

The Truth About My Headline-Making Trip to Israel

Truth matters. That's why during the lunch hour at a northern Israeli kibbutz, I skipped a group event to set the record straight about the first few days of my headline-making trip in Israel. It seems that those vilifying it are misinformed.

I've been traveling with people who represent many faiths, ethnicities, ages, and even have friends and relatives whose lifestyles and/or political beliefs are quite different than theirs. And we are witnessing first-hand the reality of Israeli daily life that most Americans cannot comprehend.

Imagine the state of New Jersey, approximately the same size in square miles as Israel, under constant threat of attack by all of North America. Next imagine not only being blamed for being attacked but also having no one come to its aid. That is Israel's situation.

Today in the Golan Heights we heard gunfire and saw an explosion that mushroomed smoke just a few miles from where we stood atop Mt. Bental in Israel as United Nations personnel looked on. In fact, as recent as six months ago skirmishes with al-Qaida occurred even closer, spilling over the Syrian border and buffer zone. It was immediately obvious to us that peace is not only fragile but can be lost at any moment. Just a few short miles northwest we passed the Israeli town of Rajar along the Lebanon border where two IDF soldiers were killed last week. Following Iranian orders, Hezbollah launched a Russian anti-tank missile from Lebanon easily reaching Israeli soil.

Contrast that with yesterday's journey to the Galilean hills of Capernaum where Jesus peacefully fed and taught 5,000 people. A patchwork of vibrant colors paint the ancient

volcanic hillside demarcating green wheat fields from rows of mango, avocado, olive, banana and apple trees. In Capernaum, which translated means “place of comfort,” laborers, farmers and fishermen left their work for a few hours to hear Jesus speak. Knowing His listeners were oppressed by the Romans, Jesus offered them comfort and hope. Many on the trip heard from ministers who like Jesus encouraged them to be salt and light in their communities, including actively participating in government.

Israel, where Jesus lived and taught, is the birthplace of Christianity. And its land is rich with historical evidence of how God’s people ruled and/or interacted with rulers. From Solomon teaching wisdom to David defending Israel to Nehemiah rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall, faith and politics were always interrelated in God’s world.

It’s important to note the twofold Biblical teaching about government’s purpose. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob created the world and everything in it. Within this context, government was created to restrain evil and promote good—to enable human flourishing. And within this context, citizens are subject to governing authorities, and rulers are God’s servants tasked with instilling order. Likewise, all Christians must pray for their nation and seek ways in which they can promote their neighbors’ well-being. In America “we the people” govern a constitutional republic. “We the people” govern—not those in Congress or the White House. Governing is supposed to be representative—by the elected on behalf of those who elect them.

Christians have for far too long ignored their responsibility to be salt and light. Biblical living involves all areas of life—including politics. Christians must be involved in creating laws that restrain evil as defined by God, laws that enable citizens to live peacefully. This was understood by the Founding Fathers. One of the quotes recently used to mock Christians was actually a phrase from the Mayflower Compact.

Sadly, less history is taught in schools and more Americans have little to no understanding of it.

America has been a long-time ally of Israel and many Christians seek to visit the very earth on which Jesus walked. I'm not referring to secular or nominal Christians, but genuine authentic Bible-believing Christians who worship a living God. Ministers on the trip explained that near the ruins of Caesarea Phillipi Jesus told his followers to confront the belief in pagan Roman gods and not be afraid. Jesus's followers courageously proclaimed the good news of the gospel and paid for their faith with their lives throughout the first three centuries.

Like Israel, much is at stake in America. And like the early Christians, Christians today have a choice as to how they will live. There is no "right" or "left," "liberal" or "conservative" Christian—only those who faithfully follow God's Word. The sad truth, as one of my Scottish friends used to say, is that "Christianity in America is a mile wide and an inch deep."

Hopefully, however, those participating on such a life-changing trip, will recognize their responsibility and privilege to be a part of the solution in restoring the various broken aspects of our society. Christians must not only support the lone free democratic state intersecting three continents, but also protect what Dennis Prager refers to as the American Trinity: Liberty, In God We Trust and E Pluribus Unum.

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