptian President. In this address, Carter cited the religious texts of Muslims, Jews, and Christians, to remind all of their obligations to God and each other to pursue the age-old hope for peace in the region. Again, Carter invoked images from sacred texts. From the Quran, he used words to encourage Egyptians to reach out to their old adversary Israel: “If thine adversary incline towards peace, do thou also incline towards peace and trust in God, for he is the one that heareth and knoweth all things.” From the Hebrew Scriptures, he cited the words, “Depart from evil and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” He then invoked the famous words of Jesus from his Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”⁸²

Two weeks later (March 25), Carter, Begin, and Sadat issued a joint statement that grounded the occasion in unmistakable religious terms. The statement read:

At the convening of the Camp David summit meeting we issued a communication which stated in part—‘Conscious of the grave issues that face us, we place our trust in the God of our fathers from whom we seek wisdom and guidance. We request people of all faiths to pray with us that peace and justice will result from these deliberations.’

Our trust in God was well-placed. On Monday, a treaty of peace will be signed between Egypt and Israel within the framework of a comprehensive peace settlement in the area. We are grateful to the people around the world who joined us in prayer. We now ask people of all faiths to join again in a

⁸⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 274-275.

⁸¹ Carter, “Remarks at Welcoming Ceremony with President Sadat in Cairo, Egypt,” March 8, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 407.

⁸² Carter, “Address before the People’s Assembly in Cairo, Egypt,” March 10, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, pp. 412, 414.

day of prayer and thanksgiving for what has been accomplished, and then ask God to guide our nations in the days ahead as we continue to work for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. With God's help, we and generations to come will know peace between our peoples. To this end, we ask that Monday, March 26, be a day of prayer around the world.⁸³

At the signing ceremony the following day, Carter concluded his remarks pointing to his repeated vision for the region.⁸⁴ Quoting the Prophet Isaiah in full, Carter spoke the ancient words: "Nations shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." He then said, as the prophet foretold, "So let us now lay aside war." Carter finished his remarks looking ahead to the wider political vision for the region.

Let us now reward all the children of Abraham who hunger for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Let us now enjoy the adventure of becoming fully human, fully neighbors, even brothers and sisters. We pray God, we pray God together, that these dreams will come true. I believe they will.

That night, at a dinner honoring Sadat and Begin, President Carter invoked the biblical vision of regional peace and expressed his hope that indeed that vision was coming to pass. "The peace that was born today has a meaning that comes down to us through many years or generations, even centuries."⁸⁵ This vision, for Carter, has its origins in Genesis, the Bible's first book.

In ancient days, God promised Abraham that from his seed would come many nations. And as you know, that promise has been fulfilled. Yet for much too long, the people of Israel and the people of Egypt—two of the nations of the children of Abraham, trusting in the same God, hoping for the same peace—knew only enmity between them.

Hopeful that another promise of the Bible was in the process of being fulfilled during his presidency, Carter said, "That time, thank God, is now at an end."

⁸³ "Joint Statement Issued by President Carter, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel," March 25, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, 1979, Book I*, pp. 490-491.

⁸⁴ Carter, "Remarks at the Signing Ceremony of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty with President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin," March 26, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 518.

Citing “the vision of the psalmist,” Carter said, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” “We share a vision of a time when all the people of the Middle East may turn back their energies backs to the works of life,” building families, watching their children grow, and living to old age, sustained by “the depth of our common faith in a just and merciful God.”⁸⁶

Quoting the book of Ecclesiastes, a book traditionally attributed to King Solomon, son of David and ancient Israel’s third king, Carter said, “For every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” And for Carter, the signing of the peace treaty marked “a season of renewal” for the peoples of Egypt and Israel who have had to endure too many centuries of persecution and dominance at the hands of foreign powers.⁸⁷

Together, in the words of Solomon, the peoples of Egypt and Israel experienced “a time to die,” of the planted being plucked up, “a time to kill, a time of breaking down, a time to mourn, a time of weeping, a time to lose, a time to hate, and a time for war.” For both countries, “we pray that the season of weeping is past” and that they were entering “ a time to heal, a time to plant, a time to build up, a time to laugh, a time to dance, a time to embrace, a time to love.” “We pray to God,” Carter said, “that at last the children of Abraham have come to a time of peace.”⁸⁸

Religion, Carter’s Motivation for Peacemaking

Jimmy Carter may have prayed, but a comprehensive regional peace still has not come. He laments the ongoing strife among “the People of the Book” in the Holy Land and that the Scriptures remain “a source of more difference than agreement, inspiring

⁸⁵ Carter, “Remarks at a State Dinner Honoring President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin,” March 26, 1979, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 522.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 523.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

more hatred than love, more war than peace.”⁸⁹ In particular, he laments that his former denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, has been led since 1979 by intransigent Christian Zionist ministers, who merely see Israel and the region through the lens of their “eschatological, or final days, theology.”⁹⁰

Nevertheless, Carter did help mediate a peace between Israel and Egypt, something that eluded his predecessors. Furthermore, none of his successors have been able to have a Camp David-like moment. Even critics concede Carter’s monumental contribution at Camp David. One critic, for instance, who argued that Carter had betrayed the philo-Semitic religious tradition of the United States because of some comments he made in his controversial 2006 book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, still argued that after “nearly six decades of American mediation” there has been “only one lasting [policy] success: the 1979 treaty between Egypt and Israel.” Interestingly, though he mentioned by name the failures of presidents going back to Harry Truman, this Carter critic failed to even mention the name of the president intimately involved in that lone, lasting presidential success.⁹¹ Though the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt led to more of a “cold peace” than a true peace based on collective trust and friendship (which Carter concedes), Carter proudly and repeatedly states that after a quarter-century “not a word of that treaty has been violated.”⁹²

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 524.

⁸⁹ Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, p. 5; *Talking Peace*, p. 5.

⁹⁰ Carter, “Just War—or a Just War?,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2003; *Our Endangered Values: America’s Moral Crisis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), pp. 113-114; “Interview with David Postman,” *Seattle Times*, December 13, 2006. Carter certainly would not endorse the extreme Christian Zionism of some religious leaders. For instance, Carter, like many other evangelicals, including President George W. Bush, would not have supported Pat Robertson’s assessment of Sharon’s illness. After Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon suffered a debilitating stroke in early 2006, Robertson said that Sharon was being punished by God for unilaterally withdrawing from Gaza. “He was dividing God’s land. And I would say, ‘Woe unto any Prime Minister of Israel who takes a similar course to appease the E.U., the United Nations or the United States of America.’ God says, ‘This land belongs to me. You better leave it alone.’” Robertson’s quote printed in “Notebook,” *Time*, January 16, 2006, p. 19.

⁹¹ Michael Oren, “America’s many failed attempts at Mideast peace,” *Boston Globe*, January 2, 2007.

⁹² Christopher Dickey and Zvika Krieger, “Egypt and Israel: A Cold Peace,” *Newsweek International*, October 16, 2006, <http://www.msnbc.com>; Carter, “Precedents for Mideast Peace,” *New York Times*, December 23, 2001;

While other considerations mattered, President Jimmy Carter fundamentally believed that working for peace in the Middle East was not about good politics. Rather, it was about doing good, doing what was pleasing to God, doing what was in accordance with biblical principles, and doing what Christ had taught. Given the importance of the Middle East, especially the Israeli-Arab dimension, this region would be important for any American president. The risk of a region-wide war that could draw in the two superpowers, the threat of greater Soviet influence, and Western dependence on Mideast oil were all weighty matters for American presidents since Truman.⁹³ “Peace in the Middle East is of vital interest to us all,” Carter said.⁹⁴ However, that is not the whole story. For Carter, there was something more at stake than merely protecting U.S. interests in the region.

Politically, Carter understood the stakes. He understood the high political risks involved, and he ultimately paid a heavy price personally and politically.⁹⁵ “The Middle East dispute,” he said, “was the heaviest political burden.” “It was very time-consuming” and involvement was commonly “frustrating and thankless.”⁹⁶ He knew that failure could further erode his prestige at home and abroad; he knew that it could hinder his other foreign policy goals and weaken his standing among world leaders. He knew it would be personally taxing, exhausting, and deeply emotional work. Given all this, one should

“Interview with Tim Sebastian,” *BBC World News’ Hardtalk with Tim Sebastian*, December 10, 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/hardtalk/2568809.stm>; “Remarks at the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel,” January 10, 2005, <http://www.eappi.org> (accessed July 8, 2006); “Interview with Wolf Blitzer,” *CNN’s The Situation Room*, February 20, 2006; “Remarks and Question-and-Answer Session at the Council on Foreign Relations,” March 2, 2006; “Interview with Larry King,” *CNN’s Larry King Live*, September 13, 2006; “Telephone Interview with Christopher Dickey of *Newsweek*,” *MSNBC.com/Newsweek*, October 7, 2006; “Interview with Larry King,” *CNN’s Larry King Live*, November 27, 2006.

⁹³ Carter, “Remarks and Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Meeting in Clinton, Massachusetts,” March 16, 1977, in *Public Papers of the Presidents, Book I*, p. 387.

⁹⁴ Carter, “Remarks to the American Chamber of Commerce in Tokyo, Japan,” May 28, 1975, *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Jimmy Carter* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), p. 69.

⁹⁵ Miller, “Shadow and Substance,” p. 3.

⁹⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 421.

not be surprised why future presidents after Carter did not make Middle East peace a priority. They understood, as Carter's press secretary Jody Powell put it, "that making peace in the Middle East was a political loser."⁹⁷

Despite the personal and political risks and costs, Carter pursued Middle East peace anyway. As shown here, what sustained Carter in this pursuit of peace, what contributed to his emotional endurance, what provided him a vision of the improbable, what gave him a dogged sense of mission, was his religious faith. He was motivated by a belief that as a Christian the pursuit of Middle East peace was obligatory for him, that it was "in keeping with the teaching of Scripture."

Though ignored by many and doubted by some, religion, Carter believed, can be a constructive force for good in the world.⁹⁸ It can build trust where only suspicion was known; it can give hope to peoples that have known despair. Without religion, Carter said, the Camp David accords would have been unthinkable; it was a crucial dimension of his statecraft. If President Nixon was right that future presidents should emulate Carter, a crucial part of his example appears to be that American presidents would be advised to examine and explore the peacemaking, peacebuilding potential found within their own personal religious faith traditions and the collective Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as Jimmy Carter had done.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Tom Baxter, "Carter expected firestorm over book, ex-aide says," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 19, 2007.

⁹⁸ Though he conceded that "a common interest in religion seems to have served at least as a diplomatic lubricant among" Carter, Sadat, and Begin, Leo P. Ribuffo denied that Carter's faith played much of a role in his pursuit of a negotiated Middle East settlement. Ribuffo wrote, "To be sure, his Middle East policy derived less from theology than from geopolitics and personal affinities." See "God and Jimmy Carter," in *Transforming Faith: The Sacred and the Secular in Modern American History*, eds. M.L. Bradbury and James B. Gilbert (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), p. 152. Tom Princen argued that ultimately Carter acted on the basis of protecting American interests, "to salvage his presidency," resorting to the use of "hard-bargaining" and "carrots and sticks." "Camp David: Problem-Solving or Power Politics as Usual?" *Journal of Peace Research* 28.1 (1991): 65-68.