

Why Are Presbyterians Launching Hate Speech Vilifying Israel?

A disturbing study guide entitled “Zionism Unsettled” has been published by an arm of the Presbyterian Church (USA), or PCUSA. The publication is filled with distorted facts and a historical narrative so extreme that some Jewish groups are calling it “hate speech.”

It vilifies Israel and Zionism while ignoring Palestinian terrorism, calls for the annihilation of the Jewish state, and absolves Arab leaders of their culpability in the plight of the Palestinian people. The study guide proves that the PCUSA has aligned itself with the most radical of positions by equating Zionism with racism, comparing it to centuries of Christian anti-Semitism and calling for a rethinking of the Holocaust to include the plight of the Palestinians.

The chapter on evangelicals and Christian Zionism skews the facts to portray Christians who support Israel as dangerous and a threat to Middle East peace. The chapter is taken largely from the writings of Dr. Gary Burge, an evangelical Presbyterian and professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, who admits to holding a form of replacement theology in spite of the fact that it was the root of centuries of Christian anti-Semitism.

Replacement theology teaches that God abandoned the Jewish people, has broken His promises to them and has chosen a new people, the church. The danger with this theology is that it implies the Jewish people have been rejected and discarded due to their sin and failures. It is fertile ground for the proliferation of anti-Semitism and should be guarded against.

The apostle Paul said in Romans 11 that God is not finished

with the Jewish people and that their calling is irrevocable. In Hebrews 6, the writer cites God's faithfulness to the Abrahamic covenant to encourage beleaguered Christians to keep their faith, knowing they serve a faithful God.

Nevertheless, Burge goes so far as to say that the New Testament teaching spiritualizes and universalizes the Old Testament land promises to the Jewish people by treating them as spiritual metaphor. While it is true that in Galatians 3:29, the apostle Paul said that Christians do enjoy the blessings of Abraham as spiritual heirs, he did not claim that they replaced the natural heirs nor were meant to inherit the land. This would require a rewriting of Scripture, since the land promised to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was "everlasting" and is confirmed 46 times throughout the books of the Old Testament.

Psalm 105 says that God does not break covenants or alter the word that has gone out of His mouth; therefore, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would receive the promises made to them. It is because of these Scriptures that the disciples asked Jesus if He was going to "restore the kingdom to Israel now" (Acts 1:6). He simply said the time was not for them to know, clearly indicating it would happen in God's timing.

In Luke 21, Jesus said that Jerusalem would once again be under Jewish sovereignty and put it in an eschatological light. Burge attempts to diminish the reach of Christian Zionism by limiting it as dispensational and dual covenant in theology. While dispensationalism is theology favorable toward Israel, only one in every 10 Christians is a dispensationalist.

A much larger number of Christians, from a wide-variety of denominations and theological persuasions, have supported the restoration of the Jews to their homeland, including John and Charles Wesley, Robert Murray M'Cheyne, Bishop Ryle of

Liverpool, Charles Spurgeon, the Puritans, professor Jacob Janeway of the Scottish National Church, Martin Luther King Jr. and many others.

Christian Zionism is also not “dual covenant.” Mainstream Christian Zionists are found in all the historical and contemporary church movements, including the Presbyterian Church, and they most certainly believe that Jesus’ finished work on the cross is their only grounds of salvation. While the basis for Christian Zionism is found in the Abrahamic covenant, in which God announced to Abraham His plan to create a people through whom He would carry out His plan to redeem the world, the Abrahamic covenant needed the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant and the New Covenant to bring about that great salvation.

Israel’s role as the vehicle of God’s redemptive plan does not make her better than any other people groups but rather more accountable to God. The Jewish people are chosen for the blessing of the nations, including the Palestinian people. However, this study by the PCUSA construes the chosenness of the Jewish people to be a form of racism that esteems them higher than other peoples and therefore not held to the same standard of accountability.

The PCUSA may wish that Christians that support Israel and the Jewish people be a fringe group, but the fact is that some 70 percent of Americans are favorable toward Israel. There are a number of reasons why Americans support Israel: personal experience while touring Israel, admiration for Israeli technology and innovation or appreciation for the only democracy in the Middle East. Bible-believing Christians support Israel because of their reading of the Scriptures. In short, God has brought the Jewish people back to their homeland in fulfillment of His promises to Abraham, and millions of Christians want to bless and help them.

Conversely, the PCUSA has aligned itself with extreme and

radical groups such as Sabeel.

Founded by Naim Ateek, Sabeel propagates Palestinian liberation theology that disregards any portion of Scripture that disagrees with Ateek's anti-Semitic views. Hence, right out of the Sabeel playbook, this study guide calls for churches to stop using hymns and liturgy that use the biblical terms *exodus*, *covenant*, *return*, *blossoming of the desert*, *Zion* and *Israel*.

It is time that the PCUSA wake up and realize that holding radical and anti-Semitic positions, such as those reflected in this study guide, will only guarantee its continued membership decline, because most Americans not only shun hate speech but admire and stand with the people of Israel.

Susan Michael is U.S. director of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem and the creator of .