

Ben & Jerry's, Boycotts and Israel

Ice cream lovers have their preferences both in flavors and brands. Recently, Ben & Jerry's turned the stomachs of many by announcing a boycott of Israel that's bad for Israel, the Jewish people, even for Palestinian Arabs—and will be bad for them.

Twenty years ago, Ben & Jerry's was purchased by corporate giant Unilever. It became one more brand in a huge international conglomerate that has a range of other food and beverage products, personal hygiene and more. The founders, Ben and Jerry, made a lot of money and walked away, but the company retained a degree of independence from their owners, specifically in promoting their social values.

In that context, when the Ben & Jerry's board in the U.S. announced that they were imposing a boycott of Israeli communities over the Green Line, what they refer to as "occupied Palestinian territories" that are known biblically as Judea and Samaria, they really stepped in the double fudge brownie, so to speak.

Other than rewriting historical fact by suggesting that there was ever a "Palestine" that Israel occupied and advocating for a discriminatory boycott of Israel, part of a formal movement to do so that's as old as when Ben & Jerry's was sold to Unilever, they also stepped into a situation where they embraced generations of antisemitic boycotts that typically never ended well for the Jewish people. In fact, what's been learned since the boycott was announced is that corporate Ben & Jerry's has been trying to get the independent licensor in Israel to stop selling products over the Green Line for some time. The Israeli company refused. So Ben & Jerry's decided not to renew the license of the current company to produce

their branded ice cream.

Underscoring this, while corporate owner Unilever has a degree of responsibility and culpability, they did come out with a statement saying that Ben & Jerry's will continue selling in Israel, making no specific notation of where the boundaries of Israel's border are according to them. This apparently angered the Ben & Jerry's board which, through its obsessive political advocacy, seems to have wanted to punish Israel in general and stop manufacturing and selling in Israel at all.

Any number of lawsuits are in the works or being considered. Potential litigants include Ben & Jerry's Israel, Unilever, distributors and independent consumers. U.S. states with laws that prevent discriminatory boycotts of Israel may also be party to lawsuits or minimally see them eliminate all contracts with Ben & Jerry's. One big state university purging the ice cream from their freezers could have a significant impact.

People who boycott Israel, and companies specifically in Judea and Samaria, do so ostensibly to support the Palestinians. They also carry an antisemitic undertone because the level of discrimination is such that they would never apply these standards to actual countries that are perpetual abusers of human rights. Not to mention, boycotting Israel does nothing to support the Palestinians. In fact, invariably, they hurt Palestinian Arabs who work for the companies that they choose to boycott. With friends like these, who needs enemies.

Listen to this episode of *Inspiration From Zion with Jonathan Feldstein* on Charisma Podcast Network as political and nonprofit consultant, Ruthie Leiberman, unpacks what this means. {eo}

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