

Israel: Catastrophe or Prophecy?

There is no shortage of people who look to every opportunity to discredit and find fault with Israel. Israel is not perfect, and there are many challenges and things I'd change if I could wave a wand and do so.

However, the vast majority of criticism of Israel is inaccurate, based on incomplete or deliberate misinformation, and often guided by a thinly veiled coat of anti-Semitism.

I once hosted a group of Christian students and was provoked by a question that lingers still today. I was asked, "What's the most inaccurate depiction of Israel in the media?" I was taken by the simplicity of the question, and the challenge I had answering it, simply because there are so many.

One that jumps out is calling Israel an "apartheid state." Originally, apartheid involved racist laws and overt discrimination that governed South Africa for decades; a complete racial separation codified by the laws of the state and woven into every aspect of society. Objectively, there is no resemblance of modern Israel with apartheid South Africa.

Israel has Arab members of the Knesset (parliament) who have not only the same rights as Jewish members, but some even use their rights and immunity from criminal prosecution to present Israel as a state where Arabs don't have equal rights! The audacity of this as they stand at the Knesset podium and espouse anti-Israel rhetoric is profound.

Israel also has an Arab Supreme Court judge, and many other judges throughout all levels of its legal system. One was my boss as Israel's Consul General, the head of a diplomatic mission in Atlanta in the late 1980s. And there are many other Arabs who serve throughout Israel's foreign ministry.

Not only are Israel's hospitals not segregated, but they are one of the finest examples of integration and equality. Israeli Arab doctors and nurses treat Jewish Israeli patients, and Jewish Israeli doctors and nurses from across the spectrum treat Israeli (and even non-Israeli) Arab patients. One of the latest and most incredible examples of this was the evacuation of seven Syrians from across the border on the Golan Heights to an Israeli hospital, treating those injured in, and fleeing from, the horrible civil war that has claimed 70,000 to 100,000 casualties.

This underscores another important bit of misinformation about Israel and the Middle East, that despite how others may portray it, not every problem in the Middle East has to do with Israel. Most don't. Israel is not only not the problem; but often a light in the darkness, and part of the solution. The world overlooks the fact that in two years, more Syrians have been killed by one another than have Arabs been killed as a result of the wars they have fought against Israel. Other examples abound.

In Israeli universities, Arabs attend classes alongside Jews in a way that's so commonplace that to mention it is like saying the sun rises in the morning. It's just part of the fabric of Israeli society.

In sports, Arabs and Jews play on same teams and opposing teams within the spirit of the sport that they are playing. My son represents the all-star soccer team in our town that plays against teams throughout the Jerusalem area. They play against Arab teams and don't think twice about, it with one exception. One Arab team's coach is the first Arab to play on Israel's national all-star team. He knows his soccer. My son and his friends look up to, respect, and learn from the coach of the opposing team.

There is no shortage of other reasons why apartheid and Israel can't even be mentioned in the same sentence with any accuracy

or integrity. Nevertheless, there is no shortage of people who peddle gross lies and are given credibility merely because it's popular to blame and hate Israel.

One of the most prominent is one-term former President, Jimmy Carter, whose book equating Israel and apartheid is slanderous, full of lies and half truths, and actually makes the case why Arab terrorism against Israel is OK.

This month will begin a season of hate as "Israel Apartheid Week" begins, to *"raise awareness about Israel's apartheid policies ... and to build support for the growing Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel campaign."* Thousands of people will gather in hundreds of cities. If Woodstock was three days of love and peace and music, Israel Apartheid Week is a season of hate, anti-Semitism, and lies.

Later in the spring, the Arab world, and those who support the lies of IAW, will morph their festivities to observe the *Nakba*, the catastrophe of Israel's rebirth 65 years ago. The reality could not be more opposite.

Israel's rebirth was not a catastrophe, it is the fulfillment of prophecy. Israel's existence is not mutually exclusive to the Arab world. The core problem is the Arab world's increasing intolerance and lack of recognizing Israel's right to exist. Had they accepted us and agreed to live with us 65 years ago, the Arab world in general, and Palestinian Arabs in particular, would have been much better off than they are now.

For those who stand with Israel, who understand the fulfillment of prophecy that Israel embodies, who understand that Israel remains the sole island of democracy and freedom of religion in the Middle East, the only country in the region where Christians are not persecuted by a Muslim majority, this season that others have hijacked as a season of hating Israel must be turned into a season of love and support for Israel.

I have been blessed to create Heart to Heart, an incredible

program that expresses this love and support in the most tangible way possible, blessing Israel and saving lives in Israel by ensuring Israel always has a safe and plentiful blood supply. Any country needs this, but Israel all the more so, surrounded by neighbors who still fight and threaten us at every turn.

So when others are mourning the “catastrophe” of Israel’s rebirth 65 years ago, we have established a goal to have at least 65 churches and other ministries stand with Israel, supporting Heart to Heart, and expressing their support. Please join us blessing Israel, and turning the tide of this season from that of hate and lies, to love and life.

Jonathan Feldstein is the Israel Representative for the American Friends of Magen David Adom and Director of Heart to Heart, a unique virtual blood donation program to save lives and bless Israel. Born and educated in the U.S., Jonathan emigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and share experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He can be contacted at FirstPersonIsrael@.