

LOVING ISRAEL — BIBLICALLY

CONFUSION IN A HOSTILE WORLD

Sadly, the Christian world is greatly divided on the issue of “support for Israel”. The popular view in the world as well as the Church in the UK is that Israel is simply a mistake. The more worrying trend is that any Christian who takes a different view is liable to be at best marginalised or at worst excluded from their Church.

This attitude manifests itself in opposition to anything which helps or sustains Israel and the Jewish people, based on two false assumptions. In the world Israel is viewed as illegitimate and in the Christian world as superseded by “The Church”. God has no further interest in them! The combined conclusion is that Israel is a pariah state - even an apartheid state and should be treated accordingly. Actions advocated by the Churches include campaigning for boycotts of Israeli goods, vilifying Jewish military and political leaders and cutting any links with professional and academic bodies in Israel.

The worst attitude of all is shown by some ‘Christian’ leaders who are prepared to publicly stand alongside anyone who has expressed hatred for Israel even when it means siding with high profile leaders of Muslim Nations.

Many have been persuaded into this view because of the influence of the Christian Media or high profile Christian speakers whose attitude to Israel has been largely shaped by a shift that has taken place in the theological world over the past 40 years. In eschatology, the evangelical

church has moved from a predominantly “Pre-Millennial” to an “A-Millennial” or at best “Post-Millennial” eschatological view. This has had huge consequences for understanding the role and future of Israel and the Church across the world. The question is – “What can be done to reaffirm the importance of a primary literal understanding and interpretation of scripture from the spiritual/allegorical view that predominates now, without being intimidated by the opposition?”

We are all called to be alert and informed of many things in the Bible ie Israel - Rom 11:25; spiritual gifts - 1 Cor 12:1; Satan’s devices - 2 Cor 1:8, 2:11; the second coming of the Lord - 1 Thess 4:13; the suffering Church - 2 Cor 1:8. Ignorance ought not to prevail, especially in the matter of understanding Satan’s plans. But how are we to treat others who are not fully aware of all the things that they should? Heb 5:2 puts it this way, “. . . ***be compassionate on those who are ignorant and going astray since we all are subject to weakness.***”

CLARIFYING TERMS USED

Sadly, there is much confusion in hearts and minds especially with terminology relating to Israel. Christians say they “Support Israel”; they “Love Israel”; they want to “Bless Israel” or they “Stand by Israel.” Generally, they “love the Jewish people” and they want to help them whenever they can. But who or what are Christians really “supporting?” Is it the Israeli government; individual Israeli politicians; the religious groups; Israel institutions; or ordinary Israelis? If we are not clear, then support can often be misguided in motive and misdirected in practise?

Support for Israel does not require that Christians should support everything that the Israel does or any individual says or does. Israel gets things wrong on occasions not just in the way it conducts some military operations but also in education legislation that favours the ultra-orthodox, social services and the finance ministry policies which affects the poor. But no more so than any other democratic nation! It is sheer hypocrisy for nations, especially our own, to demand that Israel adheres to standards that neither we nor any other nation keeps now or has kept in the past.

THE PLACE OF LOVE

Deut 6:4 says that Israel was to love God with all their being and yet Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 both list the commandments of God where love is not mentioned at all. What this shows is that love for God is not so much an emotion; more an act of the will shown by obedience to His commands. Jesus clarifies this saying "If you love Me keep My commandments." John 14:15 We are called to love His Word, to love His Holy Spirit and love to do His will. And so if we do love Him, then there is every prospect that we will love and support the things He loves.

God's love was demonstrated in allowing His Son to die as a substitute in our place on the Cross and suffer pain and shame so that all those who believe in His Name might not perish but have Eternal Life." But God's love also involves His judgments - as Israel's history shows and is the most important example to us all. See 1 Cor 10.

But should our Love for what God loves mean there is a conflict in how we fulfil our love to our neighbour? Should that "love" lead us to conceal or deny what we stand for in order to fulfil this love? I am not

talking here about sensitivity to the occasion and the timing of steps in conversation with unbelievers but rather, should we take the view in relation to Jewish people that we should never talk to them about Jesus because they have experienced such hatred from those who they believe represent the followers of Jesus? The big question today is, "Have Christians forfeited the right to share the gospel to Jewish people?" Some say yes 'we' have and we shouldn't offend them anymore!!

But didn't the spiritual forefathers of every true Christian believer, suffer the same fate for the Gospel sake at the hands of this "Church" who not only hated the Jews but all those of true faith in Jesus alone – especially here in Britain? What is the purpose of trying to identify with this so-called "Church"? Rather, to avoid confusion shouldn't we be doing everything we can to distance ourselves from a Church that now claims to have changed from this tragic past? If we don't, the Jewish community would rightly say (and they do), "If you are sincere about your apology, then don't repeat the mistake by trying to convert us. We don't want to hear anymore of your Jesus".

The tragic outcome of this way of befriending the Jewish Community is that Jesus has suddenly been sidelined and the Gospel has been neutralised. Is this true love to the Jewish people? If so, how then can they be saved?

LOVING ISRAEL - TELLING THE TRUTH

Many true Christians believe in the Salvation of Israel but because of this emotional pressure that makes them believe that Christians have forfeited the right to speak to them of Jesus, they keep silent in

the hope that God will do it in His own way.

Rom 11:26 supported by Zechariah 12-14 speaks of a general awakening in the end times But what about now? More to the point, will Jews be saved just by overwhelming revelation when Jesus returns, when salvation for Jews and Gentiles for 2000 years has been by faith alone – surely not? They had the enormous privilege of His presence with them for 30 years and yet, “seeing was not believing” at that time.

Thank God, that in His mercy the Gospel of Jesus has been shared amongst Jewish people for centuries. The unique difference today is that sharing the Gospel to Jews is increasingly the feature of life of fellow Jews and caring gentiles belonging to increasing numbers of Congregations and ministries in Israel and elsewhere. Prayer for Israel came into existence 40 years ago recognising this new reality that has not existed for 2000 years. This is the glorious realisation of the hopes and prayers of so many down the years and we praise God.

In fact over the centuries, some of the greatest Church leaders and theologians have come from a Jewish background. It's only until very recent times that confusion has developed over the gospel to the Jew as indeed it has to anyone else. Last century, the Church had a clear understanding of the need to evangelise the Jews as they did the whole world. But this new approach is what someone described as “Little Bo Peep Theology” ie “. . . leave them alone and they will come home . . .” Do we truly believe that Jewish people need to be saved at all, through faith in Jesus or is there some other way for them? I think there are clear Biblical answers.

THE GOSPEL IS AN OFFENCE

Jewish people need to know the good news of the Gospel of Jesus. Paul said it is Gods supreme act of love to the Jewish people that Jesus came first to them, died and rose again. Rom 1:16 Because of rejection he went on to fulfil his calling in Acts 9:15 by directing his attentions to the Gentiles (Acts 13 and 16) but only after first beginning with the Jews in every place he visited. The angry response he received was not because of what the “Church” had done in persecuting the Jews - it hadn't happened by then. It was because the cross of Jesus was an offence to them. (Isa 8:14; Gal 5:11) It was and still is an offence to every Jew because the Messiah died on a cross for their sin.

The Messiah was supposed to come, triumph and bring peace. Instead of this, Jesus died – period. Indeed He died but also He rose again and ascended, there to reign in majesty and power. He was victor over sin, death hell and the grave - everything a Jew (and all men) feared most of all. This Good News was preached on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:23-24) and the days that followed. Those who listened were cut to the heart that they had just crucified the Messiah and cried out “What can we do to be saved?” (Acts 2:37) Many rejected Him but to as many as did believe in Him – and there were many - He gave the right to become true sons of God. (John 1:12)

OPPOSITION TO JESUS

The Gospel of Jesus was a huge challenge to religious system. This is why Paul writes to Titus in the way he did. “It was not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:5)

This is what so offended the Jewish religious institutions. They were struck to the heart and desired as a consequence the death of every true believer. (Acts 5:33; 7:54-60)

The hatred of the Messianic body is still there amongst the religious, as was manifest recently by the actions in Ariel, Arad, Beersheva and many other places. The very existence of the Messianic Body, still strikes at the heart of the religious system in Israel. Those who oppose them still believe they are fulfilling Deut 13. But today through the outworking of the Gospel, Israel is being saved from their greatest enemy of all – not Iran, Syria, Egypt or HAMAS – but the one who imprisons every Jewish and Gentile heart – that is the Devil.

NEED TO GET OUR PRIORITIES RIGHT

It's good to contend for Israel at every level – politically, strategically and materially. It is also helpful to appreciate Israeli arts and sciences. It is good to support Israeli ministries that travel the world raising awareness for their particular ministry. All this is good, although one needs to be very discerning about some of those who come out of Israel claiming to represent the Messianic Body. But the greatest surprise to me in recent times is how little many true “Israel loving” people know of what God is actually doing today in the hearts and lives of Jewish believers in Israel.

It's not a matter of blame, instead finding ways to fulfil Hebrews 5:2 in awakening those who are “unaware” to the greatest reality of our times which is undeniably the salvation of Israel in the Land of Israel. The Spirit of God is at work today in the lives of believers in Yeshua who in this generation are a living testimony on the streets, in the homes, at work, in the

schools, in the shops, almost anywhere in Israel where there are Jewish people. Bearing witness to the Messiah Jesus is happening largely unnoticed, using natural and considerate approaches to their neighbours in the course of their daily lives, not just in word but also in deed. Surely this is the most exciting development to stir the hearts of true believers in our time.

And one would hope that since this is indeed the most important consideration of all, Christians would want to support what God is doing in the Land. Bringing Jews and Arabs to Faith in Jesus and the development of the Messianic Body made up of Jewish and Arab believers is surely the greatest concern of our hearts. This ‘Peace Process’ bringing in the One New Man (Eph 2:15) is a true miracle of our times.

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