

Please Don't Tell Me That God Is Punishing the Jews, Especially Today

There are many areas of agreement between Jews and Christians. For example, both emphasize the foundational importance of loving God and loving one's neighbor, as well as the importance of living by the ethical ideals of the Torah and the Prophets. Both emphasize a final Day of Judgment where we give account for our lives before God. There are many more.

There are also many areas of disagreement. These would include the acceptance or rejection of Jesus as Messiah (and with that the acceptance or rejection of the New Testament as Scripture), along with the question of how one receives forgiveness. There is also the question of to what extent Torah laws should be obeyed today.

Because of these agreements and despite disagreements, there are areas where, say Orthodox Jews and Jewish followers of Jesus can work hand in hand while there are areas where to work together would require us to cross forbidden lines. For example, we could not work together in producing curricula for a Jewish day school, since our vision and purpose would be very different. But we could work together to combat myths and lies and misperceptions about the Jewish people and the state of Israel. This of course is true of wider relationships between Jews and Christians. That's why we, an Orthodox Jew and a Jewish follower of Jesus, do this very thing. In fact, we feel it is essential that we do so—for the good of our people and for the health of the church.

And that brings us to the heart of this article. Since Oct. 7, there have been obscene and outrageous lies and slander, along with tangible and genocidal threats against Israel and the

Jewish people all over the world. One would be forgiven for thinking that it all blends together, indistinct in its evil and baseless morally. But recent allegations about a particular Christian leader's comments do rise above the general slander as being particularly problematic and theologically misguided. (Because there is some dispute about the full context of this pastor's remarks, we have not cited his name here.)

There is an allegation that a prominent pastor said that Hamas' Oct. 7 massacre was God's punishment on the Jews for not accepting Jesus. The allegation was not promoted by the pastor's detractors but, rather, by one of his followers, who posted the remarks on social media. These were challenged in public. Inquiries to the pastor's office have gone unanswered, neither affirming nor refuting these comments ascribed to him.

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It's a dangerous, slippery slope to claim that, by our theological presuppositions, we can declare that Israel is being punished by God for a particular reason at a given time in contemporary history. In the past, what was the excuse for Israel being enslaved in Egypt or for the vicious attack by Amalek after the exodus? Was this because the Jewish people did not know to accept Jesus thousands of years before he was born? (Or for that matter, because they were guilty of any particular sin?) Are the Inquisition, the "church" persecution of the Jews, Jews being herded into ghettos and the Holocaust, among others, also because of not accepting Jesus? Were more than 1.5 million Jewish babies and children slaughtered by the Nazis because they or their parents did not accept Jesus?

What would such prophets of doom say about the persecution and slaughter of Christians in Nigeria today, or throughout the Arab and Islamic world—that they didn't believe in Jesus

enough? They were really not Christians? And isn't it a little bit more than disingenuous to say, "Jews suffer persecution and attack because they are *disobedient* to God while Christians suffer persecution and attack because they are *obedient*"?

It's frightening that any pastor would pretend that he knows the mind of God and that God is punishing Israel/the Jews *today*—by rape and torture and barbaric slaughter—specifically because they didn't believe in Jesus. Should we say the same things about Iranian Muslims who were recently killed by suicide bombers? Was this because they didn't believe in Jesus? How about the Japanese killed in recent earthquakes? Was this also because of their lack of faith?

Or to bring this closer to home for those in the United States, what about the Christian children and Christian teachers slaughtered in cold blood in recent school shootings in America, including one in a Christian school itself? Was this because they didn't believe enough? This notion is madness.

Yet when Hamas carries out the worst shedding of Jewish blood in any one day since the Holocaust, in ways that even put ISIS and Al-Qaeda to shame, some Christians have the gall to say, "God was punishing them because they didn't believe in Jesus."

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Statements like this come across as more like Islamic extremism than Christian, all about punishment and retribution. And Jews and Christians must stand united in the imperative to combat this evil, recognizing that we are both in the crosshairs of radical Islam and have been victims more than we would like to remember. The same Islamic extremists who slaughter Jews in Israel are slaughtering Christians in other parts of the world. Let us not be deceived.

And let us be careful before we declare to know the mind of

God as to all human suffering. It's one thing when the Bible itself gives the cause and effect. It's another when we engage in vain theological speculation.

While we personally, along with Jews and Christians in general, can disagree on pivotal theological things, the war against Hamas has underscored more than ever that we are together on the right side, that the enemy is evil, and it is not the place of any pastor or (alleged) prophet to pretend that he knows that God is punishing Jews today for not accepting Jesus. We do best to let God Himself sort this out on the day we stand before Him.

The history of the professing church vis-a-vis the Jewish people and Israel is one that many Christians today still need to come to terms with. Statements like this recent one, attributed to any pastor or Christian leader, and not roundly denied and decried, propagate the shame that the church still has to deal with and make building bridges between Jews and Christians even more complicated.

That's one thing about which we as Jews and Christians can and must agree upon, together. Especially today.

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