

‘Living Openly as a Jew Isn’t Easy’

Since my last update, I have traveled thousands of miles, visiting and sharing personal stories with thousands of Christians who love and support Israel. It’s been very hard being so far from home, in every time zone across the U.S., especially as the war still rages.

Over and over, I have been overwhelmed and overcome with the dual emotions of not being at home, but by feeling very much at home among brothers and sisters who care deeply for Israel, unconditionally. If I have to be so far from home at a time like this, I couldn’t think of a better place to be and better people to be among.

It’s not possible to thank everyone individually, but please know that each of you have touched my heart and have affirmed the importance of my traveling at this time.

So, how are we?

I have been addicted to the news, seeking out every opportunity to learn up-to-date details of events taking place at home. I realized how hard it is to be in the loop and up to date on current events when being so far away and traveling, but also because there’s an instinctive reaction in most of the media overseas to try to find balance in presenting the situation in Israel which, while complex, has never been more black and white.

Sometimes, “balance” gives way to perverse moral equivalence. Understanding that this is the same for most who see the news, whether Jews or Christians, I understand how it’s that much harder to be well informed and have accurate information to sustain an instinctive inclination to be pro-Israel.

On one flight, I sat next to a teenage girl, returning from summering with her father in one state and going home to another. After mild chit-chat, she asked me where I was from.

"Israel," I said.

"Oh, where's that?" she asked.

I took out the airline magazine and attempted to find Israel. It's so small on a map of the world that I circled "Tel Aviv" on the map, out in the sea. She nodded, but seemed clueless.

"Do you know why Israel is important?" I asked her.

"No." she answered meekly, as if not knowing the answer on a test in school that she really should know.

"Israel is where the Bible took place." She nodded. But I was not convinced that it meant anything to her.

So as much as there is horrible press blaming Israel, I was heartened, I think, that not only does not everyone have a negative association, but also some don't even know where Israel is or why it's important. I saw it as an opportunity and a challenge.

While I have been away, hundreds of rockets continued to be fired at Israel. My "Red Alert" app continues to remind me that Israelis are running for cover in dozens of places, when I am in some of the most unique or remote places far from home.

Recent rocket attacks have impacted my family with another air-raid siren followed by an explosion in my community, my daughter being awakened at 2:30 in the morning by a siren in Rishon LeZion where she's been living, and a relaxing outing to the pool that turned into trauma when my wife took the kids out for the day, and while driving home an air-raid siren went off causing her to pull the car over and get all the kids

down on the ground, lying in the gravel on the side of the road covered in thorns.

For those following the trauma of my 8-year old son, you can well imagine this did not contribute to his sense of security and peace of mind. As my wife told me, fortunately he was eating an ice cream, and she was able to distract him by having him continue to do so. Three loud explosions later, they got up, pulled out the thorns and brushed off the dirt, and continued home.

The ride home was interrupted by a road closure near an Arab village whose residents have been throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails at passing Israeli cars. Think about this the next time you take your kids for a ride to the pool or beach.

I have been saddened by repeated news, seems like daily, of our soldiers dying. I've missed being at home where the natural and national instinct would be to go to the funerals of these brave men, and/or comfort some of the mourning families. I know that throughout Israel there is deep grief, but a deep sense of national purpose and awareness of the fact that it's never been clearer we are fighting an enemy for whom life is simply a tool to inflict pain and suffering—on us and on their own people. Our cause is just, yet we grieve.

What I have also realized is that I am missing day-to-day conversations that are sadly quite the norm in Israel today. Friends and neighbors whose kids are “in” are torn with the mixed emotions of pride at their sons (and daughters, albeit not in front-line combat positions) who are serving and defending us, but deeply worried for their children. No matter how well trained or well armed they are, they are still our children.

Other than destroying tunnels, weapons and setting back the terrorists in a way that's been largely effective, it was also discovered that plans were under way to launch a massive

coordinated terrorist attack on Israeli civilians during our most holy season, Rosh Hashanah. Reports are that it was planned to send as many as 200 terrorists through as many as 45 tunnels from Gaza alone. Even if that's only accurate by half, the potential for a massive terrorist attack was huge.

Several have said to me that the catalyst for the current military operation was the kidnapping and murder of the three Israeli teenage boys in June. While the nation grieved and prayed, and Hamas opened a front by increasing rocket and missile fire at Israeli communities, Israel gave Hamas many opportunities to back down, to stop the rocket fire, and affirm that quiet will be met with quiet. Yet Hamas chose the other direction and is suffering the consequences.

While the loss of every one of the dozens of civilians and soldiers alike is devastating for Israel because we sanctify life, many have suggested that had it not been for their sacrifice, Israel would never have gone into Gaza now, never have exposed and destroyed the vast network of terrorist tunnels, and that in several weeks, Israel would have been at risk for suffering an unspeakable terrorist attack that could have rivaled that of September 11 in the United States.

While traveling, I got to experience firsthand the threats of anti-Semitic protests and threats that plague even established Jewish communities. I witnessed vile anti-Semitic protests at the CUFI Summit in Washington, D.C., and was saddened and concerned about the need for heightened security at synagogues, Jewish community centers, and other Jewish institutions. It's reminded me that even in the best diaspora, living openly as Jew is not easy. I even considered taking off my kippa during travels to certain places because of concern for my own security and being an obvious target for anti-Semites, but that fleeting thought was squashed by my sense of pride and defiance.

I will spend Shabbat with friends whose son just finished his

compulsory military service. Next week we will mourn and fast, marking the anniversary of the destruction of the First and Second Temples, as well as many other tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people. We are arguably in the midst of another tragedy. The difference is that we have our state in our homeland; that we have an army to defend us, and good people—Christians and Jews—all over the world, who stand with us.

We may be going through another hard time, but we've never had more resolve, never had more friends standing with us, even as anti-Semites try to hurt and kill us, and we will continue to pray for, and through our actions merit, the prophetic rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. I'm just wondering, will it need bomb shelters when it is rebuilt?

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