

COVID-19 Vaccines, Conspiracy Theories and Israel

Opponents of Israel have tried to paint the nation as apartheid and compare it to Nazi Germany for years. The accusations of apartheid and crimes against humanity are not widely accepted at present. In recent months, however, commentary has evolved criticizing Israel's COVID-19 vaccination policy, at times likening it to these atrocities by mischaracterizing the terms medical apartheid and medical experimentation. Israel's enemies are attempting to exploit its COVID-19 policy in an effort to condemn the nation in the eyes of the world.

Misinformation regarding COVID-19 vaccines has reached unprecedented levels. These misleading inaccuracies have further helped the cause of Israel's critics. They also have wreaked havoc on the validity of vaccinations and influenced people not to receive a vaccine. With fewer people willing to receive these vaccines, some governments and businesses are considering a vaccine mandate. Israel's sovereignty and legitimacy are now under attack through targeted anti-vax conspiracies and lies. It is important to consider a potential source of these falsehoods and their adverse impact on Israel.

Before going further, it's important to make some disclaimers. First, there are some legitimate concerns that people might have regarding the COVID-19 vaccines. I do not address these issues but only those created and magnified by the dissemination of counterfeit data. Additionally, this is not to try to determine whether these vaccines are "safe." Writing as a safety professional of more than four decades, I can attest that "safe" is not an absolute term. Safety is a complex determination based on risks and benefits. The ethics of mandatory vaccinations are also beyond this article's scope and best left to ethical experts.

One source of disinformation stems from far-right or alt-right entities that claim to be Christian and sound Christian but have unbiblical foundational beliefs, including antisemitism. They have deliberately chosen to target and exploit COVID-19 anti-vax attitudes and fears as they pertain to Israel. Many in the Christian community have unwittingly accepted and propagated these myths. In doing so, they have inadvertently participated in this insidious attack on Israel and the Jewish people. Christians should only pass on information that they know to be true. Misinformation may come from anti-Christian sources.

The International Institute of Counter-Terrorism in Herzliya, Israel, recently published the report "Infected by Hate: Far-Right Attempts to Leverage Anti-Vaccine Sentiment." The report documents efforts by the alt-right to exploit anti-vax sentiments into their broader efforts to victimize Jewish people and reduce trust in governments. In the late 1990s, the U.S. government's terrorism planning focused on domestic terrorism actors and included umbrella titles like "Patriot Movement," "Militia Movement" and "Christian Identity Movement." These organizations are anti-government. They are racist, referring to Blacks as "mud people," created out of the mud. They are also antisemitic, describing Jewish people as the "spawn of Satan." And they now appear to be manipulating vaccine discussions regarding vaccines to vilify Israel.

The accusation of medical apartheid aligns with the historical lie that Israel is an apartheid nation. The definition of apartheid conveys racial segregation and bias. Some have tried to expand the definition beyond race. Never before has it been applied to medical distinctions like vaccination status, which are based on personal decisions. Modifying public activities, during a pandemic, based on one's ability to become infected or infect others, is not equivalent to discrimination based on race.

Several organizations have even submitted complaints to the International Criminal Court, implicating Israel with violating the Nuremberg Protocols through its COVID-19 vaccination policy. The allegations that Israel has defied the Nuremberg Protocols are more serious and erroneous. Equating vaccinating people with the experiments in Nazi Germany is beyond reason, even when using an experimental vaccine approved under the FDA's emergency use authorization. Moreover, it is a particularly offensive assertion as the Jewish people were victims of Nazi Germany's medical experimentation.

The Nuremberg Protocols do not define medical experiment. Neither the World Medical Association's Helsinki Declaration nor the World Health Organization's Global Health Ethics unit provides guidance. They all imply, however, that medical research is medical testing undertaken to answer a question. The FDA's definition of research is more descriptive:

A study done to answer a question. Scientists do research when they're not sure what will work best to help people with an illness. Other words to describe clinical research are "clinical trial," "protocol," "study," and "experiment."

Vaccinating a population is not medical research. Receiving an experimental vaccine does not make you a test subject, and not taking a vaccine does not put you in the control group.

A recent court decision in Texas on an employer's mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy verifies this conclusion. "As to the plaintiff's argument that the mandatory vaccination requirement was akin to "forced medical experimentation during the Holocaust," the court deemed the argument "reprehensible" and "dismissed it out of hand."

Christians should be careful not to align with false narrative and engage in the promulgation of misinformation, especially when directed at Israel and the Jewish people. Here are some

thoughts on how we need to respond:

- First and foremost, do not curse Israel. God promises that those who do will be cursed themselves. Those who bless Israel shall be blessed (Gen. 12:3).
- Test all things. Verify that something is true before you accept it as credible, especially before sharing it with others (Ps. 15:2).
- Preach the gospel. It is God's priority and needs to be our focus (Matt. 24:14).
- Always obey Scripture. That means to pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Ps. 122:6). {eoa}

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Paul Tranchell lives with his wife, Christine, in Liverpool, New York. Their ministry focuses on facilitating the emergence of the One New Man along with other key elements of the gospel of the kingdom. Paul recently retired from a career in safety and industrial hygiene. He was involved in emergency management and bio/chem/rad terrorism response planning. The combination of ministry and professional responsibilities resulted in a strong connection with and love for Israel.