

Israel Under Deluge on Two Fronts

This week, Israel came under attack on two fronts. As of this writing, the attacks continue.

It's likely that only one of these made the news, that of terrorists in Gaza firing dozens of rockets and mortars at southern Israel, endangering more than one million Israelis. This attack was just in time to welcome British Prime Minister Cameron, who condemned the attack. No doubt, much of the reporting of this contains some "even-handed" balance, implying if not stating directly that the cause of the firing these rockets was somehow Israel's fault.

One shudders to think that had the ship full of missiles, mortars, and ammunition that Israel intercepted last week actually made it to the intended recipients in Gaza, how much worse this escalation could be, risking millions more Israelis. Indeed, images like this throughout Israel could in fact become a reality.

The other attack, from another front, is ultimately as dangerous, with tentacles worldwide. This week, the annual "Christ at the Checkpoint" conference is underway in Bethlehem. On the surface, some of the CATC objectives are wonderful, few would not want to support these:

- All forms of violence must be refuted unequivocally.
- Any solution must respect the equity and rights of Israel and Palestinian communities.
- Any challenge of the injustices taking place in the Holy Land must be done in Christian love. Criticism of Israel and the occupation cannot be confused with anti-Semitism and the delegitimization of the State of Israel.
- To motivate and encourage Evangelicals worldwide to

actively seek to contribute to achieving peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

But there's clearly more beneath the surface that's sad, scary and dangerous—not only to Israel and the Jewish people, but to Christians as well. Israel's Foreign Ministry made its position very clear in this article at *Israel Today*.

CATC objectives are troublesome because they are built on a shocking foundation of replacement theology, preaching that God's covenant with the Jews was superseded by "the church." For instance, "Racial ethnicity alone does not guarantee the benefits of the Abrahamic Covenant." This theology entirely rewrites and edits scripture, the very foundation of both Judaism and Christianity, picking parts that work and support this theology, and erasing others that, inconveniently, do not.

Or, "Any exclusive claim to land of the Bible in the name of God is not in line with the teaching of Scripture." The reality is that Israel is the only land deeded by God and it's clear that He deeded it to the Jewish people. This does not preclude the fact that Gentiles live in Israel with full equality and religious freedom.

It's also noteworthy that the vast majority of Israelis are willing to make painful sacrifices for peace, not to replace or remove Arabs living here, supporting living in peace, side by side, with a Palestinian state. If that's exclusivity, we need a new definition of the word.

At a Christian conference hosted by a Palestinian Arab institution in Bethlehem, of all places, one would hope that there would be an honest look at the challenges facing Christianity and Christians in the Holy Land, and the Middle East on the whole. But CATC focuses only on the "occupation" as the source of all problems; "for Palestinian Christians, the occupation is the core issue of the conflict."

In the context of espousing care and concern for Israel, and against violence, was a word uttered in Bethlehem this week about the Iranian arms shipment that Israel intercepted, arms that placed all Israelis at risk equally: Jews, Christians, Muslims, Druze and others?

In the context of challenges facing Christians, was there a word about the threats faced in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, much less among Muslim neighbors right at home in "Palestine," just to name a few? When CATC espouses that, "Christians must understand the global context for the rise of extremist Islam," one must wonder if this merely being an apologist for Islamic radicalism, subtly suggesting that Israel is to blame. Even Amnesty International, hardly an outpost for Zionism, recently blamed Syria for using starvation as a weapon against Palestinian Arabs there in an article in the *Israel Times*.

In fact, with most of the threats to Christians today coming from Islam, based on the foundation of replacement theology that is a cornerstone for CATC, what's to say that if God broke his covenant with the Jewish people in favor of a covenant with Christians, that He won't (or didn't already) break that covenant for one preferred by the followers of Mohammed? Not my God!

From another perspective, was there any discussion of the growing phenomena of Christian Israeli Arabs seeking to identify differently from their Muslim neighbors, and the increase in volunteering for military and national service in Israel? Or the new Christian Israeli Arab political party making its' presence on the stage nationally? Maybe some will disagree with this trend, but an honest dialogue about why Christian Israelis are aligning with Israel ought at least to be worthy of examining if the CATC mantra of Israel being only bad is (still) accurate.

This week, starting Saturday night, Jews worldwide celebrate

Purim, the victory of the Jews of Persia over a plot by Haman to murder all the Jews, as depicted in the Book of Esther, some 2500 years ago. With Israel's interception of the Iranian arms shipment, one does not have to look too hard to see the threat of murderous plots from ancient Persia to modern Persia continue today.

Esther is a lesson of a Jewish woman becoming queen to a Gentile king. Through their love, and the exposure of Haman's hate, the story has a happy ending. It's a model today, for Jews and Gentiles to stand and fellowship together. Not only because it's a nice thing, but also because it's biblical.

There are many examples of Jews and Christians standing together today, honestly recognizing differences, but bound by what unites us rather than separated by what divides us. This week, when we'd all be happier to see a true messenger of peace come from Bethlehem, and as we celebrate Purim, let us commit to stand together, to engage in open and honest dialogue, repel preaching of replacement theology, and overcome challenges that undermine the very foundation of both Judaism and Christianity.

Per the example from Esther (4:14-16), who fasted along with all the Jewish people for three days, Jews also fast for a day preceding the Purim (today). Perhaps, given the challenges Jews and Christians face together from the theology emanating from Bethlehem this week as well as the threats Israel faces from Gaza and Iran, a fast today is especially meaningful. In that light, may God see our hearts and the sincerity of our prayers, and bless Israel as He has promised, and deliver Israel from these threats.

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