

Your No. 1 Reason for Resisting the Scourge of Antisemitism

As hostages and prisoners are being exchanged in Israel during a short humanitarian reprieve in the Israeli-Hamas war, many Jews living in other parts of the world are experiencing their own antisemitic discrimination. Expressions of hatred and violence toward Jews, Judaism and the nation of Israel have insidiously appeared in neighborhoods, workplaces and schools, making Jews afraid of being “publicly Jewish.”

With Hanukkah celebrations just ahead, some Jewish families have decided not to decorate for the holidays with fear of reprisals or violence. Jewish males may hide their *kippah* (head covering, “skullcap”) under a baseball cap. Others are avoiding wearing their Star of David jewelry, and some have even removed their mezuzah-Scriptures from their entryway doorposts.

Students on some college and university campuses have found themselves feeling unsafe to even attend classes due to classic forms of antisemitism. According to National Review, three Jewish students have sued New York University for allegedly committing “egregious civil rights violations” and creating a “hostile educational environment” in which Jewish students were subject to “pervasive acts of hatred, discrimination, harassment, and intimidation.”

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Who or What Is a Semite?

Originally, Semite was a linguistic and cultural

classification, denoting someone who spoke a language from an area of antiquity spreading out from what is now southern Iraq. The name comes via Latin from Greek *Sēm* or 'Shem', son of Noah in the Bible (Gen. 10:1, 21-24), from whom these people traditionally descended. This linguistically obsolete term includes a much broader range of people from the historic Middle East than just the Jews and includes many Arab tribes as well.

In the late 19th century, a pseudo-scientific racial theory began circulating in Europe. Certain "race scientists" began labeling Jews in a demeaning way as "Semites" to distinguish them from the supposedly superior Aryans. Finally, by the time of Hitler and the Nazis, the "Jewish problem" and antisemitism had festered to the point that the Nazis ultimately killed 6 million Jews as "the Final Solution" in the horrors of the Holocaust.

Today, some countries have adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism and its acknowledgment of hostility to, prejudice toward or other forms of discrimination against Jews. As advocates say, "antisemitism is a scourge and must be combated vigorously."

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Jesus Bypassed Prejudice

Early in Jesus' ministry He sought to avoid controversy with the Pharisees, departing Jerusalem and Judea and leaving for Galilee. But He felt a divine compulsion to "go through Samaria" (John 4:1-26). There he met a Samaritan woman who wanted to argue with him about their cultural and religious differences. Jesus told her true worship is not mere form and ceremony but "in truth," that is, transparent, sincere and according to biblical requirements (4:23-24).

As J. Lee Grady reminded us in his recent Charisma News article, "When Jesus lived in Israel 2,000 years ago, He

didn't support the religious racism of His day. He healed a Roman centurion's servant, ministered to a Canaanite woman's daughter, talked to a Samaritan woman and ventured into Gentile territory. He told the Jews that God's love is much wider than our narrow political boundaries."

Likewise, as followers of Jesus and His ways, we must bypass prejudice and eliminate envy and hatred of all kinds. "Pervasive acts of hatred, discrimination, harassment and intimidation" should never be named among God's people.

Instead, He gives us the renewing of the Holy Spirit to enable new, proper motives of love and kindness (Titus 3:1-7). The prospect of being transformed into the likeness of Christ motivates us to live righteously, as we purify ourselves, "just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3b).

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Licensed to full-time ministry in 1967, Gary Curtis has served on pastoral staffs and in administrative roles at churches in Illinois and California, including 27 years at The Church on The Way, the First Foursquare Church of Van Nuys, California. Now retired, Gary continues to write a weekly teaching blog and frequently contributes ministry-related articles for digital and print platforms.