

Dear Friends in Christ,

Sometimes I have a hard time telling what you're thinking because you're good, upright Midwesterners who don't show a lot of emotion. This has its benefits; hopefully it translates to us being slow to anger like God and thinking things through clearly.

When I started getting calls and questions and comments about what's happening in Israel/Palestine, I knew it was important to you. Maybe that's because it's what our media is focused on now, or maybe it's because you've heard the Evangelicals make a big deal about Israel for years. With this newsletter, I'll try to bring clarity to the issue. The easiest way to go about this is a Q and A format.

**Q: Is modern day Israel the same as Biblical Israel?**

**A:** No. God gave Jacob the name Israel (which means to wrestle with God) in Gen 32, and after the Exodus and the conquest of the Promised Land, Israel became a nation. For a while they were ruled by Judges (bet you can't guess which book of the Bible discusses this), the last of which was Samuel. Then they asked for a King, and then became known as the Kingdom of Israel. Remember that after Solomon, the Kingdom was split into 2 kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom was known as Israel/Samaria, and the Southern Kingdom was known as Judah. Israel ceased being an autonomous nation in 722 BC and Judah in 586 BC. From that moment on, the Promised Land was occupied by others. Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans occupy the land in the Old and New Testaments, and then if you fast forward a couple thousand years, the Ottoman Empire controlled the land, which is why Palestinians were living there before 1948.

Reading about the Zionist movement in the 19th Century makes a lot of this clear. If you're looking for an interesting biography, I'd study Theodor Herzl, the father of modern day Zionism. (Zionism was the political movement for creating a Jewish State.) At first, Herzl wanted a Jewish State anywhere; South America was considered very favorably. Also, the name "Israel" was a late development; they considered other names. You can think what you want about Israel having their own state, but this much is clear - modern day Israel, which was founded in 1948, is not the same thing as the Biblical Israel.

**Q: So what about God's promise to Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you?" (Gen 12:3)**

**A:** This is a verse American Evangelicals use to say that we have a biblical mandate to support Israel. They're misreading the Bible. This isn't about a particular ethnicity; this is about Jesus Christ. Jesus is the seed of Abraham. He is the nation. Jesus is the new Israel.

**Q: So you're saying I should support Palestine?**

A: No.

**Q: Just tell me what to think!**

A: No.

Okay, I'll tell you what to think, and it's because it's what Jesus tells us what to think. **“There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish’” (Lk 13:1-4).** When we see horrific tragedies in the world, it should cause us to repent. That's what we should think. Here's the key - you don't have to have an opinion on this. There's lots of things you don't have to have an opinion on. Now, obviously we have an opinion on murder. But we don't have to adopt a particular opinion on Jewish-Palestinian relations.

**Q: Okay, Rev. Smart Guy (thanks for the nickname, btw). What's your solution?**

A: Jesus. It's either Christ or chaos, and Israel and Palestine both reject Christ so they have chaos. The only way anything will ever get fixed is forgiveness, and the only way to have forgiveness is through the blood of Jesus Christ. You will not stop blood shed until you repent and embrace the blood of Christ. We should most certainly pray for peace in the region, but peace is not coming until they acknowledge the Prince of Peace. With Paul, I want Jews to receive Jesus Christ. With Jesus, I long for all nations, which necessarily includes Palestinians, to become Christians.

Any other questions?

In Christ,

Pastor