

# SEEDBED

**Practitioners in Conversation**

**March 2011, Vol XXV No 1**

**Theme:**

**ISRAEL PALESTINE & MINISTRY**

**Plus:**

**DIALOGUE, STORYING, WORSHIP, BOOK REVIEWS**



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March 2011, Volume XXV No 1

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### *Practitioners in Conversation*

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## EDITORIAL

Israel, Jews and Muslims *and* Church Planting among Muslims

Every Christian ministering to Muslims will, sooner or later, come to understand how Muslims view Jews and the modern nation-state of Israel. This will involve listening to the *Muslim narratives* about the Jews and how they stole the land from the Palestinians and now unjustly oppress the former rightful owners of the land that they occupy. Properly wrestling with this topic involves both sorting out what has happened in the past 100 years (and the past 2,000 years) and accurately interpreting what that history means to Jews, Muslims and Christians—this is NO easy task! This may also lead to a re-examination of one's biblical perspectives on the Jews and Israel. Such re-examination often leads to a profound shift in understanding.

This SEEDBED makes a modest attempt to reflect on the meaning of the people of Israel and the connection the modern nation-state of Israel has to the Scriptures which speak so much about the Jews and the people of Israel. I commend Mike Kuhn's lead article to you. He tackles the question of the *identity* of the People of God. Mike writes with the experience of someone who lived some 20 years in the Arab world and knows Muslim perspectives on Israel. He is also a careful theologian and student of the Bible. Many Christians will not find Mike's argument compelling, as the two impassioned critics of Mike's article illustrate.

Over the past two years I have attempted to better understand the history of the Crusades that tried to liberate the Holy Land from centuries of Saracen oppression and increasing violence against Christian pilgrims. I have come to see how it is that contemporary Muslims, and Islamists in particular, have re-interpreted the history of the Crusades. Their reinterpretation is one of the driving forces fuelling Islamist rage against Western 'Christian crusading armies'. It is essential that we understand history, and particularly, the last 1500 years of relations between Christianity and Islam. I encourage you to read through the entire first part of the issue. Three of the books reviewed in Part 3 also deal with this topic. I trust that you will find insights to help you minister to Muslims in the shadow of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Part 2 also contains a wealth of insights and wisdom and challenge!

I welcome many new readers to this first SEEDBED published by Pioneers. I look forward to serving you as we seek to make SEEDBED valuable and relevant to your ministry wherever you are ministering to Muslims. Please do write and suggest topics that you would like to be dealt with in this journal, or write letters to the editor in response to what you read here.

Serving with you,

Don Little, Editor ([seedbed.editor@sent.com](mailto:seedbed.editor@sent.com))

**PART I: ISRAEL, THE CONFLICT AND MINISTRY****THE ISRAEL OF GOD:  
THE IDENTITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE****by Mike Kuhn**

Following this article are three responses, including two lengthy pro-Israel responses by those who strongly disagree with Mike's perspective, along with Mike's response to them.

*Mike has lived with his family in France, Morocco and Egypt. He now lives in the United States where he serves as pastor of discipleship in a large church in Tennessee. He is the author of **Fresh Vision for the Muslim World**, Authentic, 2009. Mike wrote this article at the request of the editor. You can visit his blog at: [freshvisionourworld.blogspot.com](http://freshvisionourworld.blogspot.com)*

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I lived in Cairo, Egypt for sixteen years. While there, I learned that the subject of Israel is a dangerous topic. An Egyptian acquaintance gave me a private showing of his personal library including a multi-volume history of the people of Israel. I was curious to know the source of his fascination with his Hebrew-speaking neighbour. He confided to me that knowledge of one's enemy is the key to survival. My attempts to defend Israel against such animosity brought a rapid and undeserved accusation of collusion with the 'Zionist agenda.'

I have now lived in the United States for the past four years. As a pastor, I have had numerous opportunities to speak about the Middle East and my mission experience there. I have been surprised at how many times I have been misunderstood simply because I have called attention to the great need of the Arab people to hear and understand the gospel. It seems that pejorative labels are proliferating on both sides of the Atlantic!

I have become increasingly aware of the strong proclivity among American evangelicals for political and economic support of the state of Israel. The roots of this proclivity draw from the Scriptures of the Old Testament and are thoroughly watered by a theological understanding of Israel's identity that is scarcely open to question. The fact that Israel is surrounded by Islamic nations, many of whom have been active aggressors against that state, only serves to cement popular evangelical support of the Israeli state.

Follow me back to the Middle East where one more anecdote will further highlight the critical nature of the situation. Protestant mission efforts since the 19<sup>th</sup> century have made some inroads in the Middle East as evidenced by the presence of churches with denominational titles not unfamiliar to North American and British Christians—Baptist, Brethren, Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist, Christian Missionary Alliance, Pentecostal, etc. Although it is not a blanket truth that one would paint with a broad brush over the entire Middle Eastern church, many have nevertheless observed the reticence of these churches to preach and teach from the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> The ostensible reason for this reticence is the fact that the Old Testament is often addressed to ‘Israel.’ The presence of a political state by that same title, not to mention a state that is often viewed as a political and military adversary, creates a conundrum for some of these churches. It forces us to ask the question, should we not revisit the assumption that the ‘Israel of the contemporary Middle East’ is also the ‘Israel of God?’ Are the two the same thing or is the name ‘Israel’, as it is now applied to a political state, a false guide in our reading of the Bible?

This article will suggest on biblical and theological grounds that the two are not the same. The Israel of the contemporary Middle East has common military, political and territorial roots with the Israel of the Old Testament. However, it does not share the spiritual roots of faith that are determinative of the identity of God’s people. To use a physiological analogy, we might say that the political state of Israel shares a common blood type with the Old Testament people of God. Contemporary Christians often mistake the blood type for a deep and enduring kinship. Closer analysis, however, reveals a differentiation in DNA (Israel’s spiritual and faith heritage). It is this DNA that demonstrates the political state of Israel to be unrelated to God’s purposes for his Old Testament people. The enduring kinship with the Old Testament people of Israel lies with another—namely Christ himself. Therefore, it is a case of mistaken identity to read the contemporary political state of Israel into the Old Testament. It has disastrous effects on the church and produces massive political fallout.

My reader may already be crying ‘replacement theology!’ Some are concerned that ‘replacement theology’ leads to despising Jewish people and the kind of atrocities that have been committed by anti-Semites throughout history including the horrors of Nazism. The concept I am attempting to get across bears at least

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware that the vast majority of the Middle Eastern church is not Protestant, but from Middle Eastern Orthodox roots. To my knowledge, the Orthodox view of Old Testament Israel does not posit a continuing role for those who hail from the Jewish faith while repudiating Christ. Thus, the problem of teaching the Old Testament is alleviated for the Orthodox churches.

two distinctions from what is often pejoratively labelled ‘replacement theology’—so-called because the church is said to ‘replace’ Israel. First, the true fulfilment of Israel is Christ, the true seed of Abraham, who is the head of the church. Thus, this is not a ‘replacement’ at all, as Christ is the final objective of the entire Old Testament revelation. Jesus’ view is that the Old Testament is about Himself (See Luke 24:25-27; 44-49; John 5:39). Secondly, Israel is not replaced, but fulfilled in Christ who becomes the progenitor of a vastly expanded Israel consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. The nations become the people of Israel by adoption into Christ. Furthermore, you might anticipate that this article will advocate that the Jews have no further role to play in God’s unfolding redemption of the nations. That is not at all the intention of this article. Stay with me and we will discover a role of honour and value for those who identify themselves as Jews in our day. Let us begin by examining the biblical identity of the Old Testament people of God known as Israel.

### **Abraham: Father of Many Nations**

I contend that two elements of God’s blessing on Abraham are consistent throughout the entirety of Scripture. These elements are 1) the inclusive nature of the blessing and 2) the expansive nature of the blessing. Leslie Newbigin has pointed out that God’s election of Israel is often misconstrued as an election based on preference—Israel is God’s favourite. However, the text of the

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Abrahamic blessing indicates clearly that God’s election of Israel is based on purpose and that purpose is clearly the blessing of the nations through the election of a particular nation. In the words of Newbigin: ‘The promised blessing is, in the end, for all the nations...and the faithful remnant are the chosen bearers of it... Bearers—not exclusive beneficiaries... Again and again it had to be said that election is for responsibility, not for privilege.’<sup>2</sup> We might rephrase Newbigin to say that election is a privilege with responsibility. The two imperatives in the Abrahamic blessing of Genesis 12 are ‘go’ (12:1) and ‘be a blessing’ (12:2). Abraham is clearly told that through him, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. This is particularly

striking in the context of the division of the world into languages immediately preceding God’s election of Abraham (Gen 11). The Babel incident is not God’s ruse to destabilize humanity, but his preservation of humanity from a false, self-promoting salvation. His call and blessing of Abraham reveals an unfolding plan that will ultimately lead those nations of Babel back into the blessing of reconciliation with God.

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<sup>2</sup> Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, p 32.

Therefore, God's blessing on Abraham was a blessing through Abraham and his seed to all the nations of the earth. In the words of Christopher Wright, 'Blessing for the nations is the bottom line, textually and theologically, of God's promise to Abraham.'<sup>3</sup> I hope that there will be little disagreement on that point. The disagreement comes in identifying the nation of Abraham today. After God has given Abraham's offspring the land from the 'river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,' (Gen 15:18) He appears to Abraham with another significant promise. The promise is simply that Abraham will be the father not of a nation, but of many nations. 'Behold my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.' (Gen 17:4). Notice that there are two planes on which the promises of God are expanding. The first plane is one of geography. Abraham was originally told to go to a land that God would show him (Gen 12:1). The land given to Abraham's offspring is a land that extends from Egypt into Iraq—'from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates' (Gen 15:18). It is not merely the land of Canaan, but also includes the land from which Abraham originated and extends to Abraham's furthest sojourning—Egypt. Later, God's promise to Jacob indicates an even greater expansion of the land. 'The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south.' (Gen 28:13-14) The spread of Jacob's descendants will be universal extending to the four points of the compass.

The second plane is that of ethnicity. Abraham's fatherhood will extend to a multitude of nations. This word can hardly be mistaken for a small number of Middle Eastern ethnic entities each having a blood relation to Abraham. Something much larger is in view here. Abraham had previously received the promise that his descendants would equal the number of stars in the heavens, a sum now known to be virtually infinite. This is the promise that Abraham believed, and it was 'counted to him as righteousness.' (Genesis 15:5-6). Later, the promise is that Abraham's seed will be like the sand on the seashore (Gen 22:17). If we presume that these promises will be fulfilled through the biological descendants of Abraham, Yahweh is making promises to Abraham that are simply too great to come true. If, however, we understand these promises in the light of New Testament realities, their meaning becomes quite clear. Abraham's fatherhood is not merely the fatherhood of his biological descendants, but of all who share the faith of Abraham. The land that is given to Abraham is not merely the land of Canaan, but all the land on which his seed has sojournd. The entire earth is the possession of Abraham's descendants. In summary, God's blessing on Abraham is expansive and inclusive—to all the earth (geographically) and to all

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*, p 194.

nations (all ethnicities). I acknowledge that the expansive nature of the Abrahamic promise may be a new concept and difficult for many Evangelical readers. Nevertheless, it is a consistent, though often implicit, dimension of redemptive history. Further on we will consider Jesus' and his apostles' important contribution to the idea.

### Israel: What is in a Name?

Jacob's name is changed to Israel after the wrestling match in which Jacob declares that he has seen God face to face. Who then might this God be other than the same person who appeared to Jacob's father Abraham, enjoyed a meal with him by the oaks of Mamre and ultimately became the object of his intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah as Abraham boldly requests that Yahweh spare the city for the sake of a minority of righteous people (Genesis 18)? Jesus, the supreme interpreter of the Old Testament, makes clear that Abraham rejoiced to see *his* day (John 8:56), that the Old Testament bears witness of *him* (John 5:39), that the law, the Prophets and the Psalms, which are *about him*, must be fulfilled (Luke 24:44). We can come to no other conclusion than that Christ himself, in a pre-incarnate appearance, was revealing *himself* to the patriarchs. The change of Jacob's name to Israel could not be more revealing of God's true purposes for this people related to him by covenant.

The name 'Israel' consists of two words: *yisra'* and *el*. The first word can be translated 'he contends' or 'he strives.' The second word is the pronoun referring to God himself. Thus, it is possible to translate the name Israel in one of two ways: 'God contends' or 'He contends with God.' While the first rendering is possibly the most straightforward translation, a contextual factor favours the second rendering. Genesis 32:28 asserts, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.' Thus, Jacob is 'one who strives with God,' and this is the commonly understood meaning of the name Israel. However, it is possible, and, I contend, probable, that a double meaning is intended by this name.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, Jacob did not prevail against God. In fact, it was a mere touch from God that crippled Jacob, presumably for life, leaving him to walk with a limp. Thus, Jacob's prevailing was a gift of God; it was, in fact, God's contending on his behalf that allowed him to prevail both in his human struggles with the likes of Esau and Laban, and in his spiritual struggle with God Almighty. Jacob walked with a limp to remind him and all who saw him that his striving would prove fruitless. God's striving on his behalf would prosper him and bless him, securing for him the fulfilment of God's promises to his fathers. Jacob was wrestling with one who would ultimately prevail and secure the blessing for Jacob's seed.

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<sup>4</sup> See *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol 2: p 304-316.

Much is at stake in this name ‘Israel.’ Is it the striving of Jacob that produces the fulfilment of God’s promise or is it God’s contending on behalf of Jacob that secures the blessing for him and his descendants after him? The Old Testament is clear that God has favoured Israel, not because of her righteousness, size or status (See Deuteronomy 9), but for the sake of His glory and fame. He will demonstrate his power and glory through his indwelling of a people—Israel. The very name of Israel provides for us a key to interpreting the identity of this people. Israel is the people for whom God contends.

### **A Few Surprising Israelites**

It is instructive to note that Israel was never identified solely along lines of biological descent. Paul made a similar argument in Galatians 3. However, is there Old Testament evidence to support our thesis? Incidentally, the evidence of the inclusion of non-ethnic Jews in Old Testament Israel should give great impetus to the ‘all-nations’ missionary vision of the contemporary church.

We are not arguing that all of these individuals became Jews. It might be helpful to envision concentric circles. Israel itself is the innermost circle with Yahweh’s enthronement above the cherubim as the heart of Israel. The presence of Yahweh among His people attracts the people of the nations. The Old Testament is replete with stories of individuals and nations who were either drawn into the orbit of Israel or who moved into the outer rings of our concentric circles and closer to a true faith in Yahweh through Israel’s instrumentation. Examples of those who actually became part of the Jewish people include Ruth the Moabitess, Rahab the harlot and Israel’s slaves who were circumcised and became partakers in the covenant (Gen 17:11-13). A little further from the centre circle are others who worshipped Yahweh, Israel’s God, acknowledging that He alone is God. These include Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, Naaman the Syrian, Nebuchadnezzar, the mariners who cast Jonah into the sea and the Ninevites. There are many others who witnessed the greatness of Yahweh and acknowledged Him even though we do not know the depth of their faith. Examples of these include the Egyptians<sup>5</sup> after the Exodus, Cyrus the Mede, the widow who served Elijah and the Queen of Sheba.

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While this is a cursory overview, the evidence is strong to indicate that inclusion in the covenant people of Israel was not solely on the basis of

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<sup>5</sup> It is revealing to note the number of times in which either Yahweh or Moses states that the Egyptians will know that Yahweh alone is God because of the plagues. I counted at least nine times in the early chapters of Exodus.

biological descent. In fact, there were those who were biological descendants of Abraham who were excluded from the covenant.<sup>6</sup> Others who were clearly not of ethnic Israel were included in the covenant people. The law of Moses does not insist on the ethnic identity of the people to participate in the Passover and Israel's other feasts. It does insist on the sign of the covenant—circumcision—as the criteria for covenant participation. All of ethnic Israel was to be circumcised, but others who joined themselves to Israel could be circumcised irrespective of their ethnic identity.<sup>7</sup>

We could easily go into much more detail on how the Psalmist and the prophets foresaw the worship of Yahweh by the people of the nations. One stunning prophecy among many others is Isaiah's declaration 'blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork and Israel my inheritance.' (Isa 19:25) After a long litany of Yahweh's chastisement of Egypt, the tone of this prophecy begins to change as the prophet pronounces the phrase 'in that day' a total of six times. With each pronouncement, the unfolding grace of God is revealed to Israel's enemy. They will tremble with fear before the Lord (v. 16). They will swear allegiance to Yahweh and among them will be those who speak the language of Canaan—perhaps this is a reference to Israel's fulfilling her priestly role to the nations (v. 18). There will be an altar to Yahweh in the midst of Egypt (v. 19). They will know Yahweh (v. 21) and they will worship and make vows to Yahweh. Imagine the shock such a prophecy would cause to a native Israelite. How could the prophet use these monikers for Egypt—Israel's enslaver—and Assyria—Israel's exiler? Surely Israel alone is Yahweh's people! Israel alone is Yahweh's handiwork! Yet Isaiah prophesies of a day when Israel will be joined with Egypt and Assyria as God's people in the earth.

Another stunning example is Isaiah 49:5-6—one of the 'suffering servant' songs of Isaiah. The servant of Yahweh, said to be Israel in verse 3, is told that it is 'too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel.' The prophet says this magnificent cause of restoring Israel and Jacob is simply not enough. 'I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.' God's clear intention for Israel is that she be a vessel to bring his saving power to all the nations of the earth! Matthew identifies Christ as this suffering servant (Matthew 12:18-21) and Christ lays claim to the words of Isaiah's song when he declares

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<sup>6</sup> Consider the story of Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16 or that of Zimri in Numbers 25.

<sup>7</sup> I am aware that certain nations were excluded from Israel based on their response to the Exodus. However, these were specific cases in point, not the general rule.

himself to be the 'light of the world' (John 8:12). These are but two examples of a multitude of prophecies that indicate God's expansive work among the nations.<sup>8</sup>

The point is simply this: Although Old Testament Israel is broadly identified as the physical descendants of Abraham, exceptions abound. We find non-Jews entering the covenant people. We find Jewish people being excluded from the covenant people. Thus, biological descent is not the sole criterion for becoming an Israelite.

The exile is a tragic story of Israel's failure to live in covenant relationship to Yahweh. Ezekiel and Jeremiah clearly show that Yahweh will no longer treat Israel as His people. They will be cast off the land, they will be taken into exile, their homes and temple will be destroyed, cannibalism will take place in the streets of Jerusalem and ultimately the presence of God's glory will depart from Israel. (Jer. 25; Ez. 21) Could it be more clear that the covenant relationship with Yahweh is not a most-favoured status for the nation to enjoy? It is a purposeful calling characterized by covenantal relationship. When that covenant is broken, the covenant status is transformed to shame and disgrace. Yahweh acted for the sake of his name: 'But for the sake of my name I did what would keep it from being profaned in the eyes of the nations.' (Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22; 36:22)

However, what about God's clear and persistent promises that He will never forget or forsake Israel His people? 'Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.' (Isaiah 49:15-16) Is it not true that Ezekiel and Jeremiah, although they prophesied disaster for Israel, also prophesied of a new covenant when God's laws would be written upon the peoples' hearts and He would dwell among them? (Jer. 31:31-37; 32:36-41; Ez. 36:22-36) The new covenant promises the return of Israel to the land where Yahweh had planted her. Thankfully, God's covenant is a covenant of grace from beginning to end. Israel has not been forgotten even though she miserably failed to keep the covenant. The people did return to their land, and even though that return was less glorious than hoped, it was the necessary preparation for the coming Messiah.

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<sup>8</sup> The best treatment I have found of the 'all-nations' vision of the Old Testament is Christopher Wright's *The Mission of God*.

## Jesus: The Completed Israel

Jesus' title 'the Son of God' has been the subject of great debate in the Middle East. Muslims presume the title indicates a physical act of procreation on the part of God or they view it as a reference to a pre-Islamic concept of lower gods and goddesses who were known as the sons and daughters of God. Such a concept is rightly rejected by Muslims. In this article, we will not presume to unpack fully the theological meaning of the title, but to point toward one aspect of its meaning, which has particular bearing on our question of the identity of Israel.

Yahweh instructed Pharaoh to let Israel go in order that the nation might serve him. He referred to the nation as 'His firstborn son.' (Ex. 4:22-23) The plagues visited upon Egypt reach their climax in the death of Egypt's firstborn in return for Pharaoh's belligerence and refusal to release Israel. The lesson could not have been more poignant for Egypt. 'Oppress my firstborn son (Israel) to your peril!' The prophet Hosea confirms the imagery: 'Out of Egypt have I called my Son' (Hosea 11:1). Matthew, whose gospel is punctuated with not-so-subtle challenges and reprimands to Israel's leaders, quotes Hosea and applies that quote

*The apostles understood Jesus to be the Son of God—the Israel of God, the true embodiment of God's contending for his people. Where Israel failed, Christ succeeded. Israel*

directly to Christ's sojourn in Egypt (Matt. 4:11). Is this mere coincidence? Does Jesus have an uncanny similarity to Israel, or is Matthew, along with the other apostles, pointing us to some deeper significance? Further examination demonstrates deeper affinities between Jesus and His ministry and Israel. For instance, commentators have noticed repeatedly that Jesus stood upon a mount (as did Moses) to give his discourse—the Sermon on the Mount—which stands as a further elucidation and authoritative interpretation of the Law of Moses. Consider

also Jesus' selection of the twelve apostles. Without doubt, the number twelve recalls the twelve tribes of Israel. Again, is this mere coincidence, a type of literary parallelism that mirrors the Old Testament? Or is there greater significance to these intentional references to Israel's history?

New Testament scholar Gary Burge has pointed out that John, in his gospel, shows Jesus' superiority to the land of Israel. The land held the temple, but Jesus' body was the real temple (Jn. 2:21-22). Jacob's well in Samaria offers water that satisfies only temporarily. Jesus' living water satisfies eternally (Jn. 4:10). Jesus heals conditions that the pool of Bethesda cannot heal (Jn. 5:1-9). Jesus radically redefines the concept of holy place by telling the woman of Samaria that true worshippers will worship 'neither on this mount nor in Jerusalem.' For John, Jesus is the new Moses (Jn. 1:17). He feeds his people the true manna from heaven (Jn. 6:1-34). He leads his people to their final dwelling place (Jn. 14). The vineyard, a symbol of the land of Israel (Isa 5), is refined by Jesus who points to himself as

the source of true rootedness for Israel—the vine (John 15). When John says, ‘the word became flesh and dwelt among us,’ he uses a special term: *dwelt*, which is the same word used for ‘tabernacle’ throughout the Old Testament. In effect, Jesus is the new place of God’s dwelling.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus’ view of the Old Testament surprises us as well. Jesus stated categorically that the Old Testament was about Him. He charged the Jewish leaders with searching the Scriptures to find eternal life, and yet not realizing that those Scriptures give testimony to *him* (John 5:39). He instructed his disciples that the Old Testament in all of its parts (Law, Psalms and Prophets) are about him and must be fulfilled. Furthermore, they point to his suffering, death and resurrection. We presume that Jesus’ unpacking of the Christ-centred implications of the Old Testament comprised much of Jesus’ post-resurrection teaching of the disciples, since that element is pre-eminent in the teaching of the apostles (Acts 4:12 and Acts 5).

What is the point? The apostles understood Jesus to be the Son of God—the Israel of God, the true embodiment of God’s contending for his people. Where Israel failed, Christ succeeded. Israel broke the covenant. Christ kept the covenant. Israel embraced the nations’ idolatry, which led to the departure of God’s presence and glory from her temple. Christ loved the Father with perfect love and was perfectly one with the Father such that He could declare, ‘he who has seen me has seen the Father.’ Jesus’ selection and commission of the twelve disciples is a reconstituting of Israel. He is known as ‘the messiah’—the anointed one. His anointing as prophet, priest and king witnesses to the fact that he has been given pre-eminence over all. His passion and crucifixion is a parallel of Israel’s exile.<sup>10</sup> Jesus is the Israel of God. As such, he is gathering the people of Yahweh into his sheepfold—both Jews and Gentiles (John 10:16)—so that they will be **one flock with one shepherd**. He will not fail to do this. It is vital to see this Christ-centred understanding of the Old Testament. If we fail to understand Christ as the final interpreter of the Old Testament, we will fail to see the fulfilment of the Old Testament story in Christ. Perhaps this is why so many see a duality in the people of God with the ethnic

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<sup>9</sup> Gary Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise?* pp. 176-177.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Wright’s *The God I Don’t Understand* explains this idea in the third section of the book on the crucifixion.

nation of Israel continuing to hold a central place in God's unfolding story. Those who see the Old Testament as being about Christ will have no difficulty seeing that Christ majestically accomplishes what Israel did not. It is not a 'sell-out' of the Old Testament to see it as Christ's story, nor is it an 'over-spiritualization' of the Old Testament. It is Christ's own understanding that leads us to see him as the final fulfilment of all God's purposes through Israel. He is the seed of the woman who crushes the head of the serpent. He is the seed of Abraham through whom the nations are blessed. He is the seed of David—the exalted king over a multitude of nations!

### **Jesus' Teaching on Israel**

Perhaps the question 'what would Jesus do?' has lost some of its appeal due to a surfeit of Christian trinkets that constantly invoke the question. Nevertheless, it is instructive to ask how Jesus responded to the legitimate leaders of Israel in his day.

In Matthew 21:33-45 Jesus relates the story of a vineyard—imagery that the Old Testament used for the nation of Israel (Isa. 5:1-7)—in response to the questioning of his authority by the chief priests and elders. The tenants were expected to be stewards of the precious fruit that was the sole possession of the owner of the vineyard. Unbelievably, they beat, wound, mock and abuse messenger after messenger sent from the vineyard owner. In a final attempt to rectify a desperate situation, the vineyard owner sends his very son. The response of the tenants defies imagination. They beat the son and kill him! What then will the vineyard owner do when he returns? He will cast out those wicked men! In the same way, Jesus tells the Jewish leaders of His day, the vineyard will be taken from you and given to a people producing its fruit. The leadership of God's people was indeed taken from the hands of the Scribes and Pharisees and given to the apostles of Christ. Those apostles produced fruit among the Jews and the nations. Christ's desire was that His vineyard be tended and cared for in order to produce the fruit he intended—the purpose of the Abrahamic covenant, the blessing of all nations. May I be clear to suggest that this parable does not teach the rejection of the Jews, but the replacement of the Jewish leaders by the apostles who would carefully tend the vineyard of His people whom we know to include both Jews and Gentiles.

The Romans were a non-Jewish occupying force. Doubtless, their presence ran roughshod over Israelite sensitivities and religious preferences. One might well anticipate that the Jewish Messiah would prophesy the removal of Rome from the ancient homeland of the Jews. Such a prophecy is conspicuously absent from Jesus' teaching. In fact, to my knowledge, Jesus never once reprimands Rome or its rulers for their usurpation of the Jewish homeland; nor does he endorse it, of course. Jesus' preoccupation is not with a political entity, an earthly realm or a geographically defined homeland (neither Israel nor Rome). He came proclaiming

the Kingdom of Heaven—the Kingdom of His Father. That was his preoccupation throughout his public ministry.

In this atmosphere of military and political exploitation, the Roman centurion stands out as a refreshing counter-example. We find his story in Matthew 8:5-13 and the parallel passage in Luke 7:1-10. Apparently, the centurion loved the Jewish nation and had constructed a synagogue. His statement is a startling recognition of Jesus' authority: 'For I too am a man under authority.' Jesus specifically declares that He has not seen such faith in Israel. Furthermore, He declares that the Kingdom of Heaven will be populated with such people who will come from the east and the west, and recline with Abraham in the Kingdom of heaven while 'the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside.' Jesus elevates the criterion for entry into the Kingdom of God beyond the status quo of the day. The criterion is not birthright. It is faith in Him, as the Roman centurion so aptly demonstrated. The sharing of the family meal with the patriarch will be enjoyed by such people irrespective of birthright or religious pedigree.

Many other facets of Jesus' life and teaching suggest a re-envisioning of the identity of God's people. These include:

- The inclusion of Gentile women (Rahab and Ruth) in Jesus' genealogy. (Matt. 1:5)
- Jesus' delight in the ready response of the Samaritans. (Jn. 4:34-38).
- The geographic spread of Jesus' ministry into Tyre and Sidon and the Greek Decapolis.
- Jesus' harsh denunciation of the Shepherds of Israel—the Scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 24.
- Jesus' willingness to defile himself by drinking from a Samaritan vessel and sleeping in a Samaritan village. (Jn. 4)
- Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem coupled with the warning that Jerusalem had failed to recognize her salvation. (Matt. 23:37-39; Lk. 19:41-44)
- Jesus' cleansing of the temple quotes Isaiah 56:7, which states that the temple is to be a house of prayer for all peoples. (Lk. 19:46)
- Jesus' insistence that he has other sheep not of this fold, and that He must go and bring them in to be one sheepfold with one shepherd. (Jn. 10:16)
- Jesus is portrayed as the fulfilment of the suffering servant (Matt. 12:18-21) whom Yahweh would use to bring his light to the nations and his salvation to the Gentiles. (Isa. 46:5-6)
- Jesus' identification of his own family and people as those who 'hear the word of God and do it.' (Matt. 12:48-50)

In summary, we contend that Jesus, in word and action, gave sufficient indication that the true people of God are those people who believe the testimony about him and join themselves to him to become one with him. Jesus is the spiritual progenitor of a new people, a new nation consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. This nation is the inclusive and expansive continuation of Old Testament Israel. The difference is that now the anointed prophet, priest and king has appeared. God's eternal purpose for His people is fulfilled in Christ. To use the language of Hebrews, the shadow has now given way to the reality. In Christ, God's purposes are not merely proclaimed, but achieved. Christ is the Israel of God.

### **The Apostles' Understanding of Israel's Identity**

This Christocentric understanding of the Old Testament and Israel is clearly discernible in the apostles' teaching. Paul refers to the body of Christ as the temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph 2:21). We recall that it was the Old Testament temple—the heart of Old Testament Israel—that was to be the dwelling place of Yahweh. The new temple is made of living stones that are the dwelling place of the Spirit of Yahweh. This building is founded upon the cornerstone—Christ himself—with the foundation stones being the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20-22). Furthermore, in this temple, the veil of separation has been torn asunder. In terms of participation in this Kingdom, there is no further differentiation between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, barbarian, Scythian, male and female (Gal 3:28-29). Paul's unflinching conclusion: 'If you are Christ's then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.' His words are unequivocal, stunning in clarity and poignancy.

*It strains the mind to realize that a Jewish apostle is applying these words, originally addressed to Old Testament Israel, to Christ's Kingdom—His followers comprised of*

Paul is not alone in highlighting the identity of Israel in God's new covenant people. Peter quotes from Exodus 19—the prologue to the Decalogue—to make a startling identification of God's new covenant people with Old Testament Israel: 'But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation that you should show forth the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.' It strains the mind to realize that a Jewish apostle is applying these words, originally addressed to Old Testament Israel, to Christ's Kingdom—His followers comprised of people of all tribes, tongues and nations.

Consider Paul's statements in Romans 2 and Galatians 3, which leave no margin for doubt as to how Paul identified the Israel of God. 'A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly, and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men but from God.' This is a key passage that must be reckoned with in any attempt to

identify the true Israel. Paul clearly indicates that the outward sign of circumcision (presumably including an ethnic identification with Israel) is not the deciding factor. Who then is the Jew? It is the person who is inwardly circumcised (see Jeremiah 9:24-26). Paul spells this out even more clearly in his passionate plea to the Galatians: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.' (Gal 3:28-29) It is the believer belonging to Christ that identifies him or her as Abraham's seed.

The reader may well object: 'Yes, but Paul clearly sees a future for Israel in Romans 9 through 11.' Paul argues that the ethnic descendants of Abraham are included in the identity of Israel. His famous analogy of an Olive tree that contains both wild branches, which have been grafted in (representing the nations), and branches native to the tree (representing the Jewish people) is critical to understand. The tree is one tree which includes both the ethnic descendants of Abraham—the Jews—and the seed of Abraham by faith—the nations. The point of the analogy is the inclusive and expansive nature of the new entity. The people of God are one people that include Jews who are 'in Christ.' These Jews have a place of distinction in the one tree of God's people because, as Paul says, 'the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises' come through them (Rom. 9:4-5). It is an honourable distinction that is drawn from the Old Testament. Paul states that God has not forsaken his people as is indicated by the fact that Paul himself is a Jew (Rom 11:1-2). The inclusion of the Gentiles is not tantamount to the rejection of the Jews, as some have argued. Paul seems to anticipate a greater inclusion of the Jews in the future based on Romans 11:15: 'For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?' This is the place of honour given to the Jewish people, to which I referred earlier. Jewish Christ-followers are our older brothers. We honour them, since the law, the worship, the covenants and ultimately the Messiah came to us Gentiles through them. Personally, I also anticipate and pray for many Jewish people to find life in Christ. I believe Romans 11:15 suggests this anticipation. The dividing line between a theology of replacement (which I reject) and a theology of inclusion (of which I am a proponent) is this. An inclusive theology of Israel maintains a place of honour and hope for the Jewish people. It clearly recognizes the indebtedness of the Gentiles to the Jewish nation and passionately yearns for the return of all Jewish people to their Messiah—Christ. The church does not replace Israel. Rather, Israel is expanded to include the nations.

Is it any wonder that Paul would send his final greeting to the Galatian church using the moniker 'the Israel of God?' (Gal 6:16) It is the natural and anticipated result of all we have been saying. God is bringing his eternal purposes for Israel to fruition. He is contending for a people. He is indwelling that people

by His Spirit and thereby bringing blessing to a multitude of nations who will rise up to be called by his name.

### **Missional and Political Implications**

If such an understanding of Israel were embraced, what implications might we see as this understanding of Israel spreads through the church?

First, this understanding of Scripture must never be used to justify anti-Semitism. I want to say explicitly that this is not an attempt to justify the tactics of terror that have been used to take innocent Israeli lives. I am not in solidarity with the Egyptian acquaintance that I quoted earlier. The state of Israel is certainly not my enemy. I pray for the peace and security of the people within that state and I hope and pray for political solutions that honour that people as well as the surrounding Arab nations. Objective observers of the Middle East will readily admit that atrocities have been committed against Israel. Christ-followers must stand against those atrocities as well as the injustices that have been committed against the Palestinian people.

Nevertheless, I believe that this understanding of Scripture would assist the church to identify the Kingdom of Jesus as its first loyalty and priority rather than a political state with geographic borders in the Middle East. The regathering of Israel might instead give great impetus for intercessory prayer and incarnational ministry. The *state* of Israel, as a geopolitical entity, is a present reality in our world but is not synonymous with God's Kingdom. That role belongs to Christ alone, not to any political entity anywhere in the world. One missiologist friend referred to the current state of affairs in Israel and Palestine as a missiological emergency. Muslim nations are deeply offended by what they perceive as impartial political, military and economic support of the Israeli state by Western Evangelicals. Some may see this as a purely political issue without reference to the church. However, the truth is that the Western church has become enmeshed in the political and monetary support of this state. The church must realize that her theology of Israel implicates her in responsibility for atrocities committed against Palestinians and Israelis. Many have pointed out the complacency of the church as the Third Reich began to perpetrate injustices against the Jewish people. Can we not learn the lesson of history to examine the claims of all peoples in the light of what is just and equitable? This calls for deep contrition and humility on the part of the church.

The missional implications for the current state of affairs are staggering. The Muslim world perceives, rightly or wrongly, a perpetual repression of the Palestinian people and a solemn denial of injustices committed against that people. If we as the church are unwilling to consider both sides of this ongoing struggle in the light of Biblical justice, we lose credibility as ambassadors of Christ. Is the contemporary church guilty of the same gross misrepresentations of the gospel that our forbears

expressed in the Crusades and the Inquisition? Has the contemporary church resorted to faith in a military solution to bring lasting change to the Middle East? Do we really believe that transforming the Middle East will be wrought by a 'free market economy?' This writer does not. Elisha struck the water with Elijah's mantle and asked, 'Where is Yahweh, the God of Elijah?' The contemporary church would do well to ask itself, 'Where is the power of the gospel?'

Secondly, equipped with this Biblical understanding of Israel, the people of Christ would seek to be effective peacemakers in the current conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people and perhaps gain credibility as peacemakers in countless other irascible conflicts that cover our globe. Perhaps the church could make a tangible contribution to the peace of earthly Jerusalem, at long last. 'Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the sons of God.'

Third, Christians would begin to return to the study of the Old Testament, not just for its Jewish background, but also for discipleship. The church would seek to learn the lessons of Israel in its mission in the world. A Christocentric hermeneutic could re-energize the preaching and teaching of the Old Testament. The church's eschatology would also take a different shape. The limited scope of this article prohibits further discussion of eschatology, but suffice to say that a paradigm shift in our understanding of the Biblical Israel will have profound implications on our eschatology.

Finally, the body of Christ universal would be armed with an innate understanding that the final Kingdom of Christ cannot be identified with any nation or its capital—Washington, DC, Mecca, Jerusalem, Geneva, etc. The capitol of our Kingdom is a heavenly Jerusalem where Christ is enthroned at the right hand of God the Father. We await the promised descent of this Jerusalem to earth (Rev 21:2)—the consummation of the Kingdom Jesus inaugurated during his earthly ministry. 'Your Kingdom come.'

## Conclusion

The Israel of God is Christ. Those who are in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, are fully embraced in the Israel of God. They are those for whom God has contended in Christ. We reject the title of 'replacement theology' with its pejorative connotations and suggest the title 'Inclusive Israel' or 'the expansive people of God.' It is a reading of Scripture that holds the Jewish people in high esteem and anticipates their eventual embrace of the Messiah. It refuses to elevate ethnic descent over faith or any earthly political entity above the Kingdom of Christ.

*Is the contemporary church guilty of the same gross misrepresentations of the gospel that our forbears expressed in the Crusades and the Inquisition? Has the contemporary church resorted to faith in a military solution to bring*

## FIRST RESPONSE TO MIKE KUHN

by Abu Roo

*Five years ago Abu Roo and his family began ministry in the ME following many years as pastor of evangelism in a large American church. Having found Christ as an adult, his life-long passion and central gifting is in evangelism. He serves in a regional leadership role.*

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Mike Kuhn has written a scholarly and well-thought-out Biblical treatise validating the danger of elevating ethnicity or an earthly political state above faith in Christ and the Kingdom of God.

The Biblical and theological understanding of the nation of 'Israel in contemporary Middle East' is definitely an emotionally charged topic for the evangelical church, the Arab world, and of course for Israel itself. Mike tackles the subject with grace for those of different views while carefully arguing from Scripture (in both Old and New Testaments) that the true seed of Abraham, and thus heirs of promise, are followers of Christ. He emphatically rejects replacement theology and speaks out against anti-Semitism (which I do also), while properly outlining the Biblical history of God's purpose for the man Israel, then the nation of his descendants to usher in the Messiah who is the fulfilment of the Old Testament.

Mike carefully avoids the emotional landmines associated with the question of the modern nation state of Israel being true representatives of 'God's people,' but rather correctly focuses his attention on the Biblical importance of the inward nature of Christ-followers. He accurately points out from Scriptures that 'biological descent is not the criteria for becoming an Israelite.' Living in the Middle East myself for the express purpose of bringing the Gospel to the Arab world, I am constantly caught between the plight of the Palestinian people as inflicted by the modern state of Israel, and the unjustifiable acts of terrorism and violence aimed at Israeli innocents by Palestinians. I support neither, and view the situation unsolvable apart from Christ. I agree with Mike's conclusion that 'Those who are in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, are fully embraced in the Israel of God.'

All-in-all, his article is thought-provoking and Scripturally justifies the need to re-examine our view of the nation state known as Israel, and what it means to be 'of the seed of Abraham.'

## SECOND RESPONSE TO MIKE KUHN

by David Parsons

*Rev. Parsons is media director for the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (icej.org)*

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Most evangelical Christians assign great biblical significance to Israel's modern-day restoration. Yet a growing number of Evangelicals today are sympathetic to Palestinian suffering and nationalist claims. They are finding a theological footing for their position in the trendy new answer of Fulfillment theology, rather than the traditional Replacement concept. This is, nonetheless, a view that sees natural Israel as having already 'fulfilled' her redemptive purpose with the coming of Jesus, leaving the Jewish nation with no future role to play.

Mike Kuhn has ably presented the Fulfillment position, laying much emphasis on the ever-expanding 'inclusiveness' of God's salvation plan. Indeed, the universal nature of God's intended family is such an elemental truth of Scripture that no Christian can rightly contest it. On the other hand, the Apostle Paul says there is a certain 'mystery' to natural Israel that has survived the cross and the birth of the Church. So while Fulfillment theology makes valid points, it is not the full counsel of Scripture. That is to be found in Covenant theology.

The great covenants of the Bible tell the story of God's salvation plan, beginning with His covenant with Abraham, which serves as the foundation for the Mosaic, Davidic and New covenants. Each was built upon or 'added to' prior covenants and did not nullify any preceding one (Gal. 3:16-19).

In the Abrahamic covenant, God offers salvation to 'all the families of the earth' through faith in Him. But the world did not know it needed to be saved, so in the Mosaic covenant the Ten Commandments were given to tell us we are sinners (Gal. 3:24). Under the Davidic covenant, we are assured of a King from David's lineage who will be the Righteous Judge of the whole earth.

In the New covenant, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus enables Gentiles to be 'adopted' as 'sons of Abraham' and 'heirs of the promise' of salvation (Rom. 4:1-16; Gal. 3:6-14, 29). The sinless life of Jesus also satisfied the just requirements of the Mosaic Law (Rom. 8:1-4; Col. 2:11). His perfect obedience to the Father, even to the point of a cursed death on a tree, earned Him the right to ascend to the throne of David (Ps. 110; Eph. 1:15-23; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 5:5-10).

Now notice all of these covenants were established with natural Israel. In fact, Paul describes this using possessive terms. In Romans 9:3-5, he explains the covenants 'pertain to' or 'belong to' his fellow Israelites. Earlier in Romans 3:1-4,

he insists the very oracles of God were ‘committed’ or ‘entrusted’ to natural Israel. Even Jesus told the Samaritan woman that ‘salvation is of the Jews’ (John 4:22).

This all describes natural Israel’s unique covenant relationship with God, who made them custodians of world redemption. God called Israel to be a trustee of salvation, with the beneficiary being the world. Even title to the Land of Israel was vested in Abraham’s progeny in the nature of a trust so Israel could become a nation that over time might birth into the world all the things we need for salvation.

In serving this role, Israel did not enjoy ‘most favored nation’ status. Rather, they were called to be suffering servants, even to the point of being hardened by God towards their own promised Messiah. Paul tells us this was for the sake of the Gentiles, expecting us to be grateful (Rom. 11).

Therefore, God called natural Israel in order to birth spiritual Israel—the one ever-expanding household of the redeemed. We Gentile believers do not replace natural Israel, we enlarge spiritual Israel (Eph. 2:11-22).

Yet God has always worked out his salvation plan through natural Israel, using their belief and their unbelief in equal measure to produce the one family of the redeemed. This is even true for the ‘new covenant,’ which was established by Jesus with twelve Jewish disciples gathered for the Last Supper. Hebrews 8 adds that it was ‘made with the house of Israel.’ Moreover, even the Church was birthed through 120 Jews gathered at Pentecost in that same Upper Room.

*God called Israel to be a trustee of salvation, with the beneficiary being the*

Thus, Paul bases his ‘mystery’ upon God’s irrevocable covenant with Israel, which is still in operation even through their unbelief. Romans 11:25 essentially says that as long as natural Israel rejects their Messiah, there is still time for Gentiles to be saved.

So while I agree with Kuhn that Israel’s calling involved divine purpose and not preference, the New Testament says that redemptive purpose is on-going even in the Jewish rejection of Jesus, so that Gentiles might accept a Gospel message that is otherwise ‘foolishness’ to us (1 Cor. 1:23). What is more, while Kuhn sees Paul ‘anticipating’ Israel’s future collective salvation, the Bible actually assures it.

We know this as well from the preaching of Peter in Acts 3:17-21, where he proclaims that all the prophecies concerning the things Messiah must suffer have been ‘fulfilled,’ but that there are still many other things spoken by the prophets yet to come. Peter is drawing here from Hosea 5-6, which refers to Israel’s promised national repentance and restoration in the last days. The prophets all agree this will entail a physical return to the Land in unbelief and then a spiritual return to God and His Messiah (see, e.g., Jer. 31, Ez. 36). Peter even declares that Christ is ‘received’ (or ‘retained’) in heaven until all this is accomplished.

Jesus also alludes to this future ‘regeneration’ of Israel in Matthew 19:28, when his disciples will ‘sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’ He also foresees the physical return of the Jews to Jerusalem (Luke 21:24) and their spiritual turning to Him as their Messiah (Luke 13:35).

These passages all speak of the future timing of the Davidic covenant, when Christ will take up David’s throne in Jerusalem, to rule over the earth in righteousness and peace. Moreover, since the covenants were entrusted to natural Israel and always find their outworking through them, this means that the Jewish people still have a redemptive role to fulfill for the benefit of the world.

Plainly stated, the modern-day restoration of Israel is destined to birth the world into the Messianic Age in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. In this process, natural Israel will be absorbed into spiritual Israel and will finally enter her promised rest in the Land.

This may frustrate some Christians, as it takes certain matters out of their hands. We Evangelicals think if we only preach the Gospel in all nations, then ‘the end will come’ (Matt. 24:14). This is true, but it is equally true that natural Israel also has a role to play. This demands that we respect Israel as still elect of God, even in her unbelief (Rom. 11:1, 11, 29).

Over the centuries, far too many Gentile Christians have failed to appreciate this mystery of Israel’s enduring election. We tend to reject the Jews because they rejected Christ, and we fail to see the redemptive purpose of God in ‘committing them all to disobedience’ for our sake (Rom. 11:28-32).

In addition, confusion often comes when we read that the ‘old covenant’ was passing away (Heb. 8:13). However, that refers only to the ritual Mosaic laws, which were but foreshadows of Christ. It does not refer to the Abrahamic covenant, which is the genesis of Israel’s relationship with God as well as our own salvation as New Testament believers. Otherwise, we are all in trouble!

The reason is spelled out in Hebrews 6, which tells us that the same unchanging God Who swore by an oath to Abraham likewise swore that Christ is our High Priest forever (Ps. 110:1-4). So if God has finished with natural Israel or vacated His promises to Abraham, including the land promise, then could He not also change His mind about the blood of Jesus?

Ultimately, a Christian’s view on Israel has to do with their view of the character of the God we serve. Is He absolutely faithful to His covenant promises, or can we reinterpret them to suit our shifting political sentiments? God is completely trustworthy, and we see this in the historic justice of God re-gathering the people He scattered so they may fulfill their prophetic national destiny. This process presently involves a very complex and painful conflict over the Land, yet

His ultimate purpose remains to bless the world—including Arabs and Muslims—through Israel's acceptance of the rightful heir to the throne of David. What a powerful message to share with the peoples of the Middle East!

## RESPONSE TO DAVID PARSONS

by Mike Kuhn

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I appreciate David Parsons' thoughtful reply. I read it with great interest, especially because I am indebted to covenant theology for an understanding of the unity of the Bible. He articulated his response well and I acknowledge the depth of thought that went into his reply. I am in solidarity with him on many points such as the unfolding nature of the covenant and the fact that each covenant builds on the previous one to point us forward in anticipation of the Messiah. The covenants were made with the Jewish people and we Gentiles are indebted to them. He makes the point well and forcefully that 'Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.' (Rom. 11:25) We agree that, in God's mysterious providence, through Israel's rejection of Messiah the day of grace has dawned for the Gentiles.

Furthermore I recognize that any human perspective will fail to grasp the 'full counsel of God.' By writing this article I hope to join in a conversation with many serious students of God's word who are pouring over this very topic. I recognize that my views are liable to error. However, I hope the reader will agree that my views are not born out of the shifting political winds of the Middle East or an attempt at a trendy new 'fulfillment theology.' Perish the thought! If the Scriptures do not teach what I am proposing, then I will happily walk away from it and stand corrected.

The basic premise of David Parsons' reply is that there remains a distinction between 'natural Israel' (I presume this would be all Jewish people, not only the state of Israel) and 'spiritual Israel' (I presume this to be all Christ-followers, Jews and Gentiles). The promises made to 'natural Israel,' including the promise of land are still in force. These promises were made to Old Testament Israel (natural Israel) and will be kept with 'natural Israel.' Thus, the promises made to 'natural Israel' (e.g. land) do not apply to 'spiritual Israel,' at least not to the Gentile believers of spiritual Israel. In the words of Mr. Parson's response: 'We Gentile believers do not replace natural Israel, we enlarge spiritual Israel.'

On what Biblical basis do we hold that some promises are valid only for those who are ethnically and religiously Jewish? Paul unpacks the mystery of the gospel as follows: 'This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs

together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.’ (Eph. 3:6 NIV) If the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, why should Gentiles be excluded from certain promises? Paul tackles this issue head on and is absolutely clear that the Gentiles now become full members of God’s covenant people with all rights and privileges pertaining thereto: ‘Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, ... remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both [*Jews and Gentiles*] one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, [*again, Jews and Gentiles*] so making peace, So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.’ (Eph. 2:11-15,19 ESV).

Positing a distinction between ‘natural Israel’ and ‘spiritual Israel’ is misleading. The Scriptures do suggest a distinction, but it is a distinction *within* the one family of God—his covenant people. It is a distinction that looks back in history in grateful recognition of how God has used his old covenant people to bring Messiah and salvation to the nations. Jewish followers of Christ are our older brothers and maintain that place of honor. We are the adopted siblings who have been brought into the family by the love of God. We are now full members of the Israel of God. If this is not the case, then the very nature of the gospel is compromised. As Paul says ‘For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.’ (2 Cor. 1:20 NIV) God has not vacated his promises and He certainly has not changed His mind. He has simply enlarged the promises and given them to us Gentiles as well. So, Biblically, Gentile Christ-followers have rights to the land as well. This may strike modern-day evangelicals as ludicrous—how can I claim to have a right to the land of Israel? But recall that the land promises were expansive. Jesus promises the meek that they will inherit the land (the earth) (Mt. 5:5) and his faithful followers that they will rule cities (Lk. 19:17,19).

*If the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, why should Gentiles be excluded from certain promises? Paul tackles this issue head on and is absolutely clear that the Gentiles now become full members of God's covenant people with all rights and privileges*

Now on to a few of the passages mentioned in Rev. Parsons’ response. Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31 are referred to as promising ‘a physical return to the Land in unbelief and then a spiritual return to God and His Messiah.’ Both passages refer to a new covenant and both passages refer to Israel’s being returned to the land of promise and cleansed from all their sin. Ezekiel 36:27

states 'I will put my Spirit within you.' Jeremiah 31:34 states: 'for they shall all know me... For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.' Again, we follow our hermeneutic and inquire how Jesus and the apostles understood these prophecies of a new covenant. We can agree that Jesus inaugurated this promised 'new covenant' (Lk. 22:20). The writer of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 practically verbatim insisting that 'Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.' (Heb. 8:6) Later the same book affirms: 'But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a *new covenant*,' (Heb. 12:22-24 ESV) Note that the writer of Hebrews is writing to Hebrew Christians and urging them not to abandon the faith. He does not point them to an earthly Jerusalem as the locus of their hope, but to the city of the living God where Christ reigns.

*However, a careful reading of the passage makes clear that Jesus does not promise that the Jews will return to the land. Luke 21:24 simply states that Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the*

We therefore understand the new covenant as having been inaugurated in Jesus as He forgives his people of their sin and sends the promised Spirit to indwell and empower them. The perfect fulfillment of this covenant takes place in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is the place of Christ's reign and the city that descends upon the earth in Revelation 21. Is there hope that the Jewish people will return to Christ in

this life? I have made plain my anticipation that the number of Jewish Christ-followers will continue to increase and will bring great blessing to the entire Israel of God. Furthermore, it is crucial to see that many Jews believed the preaching of the apostles and were enfolded into the early church (Acts 21:20). Thus the blessings of the new covenant have already come to a multitude of Jewish people. Paul pointed to a remnant of Jewish believers as an indicator that God would keep his promises (Rom. 11:5). Indeed He has and He will.

Finally, in his response, Rev. Parsons mentions the New Testament affirmations of a coming renewal of Israel. The first passage is Matthew 19:18 which states: 'Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."' (Mt. 19:28 ESV) This is not a prophecy of a coming renewal of Israel. It is a promise to the apostles that they will be appointed to judge the twelve tribes. It gives no indication of the spiritual state of those twelve tribes.

The second passage cited is: "They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24 ESV). Rev. Parsons states that this is a New Testament promise of a return of the Jews to the land of Israel. If this is the case, we must conclude that the New Testament does in fact promise the Jews that they will return to the land. However, a careful reading of the passage makes clear that Jesus does not promise that the Jews will return to the land. Luke 21:24 simply states that Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. In fact, the context makes clear that the signs of the end will then take place and then, 'At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.' (Lk. 21:27 NIV). If we take the text for what it says, there is no mention of reoccupying of the land prior to the events of the end times and the appearance of Christ in glory.

Luke 13:35 (ESV) is also cited: 'Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"' The fulfillment of this prophecy is found, not in a future renewal of Israel, but in Luke 19:38 as the crowds call out 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' only one week prior to Jesus' crucifixion. The cry did not reflect the condition of their hearts, obviously. Matthew's gospel (23:39) quotes Jesus as saying the same thing, only in this context Jesus is teaching about his second coming. Thus it is preferable to understand this saying, not as a promise of Israel's renewal, but as a statement of Israel's reaction when Christ returns in glory.

As stated previously, I think the Biblical affirmation of the anticipated repentance of the Jewish people is found in Romans 11:25-32. However, neither this passage nor any other New Testament promise links the Jewish repentance to a return to the land.

Maintaining a separate category for natural Israel and spiritual Israel with certain promises applying only to natural Israel, reflects in my opinion, a misunderstanding of not only the New Testament but also of the Old. We have tried to show that many of 'natural Israel' in the Old Testament failed to inherit the promises for the simple reason that they broke the covenant with Yahweh. For this reason, some were exiled and lost their land. Some were carried away into slavery. Some were punished directly by God and perished from the earth. God's covenant promises were fulfilled for those who, by faith, remained within the covenant by practice of the covenant signs which included the sacrifice of a Passover lamb as a redemption of Israel. The fulfillment of that redeeming

sacrifice is Christ. The fulfillment of the covenant promises are for those who embrace the Messiah—Jew and Gentile alike.

Does it matter? That is the question. Does it really make any difference how evangelicals understand the question of the Jewish return to the land? I think it matters. Evangelicals have a tendency to support the state of Israel (spiritually, financially, morally and politically). That support is too often misdirected or out of balance. As a result we skew the message of the gospel and the universality of it to all peoples of the Middle East—Muslim peoples, Christian Arabs and the Jews. Arabs often perceive the message of the gospel as a political and national threat while Jewish people may perceive it as a statement of political solidarity. In both cases, the true message of the gospel of the Kingdom is misconstrued. The hope of all people is the Kingdom of God. That Kingdom alone offers *shalom* to the peoples of the Middle East. That Kingdom is already present in our world and it is not based in any earthly capital. Christ rules that Kingdom from the heavenly Jerusalem. All people are welcome and invited to enter that Kingdom through the grace of God in Christ. Yes it matters.

## THIRD RESPONSE TO MIKE KUHN

by Dr. Stephen Baruch

*Stephen Baruch holds a PhD in Jewish Studies. Dr. Baruch also earned rabbinical ordination from an Orthodox Jewish institution. After coming to faith, he completed a Master's of Divinity, with an emphasis in Biblical Languages. He served congregations in the United States from 1986-2001 before immigrating to Israel in 2002. There he works teaching and discipling both Jewish and Arab individuals. All of his work is done in the Hebrew language.*

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There are many points in Mike Kuhn's article with which I agree. Even though I work primarily with Jewish individuals, I acknowledge the great need for the Arab world to hear and understand the Gospel. I also agree that God's call of Israel does not imply a favoured status, but it is a call based upon purpose that carries a great responsibility. In other words, the ultimate purpose in God calling Israel is not only for Jewish individuals, but that, through Israel, all the other nations would also respond.

Mr. Kuhn's use of Isaiah 49 is of great importance. The section that he uses reveals that it was always God's purpose to include Gentiles in His Kingdom. Hence, the proper picture of the Kingdom of God is that of both Jew and Gentile together worshipping the Lord. Faith in Messiah Jesus does not remove one's ethnicity. Rather in Christ, the body of believers from every nation, tribe and language standing before the Lamb confirms the faithfulness of God. An issue of

concern for me is when one wants to conclude that because the vast majority of Jewish individuals reject Jesus as the Messiah, that God has written off the Jewish people and the unique call that the Sovereign God has placed upon them. I am not saying that Mr. Kuhn takes such a position, yet I would like to interject into this subject a very important Biblical truth.

Mr. Kuhn states that after the Babylonian exile, 'the people did return to their land and even though that return was less glorious than hoped, *it was necessary preparation for the coming Messiah*' (my emphasis). I suggest that in the same way that Mr. Kuhn states Israel had to be back in 'their land' for Messiah's first coming, so too is it an absolute necessity for Jewish people to be dwelling in the Land of Israel for Jesus to return and establish His Kingdom. The Prophet Obadiah makes it most clear that before the Millennial Kingdom will be established, Jewish individuals must dwell not only in the borders that the modern State of Israel currently possesses, but even in places that currently belong to Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt (See Ob. 1:18-21). The Prophet Isaiah states that Jewish individuals will return and rebuild the desolate places (See Is. 54:1-3). It is important to remember that this prophecy of Isaiah comes within a group of chapters that clearly have end times implications.

This is the reason why it is so vital to watch Israel—the land and the Jewish people, because when the world sees the faithfulness that God will display to Israel, it will be a strong statement to the Gentiles. When the Gentiles see how the Lord deals with Israel, redeeming a remnant of them, many Gentiles will likewise place their faith in Jesus. This is the proper understanding of verses like Ezekiel 37:28 which says, '*And the nations shall know (Me) when I the LORD sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary shall be in the midst of them forever.*'

Mr. Kuhn makes a distinction between the Israel of the Bible and the modern State of Israel. He also warns that failure to make such a distinction can have serious and negative results. It would seem that his concern lies in the fear that failure to make this distinction could cause one to accept or encourage the modern State of Israel committing acts that are Biblically and morally unacceptable. I agree that simply because the State of Israel today has the same name as the people of God in the Old Testament, one should not accept the behaviour and actions of the State of Israel as approved by God. The modern Israel should **not** be given a free pass, but be evaluated based on Biblical standards.

*I agree that simply because the State of Israel today has the same name as the people of God in the Old Testament, one should not accept the behaviour and actions of the State of Israel as approved by God. The modern Israel should not be given a free pass, but be*

My impression is that the support that Mr. Kuhn is referring to is based on a few Biblical principles. First, there is a Scriptural priority on sharing the Gospel to Jewish individuals. Paul is most clear about this when he writes, *‘For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Messiah—for it is the power of God to each person who believes; to the Jew first and also to the Greek’ (the non-Jew)* (Rom. 1:16). There are those who want to say that the proper interpretation of this verse is that the Gospel was first offered to the Jews and was rejected and now it is also for the Gentiles. However, such a view is not in line with Paul's statement that one of the purposes of the Church is to provoke Jewish individuals to jealousy, that is to have the same relationship that believers in Christ have with the God of Israel (See Rom. 11:11). Therefore, the priority to share the Gospel to the Jew is still one of the primary calls of the church.

I commend Mr. Kuhn for recognizing that there is indeed a future day of redemption for a great number of the sons of Jacob and that this redemption will have a mighty and positive result in the world. I believe this is a reference to the establishment of the Kingdom of God. I fully agree when Mr. Kuhn writes, *‘An inclusive theology of Israel maintains a place of honour and hope for the Jewish people. It clearly recognizes the indebtedness of the Gentiles to the Jewish nation and passionately yearns for the return of all Jewish people to their Messiah—Christ. The church does not replace Israel. Rather, Israel is expanded to include the nations.’*

An additional reason why some evangelicals support Israel lies firmly in what I previously commented upon, the role that both the Jewish people and the Land of Israel will play in the last days in bringing the nations to salvation. It is clear that much of mainline Christianity, as well as the Catholic Church, reject the right that the modern State of Israel has to the land, which the Bible calls Judea and Samaria (what the world refers to as the West Bank). This issue is usually linked to the creation of a ‘Palestinian’ State, which brings much of the support among evangelicals to which Mr. Kuhn maybe referring. Evangelicals support Israel against the ‘Palestinians’, neither because Jews are more important to God than Gentiles; nor because the suffering of the ‘Palestinians’ are less important to the sufferings of any other people including the Jews, rather because it is simply not the will of God for Israel to be divided into two modern states.

The Prophecy of Joel, which is thoroughly eschatological in nature, states: *‘For behold in those days and in that time I will return the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem. And I will gather all the nations and bring them to the valley (called) the LORD JUDGES and I will be judged with them, there concerning My people and My inheritance Israel which they scattered among the nations, and My Land which they divided’* (Joel 3:1-2). Joel mentions the valley of Jehoshaphat, which means literally ‘the Lord Judges’. This valley is in the Jezreel valley and is known in the New Testament as Armageddon.

Joel reveals that in this place God will also be judged, that is His character and purposes will be recognized by the nations. This will be made known when He judges those of the nations that go up to Jerusalem to make war with Israel. Please note that the Lord will also judge those who divided His Land. Hence, even though it is not His will for a 'Palestinian' state to be created, Joel seems to be revealing that this will occur. Once again, one should not be against the 'Palestinian' people nor ignore their sufferings, but establishing a state in Judea and Samaria is not the solution to their sufferings. Although it is very easy to blame the State of Israel (**I am not in any way implying that Mr. Kuhn is doing this in this article**), one should be aware that it is Muslims who administer both Judea and Samaria as well as the Gaza Strip who are guilty of gross violations of human rights. My complaint against Israel is not for what they have done (although Israel is not without some blame), as much as what they are failing to do. What is this? They are failing to enforce the laws of Israel in these places and are not coming to the aid of those Arabs who are suffering for not supporting the leadership of Islamic terrorists.

In conclusion, I too look forward to the New Jerusalem, but do not want to ignore the Biblical significance of the Jerusalem today in God's prophetic plan and the fact that Messiah Jesus will rule from an earthly Jerusalem for a thousand years. It is often the failure to emphasize the earthy reign of Christ from Jerusalem in the last days that keeps one from emphasizing the Jewish people and the Land of Israel now.

## RESPONSE TO DR. STEPHEN BARUCH

by Mike Kuhn

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I appreciate Dr. Baruch's response to the article and am gratified that there is much we can agree on. I am also grateful for his commitment to Biblical truth and ministry of that truth in Israel to both Jewish and Arab peoples.

Our conflicting reading of the Old Testament prophecies is apparent in three areas. The first is the ongoing literal validity of the land promises to ethnic Israel—a view held by a large percentage of evangelicals worldwide. Many believe that the contemporary state of Israel has a divine right, not only to the land they currently occupy (Israel and the West Bank), but also to land currently occupied by other sovereign states of the Middle East such as Jordan, Egypt and Syria. While I disagree with this reading of the Old Testament promises, I understand why sincere readers of Scripture would arrive at this conclusion. The response

referred to three primary Old Testament passages. I will briefly supply an alternate understanding of those passages.

### **Obadiah 18-21**

First, Christ is the ultimate interpreter of the Old Testament. After Jesus himself, we look to the apostles to supply their understanding of the Old Testament. Their approach to the Old Testament scriptures must inform and direct our approach. Obadiah is a prophecy against Edom—Old Testament Israel's nemesis who rejoiced at her demise and exile. The first part of the book promises God's judgment on Edom and states that Israel will be used of God to mete out that judgment. The final 3 verses (18-21) promise Israel that she will possess Edom and occupy her land, thus vindicating Israel against Edom.

Obadiah is not the only Old Testament prophecy against Edom. A parallel promise is given in Amos 9:11-12: 'In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,' declares the LORD who does this.' Now the question is: does Jesus—or his apostles—help us understand how this prophecy of God's punishing Edom and Israel possessing Edom's land is to be understood? The answer is yes. In Acts 15:16-17, James quotes this very passage from Amos. He amends the latter part of the prophecy from what we read in Amos to say: 'that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things.' (Acts 15:16) To our modern ears, this seems a rather strange shift from James. How does he equate Israel's punishing of Edom and possessing her land with the Gentiles coming to faith in the Messiah—the subject of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15? Did James take the Scriptures out of context? Has he misapplied the prophecy? Our confusion betrays our failure to understand the nature of Jesus' Kingdom and the epoch-making changes that Christ's announcement of the presence of the Kingdom entail. The enthronement of Messiah as the nations bow their knee to him is the vindication of Israel. These are the nations that are called by the name of Yahweh (Amos 9:12). As the nations acknowledge the Messiah of Israel, they become the subjects of the expanded Israel. Israel—the Messiah—is now in fact possessing the nations, including Edom.

### **Isaiah 54:1-3**

'Sing O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song...' Paul quotes this passage and relates it directly to 'the Jerusalem that is above' (Gal 4:27). Paul's understanding of this passage helps us understand that it should be applied to the heavenly Jerusalem where Christ is enthroned, not the earthly Jerusalem.

**Joel 3:1-2**

First, Joel's prophecy pertains to conditions when the prophecy was given—the time of Joel. We must avoid assuming that these prophecies refer to events in our day (2000 + years after the prophecy). God declares that 'in that day' He will enter into judgment against those people who have divided Israel's land, traded boys for prostitutes and girls for wine to drink, etc. God did judge nations for their severe mistreatment of Israel prior to Christ's coming. Secondly, does this prophecy point toward a return of Jews to the land of Israel in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? It is noteworthy that this promise of Israel's vindication against the nations for 'dividing up the land' immediately follows the prophecy of the outpouring of God's Spirit on all flesh fulfilled in Pentecost. Contextual evidence strongly suggests that any future application of the passage should be made, not to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but to Pentecost—the great expanding event of Israel. Again, we see the Old Testament threat of judgment on the nations transformed into a promise of grace for all who are 'in Christ'—the Israel of God. Peter urges the Pentecost observers to save themselves from this corrupt generation. The modern day application of this text is that God is still to enter into judgment with all who have abused and torn apart his covenant people. However, that covenant people is not a political state in the Middle East, but the seed of Abraham by faith, the followers of Jesus. Thus God promises to execute judgment on all who abuse, threaten and persecute His covenant people.

**The second area of conflict** is the view that ethnic Jews must occupy the land before Christ's return. Our principle is that Christ is the authoritative interpreter of the Old Testament. Neither Jesus nor his apostles preached his return in glory on the presence of ethnic Jews in the land of Israel or the re-establishment of an Israeli state on the ancient land of Israel. This is not an attempt to dispute the legitimacy of the Israeli state. It is rather a recognition that the legitimacy of that state must be demonstrated on pragmatic and political grounds, not Biblical or theological grounds.

**The third area** is the nature of the Kingdom of God. Jesus announced, not a future coming kingdom, but a present kingdom proclaiming the kingdom to be 'at hand' or to have 'drawn near.' (Mt. 3:2, 4:17; Lk. 17:21) Christ-followers are not waiting for Jesus to begin to reign. We are invited to live in the reality of His reign—subjugating ourselves and our loyalties to any human institution to the primary loyalty of Christ and His Kingdom. The Kingdom was inaugurated in Christ's first coming and will be consummated in his second coming. This reign of Christ subsumes every political state and every earthly institution. That reign will be brought to a renewed earth as the heavenly Jerusalem descends to earth as the consummation of Christ's reign (Rev 21:2).

## WHY WE SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

(From: <http://www.christianzionism.org/> Accessed 14 March, 2011)

Christians are troubled when injustice is committed. We are especially troubled when it is perpetuated through the appropriation of Christian theology for ideological purposes. One such misappropriation is commonly referred to as Christian Zionism.

### **What is Christian Zionism?**

Christian Zionism may be defined either broadly or narrowly. Broadly speaking, it designates any Christian support for the national revival movement of the Jewish people realized through the establishment of the modern State of Israel (historically known as Zionism). More narrowly defined, Christian Zionism is an ideology grounded in beliefs which consider the State of Israel to be divinely ordained and scripturally determined with a central role in ushering in the end of history, where unconverted Jews and unbelievers (including Christians who are considered to be of questionable status) are judged by God's wrath. It is the narrower form that causes immediate concern.

### **Why should we be concerned?**

There are a number of reasons why this narrow ideological form of Christian Zionism raises concerns for the member communions of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Among these are the following:

#### ***1. It is a movement with negative consequences for Middle East peace***

Christian Zionism, in its narrow ideological form, encourages political advocacy committed to preserving control over all of historic Palestine for Jewish people alone, including the West Bank and Gaza strip, to ensure the realization of the movement's own end-times hopes. This ideological approach rejects any peace process built on a negotiated settlement towards a two-state solution to the conflict. Leading advocates of this ideology have formed themselves into oftentimes very public and well-funded political action groups whose aim is to prevent any negotiations that may lead to a two-state solution to the conflict.

#### ***2. It fosters fear and hatred of Muslims and non-western Christians***

Prominent spokespersons for Christian Zionism are known for promoting negative stereotypes of Muslims and Middle Easterners, including Middle Eastern Christians. They often accuse these Christians of siding with Muslims against the US and the State of Israel in a cosmic battle of good and evil, thus questioning their Christian faithfulness. Rather than fostering understanding and cooperation with neighbors, ideological Christian Zionism often teaches Christians in the US

to harbor suspicion and enmity towards Muslims and non-westernized Christians. When it does so, the movement negates Christ's command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39).

### ***3. It can lead to the dehumanization of Israelis and Palestinians***

Because Christian Zionism bases support for the State of Israel on its supposed role in the end of history, its adherents tend to treat Israelis and Palestinians not as neighbors to be loved, but as pawns in a cosmic drama of divine vengeance and retribution. The conclusion of this drama involves the death of all non-Christians, including Jews, through apocalyptic warfare or divine judgment. Given these beliefs, even many Jews wonder if the movement promotes proper Jewish-Christian relationships and question the nature of the movement's support for Israel.

### ***4. It is not based on traditional teaching or doctrines of the Church***

Christian Zionism and its theological presuppositions are nineteenth-century innovations in Christian doctrine. The most prominent spokesperson for these beliefs was John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). Although the advocates of Christian Zionism and its underlying theology sometimes claim to base their beliefs on ancient understandings, generally scholars recognize these to be recent innovations.

### ***5. Evangelical Christians are concerned***

Ideological Christian Zionists sometimes claim that they speak on behalf of all American evangelicals. This is not so. Many evangelicals in the US do not want to be identified as ideological Christian Zionists. Several prominent evangelical spokespersons have spoken out strongly against this ideology, recognizing how it contradicts the central commitments of Christianity to justice and peace-making. Many question its theological assumptions.

### **How should we respond?**

Christians in the West must ask themselves questions about the influence of Christian Zionism on US public opinion. It grieves the member communions of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA to note that many Christians visiting the land of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection are not even aware of the existence of Arab Christians, and do not have opportunities to interact with local Christian communities. One step toward addressing this concern is for Christians in the West to become better aware of Christian Zionism and its effects, including the history, theology, and forms of biblical interpretation underlying this ideology. Please take the time to learn what this movement is all about, get involved, and continue to 'pray for the peace of Jerusalem' (Psalm 122:6).

## THE LA GRANGE DECLARATION CHALLENGING CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

**Editor's Note:** *This statement is reproduced in Seedbed in order to illustrate some of the initiatives taken by American Christians to seek balance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.*

This statement was prepared and endorsed in 1979 by 5000 American church leaders, including many in the evangelical community.

As believers committed to Christ and his kingdom, we challenge the popular assumptions about biblical interpretation and the presuppositions of political loyalty held so widely by fellow Christians in their attitudes toward the conflict in the Middle East.

We address this urgent call to the church of Jesus Christ to hear and heed those voices crying out as bruised reeds for justice in the land where our Lord walked, taught, was crucified, and rose from the dead. We have closed our hearts to these voices, and isolated ourselves even from the pleading of fellow Christians who continue to live in that land.

*We call on Christ's followers to repent from their complicity—through either their indifference or their uncritical embrace of US policies—in the continuing cycle of Middle Eastern violence, accelerated by our tax dollars and*

We are anguished by the fact that countless Christians believe that the Bible gives to the modern State of Israel a divine right to lands inhabited by Palestinian people, and divine sanction to the State of Israel's policy of territorial acquisition. We believe such an understanding must be judged in the light of the whole of biblical revelation affirming that in the revelation of Jesus Christ, God's covenants find their completion. Therefore, we plead for all Christians to construct a vision of peace in the holy land which rests on the biblical injunctions to correct oppression and seek justice for all peoples.

Forthrightly, we declare our conviction that in the process of establishing the State of Israel, a deep injustice was done to the Palestinian people, confiscating their land and driving many into exile and even death. We are further grieved by the ongoing deprivation of basic civil rights to those Arabs who live today in the State of Israel.

Moreover, for thirteen years, large portions of the holy land and its people, including the West Bank of the Jordan River, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, have suffered under foreign military occupation, even as in our Lord's time. Land is seized from its inhabitants. Water for farming is rationed and restricted. Schools and universities are closed by the Israeli military authorities. And 100,000 people

have been arrested in large part for speaking their convictions. Of these, some have been subjected to brutal torture, described by the US Consulate in Jerusalem as 'systematic' and documented beyond any question.

We confess our silence, our indifference, our hardheartedness, and our cowardice, all too often, in the face of these dehumanizing realities.

Earnestly, we pray for a new anointing of the Spirit in our hearts, creating us into a more faithful people used to break every yoke of oppression and let the broken victims go free.

We extend our hearts to our Jewish brothers and sisters, common sons and daughters of Abraham. Like us in the United States, their corporate national spirit is being corroded by the weight of the government of the State of Israel's reliance on rampant militaristic policies and actions. We would pray for them, and with them, for a vision of security rooted in expanding channels of trust rather than escalating arsenals of armed might.

Historically and today, the State of Israel's territorial ambitions have been justified as security needs. Through the decades, this has instigated a cycle of violence and counter violence that still continues, engulfing all sides, and leaving none unblemished from the spilling of innocent blood. We pray with the Psalmist for every bow to be broken and every spear to be snapped.

Too many of us have been lulled into the shallow hope that peace can be built in the Middle East through the US supply of more weapons, with the continued military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, and while basic human and political rights of the Palestinian people are denied. We call on Christ's followers to repent from their complicity—through either their indifference or their uncritical embrace of US policies—in the continuing cycle of Middle Eastern violence, accelerated by our tax dollars and our government's political decisions.

The Arab people and their land have been plundered for centuries by Western Christendom. We acknowledge and confess a continuing legacy of prejudice, evidenced today, toward Arab people, both Christian and Moslem.

We repudiate with equal and uncompromising fervour the enduring prejudice toward the Jewish people still present this day in our society and in our churches (those churches include, ironically, many of those churches with staunchly pro-Israeli biases, drawn from their versions of biblical interpretation).

Overcoming these divisions and hatreds, we affirm, as God's revelation declares, our common humanity with all.

We believe that any biblical hope for peace and security for all peoples in the Middle East must encompass some form of restitution for past wrongs. Life, peoplehood, and land are all God's gifts. These gifts enjoyed by the Jewish people in the Holy Land have been denied to the Palestinian people. Therefore, we yearn and we call for the building of a peace that includes the clear expression of political self-determination and justice for the Palestinian people. This includes leadership of their own choosing, and a sovereign state. Our firm conviction is that through asserting these rights, the way can be opened for Jews in Israel and Palestinian people to find peace and true security in that land.

We pledge ourselves, and we invite others, to an urgent devotion to see God's purpose of peace, justice, and reconciliation realized in this land. In that spirit, we call upon all Christians to join with us in re-examining assumptions regarding biblical revelation and views of the conflict in the Middle East; we commit ourselves and our resources to active and ongoing dialogue with other Christians on these questions; and, we pray that the Body of Christ will extend its life as a humble, sacrificial and unswerving servant of peace/salaam/shalom in the land where God sent his Son to live among us.

## MIDDLE EAST TALKS: CORE ISSUES

*www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east/11138790* (accessed 27 Sept 2010)

The BBC's Paul Reynolds outlines where Israel, the Palestinians and the United States stand on the core issues of the conflict.

### Jerusalem

#### Israel

The Israeli government is unwilling to divide Jerusalem, held to be the political and religious centre of the Jewish people. It stands by the 1980 basic Israeli law that 'Jerusalem, complete and united, is the capital of Israel'. In the past there has been room for manoeuvre on the margins. In talks in 2000 and 2007, the then Israeli governments proposed exchanging some outlying annexed districts.

#### Palestinians

The Palestinians want East Jerusalem, which was controlled by Jordan before being captured by the Israelis in 1967, as the capital of a Palestinian state. The Old City contains the third holiest place in Islam, the al-Aqsa mosque, and the Dome of the Rock, from where Mohammed is said to have visited heaven on his winged steed Burak.

#### United States

The US does not recognise the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem and maintains its embassy in Tel Aviv. President Barack Obama has opposed the building of housing for Israelis in East Jerusalem though he said before becoming president that dividing the city would be 'very difficult to execute'.

### Borders

#### Israel

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accepts that there should be a Palestinian state and that there will have to be an Israeli withdrawal from parts at least of the West Bank (captured by Israel in 1967) to accommodate this. Israel has already withdrawn from Gaza. Israel would like the borders to include Jerusalem and the major Israeli settlements that have grown up on the West Bank.

#### Palestinians

They want the talks to start from the basic position that all the land occupied by Israel in 1967 belongs to a future Palestine. Any land given to the Israelis would have to be compensated for by a balanced land swap.

#### United States

The US agrees that the starting point but not the end point should be the 1967 lines and that a land swap will have to be the basis of any agreement. It will encourage this.

### Settlements

|                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Israel</b>        | The Israeli government insists on keeping the major Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Any departure from this would break up the coalition which forms the government. An immediate problem is that an Israeli moratorium on West Bank settlements is due to run out on 26 September.               |
| <b>Palestinians</b>  | Ideally, the Palestinians would like all settlements to be abandoned as they were in Gaza. However, they appear to accept that some will have to stay but they will argue for a minimum number and a land swap for any that are left. They threaten to leave the talks if the Israeli moratorium is ended on 26 September. |
| <b>United States</b> | As with the annexation of East Jerusalem, the US has not recognised the international legitimacy of the Israeli West Bank settlements. But it accepts their reality and will press for compromise. It is also trying to reach a compromise on the moratorium problem.                                                      |

### Refugees

|                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Israel</b>        | Israel rejects the idea that Palestinian refugees from previous wars should be allowed any 'right of return' to their former homes. They say that this is a device to destroy the state of Israel by demography in order to re-establish a unitary state of Palestine. For that reason Mr Netanyahu has called for Israel to be recognised as a Jewish state.                         |
| <b>Palestinians</b>  | Formally, they maintain the 'right of return', arguing that without it a great injustice would not be put right. However, there has been regular talk among Palestinians that this 'right' could be met by compensation. They refuse to recognise the concept of Israel as a 'Jewish state', saying that this is unnecessary and that it ignores the Israeli-Arab citizens of Israel. |
| <b>United States</b> | The US understands the Israeli refusal to take back refugees and hopes that this can be resolved by compensation and development aid for this whose cannot go back to their previous family homes.                                                                                                                                                                                    |

### Security

|               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Israel</b> | The Israeli government is afraid that a Palestinian state might one day fall into the hands of Hamas and will be used as a stepping-stone to turning Israel into Palestine. Therefore it is insisting that it keeps a large measure of security control, including in the Jordan Valley, and that a state of Palestine be largely demilitarised. |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Palestinians</b>  | They argue that security will come from a stable two-state solution not the other way round. They want as many attributes of a normal state as possible. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas fears that client-status would be untenable and open to a Hamas takeover. |
| <b>United States</b> | The US accepts the Israeli need for security but also the need for Palestinian statehood and reconciling these is the aim of its diplomacy. It is unlikely, however, to recognise a state of Palestine which has not emerged from negotiation.                                   |

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE PALESTINIAN – ISRAELI CONFLICT ON MINISTRY AMONG MUSLIMS

by Don Little

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### Introduction

Recent weeks have seen world attention once again focused on the Middle East as first the Tunisian people, and then the Egyptian people, succeeded in forcing their leaders to step down through unrelenting street demonstrations. Today (March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011) the outcome of similar demonstrations is far from clear in Yemen and Bahrain, and in Libya coalition forces, backed by a UN security council resolution, have intervened to prevent a likely massacre of people who have opposed Gaddafi's regime and taken up arms to oppose his 42-year dictatorship. Unusually, the recent news of fifty rockets fired from Gaza at Israel, and Israel's retaliation was not headline news in the American press!

Islamists have long cited the unjust occupation of Palestine by Israel as a major reason for their hatred of the West, and particularly of America, for continuing to support the 'colonizing Israeli Zionists'. The 63-year-old conflict launched by the creation of the nation of Israel is understood by some to be the principle cause of Muslim hatred of the West. For Christian workers living in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, this conflict sometimes dominates their lives and presents a major challenge as they attempt to communicate the good news of

Christ to people who often believe that Christians are in a ‘crusader war’ against the Palestinians and Muslims. Many Christians, influenced by their eschatological views, believe that this conflict cannot be resolved before Christ’s return.

Since the central theme of this issue of SEEDBED is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the theological and political issue of Christian Zionism and the place of Israel in God’s plans for the future, I felt it would be valuable to try to reflect on the influence this conflict has on those ministering to Muslims throughout the world. Does this conflict also impinge on attempts to share Christ among Muslims in areas far from Palestine, or is it significant mainly in the Middle East?

### **The survey questionnaire and those who responded**

In order to explore the extent to which this conflict affects ministry among Muslims *worldwide*, I wrote a short questionnaire and distributed it to friends, and friends of friends, via email through various networks in November 2010. Thirty-one people returned the completed questionnaire. This article describes and analyzes some of the rich variety of responses received in answer to my questions. Given the very limited nature of the questionnaire and the small sample size, all observations and analysis offered in this article must be understood to be tentative and merely suggestive as to how these issues may be understood. Further wide-ranging research would need to be done before the analysis in this article could be taken as established, but the provisional outcomes of this limited survey do offer insights that are of genuine value.

The fourteen-question survey asked about: (1) Muslim attitudes toward Jews, Israel, Palestinians and Christians, (2) the impact of this conflict on how Western Christians are perceived and how they share their faith, (3) how a ‘successful resolution’ (or end) to the conflict would be viewed, and (4) about how their own views on Israel are influenced by ministering to Muslims and how their ministry is affected by Christian Zionism.<sup>1</sup> See the table below for some data about the 31 people who responded to the questionnaire.

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<sup>1</sup> These are the questions asked in the Questionnaire: (1) How readily does the topic of the conflict come up in conversation with local Muslims? (2) What would you say are some typical local Muslim attitudes towards this conflict and topic? (3) What are typical attitudes towards Palestinians in your area? (4) What are typical attitudes towards Jews and the State of Israel in your area? (5) Has the conflict a positive or a negative impact on your ability to share the Gospel with people? (6) Many argue that the conflict is the primary source of Islamist rage against the West. They believe that if the conflict were successfully resolved with a permanent peace, the fuel for fundamentalist rage would be removed and Islamism would become a far less serious threat to the West. (7) In light of your experience with Muslims locally, please comment on this thesis: (a) Are evangelicals typically implicated in the conflict? If so, how are they viewed? (b) How do you think a successful resolution to the conflict would change attitudes toward Western evangelicals and Christians in general? (c) What are some ways that you have found to use

| Some characteristics of those who responded to the survey |    |             |    |                         |    |                     |         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----|-------------|----|-------------------------|----|---------------------|---------|
| Gender                                                    |    | Nationality |    | Region of Ministry      |    | Languages Used      |         |
| Male                                                      | 21 | American    | 16 | Arab world              | 15 | (English)           | all     |
| Female                                                    | 10 | British     | 5  | Indonesia & Malaysia    | 7  | Arabic              | 11      |
| Years of experience                                       |    | Canadian    | 5  | Pakistan & Central Asia | 6  | French & Spanish    | 8       |
|                                                           |    | 0 – 5       | 6  | Egyptian                | 1  | Muslim World        | 1       |
|                                                           |    | 6 – 10      | 1  | Palestinian             | 1  | Africa              | 1       |
|                                                           |    | 11 – 20     | 11 | Swiss                   | 1  | Ministering in West | 13      |
|                                                           |    | 21 +        | 13 | Australian              | 1  |                     | Baatonu |
|                                                           |    |             |    | S. African              | 1  |                     | Hebrew  |

### Some general observations about the outcomes

Somewhat as expected, the further one gets geographically from the location of the conflict, the less the topic comes up and the less it poses a challenge in conversations or relationships. To put it the other way around, for those working in Lebanon & Jordan the topic formed the backdrop to life and was explicitly or implicitly in virtually every conversation with local Muslims. In such contexts, the work of evangelism has to struggle with implications of the conflict all the time. This was particularly true in how much evangelicals were implicated in the conflict in the Middle East but not nearly so much at greater distances.

Several outcomes were somewhat surprising. For example, only one or two noted that this conflict *was ever* an issue when *discipling* believers from Muslim background (BMBs), even in places where the issue was of massive importance in evangelism and in relating to local Muslims. Another surprise was that *in some cases*, in places as far away as Indonesia, this topic came up almost all the time, even more frequently than it often did in the Middle East itself. For almost half of the respondents, their experience ministering to Muslims has led them to a considerable revision in their perspectives and convictions on the question of Israel, Bible prophecy and the Palestinians. It was also good to learn that very few have experienced team tensions over the conflict—though a few mentioned that the topic was carefully avoided on the team to avoid such tensions.

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conversations about the conflict to your advantage to bring in some truths of the Gospel? (d) Has your perspective on the state of Israel and on Biblical prophecy changed as a result of serving among Muslims? If so, how? (e) Do different beliefs about the prophetic significance of the state of Israel pose a challenge in your team and ministry relations? (f) Is a strong pro-Israel (sometimes called ‘Christian Zionist’) stance among your supporting constituents a communication challenge? (g) Have you found that the conflict proves to be a challenge in discipling believers from Muslim background? If so, how? (h) Please share any other thoughts relating to this topic and how the conflict shapes and influences your ministry among Muslims.

## **Muslims' attitudes toward Jews and Israel, the United States & American Christians**

One person summed up the attitudes of Muslims in their area succinctly: 'Our Muslim brothers are oppressed in Palestine by the evil Jews, assisted by their henchmen in the USA.' Some expressed it in terms of a conspiracy in which Western Zionists are trying to get rid of Muslims in cooperation with Israel. Hatred of the Jew and of Israel was widely mentioned. Israel is viewed as evil and the US supports Israel because the Jews run the world. Jews can do no good and the Palestinians can do no wrong. Another expressed it this way:

The conflict merely serves to support fears and hatred already present in the Muslim psyche. Specifically, the gross injustice of the continuing expansionist policies of Israel, combined with support from both political and religious Zionist (often very well funded) around the world—most notably in the US and also in Europe and most regrettably supported by Christian Zionists—all serve to fuel a range of anger, despair, hatred and a lot of conspiracy theories. Most North Africans (I think rightly) see this as a classic and unapologetically brutal example of colonisation.<sup>2</sup>

One person, in a Middle Eastern Arab country, has experienced that the anger against Israel is not a Muslim issue, but an Arab issue, since she has seen that Christian Arabs are just as angry at Israel as are Muslim Arabs. Both Muslim and Christian Arabs feel that Israel is an American puppet that is never held responsible for its crimes against the Palestinians because the United States supports Israel regardless of her evil behaviour. Only Israel gets away with such unjust actions because it is supported by America. Thus, the US conspiracy to support Israel against the beleaguered Palestinians at all costs proves how evil the US is. Many are angrier at the US than with Israel because the US is a world power that has not stopped Israel's gross violations of justice!

There appears to be a widespread feeling of intense hatred towards Israel. Israelis are horrifically evil and are running the world. For many, Israel is viewed with hatred, fear and loathing, and represents the worst kind of colonial oppression. One person, in Europe, said that Jews and Israelis are hated in the same way that they hate and avoid pigs.

Right across the Muslim world people have an automatic interpretation that Israel is in the wrong and the Palestinians are being mistreated. However, in some places distant from the Middle East, the sense of injustice and anger is directed far more at the local authorities than at the US or Israel. In Indonesia, for example,

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<sup>2</sup> The final statement here can also be seen to illustrate how living amongst Arabs one can absorb their perspective. The author of this statement has spent much of his life in North Africa.

one person commented that though when events happen in the conflict the media is anti-Israel, the conflict does not touch the daily lives of most people.

### **Are evangelicals implicated in Zionism that enrages Muslims?**

As was expected, asking whether evangelicals in particular, as a sub-group of Western Christians, were seen as implicated in the conflict elicited a variety of responses. Nine people agreed that evangelicals are seen as Zionists. Another four find that evangelicals are simply lumped with all Christians as Zionists, and three further find that evangelicals, Christians, Americans and Westerners are all lumped together and viewed as supporters of Israel. Seven of the nine who find that evangelicals are implicated are people from within the Arab world. The more distant people are from the conflict the less they see or even understand distinctions between evangelicals and other Christians, let alone distinguishing Christians from Westerners.

Nevertheless, some of the comments of those in the Middle East about how evangelicals are viewed by Muslims are rather disturbing. A colleague in Jordan said that evangelicals are viewed with deep suspicion and he is often asked why we evangelicals (along with the West in general) support Israel. One woman commented that evangelicals in Lebanon do not have a good reputation, whether they are foreign or Lebanese. She has had Palestinians ask her why all Americans, that is, Christians, want to kill them. Another woman in Lebanon made this comment:

A substantial majority of Muslims in the area view evangelicals as pro-Zionist and this discredits us as moral people or as people who want the best for them. The assumption is that people vote with their denomination. If the president of the USA is evangelical (Protestant) and pro-Zionist, we all must be.

A comment out of North Africa is even more disturbing, where the designation 'evangelical' has come to mean, simply, 'Christian Zionist'. He commented:

Apparently, Aljazeera ran some documentaries a while back showing how Zionist American evangelicals are. This has significantly changed the way Christians are viewed in recent years. It appears that locals only view evangelicals as an extreme sect within Christianity and not representative of Christians. They appear to understand the word 'evangelical' as only being synonymous with Zionist. They do not seem to have any other understanding of the term.

A British colleague, from North Africa, stated that:

Christian Zionists and other US right wing fundamentalist evangelicals are *major* players in the fuelling of the entire crisis and *are not only bringing the name of the Lord into disrepute but are unintentionally causing this conflict to worsen*. Therefore, they are viewed in the same way as all Zionists.

An Egyptian colleague living in Europe commented that evangelicals are clearly implicated in the conflict by both Middle Eastern Muslims and Muslims in Europe, because it is well known that evangelicals in the United States support Israel. Someone else, also living in Europe, said that local Muslims do not know evangelicals as a separate Christian group, but they do know that some American church leaders speak of them as the enemy! This forces him to try to distance himself from such American evangelicals. A third European, with wide experience across the Arab world, believes that many believe that the conflict has not been resolved because of the unconditional support given to Israel by Christian Zionists.

One other aspect of evangelical support of Israel comes from a European speaking of his time in Jordan: 'I met with Palestinian evangelical Christians who were very bitter towards the biased pro-Israel stance of many Western evangelical denominations. So they were encouraged by Western evangelical missionaries who loved the Palestinians so much that they went to preach the Gospel to them.'

It seems that the closer one gets to the heart of the conflict, and the more knowledgeable Muslims are about American evangelical Zionism, the worse it is, and the more damage that this politicized theology does to the cause of Christ among Muslims.

### **How do Arab and non-Arab Muslims view the Palestinians?**

Though I have known for years that the common Muslim passionate anti-Israel stance does not always translate into a favourable attitude towards Palestinians, especially on the part of Arabs closest to the conflict, I was still surprised to hear, during a recent visit to Bahrain, how much the Palestinians are hated and despised there. This ambivalence towards the Palestinians showed up in the responses in this survey as well. A general pattern seems to show up that the further people are from the Middle East the more favourable they seem to be towards the Palestinians in a sort of impersonal sympathetic way. However, those closest to them sometimes despise them the most. For example, one person with experience in Lebanon says that most Lebanese dislike the Palestinians, think they are below them, want them out of the country and blame them for their fifteen-year civil war. One person observed that North Africans do not care much about the Palestinians now. They are more focused on what is happening in Iraq and Afghanistan than in Israel. Further afield, in India, though Muslims there are aware that the Palestinians are their Muslim brothers and sisters, they seem to care far less about their plight than they do about the evil of the US role in supporting Israel against them. Some Muslims distant from the conflict are neutral about the Palestinians and are more concerned about their own local problems.

## **What impact would a resolution of the conflict have on Muslims' anger against and hatred of America and the West?**

Many believe that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the *primary* source of Islamist rage against the West. They believe that if the conflict were successfully resolved with a permanent peace, much of the fuel for fundamentalist rage would be removed and Islamism would become a far less serious threat to the West. I asked for comment on this thesis, and the responses fall into three fairly distinct categories: (1) those who say there is some real merit to this idea, but there are also other causes of the rage against the West, (2) those who dismissed the idea out of hand and attributed the anger against the West to ideological Islamism, and (3) those who are convinced that the conflict will never have a successful resolution. I now present each of these responses in turn.

### **1. Resolving the conflict would help a lot, but it is not the only problem.**

Almost everyone who believed that finding a successful just resolution to the conflict would significantly help diffuse Muslim anger at the West lived in the Arab world. Just one lived in Indonesia. Their consensus is that the 'gross injustice' of the state of Israel's presence in Palestine, and the complicity of Western nations in supporting Israel, are a huge cause of radicalization. One person, speaking from a European and North African perspective, said that it is impossible to underestimate what impact such a resolution would have—but it would be *huge*! Another said that if America stopped treating Israel as a favourite and insisted on justice for Palestine, Americans would be viewed much more favourably. One man, whose Arab world experience was primarily Egypt, suggested that the conflict was the primary cause of the birth of the radical Islam espoused by the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt, which has been exported around the world. Thus, were there an agreed peace, most of the reason for the anger and frustration would disappear—not that this anger would be totally forgotten or abandoned (think of how the Crusades are still remembered)! One Palestinian worker, based in the UK and ministering across the Arab world, commented that it would be so much easier to communicate the gospel if the agenda of Christian Zionism were lessened through a resolution of the conflict! It would make it easier not to have to talk politics! Pretty much everyone who expressed that the end of the conflict would be a great help, nevertheless qualified it by saying that there were still plenty of other issues that Muslims would take up to continue their hostility toward the West. This brings us the largest group of responses.

### **2. Resolving the Conflict would make little difference because other issues either dominate now, or would quickly take its place.**

Twenty-one people had very similar perspectives, though they certainly expressed their opinions in different ways. Some responded to the 'thesis' that ending the

conflict would substantially decrease Muslim anger and hostility by saying such things as: absolute garbage, no way!, naive, almost irrelevant, and 'it would make no long term difference'. I think it is helpful to list the primary reasons given for the ongoing Muslim hostility against the West that would be little influenced by an end to the Palestinian conflict.

- The general phenomenon of Islamic rage is fundamentally demonic, seeking to destroy God's kingdom. There is a spiritual force behind this conflict.
- There will never be a permanent peace between Muslims and Jews because Muslims consider Jews their main enemy.
- Islam wants to be a majority. Muslims want to take over and spread Islam, being convinced of the superiority of Islam. This conflict is just an excuse.
- The Islamist conflict in Indonesia, which began before the founding of Israel, is over the imposition of Muslim governance and institution of Shari'a law.
- There is grudge against the West, centuries old, that will only stop when the West is conquered. Muslims believe that the West wants to destroy Islam.
- Local Muslims coming to faith in Christ makes people feel that Islam is under attack and needs to be defended.
- In North Africa, Bosnia and Pakistan, Muslims are much more concerned about the Western 'crusade' against Muslims in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Muslims view the Christian West as morally decadent and inferior.
- Muslim rage against the West is based on a worldview that views the West as exploiting Muslim people and lands, especially the poor.

According to workers across the Muslim world, there are plenty of reasons for not believing that a successful end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would significantly reduce Muslim hostility towards Christians and the West.

### **3. The conflict will never be resolved.**

There seem to be three somewhat interrelated lines of thought that led five or six respondents to the conclusion that the conflict will never be resolved. The first takes a particular reading of scripture to argue their case. For example, one man in the Middle East stated 'I look to Scripture for my worldview and, frankly, the sons of Ishmael will always be in conflict with the sons of Isaac.' Since there will not be a resolution before the return of Christ, asking about the impact of a possible resolution is of little value. The second reason for the conviction that there will never be a successful resolution is that the West continues unjust policies that help Israel and marginalize Arabs, and thus perpetuate the conflict. They blame this on widespread support of Zionism in the West, including the misguided support provided by Christian Zionism. This reason for arriving at the same conclusion is virtually the opposite of the first. The third reason that some have for this conclusion is that the Islamists will never be appeased and will be satisfied with nothing other than the destruction of the nation of Israel. Muslims as distant from

the conflict as those in Indonesia want Israel *totally* destroyed. Unless this ideological opposition to Israel ends, Israel can never live in peace with its neighbours.

The large level of consensus, among the thirty-one respondents who have diverse firsthand knowledge and experience of Muslims and Islam, that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is NOT a dominating factor in causing Muslim anger and rage against the West could well suggest that the pivotal importance of the conflict is often over-stated. This conclusion aligns with that of Efraim Karsh, the head of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Studies at King's College London, who recently said:<sup>3</sup>

The idea that Israeli-Palestinian peace will take away one of Islam's primary gripes against the West *totally misreads history and present-day politics*.... It is not out of concern for a Palestinian right to self-determination, but as part of a holy war to prevent the loss of part of the "House of Islam" that Islamists inveigh against Israel. (Emphasis added)

### How has serving among Muslims influenced your views of Israel?

In my early twenties, through reading historic Protestant theological perspectives, Reformed eschatology and studying Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics, I left behind the dispensational views of my upbringing. By the time I was engaged in ministry to Muslims my perspective on Israel was pretty similar to the one Mike Kuhn argues for in the lead article in this Seedbed ("The Israel of God"), and my views have not significantly changed in the subsequent thirty years. However, I was curious to find out how much the experience of learning to work among and love Muslims changes one's perspectives on Israel. Here is a quick list of the answers to the question: Has your view of Israel and Bible prophecy changed?

| Has your perspective on Israel & Prophecy changed? |     |    |          |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----|----|----------|
| Nationality                                        | Yes | No | Not Sure |
| Americans                                          | 7   | 7  | 3        |
| Brits                                              | 1   | 2  | 2        |
| Canadians                                          | 4   | 0  | 0        |
| Other                                              | 2   | 1  | 1        |
| Totals                                             | 14  | 10 | 6        |

Though my question did not ask for explicit explanation of people's current or past views, everyone who described how their views changed said that they had become more sympathetic with the Palestinians and far less sympathetic with Israel. Not everyone clearly left behind their Christian Zionism, but even the one

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<sup>3</sup> 'The Pinnacle of Incompetence,' in *The Jerusalem Post*, March 22, 2011.

or two who were still ‘soft Zionists’ have become ardently pro-Muslim and often pro-Arab as well. The ten who said that their views have *not* changed all began their ministry as non-Zionists, and merely had their views strengthened and clarified while ministering among Muslims. The six who said they were not sure whether their views had changed gave varying reasons for the uncertainty. One changed his view after leaving Islam and becoming a Christian, but had simply developed in his new Christian understanding subsequent to his conversion, and has not changed significantly. Several people did not have a clear perspective on the issue before they began their ministry and so they have developed their present view on the field. Two did not indicate why they were unsure.

It is fascinating to note that only a few of the thirty-one respondents currently hold a theological view that gives contemporary Jewish presence in the Holy Land much theological or eschatological significance. What is going on here? Have the fourteen workers who changed their views simply absorbed anti-Israel attitudes from working among Muslims? Should we see here a warning that if one begins to love and serve Muslims, one will cease to esteem Israel highly? Though such a reading of the data might be tempting, especially for those who continue to have theological reasons for believing that the modern state of Israel is central to God’s end times plans, I would suggest a profoundly different interpretation of this shift in perspective on Israel that has come about because of their ministering among Muslims.

Instead, may I suggest that something like the following change in thinking and perspective often occurs. A worker begins ministry with a pretty solid conviction (whether examined or unexamined) that the nation of Israel stands in direct prophetic continuity with the people of Israel who occupied the same real estate in Bible times. Then, as one develops friendships with Muslims, one quickly discovers that the facts of the creation of the state of Israel have radically different interpretations, depending on whether one is pro or anti-Israel. One begins to be less confident that all the events that led up to the creation and growth of the state of Israel are simply a result of God’s sovereign work in fulfilling prophecy. For some, the process stops there, and they simply remain sceptical of such prophetic claims about Israel, and they seek to be fair and open minded in understanding current political realities and recent histories in the Middle East.

For many others, however, this awakening to the complexity of the situation leads to a serious re-examination of scripture and of the theological grid that they have been taught, and eventually, to a complete re-shaping of their understanding of much of the New Testament and how it relates to the Old Testament and the people of God. They discover, as one respondent put it, that they have been ‘interpreting the NT through the lens of the OT’, instead of doing as Jesus and the Apostles model for us, and interpreting the events, history and promises of the

OT through the eyes of Jesus and the Apostles. This discovery frees them to read the NT with new eyes, and see more clearly that they should take their cues for interpreting the OT from Jesus and the Apostles instead of from 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century eschatological innovators. Once they have made this shift, they begin an ongoing process of growing in their understanding of the nature of the kingdom of God and of what God has fully accomplished by sending his Son to fulfil all of the promises given in the OT. This leads them to place the historic people of Israel in appropriate NT light, and thus see modern Israel for what it is: a political entity, like any other; a nation that must earn its respect as a nation from the way it treats its own people and the way it treats their Palestinian neighbours.

Thus, they move to a healthier, nuanced and balanced understanding of the historical and contemporary political issues that surround the ongoing conflict. This means that these people are far less likely to view Israeli victories over the Palestinians as acts of God against His enemies. They begin to cry out to God that Israel would treat Palestinians with justice and compassion, even as the OT prophets did when they rebuked the corrupt people of Israel prior to and during Jesus time on earth. Therefore, I think it is reasonable to suggest that the consistent change in perspective on Israel among those who minister to Muslims should be viewed as a very *positive* development.

### **How does Christian Zionism affect team life and relationships with supporters?**

During my years serving in church planting in North Africa I do not remember having a teammate who was dispensationalist or significantly pro-Israel. That said, we did not often talk about this subject. However, within our Arab world ministry personnel there have often been tensions on this subject, especially when some Arab team members detect even a whiff of Zionism in the views of their Western colleagues. Partly because of the awkwardness of this topic, and also because of the sensitivity with which the topic of Christian Zionism must be handled when dealing with the Christian public (especially) in North America, we have largely avoided broaching or discussing this topic in any official or formal way. In fact, I was specifically asked to tackle this controversial topic here in SEEDBED because it is in the context of a written conversation among practitioners, that it is safe to raise this issue and seek to address it in a serious manner, without, hopefully, alienating those who strongly disagree.

I asked two related questions to try to flesh out how the issue of Christian Zionism has affected them in their teams and how it has influenced their relationships with their supporting churches and the Christian public. The first question was: Do different beliefs about the prophetic significance of the state of Israel pose a challenge in your team and ministry relations? The second was: Does

a strong pro-Israel, or Christian Zionist, stance among your supporting constituents pose a communication challenge? We will briefly report the responses to both questions.

### **1. Dealing with Christian Zionism in one's team and ministry to Muslims**

Among the ten people who said that Christian Zionism causes challenges, the only statistically interesting contrast to note was that in the Middle East 6 said it was not a problem whereas four said it sometimes was. In contrast, in South and Southeast Asia only one of the nine who responded noticed this issue causing a problem. This suggests that the issue is more difficult to deal with on the team level when one lives closer to the conflict. Also of interest were some of the comments that were made, from both sides.

Here are some intriguing remarks from among those who said that the issue did not create problems in their teams or ministry. 'Our biggest concern is with pro-Israel Christians trying to infiltrate our ministry to "protect us" against "Arab bullies and terrorists."' 'We avoid the subject.' 'No problem on the surface, but I have found that evangelicals are very hesitant to be anti-Israel, lest they stand in danger of losing the Lord's blessing.' 'Not yet, but it could come because one couple is very pro-Israel in their Dispensational views.' 'It's far enough away geographically that it's pretty much a non-issue here' (SE Asia). The next and final comment is telling and probably reflects why so few have found this issue divisive at the level of the ministry team: 'Our team does differ in our views, but we are all agreed that we are about keeping the main thing the main thing' (SE Asia).

Two comments are worth passing on from the few who have seen problems over this issue. The first comment is from a leader serving in the Middle East. She says 'Some people feel very strongly about Israel. New people in particular have not really thought through solid theological underpinnings for their beliefs and they have not considered how their unconsidered pro-Israel positions spill over into the Muslim communities where we work.' One experienced Arab world leader commented that he is sometimes seen by teammates as being too pro-Palestinian.

It is not too surprising that this issue generally does not create problems within teams of people whose focus is on loving and ministering to Muslims. The data from this modest survey confirms that this is the norm.

### **2. Does a strong pro-Israel stance among your supporting constituents pose a communication challenge?**

Responses to this question split down the middle with fifteen saying that this issue definitely posed a problem for them, and fifteen saying that it did not. One personal experience that I had, of the negative consequences of committed Christian Zionism, happened when I was leading AWM's work in Canada. The person who was the largest single donor in the history of our ministry in Canada

abruptly stopped further support and completely cut off contact with our ministry to Muslims when he perceived that the ministry was not strongly *pro-Israel*.

The majority of those who have had problems were American and Canadians, or Brits with American supporters. Yet among the North Americans they were evenly split with ten experiencing problems and ten not. In contrast, only one Brit reported problems. More interesting than the statistical breakdown of the responses, were some of the comments which show how significant a challenge Christian Zionism can sometimes be for those called to work with 'Israel's enemies, the Muslims. One very experienced leader with an international ministry commented that he lives in the UK, even though he is an American, precisely because of the prevalence of Christian Zionism in America. One couple, ministering to Muslims in the West, had to leave their home church, and their largest supporting church, because the church was so consistently Zionist that after ten years in the church they gave up pushing against the tide of anger against Muslims that resulted from the strong pro-Israel stance that led to viewing Muslims as God's enemies.

Others avoid having problems by carefully and systematically avoiding the topic. One man commented that even when he is challenged on the topic, he avoids saying anything about it in public. Several of those who reported having no problems also added that they never mention the subject, or that it never comes up because they talk about other things. One person said that some of his supporters serve as volunteers in the Israeli Defence Force (army), and several commented that some people in their church constituencies could not understand how they can love and minister to Palestinians because they are the enemy of God's chosen people. It seems that the skill we develop in talking with Muslims about controversial topics is often applied by workers as they discuss this issue when they are at home among their supporting churches. One man said 'It is not a huge challenge, but I do need to choose my words wisely. But with a bit of tact and patience, there are rarely significant problems.'

### **Using the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to share truth**

It is fitting to conclude this article with what I found to be one very encouraging outcome of this survey—the fact that many people have found ways of skilfully turning this often difficult topic so that the conversation becomes an opportunity to share spiritual truth.

Twenty-one of the respondents reported having learned ways of turning conversation about the conflict into profitable discussion of some related spiritual truths. The following list expresses some of the primary ways that conversations with Muslim about these very difficult political issues related to Israel and the Palestinians can be turned into spiritually profitable directions.

- I talk about reconciliation, telling some of the stories of Jesus' interaction with individuals who were marginalized.
- I share my love for all people and how I am concerned about unrighteousness wherever it may be, whether in Israel or in Islam.
- I usually talk about my own struggles to forgive and love enemies. I talk vulnerably, share that Jesus' teaching are difficult because He asks me to give up 'my rights' so that I can forgive and love my enemies.
- I share what Jesus taught about how we are to treat our neighbour. I try to show that war is not the solution and that 'eye-for-eye' does not have a good track record locally in ending hostilities.
- In response to their claim that the Arabs' hate for Jews is in their blood, I explain that Christ commanded us to love our enemies. I then say that every sinner is an enemy of God, and if God still loves us sinners, how can we not love our enemies?
- I often remind people how Arab Christians are squeezed and unjustly treated by both extremist right wing Jews and extremist Muslims. I also compare how Jesus and Mohammed responded to extremist Jewish opposition.
- I often comment that God also hates injustice and longs to bring justice for the oppressed.
- A Palestinian Christian says that he talks about conflict resolution and how we are called to unity and to love of our enemies. When Muslims see a Jew and a Palestinian together because of their faith in Christ, it is an amazing testimony.
- I talk about how Jesus wants to transform us – care for our wounds, care for our angers and fears, give us a new hope and a new future.
- I reassure them that I agree with many of their complaints about the injustice perpetrated on the Palestinian people. When the conversation turns toward the conflict and the lack of peace, I turn the conversation toward inner peace.

Not everyone reported such positive success in turning conversations in positive directions. Someone in SE Asia commented that the topic almost never comes up, but when it does, it is usually a sign that the conversation will be fruitless. Another in the same region said that he tries to get off the topic as quickly as possible, but finds that they often just want to argue. One Middle Eastern commented that there is no connection between Palestinians and the Gospel. However, overall the question produced many intriguing insights into ways that we can learn to turn a difficult political conversation into a fruitful spiritual conversation.

## **Concluding Reflections on Christian Zionism and Ministry to Muslims**

What kinds of tentative conclusions does this survey suggest? I believe that the limited data provided in the survey questionnaire brings to light some rather disturbing realities, as well as some encouraging white lining to the 'dark cloud' of Christian Zionism's negative impact on ministry across the Arab world and beyond. Unconditional ideologically driven political and economic support of Israel by

Western evangelicals is making it much more difficult for evangelicals to carry out great commission tasks in the Muslim world, and especially in the Middle East. This negative pressure on advance of the Gospel among Muslims manifests in several main ways.

(1) The high profile public political support that some evangelicals maintain for Israel, both in the States, and in Israel itself, in such organizations as the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, leads to ever growing prejudice and hatred against evangelicals by Muslims throughout the Middle East. This considerably complicates the task of bringing the Gospel to people in the region.

(2) Christian Zionism frequently undermines the prayer and financial support of those God has called to minister to Muslims. This unbiblical political ideology also promotes fear and hatred for Muslims among Western Christians, which missionaries to Muslims must continually seek to counteract.

(3) The conflict over Jerusalem and over the land in Palestine continues unresolved in part because of the massive support by millions of evangelicals, especially in the United States. This support keeps Israel from responding to its critics and moving towards a more effective negotiation towards peace. Of course, by making this point, I am NOT denying that the *bigger* reason for the lack of progress towards peace is the Islamist ideology that is never going to be satisfied until the modern nation of Israel is utterly destroyed.

The above-mentioned silver lining to these dark clouds created by Christian Zionism consists in the encouraging finding that this issue seldom causes problems within teams ministering to Muslims, and that so many people are finding ways of turning talk about the conflict into opportunities for potentially fruitful engagement on spiritual topics. Furthermore, as was somewhat anticipated, the further one is from Israel, the less this seemingly intractable conflict plays a central role in the minds and attitudes of Muslims (exceptions tend to coalesce around places where Islamism has influence). Thus, if you are reading this in China or in Malaysia and cannot relate to the challenges that the conflict creates, then count yourself blessed, and pray that there may yet be a resolution to the conflict for the sake of those serving closer to the geographic centre of the Middle East.

May God grant us all grace to faithfully live out and speak of the glories of the God who pursues *all people*, wooing them to himself, whether they be Muslim Palestinians, or Jews, or yes, even American evangelicals!

## PART 2: AGEING, DIALOGUE, STORYING, WORSHIP MUSIC AND UNDERSTANDING SUNNI WOMEN

### THE ARAB WORLD IS AGEING!

by Tom McCormick

*Dr. McCormick serves as a consultant and lecturer in various missiological and linguistic subjects. He lives in Toronto, Canada.*

#### Introduction—Background

Why would the Centre for Studies on Aging (CSA), Beirut, Lebanon, organize a conference on *Aging in the Arab Countries* in November of 2009? Why would the United Nations Fund for Population (UNFPA) serve as its main sponsor in cooperation with the Lebanese Health Care Management Association (LHMA)? Why would over one hundred and twenty five participants from Lebanon, the region and the rest of the world attend such a conference? Is the Arab World Aging? Is there not rather a ‘youth bulge’?

Already in February 2002 the United Nations’ Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA; <http://www.escwa.un.org/>) produced ‘The Arab Plan of Action on Ageing to The Year 2012’. This plan noted that ‘In developing countries in general and the Arab countries in particular, notwithstanding the fact that the majority of societies remain youth-dominated, the size of the ageing population is increasing with perceptible rapidity, and *at a pace which outstrips that of most developed countries*.’<sup>1</sup>

Is this true? And how might an aging Arab world be relevant for you? First, then, let us examine the reality of ageing in the Arab world.

The Arab World is aging, but it is not an isolated phenomenon. The AARP Global Network recently stated: ‘Global aging is a defining phenomenon of the 21st century’.<sup>2</sup> The United Nations summarized its extensive study (500+ pages), *World Population Ageing 1950-2050* (2002) in four points:<sup>3</sup>

- Population ageing is unprecedented: that is, without parallel in the history of humanity, with more & faster to come
- Population ageing is pervasive: it’s a global phenomenon affecting every

1 [www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/sd-02-01.pdf](http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/sd-02-01.pdf) (accessed 26 Aug 2010; emphasis added).

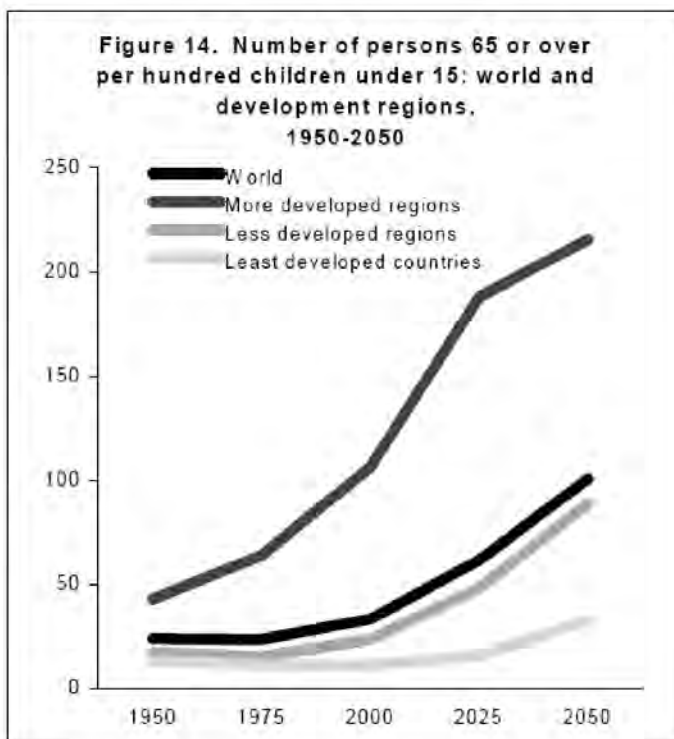
2 [www.aarpglobalnetwork.org/about/info/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.aarpglobalnetwork.org/about/info/Pages/default.aspx) (accessed 19 Aug 2010).

3 <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/worldageing19502050/>

man, woman and child, though differently

- Population ageing is profound: having major consequences and implications for *all* facets of human life.
- Population ageing is enduring: we will not return to the earlier young populations.

In fact, they claim, and many others confirm, that by 2050, the number of older persons (60+) in the world will *exceed* the number of young (< 15) for the first time in history!

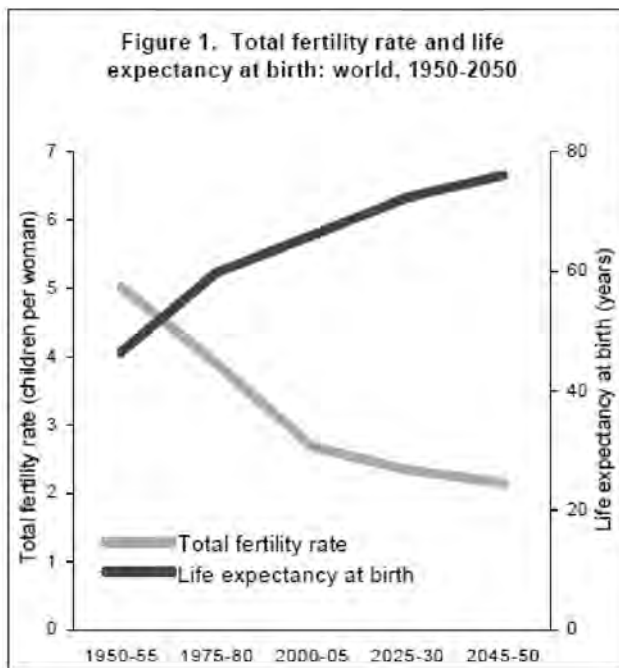


The situation in Arab countries is not dissimilar.<sup>4</sup> By way of introduction (more detail to follow), ‘The Arab Plan of Action on Ageing to the Year 2012’, produced in February 2002, noted that the age structure of the population of Arab countries has undergone fundamental changes. These include a sharp decrease in

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<sup>4</sup> The current list of ‘least developed countries’ can be found at: [www.unobrls.org/en/ldc/related/62](http://www.unobrls.org/en/ldc/related/62)

the percentage of children under 15 years old, together with an initially slow rise in the proportion of persons aged 60+ from 1975-2000. However, the 60+ population is expected to rise rapidly until at least 2025.<sup>5</sup> The reasons are simple: increased life expectancy and lower fertility rates.<sup>6</sup>



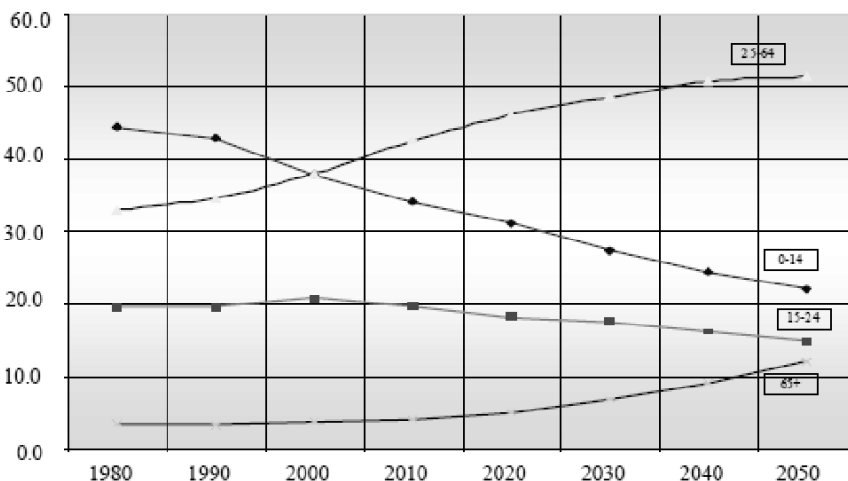
The same trends characterize Arab countries. From 1975 to 2000, death rates were cut in half with life expectancy increasing from 55 in 1975 to 67 in 2000; further increases are expected to 73 by 2025 and 76 by 2050 with fertility rates continuing to decrease from 6.8 in 1975 to 3.7 in 2000, with an expectation of 3.2 by 2025.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> [www.escva.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/sd-02-01.pdf](http://www.escva.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/sd-02-01.pdf) (accessed 16 Nov 2010).

<sup>6</sup> The preceding two graphs are from *World Population Ageing 1950-2050*, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.escva.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/sd-02-01.pdf> (accessed 16 November 2010, p. 3).

### Distribution of the Arab population by broad age groups, 1980-2050<sup>8</sup>



Similarly, the percentage of children is decreasing while the proportion of the elderly is increasing. Here are the numbers: Children under 15 years of age decreased from 42% in 1975 to 38% in 2000; this is expected to fall to less than 29% by 2025. Concurrently the slow rise in the proportion of persons aged 60+ from 5.4 per cent in 1975 to 5.6 per cent in 2000 will give way to a rapid increase expected to reach 8.9 per cent by 2025. In actual numbers, this represents an increase in the number of older persons from 8.7 million in 1975 to 15.8 million in 2000, a number expected to more than double by 2025 to 41.6 million. Thus, the expected increase of older persons by 3.9 per cent during the period 2000-2025 is almost twice the increase of 2 per cent in the total population. *Altogether, this amounts to fundamental changes in the age structure of the population in Arab countries!*

### Regional Implications

The November 2009 meeting entitled 'Aging in the Arab Countries: Policy, Research and Development' (AAC) was the first ever such meeting on ageing research and policy in the region.<sup>9</sup> Here are some highlights:

- Dr. Sibai<sup>10</sup> noted that by 2050, 15% of the population in seven countries of

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/div\\_editor/Download.asp?table\\_name=divisions\\_other&field\\_name=ID&FileID=553](http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/div_editor/Download.asp?table_name=divisions_other&field_name=ID&FileID=553) (accessed September 11, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> The proceedings can be accessed here: [www.ifa-fiv.org/images/stories/apr10/Proceedings%20of%20AAC%20Conference%20December%2015%202009.pdf](http://www.ifa-fiv.org/images/stories/apr10/Proceedings%20of%20AAC%20Conference%20December%2015%202009.pdf)

the region will be above 65 years of age. The challenges she noted include: Levels of schooling attainment are uneven; dependence issues amongst older men, as 10-14% work after the age of 80; no pension plans; women are living alone (because of migration); family support is threatened because of entry of women in the labour market and because of immigration; the double burden of diseases; the prevalence of obesity especially among women.

- Mrs. Emily Nasrallah, a renowned Lebanese author and literary figure, noted that the rush of modernization and the influence of global values threaten some of the rich and varied traditions of the region. She noted the special role of older women in preserving traditions through tales, anecdotes and other oral materials they deliver to their grandchildren.
- Mrs. Soumaya ben Chakroun (Morocco) noted that the strategy for ageing in Morocco attends to four main areas—income, health, and residence and preserve the dignity of older people. There is an additional focus in the plan to improve the image of ageing in society.
- Dr. Ahlam Bint Break (Yemen) acknowledged that the majority of Yemen's population struggled for access to services, particularly to health care, and that therefore the care of ageing populations fell almost entirely upon families. Despite the rich traditions of love and respect for older people, this situation was likely to become problematic in the near future.
- Mr. Saeed Abdallah Saeed (Sudan) provided an overview of the situation of the older population in his country, noting that the majority of the older people in the Sudan (up to 70 percent) live in rural areas, which were relatively speaking age friendly. However, there were problems in urban areas where older people are more exposed to armed conflict. Moreover, people and even entire families have migrated from rural to urban areas in search of employment. He suggested that there is a lack of organized facilities in urban areas under conflict threatening the prevalent culture of inter-generational solidarity, which is part of Sudanese culture and society.
- Dr. Walid Faysal (Syria) noted that the Public Health sector is concerned with mothers and children, without explicitly mentioning older people, even though such programs as nutrition, chronic diseases, infection surveillance are also relevant to the old. He suggested that older persons should be addressed explicitly within these priority programs.
- Dr. Faysal Al Nasir noted (Bahrain) that financial and economic aspects

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<sup>10</sup> Abba Mehio Sibai is Professor at the Department of Epidemiology and Population Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, American University of Beirut and the Director of the Center for Studies on Aging.

remain the most important issues. Most of the developing countries are poor in their economic resources, whereas they are facing huge health challenges.

- Dr. Banouby (Egypt) highlighted the issue of poverty, as the main determinant of ageing experience in the Arab context.

## Old Age Dependency Ratios

One major long-term concern can be addressed in terms of the *Old Age Dependency Ratios*, measuring the number of persons 65+ per 100 persons aged 15-64 ('working age'). Smaller ratios are better. Currently the Arab region has the lowest ratios in the world at 5% though it is expected to rise to 8% by 2025 and 13% by 2050. There are, though, significant variations by country, with the larger increases bringing greater concern. (*Refer to the Old-age Dependency Rates in the graph on the next page.*)

## Missional and Biblical Implications and Opportunities

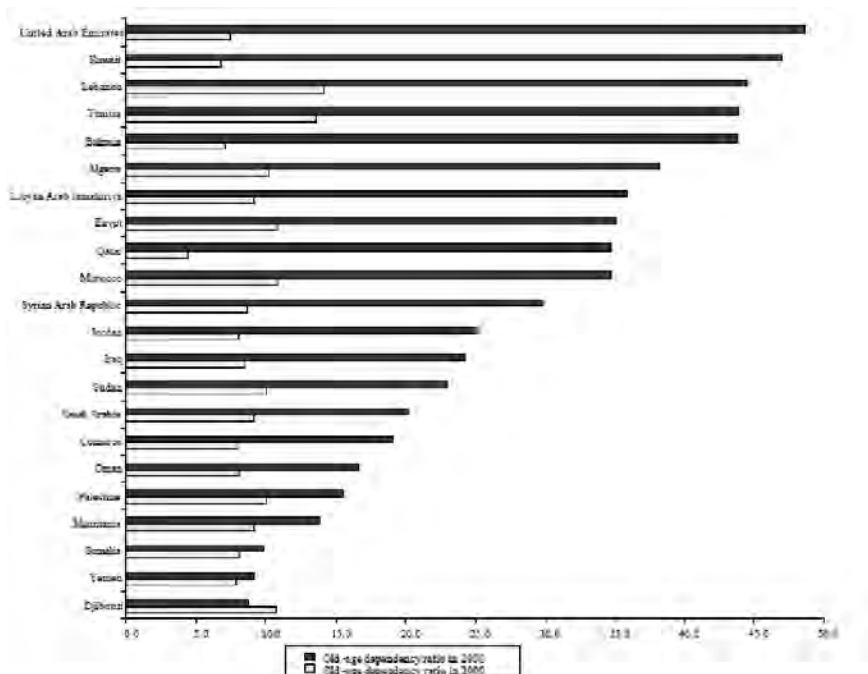
In 2010, The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) concluded that 'most ESCWA Member states<sup>11</sup> lack sufficient social security and health services to meet the needs of the increasing population of vulnerable elderly people' and it has been working to assist with the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA)<sup>12</sup> at the regional level.<sup>13</sup> The MIPAA is a 'comprehensive', detailed, and practical plan for responding to local situations. It includes three Priority Directions, each with up to 8 Issues, each Issue with up to 1-4 Objectives and each Objective with up to 11 concrete recommended actions. The three Priority Directions are (1) Older Persons and Development (2) Advancing health and well-being into old age and (3) Ensuring enabling and supportive environments. In our lingo, it is very much a plan for *Integral-Holistic Kingdom Mission*, with one major exception: it lacks attention to 'the spiritual dimension' of aging. Nonetheless, it provides a very concrete place to start our planning.

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<sup>11</sup> Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.globalaging.org/agingwatch/docs/mipaa.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.amun.org/uploads/Handbooks/2010/10\\_Chapter\\_Six\\_-\\_The\\_Economic\\_and\\_Social\\_Commission\\_for\\_Western\\_Asia.pdf](http://www.amun.org/uploads/Handbooks/2010/10_Chapter_Six_-_The_Economic_and_Social_Commission_for_Western_Asia.pdf) (accessed 11 September 2010).



There certainly is opportunity, but is there a biblical call to respond specifically to ageing in the Arab World? For most of the world, caring for the elderly is a ‘no-brainer’: life includes being born, growing up, getting married, having kids and caring for the elderly. Honouring the elderly is written into the major religions of the world, and expressed in various forms, even in animist cultures. Biblically, the fifth of the 10 commandments is ‘*Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you,*’ which is reiterated at least 6 times in the New Testament. Both the Old Testament and the New extend the honour due parents to the elderly in general (Lv. 19:32; 1 Tm. 5:1-2ff). Strikingly, the Old Testament interweaves honour for the elderly with honour for God Himself: ‘You shall stand up before the gray head and *honour* the face of an old man, and you shall *fear* your God: I am the LORD.’

Clearly, honour for all elderly is called for biblically, and just as clearly biblical honour entails comprehensive care. Using the widow as the model for how the elderly are to be cared for, we find specific instructions enjoining care for her physical, psychological, material, social, cultural, spiritual, emotional, and legal needs (Ps. 68:5, Dt. 14:28, 29, Dt. 16:10-15, Ex. 22:22, cf. Is. 9:17, Dt. 10:18, 1 Tm. 5: 1-8, 16). Finally, bringing together the opportunities with the injunctions, consider Galatians 6:10: ‘So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.’

To care for the elderly would be a clear case of ‘doing good’, and likely would be perceived as such and welcomed by families, neighbourhoods, communities, and governments at all levels.

May our gracious and compassionate Lord and Saviour guide us in His own paths of righteousness for His own name’s sake.

## MUSLIMS AND THE METHODOLOGY OF DIALOGUE, DEALING WITH OTHERNESS

by Rev. Marten de Vries

*Rev. Marten De Vries has been working as a missionary minister in Rotterdam since 2000. He studied Christian Theology in Kampen, the Netherlands and Islamic Theology in Leiden, the Netherlands. He is the founder of ‘Het Kruispunt’ (The Crosspoint), a study centre and meeting point where Christians can speak with Muslims. Since 2003, he has been a board member of Arabic World Ministries in the Netherlands and has made several trips to North Africa and the Middle East in this capacity. SEEDBED published his reports about conversations with Muslims titled, ‘Mary in the mosque’ (2007, Vol. 21:2) and ‘Abraham in Mecca’ (2007, Vol. 21:3).*

*The material in this article was presented in Amsterdam May 2010, at a conference of the Federation Islamitische Organisaties Nederland (FION—Federation of Islamic Organisations in the Netherlands), a department of the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (FIO), linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. Subsequently, in September, the same material was presented at an assembly organised by the Nederlandse Zendingsraad (Dutch Mission Counsel), where theologians and church workers who are engaged in conversations with Muslims met each other.*

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### Introduction

The following seven comments are of a methodical nature. They all revolve around the subject ‘Muslims and dialogue’. By this I mean specifically the inter-religious dialogue between Muslims and Christians. I am speaking from a Christian perspective; I could not do otherwise. Nevertheless it is my genuine intention to formulate my comments in such a way that Muslims and Christians alike can deal with them. My wish is that they may contribute to the organisation and holding of respectful meetings, and that they meet the satisfaction of both Muslims and Christians, in accordance with their deepest motives.

### Seven Comments

#### 1. Muslims and Christians have something to say to each other

Naturally my focus on meetings between Muslims and Christians has to do with the service that has been entrusted to me by a number of churches and

therefore by God. However, I also believe Muslims and Christians have something to tell each other.

Their religions are mutually related. Islam claims to be the successor of Christianity with the Qur'an as a replacement of the Bible. Even though Christians cannot accept that concept, it cannot be denied that the same people figure in both holy books. And even though theological notions take on their own specific meaning in different contexts, Muslims and Christians share a set of concepts that is derived from their respective religious sources.

*In its essence Islam is an attack that goes to the heart of Christian confession, just as Christianity to Muslims must feel like a stab in the back because of the rejection of monotheism,*

Moreover, Muslims and Christians are eager to share something with each other. A good Muslim calls upon a Christian to follow the prophet Mohammed and to give up the Christian belief that Jesus is God and appeared in the flesh, and that God himself brings atonement to sinful human beings through the death of His Son on the cross. A Christian on the

other hand wants nothing more than to share his greatest wealth with his Muslim neighbour. That wealth is the comfort he has through his belief in the Lord, who was crucified, risen and ascended to heaven. Muslims and Christians have a special concern for one another.

## **2. Pain is inevitable in the encounter between Muslims and Christians**

By saying this I admit there is a tension. Superficially there may be resemblances or points of recognition, but reasoned from the heart, both religions find themselves in a position of rivalry towards one other. That is painful, especially because of this family relationship.

It is unrealistic to deduce or reduce differences merely to different ways of expressing the same content. In its essence Islam is an attack that goes to the heart of Christian confession, just as Christianity to Muslims must feel like a stab in the back because of the rejection of monotheism, as Muslims understand it to be. It is unwise and even harmful to disguise that. It is indeed a challenge to work with this.

If one is not prepared to feel the pain, one chooses not a society but—at best—a peaceful co-existence; for example, by allowing people to live in separate city areas or ghettos. While it is doubtful that that is really a suitable solution in the East where it commonly occurs, we certainly do not want that here in the West.

Pain is inevitable in a pluralistic society. Pain is not only to be found where followers of one religion are discriminated or persecuted in name of another dominant religion; it is also characteristic of a respectful meeting.

### **3. A double agenda is fine but a hidden agenda is terrible**

A respectful meeting demands transparency. A Muslim should not have to be secretive about his da'wah obligation. And let a Christian openly acknowledge that his missionary task is part of the essence of his faith.

There are Muslims and Christians to whom this is not a priority. Others even find it unnecessary or only relevant within specific circumstances. This can be either pragmatically or theologically motivated. For the rest it is clear that dialogues by, or between, people of different religious convictions take place and should take place, at various levels.

In the meantime, we do ourselves a favour if we are not secretive about a double agenda in an exchange of thoughts on religious subjects. It is unnecessary too. Missionary drive does not exclude a dialogue in formal equality. For it concerns the *motive* for the meeting and therefore need not necessarily place its stamp on the way the dialogue takes shape.

When the form of the communication remains neutral, a spirited manner of discussion only makes the content even more interesting. At least, when the discussion is not coming only from one party, but from all participants.

God, who reveals Himself, does not want hidden agendas. It puts one in a predicament and forces one to say something different on the inside than to the outside world. Sooner or later one will be discovered, and that would be damaging to one's credibility and the credibility of one's message.

### **4. When one forces the other to speak within his or her own frame of reference, there is no discussion**

One of the first requirements for an inter-religious discussion is to speak on the same level. Of course one may consider one's religion to be superior to the belief of the other. For one does not believe one's own ideas, but instead what one sees as God's revelation. But if one does not wish to hold a monologue, but wishes to have a true dialogue and exchange of ideas, one will have to grant the other more space than one's own frame of reference allows.

Christian dogmatics with integrated apologetics against Islam is unfit as dialogue material. Just as unfit as an Islamic book titled 'dialogue about the divinity of Jesus' that in the end boils down to the fact that a Christian must become Muslim.

Christians should not call Muslims ‘Mohammedans’ because in doing so they are defining the prophet for Muslims as an Islamic Jesus. Muslims, on the other hand, should realize that Christians are not the ‘people of the book’. They are followers of a Person, of Jesus Christ. Their Holy Scripture is not a Christian Qur’an but it leads them to Jesus, in the same way that, in the Islamic understanding, the prophet brought a Book to the people.

Christians should not judge the Qur’an by the lack of chronological order, which is specific to the Bible. Nor are they obligated to make the Old and New Testament answer to the Islamic criteria for the way a holy book should be.

### **5. For a meeting it is necessary that one is prepared to stand in another person’s shoes**

The Christian who is not prepared to stand beside a Muslim does not understand how he is misunderstood when he explains his beliefs. He is also incapable of interpreting his neighbour’s questions. He has even less right to make critical remarks on what the other brings into the discussion from his Book and from his heart. A Muslim who cannot, and will not, try to imagine how a Christian can find comfort and direction in his Faith in Jesus Christ as Gods Son and Saviour, is unfit to be a partner in dialogue.

*If you, as a Muslim need more than the Qur’an, or as a Christian cannot do with just your Bible, then you have disqualified the holiness of your own sources*

The Christian must understand that monotheism is everything to his Muslim neighbour. A Muslim must try to understand that to a Christian his belief in Jesus is not in contradiction to monotheism.

Sometimes people think that a convert can serve some purpose at a dialogue. Certainly, he can serve as a role model for those who, like himself, wish to trade one religion for the other. In the discussion between convinced Muslims and confessing Christians, however, a Christian who is born in the house of Islam or a Muslim who has betrayed his faith, is a disturbing factor, because of his apostasy. Pushing someone like that forward is a sign of disrespect for the other and deprives the inter-religious discussion of its necessary neutrality.

### **6. It is unnecessarily disrespectful to use another’s religious sources for one’s own purpose**

There are Christians who want to read the Qur’an with Muslims. What they want is to lead the Muslims to Jesus through the Qur’an. The underlying idea is that what the Qur’an says about Jesus leads to a Christian creed sooner than to the Islamic Jesus, who is no more and no less than a prophet between Moses and Mohammed.

Likewise, there are also Muslims who abuse the Christian Bible to prove Islam. They point out passages that they say foretell the coming of the Islamic prophet and claim that some of Jesus' words confirm this. The assumption is that the Christian canon is a corrupt book in which traces of the original revelation are nevertheless still to be recognized.

This method exists due to the disregard for the near, or broader, context. It also displays a disregard for the phenomenon of another person's scriptures and their use of them. It should be beneath everyone's dignity to pester the other with one's own interpretations of what is holy to the other.

If you, as a Muslim need more than the Qur'an, or as a Christian cannot do with just your Bible, then you have disqualified the holiness of your own source.

## **7. We live permanently in a globalized world, so territorial thinking in religion has had its day**

We live together as Muslims and Christians in one country. We live in a world that is becoming smaller and smaller. This will never change, thanks to modern transport and the Internet. A government that wishes to protect its citizens by withholding what it sees as religious disinformation, will in the long term achieve the opposite of what it intends.

Territorial thinking has had its day. Christians should not think that way, as Jesus clearly said that his kingdom was not of this world. A Christian or Jewish-Christian state, for example is an unchristian expression.

While the concept of the house of the Islam as territorial ground can be placed within a theological construction, it has become fruitless. The same can be said about the Islamic state. Naturally, it is up to Muslims to draw this conclusion. However, I associate with Islamic scholars, who are accepting the reality, and who in fact have reached the same conclusion.

Muslims live all across the world. They deserve equal rights but cannot dictate the Shari'a to others. Countries dominated by Muslims harbour millions of non-Muslim inhabitants. The indigenous inhabitants will only accept a second-class status at the cost of loyalty. Western or Asian guest labourers will not let themselves be locked up in compounds forever.

We are left with the task of bringing ideological building stones from our own religious conviction into a mixed society in which everyone feels at home. Not just tolerated, but emancipated.

Muslims are prepared to do that. Proof of this is the time offered to me today, in which I could speak freely.

## SIMPLY SHARING THE GOOD NEWS THROUGH STORIES

by Roland Clarke

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Christians and Muslims believe in one God. But the law of Moses doesn't just focus on God's oneness; it also mentions his saving power. This is what the first commandment says, 'I am the LORD your God who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. You must not have any other god but me.' God's oneness is anchored in the great rescue from Egypt—a story known and loved by children. This commandment simply means that since God saved the Israelites, he is the only One we ought to worship.

*In reading the stories of Shadrack and Moses, we see a close link between God's oneness and his*

The Bible instructs believers to gradually 'unfold' these two themes with unbelievers by illustrating them in the lives of the prophets. As we share God's Word with them (Muslims included),

they will be 'enlightened' and the 'simple will gain understanding'. (Ps. 119:130) Many of these Old Testament rescue stories, which are the back-bone of the biblical story of salvation, are known and loved by Muslims—albeit in a distorted and superficial way.

### Simple Stories Appeal to Children

A good place to start exploring the rescue theme is with the story of three young men who refused to bow to a ninety foot idol which the King of Babylon had made. On many occasions I have asked Muslim friends, 'Have you heard the story of Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego?' They hadn't heard but they were curious. Then, when we read the story, they would thoroughly enjoy it.

Recently, I was in Moe's [pseudonym] home, watching a soccer match on TV with his four sons. As their bedtime was approaching I asked, 'Do you boys want to hear a story?' They agreed, so I got out my Bible and turned to Daniel, chapter

three. Their attention was riveted as the tension mounted. We read how Nebuchadnezzar gave Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego one more chance, warning them sternly that if they disobeyed him, they'd be thrown into the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar concluded, 'then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?'

To everyone's astonishment, the three men who refused to bow were saved from the furnace. The King—who earlier defied Yahweh—now praised the God of Shadrack, acknowledging, 'There is no other god who can rescue like this!' Deeply impressed by this story, Moe's family have agreed to read other Bible stories on future visits. Can you imagine the stimulating discussions we will have in the next few weeks as we read stories about God rescuing Moses, Jonah, etc? (These stories are merely glimpsed in the Qur'an.)

Ponder how a Muslim feels when he reads Jethro's response to Moses. Jethro listened to his son-in-law tell about the amazing rescue at the Red Sea and then he said, 'I know now that the LORD is greater than all other gods.' Notice how this implies God's power to save has worldwide relevance. Compare other scriptures that declare all the world shall acknowledge that God is Saviour. (Ex. 9:16; 2 Kings 19:11-19; Is. 45:21-23)

However, God's intervention and deliverance involves more than a military victory over oppressive forces. Rescue also involves being ransomed by sacrificing a lamb. In fact, this is what marks the real turning point of this story: Israelite families celebrated Passover in order to commemorate this great escape. We read in Exodus 12:26, 'Then your children will ask, "What does this ceremony mean?"' This opens a natural door to explain redemption in simple terms. In reading the stories of Shadrack and Moses, we see a close link between God's oneness and his saving power. Interestingly, Moses' story has been popularized as an animation-style movie 'Prince of Egypt', dubbed into 17 languages.

If you've felt perplexed or daunted by the prospect of witnessing to Muslims, I trust you are now beginning to see it isn't really so difficult; you can sow seeds by reading OT stories.

We've seen how children and stories go hand in glove. This also implies the message is simple enough for a child to understand. Now let us reinforce this by looking at another prophet, Asaph, whom the Lord raised up 500 years after Moses. Asaph wrote Psalm 78 to remind the Israelites how the LORD had wonderfully rescued their forefathers from slavery in Egypt.

In the introduction to this Psalm, one notices that the word 'children' (and its synonym 'next generation') are mentioned six times,

O my people listen to my instructions.

Open your ears to what I am saying,  
For I will speak to you in a parable.  
I will teach you hidden lessons from our past  
    stories we have heard and known,  
    stories our ancestors handed down to us.  
We will not hide these truths from our *children*;  
    we will tell the *next generation*  
    about the glorious deeds of the LORD  
    about his power and his mighty wonders.  
For he issued his laws to Jacob;  
    he gave his instructions to Israel.  
He commanded our ancestors to teach them to their *children*,  
    so the *next generation* would know them  
    even the *children* not yet born  
    and they in turn will teach their own *children*.  
So each generation should set its hope anew on God.

The psalmist not only recalls Israel's past, he also looks with hope to the future. He expresses confidence that the LORD'S sanctuary, Mount Zion, is 'solid and enduring' (Ps. 78: 68-69). Hundreds of years later, the Messiah came as prophesied in scripture. Through him came the true light, fulfilling man's longing for immortality. Jesus rose from the dead on Mt Zion, which was also in accordance with prophesy. (Isaiah 25:7-9) This momentous event signified he overpowered death, as he himself said, 'I hold the keys of death and the grave.' (Rv. 1:18; cf. 2 Tm. 1:10)

### **Children featured in Christ's life—in various ways**

It was this same Jesus who 'always used stories and illustrations ... when speaking to the crowds.' Scripture tells us that Christ's parabolic teaching 'fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet.' (Mt. 13:35. Note how his story-style teaching points back specifically to Psalm 78:2). As one would expect, there were children among the crowds who listened to Jesus. For instance, on the occasion of the feeding of the 5000, it was a boy who made available his five loaves and two fish to be used by Jesus. (John 6:1-15)

Most Christians are familiar with the incident where parents brought their children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. His disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. Then we read that 'Jesus called for the children and said to the disciples, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them. For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."' (Lk. 18:16,17)

Jesus had another encounter with children, as recorded in Matthew 21:15-16, 'the teachers of religious law saw these wonderful miracles and heard even the children in the Temple shouting, "Praise God for the Son of David." But the leaders were indignant. They asked Jesus, "Do you hear what these children are saying?"'

'Yes,' Jesus replied. 'Haven't you ever read the Scriptures? For they say, "You have taught children and infants to give you praise."'

Reading how the children praised the Lord reminds me of Farhad's [Pseudonym] encounter with a three or four year old child. This child of a Christian neighbour came up the stairs singing, 'Hallelujah.' Though Farhad did not understand that Hallelujah meant 'Praise the Lord', his curiosity was stimulated. Farhad's wife noticed a small paper in the child's hand and asked, 'What is this?' A simple conversation followed... She kept the pamphlet and later read it more carefully.

Farhad explained how this simple witness was a turning point in his family's journey to Jesus. It is interesting to see how Christ's rebuke of the Jewish leaders—noted earlier—correlates with this story.

A slightly longer version of this story recounts how this Muslim family—who were observant Muslims—became acquainted and friendly with their Christian neighbour. Eventually they accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Interestingly, this story didn't happen in the west where Muslims are a minority. It happened in a nation where 99% of the population is Muslim. Any follower of Jesus in this country who dares to witness does so under the shadow of persecution. Sharing one's faith requires boldness. How different this situation is compared to Christians living in the west, who are typically so timid.

*I know of several situations where children made friendships with Muslim classmates. Through that connection the Christian parents became acquainted and friendly with their Christian neighbour.*

In spite of this repressive climate, God used the spontaneity of a child to reach Farhad. In fact, Farhad's neighbour had **not** instructed their child to do what he did. He spontaneously expressed what was in his heart. The Lord used the child's praise to evoke the spiritual thirst of the unsaved neighbour! So often we are prone, as adults, to underestimate the power of a child's testimony and their fearless spontaneity.

I have noticed several incidents where this same dynamic has happened. I know of several situations where children made friendships with Muslim classmates. Through that connection the Christian parents became acquainted and friendly with Muslim parents. These stories illustrate, once again, how God uses the uninhibited behaviour of the children to prompt adults to engage with each other.

It is interesting to see how untainted children are by adult prejudices and

fears. Furthermore, as I've pondered these relationships, I have realized it is not uncommon for children to unashamedly talk about God and spiritual things. Children can show us how to behave: how **not** to be politically correct and how **not** to be intimidated when talking about spiritual things!

### **Through the Eyes of a Child**

Earlier we read about the five loaves and two fish that belonged to a child, and about how he was willing to share them for a greater cause: feeding a crowd of 5000. When telling this story, we often focus on how a small meal was miraculously multiplied; but, let us view this story through the child's eyes. Notice the challenge of the situation for the child: We shouldn't underestimate the child's unselfishness and trust as shown by his willingness to give up his/her lunch.

I am reminded of the story of David, the youngest of eight sons. His father asked him to take some food to his brothers, who were serving in the army encamped at the valley of Elah. The story of how he killed Goliath has become legendary, but we often overlook how little David appeared in their eyes. There is an ironic twist to this story that hinges on the word 'child'.

David spontaneously responds to Goliath's mockery of his beloved God, 'Who is this pagan Philistine anyway, that he is allowed to defy the armies of the living God?' Then David went to the King and told him, 'Don't worry about this Philistine. I'll go fight him.' The King responds to David dismissively, 'Don't be ridiculous! There's no way you can fight this Philistine and possibly win! You're only a boy, and he's been a man of war since his youth.' (1 Sam. 17:32-33)

The fact is that God often uses insignificant, weak and foolish things to accomplish his great purposes. Bearing this in mind, let us resist the temptation to underestimate simple children's stories, especially when we are speaking to Muslims who we feel are notoriously hard to reach. We know Muslims are prone to ask difficult questions. So we make the excuse, 'I'm not qualified to witness to Muslims.'

Luke 10 tells how Jesus sent out 72 disciples as his witnesses. Hearing their reports, 'Jesus was filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit, and said, "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike. Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way."' (Lk. 10:21)

### **God's non-professional, ordinary co-workers**

If Acts 1:8 launches the worldwide proclamation of the gospel, then Acts 8:1 marks the pivotal juncture where Christ's witnesses moved outside their 'comfort zone'. A great persecution thrust them out of Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria. Notice, however, that all 12 apostles stayed in Jerusalem. It was the ordinary folk—the 'non-experts'—who fled into the surrounding areas of Judea and Samaria. Another fact

we should not overlook is that the inhabitants of Samaria followed a religious cult called Samaritanism. These people were constantly debating with their Jewish cousins over religious issues and thus were regarded as a very difficult to impact with the biblical message. Can you see the parallel between this situation in the first century and the polarized situation in our day between Christians and Muslims?

The Bible tells us that these 'ordinary' disciples, who undoubtedly felt inadequate to engage with resistant Samaritans, were scattered into the province of Samaria. It is significant to note that they spread the gospel and made a remarkable impact. See the article Reluctant Messengers available on line at: [www.answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/reliquant\\_messengers.html](http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/reliquant_messengers.html). I recommend reading the story of Gideon who felt deeply inadequate in the face of a daunting challenge. May his example embolden us to share the Gospel with Muslims. (Judges 6,7)

## Conclusion

Sharing the gospel with Muslims need not be complicated; indeed, it is actually quite simple. But does this mean it will be easy? In order to step out of our comfort zone and share the truth we must be moved with compassion. Also, we need to be bold. Being a witness of Christ is simple, however, we can—and should—learn to be more effective.

All biblical quotes are taken from the New Living Translation unless otherwise noted. If you have any questions or comments contact me at: [starsign77@hotmail.com](mailto:starsign77@hotmail.com).

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A good explanation of how to engage Muslims in conversational witness using key commonalities is available at:

[www.answeringislam.org/authors/clarke/worship\\_one\\_god.html](http://www.answeringislam.org/authors/clarke/worship_one_god.html).

Two excellent websites which complement these foundational insights are available on line here: [www.oralcitystrategies.org/strategy\\_detail.cfm?StrategyID=1;one-god-one-message.com](http://www.oralcitystrategies.org/strategy_detail.cfm?StrategyID=1;one-god-one-message.com).

Other sites provide many cases of how God has opened incredible doors through telling simple Bible stories: [www.storyrunners.com/case-studies/miriam](http://www.storyrunners.com/case-studies/miriam);  
[www.storyrunners.com/case-studies/bilbo](http://www.storyrunners.com/case-studies/bilbo)

## ENCOURAGING THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIGENOUS WORSHIP MUSIC: A CASE STUDY

by PR

*PR and her husband have been involved in evangelism, discipleship and CP in Europe and North Africa for more than 20 years.*

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The Asoumi (a pseudonym) people are one of several major indigenous (i.e. non-Arab) Muslim people groups in North Africa numbering 2-3 million people. Their language is called Tasoumit (a pseudonym). There are about 75-100 believers among this people group.

While there are many forms of Asoumi music, much of it is in a call and response form with a pattern of repetitions. It uses just 3-4 notes often within an interval equivalent of a minor third.<sup>14</sup> Percussion is essential in Asoumi music with a snare drum being the primary percussion instrument. A stringed instrument is also used frequently. Dancing is an integral part of some of these music forms.

In the south of the region, music and singing are a natural part of everyday life. In the north, although music is a part of celebrations and used in epic storytelling by musician/poets, its reputation has been tainted by its use by prostitute dancers. For this reason, believers (most of whom are from the north) were reluctant to write Christian music in traditional Asoumi styles. As children, they were told that music and singing were shameful.

We began this process of developing worship music by praying and proceeded by prayer. We then began to discuss with the believers as to whether Asoumi music can be redeemed for God's glory. This discussion took place off and on over a number of years as the believers wrestled with this idea.

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<sup>14</sup> Some precisions on the technical aspects of the music and forms from an ethnomusicologist familiar with Asoumi music: (1) Melody: Asoumi melodies have a stepwise contour that spans a small ambitus of pitches, often within an interval equivalent to a minor third. The term "scale" does not really describe the collection pitches that make up the melodies. Sometimes, there are hints of the Arabic *bayati* or *saba maqamat* (modes). (2) Call and response pattern: In this traditional group singing style, the call and response tend to be between a pair of lead poets/singers and the rest of the troupe. The lead poets lead the sung verses whereas the "Maestro" leads the movements and change in rhythm. The pair of lead poets sings a poetry verse, and then the chorus enters with a repeat of the verse, or a refrain. Many groups are male only. With the male-female groups I have seen, the females do not sing or play the snare drum. Their function, as a friend has said, is to "look pretty." Sometimes, women may sing a prelude but they do not sing again after the group singing has begun.

One advantage we had was that different types and uses of Asoumi music are very well known both among average people as well as among academics. Much research has been done along these lines. Local people use these music styles and instinctively know which type is appropriate for what use. Therefore, it was not necessary to interview numerous people concerning the music, analyze the music or determine appropriate uses for various styles, as is frequently the case in other contexts.

At one point in the past, one believer wrote seven worship songs in Tasoumit, but at the time there were very few believers and the songs never caught on. Another time, someone had commissioned and paid for some worship songs to be written. However, it turned bad when the group wrote many more songs than commissioned and then wanted to be paid for the additional songs, which turned out to be quite a sum of money.

One idea that hindered this project advancing is something that is called 'low cultural esteem.' This is when a people group does not think that their language or traditional music is worthy and in this case, worthy to be used in worship of God. This is often found with languages and cultures of indigenous groups where there is a dominant trade language or culture. These Asoumi believers had a double cultural jump when it came to worship music. They were used to worshipping in classical Arabic and Middle Eastern style, which is one-step removed from the national style and even another step removed from Asoumi style. This low cultural esteem combined with the association of music with prostitution created a reluctance even to try to create worship music in Asoumi language and style.

This is also why I resisted the suggestions that some made that we send some believers to the summer music workshops that are held in the country. They do great work and have been effective in getting nationals writing songs, but the songs are mostly in a Middle Eastern style. I kept saying that I did not want the Asoumi believers to learn to write Middle Eastern songs or even Arabic songs in our country's style. I wanted to find a way to encourage them to write traditional Asoumi songs—indigenous worship music that touches people's hearts and moves their bodies.

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This topic of Asoumi worship music would come up and be discussed from time to time, and often between my husband and one of the believers whom I will call Z. Once Z. decided that yes, Asoumi music could be redeemed for God's glory, he began jotting down the words to songs that would come to him at night when he could not sleep. He kept a notebook of these and would share them with

my husband from time to time. Some were in a traditional group singing and dancing style with a lot of repetition and some in a long epic storytelling style. Z. soon began to put melodies to the words, and he continued to share these with my husband. After he had about ten songs ready, he and my husband worked on typing them up so that those who were literate could follow. Together we then set up a time to get some believers together for Z. to teach them these songs. Z. brought his family and some other friends, and God providentially brought two believers who were in the city for another meeting and heard about our gathering. The older of these men was thrilled with this music and has become a true partner with Z. in producing (though not writing) and promoting this music. They make a great team singing these long epic story songs!

The little worship team, as I call them, met monthly for about 6 months to learn, practice and refine the songs. In each practice session, we recorded the songs on a decent quality hand-held cassette recorder, so we could have a record of what we did. (At the end of the practice times, there was often spontaneous singing and trying new things. We were sure to record this as well so that these creative moments would not be forgotten. Sometimes it takes a few hours of getting into the mood for spontaneous creativity to come out.) We worked as a team with each one giving input and making suggestions. We hosted the meetings at our home since we made a lot of noise (singing and drums) and we live in a building where that is not a problem with the neighbours.

Once the songs and the group were ready, the group went to a recording studio in a nearby town and recorded the songs. We provided transportation (and in one case paid for someone's transportation each practice time, since the person was poor and had to come from far away) and funded the recording, editing and production. The costs were \$600 for a day of studio recording plus 20 hours of mastering time and then an additional \$120 for 4 hours of additional mastering time after an editing process. Producing the CDs cost about \$0.42 each (including the CD, a soft CD pocket, and designing and printing a colour CD label). We also created a small booklet ('hymnal' if you like) to be used in singing the songs. Quite a lot of work went into transcribing the songs and putting them into readable format.

A couple of national church groups have begun using these songs in worship. We also had a worship gathering (at our home but led by nationals) and invited people from other towns to come and worship in Tasoumit. The idea was that they would catch the vision and take it back to their house churches. (The entire worship time was done in Tasoumit: prayer, singing, Scripture reading, message and testimonies.) It was beautiful to see people radiating joy, singing and dancing in their traditional styles, ululating (a yodel-like sound women make here on occasions of

joy) with happiness in worshipping Jesus. These instances are probably the first time in history that God is being worshiped with Christian music in the Asoumi language and culture. We initially thought we would do the worship gathering without using the song booklets. We did not want to impose a literate setting on the worship time. But only some of the folks present were illiterate, and the ones who were literate really wanted to use the booklets and then to have a copy later. The people who could not read still learned and sang the songs with no problem.

In addition to being used in some house churches, the music is being used evangelistically. The songs are on the evangelistic website geared to this people group. They are also being used in outreach to populations of Asoumi living in Europe.

So, where do we go from here? We hope to see more people writing/composing music. One man expressed the need for contemplative, prayerful songs. He plays a traditional guitar-like instrument, so we would like to spend some time with him developing this idea. It would also be good to have more songs—more evangelistic songs, more scripture songs, more teaching songs, more story songs as well as more worship songs.

### Some Further Thoughts

- It is often beliefs that hinder the development of indigenous worship music more than the lack of technical expertise. Beliefs such as my culture and language are not worthy or belief that my music style is shameful, etc. I tell people to begin to discuss the issue with believers and keep discussing. It may take time. From the time we started praying about this until the CD was produced was about six years.
- Be wary of using indigenous music of other people as examples or you may end up having them write songs in those styles. You can use it as an encouragement: 'They did this, so can you' but not as 'listen to this and do the same.' For instance, people kept telling me to have the Asoumi imitate the indigenous group to the south of our region. Well, that group uses a completely different musical scale, a pentatonic scale. We did not want the Asoumi writing music in the style of their neighbours rather than in their own style!
- Often all that is needed is someone to come along side and be a sounding board giving encouragement and direction. Z. had an idea but lacked confidence, direction and a framework in which to move forward.
- I feel that it was helpful that I am a musician, but it was not essential. My husband speaks the language of Tasoumit fluently, which was very helpful. He perhaps could have done the facilitating just in colloquial Arabic, but he would

not have been as effective as a catalyst without also having the ability to speak in Tasoumit. Knowing Tasoumit was extremely helpful for transcribing the songs and putting them together in booklet form.

I have some materials from SIL on this subject that I can send to anyone who is interested. Just contact the SEEDBED editor ([seedbed.editor@sent.com](mailto:seedbed.editor@sent.com)) and he will forward on your request.

## A SUNNI WOMAN'S HEART PART 7—A SENSE OF VULNERABILITY AND A NEED FOR SECURITY

by Tahira

*The author, a North American, has lived in the Middle East for nearly 20 years, residing in a variety of neighbourhoods and engaging in a variety of ministries. She holds a D. Min. in Missions and Cross-Cultural Studies from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.*

**Editor's Note:** This is the final instalment in the seven-part series entitled 'A Sunni Woman's Heart' begun in SEEDBED 2008, no 1. Tahira is happy to discuss these issues and ideas with you. She can be contacted through the editor ([seedbed.editor@sent.com](mailto:seedbed.editor@sent.com)).

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'I seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan.' The attentive listener in my neighbourhood will hear this phrase, known as the *isti'adha*, repeated many times daily. One needs protection because Satan is devious and has many agents in the world. He tries to drag the faithful off the Straight Path to the everlasting fire. He uses one's enemies to curse one through envy, magic and violent action. I have heard my Muslim friends talk about their need for God's protection from all sort of things, including: Satan, evil angels, the eye of the Jinn, the malice of the Jews, the deceptions of the Christians, the Antichrist, false charges, punishment, God's anger, the heat of the Last Day, judgment and torture, hell, the evil eye, temptations, poverty, war, pride, evil influences on their children, getting into trouble, getting lost in a crowd, being hit by another person, enemies, malicious gossip, an abusive or unfaithful husband, being hurt by fellow Muslims, divisive people, illness and sudden death. It is a scary world.

Ever since the Fall, it is normal for human beings to be afraid. We are vulnerable. God has a habit of drawing to Himself those who recognize their vulnerability and turn to Him. The need for security that Muslim women feel could be an opening for the gospel, but Islam makes it very difficult for women to find their security in Christ.

## Barriers

Islam is bedrock for them. They find security in Islam's comprehensive rules, community and family relationships and rituals. Their belief that they can determine their eternal destinies by their behavioural choices gives them a sense of control over their fate. Conformity to the standards of Islamic consensus relieves them of the risk of making wrong choices. This subculture discourages women from responding in faith to the consolations of the Holy Spirit through many means: through its emphasis on guidance through books and legal rulings, through its modernist reverence for being 'scientific' and providing logical proofs and through the dominance of males in nearly all areas of life. Islam contains many powerful truths about God and the world that reinforce the credibility of the religion and the sense of security of those who believe in it. In addition, the Qur'an and the *Sahih* Hadiths are believed to be utterly reliable and without doubt. The integration of Islam into all areas of life ensures that any woman who leaves Islam will find herself in a situation of utmost vulnerability, a situation that her upbringing has given her few skills to face.

While Islam is seen as bedrock to many Muslims, they perceive Christianity as established on thin ice. The standard portrayal of Christians in my community is that we trust in fetishes like crosses, statues and icons. These women are constantly told that Christians have corrupted Scriptures and cannot even speak truthfully about their own prophet Isa. Christian teachings about vulnerable love are considered weak and defeatist; nothing could be more counter-cultural. The assurance of salvation, which Christians so cherish, is denounced by Sunni leadership as dangerous and as leading to pride, laziness and self-satisfaction. The security Muslims know in Islam and the insecurity they perceive in Christianity act as a double deterrent against giving the message of the gospel a second thought.

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## Bridges

Nevertheless, the situation is not hopeless. Some shared beliefs can help create a sense of being in danger together that gives reason to talk about our situation. There are also shared beliefs about the source of security, which form common ground for discussion. Both Christians and Muslims believe that God is sovereign and that we are all utterly vulnerable apart from his mercy. We acknowledge, albeit in different ways, God's love, his powerful and unchanging word and his wisdom. We recognize together that Satan is a treacherous deceiver committed to our destruction. Pride is known to be spiritually lethal by both communities. Along with Christians, Muslims acknowledge that Jesus had divine power to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out

demons and do other miracles, and that he will judge on the Day of Accounting. Some Muslims may be interested in the protection Jesus affords.

In addition to similar beliefs, we share similar longings. We want to feel safe, to know our needs will be met. We sometimes suspect that others speak ill of us, and the thought is unnerving. We feel distressed and impotent when those precious to us are threatened by illness, temptations, economic hardship, disaster or injustice. The creeping menace of worldly corruption concerns both communities. We long to know that we are forgiven and accepted, and we hope for the eternal security of heaven. By allowing Muslims around us to witness our vulnerability and the way in which we find security and protection in Jesus, we may plant a seed of confidence in His love and power in their hearts.

### Fault Lines

Sometimes it is obvious that Islam is not the ultimate security. If, as Muslims claim, ‘no one with an atom of pride enters heaven,’ then any honest person will admit that he or she is in grave danger. Many Muslim women feel the tension between their legitimate fear of spiritual pride and their need for assurance that they are good enough to avoid eternal torment. Trying to achieve salvation through one’s own merit makes this inconsistency inevitable.

Muslims also seek to reconcile their insistence that Muhammad was only human with their need for more immediate help than a distant Almighty Judge, a 1400-year-old book and a dead prophet.<sup>15</sup> The Sunnis among whom I mix are reluctant to resort for protection to most of the occult practices of heterodox folk Islam. Angels and jinn fill some of the gaps at a theoretical level, but women rely in practice on the intercession of Muhammad from his grave, the support of the Muslim community, prayers and recitations like the *isti’adha* and acquiescence to God’s will. They seem conscious that Jesus has a better reputation than Muhammad for miracle- working, and use the ‘miracle’ of the Qur’an and late and dubious traditions of Muhammad’s miracles to bolster confidence in the Prophet.

Despite the glowing rhetoric, I have found little evidence that Muslim women in fact believe that the Qur’an and Hadith, the Muslim authorities or the Islamic community would provide them with adequate protection in cases of abuse, rape, disadvantageous marriage arrangements, divorce and discrimination. They want to both be respected as women and be safe.

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<sup>15</sup> However, some Muslims believe that Muhammad is in heaven and do not think of him as dead, despite Abu Bakr’s uncompromising assertion to the contrary.

## Worthy of Observation

A person who feels vulnerable often looks to God. Therefore, it is worth giving attention to what the Holy Spirit might be doing in the lives of people who feel insecure at any level: eternal destiny, relationship with God, health, marriage, finances, volatile family situations, reputation, political instability, intellectual doubts and so on. Many Muslims love to hear stories of miraculous answers to prayer, an indication of their desire for security and inclination to seek it in God. Among the Muslims most open to hear the gospel are those who associate some experience of personal safety with Christian teachings, people, places or symbols.

Like godly people of the Bible, contemporary workers among Muslims should be on the alert for opportunities to show the saving power of God. I have often found Sunni homemakers open to praying with me about the things in their life that make them feel frightened and helpless.

Dreams, even positive ones, can be disturbing if one does not know how to interpret them, and the worker should be aware of what God might be saying through dreams.

*We can show Muslims that they are safe with us because we genuinely care for their needs, their honour, their reputation and their eternal well-being. We can pray with and for people in need and*

Two categories of vulnerable people may need special attention: first, those who recognize that they can never do enough to be sure of God's mercy. It is unusual for Sunnis to admit this, and doing so may be a sign that God is initiating a saving work in the person's life. The second type of person who needs special attention is the one who parrots the expected praise to God in difficulties, but without conviction. This person may be honest enough, at least internally, to admit a loss of confidence in God, and yet a desire to believe in his love and goodness.

## Missional Strategies

To encourage genuine security in the Triune God will require addressing both the reasoning and the affections. Let us begin with the intuitive and affective, since this is usually what we experience first.

Believers in Jesus can promote a sense of the safety there is in Christ in several ways. We can show Muslims that they are safe with us because we genuinely care for their needs, their honour, their reputation<sup>16</sup> and their eternal

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<sup>16</sup> One very practical outworking of genuine care for the well-being of Muslim seekers and new believers is to guard carefully all confidences and never betray trust. Another is to protect Muslim followers of Jesus from being exploited by Christian individuals and organizations who want to make unfair use of them for promotional or fund-raising purposes.

well-being. We can pray with and for people in need and fast on their behalf. By using the powerful Name of Jesus as our authority, we can convey our confidence in His ability to intercede and act graciously. When we talk about and to God with the joyful confidence of beloved children, we witness to the security we feel in our relationship to him. Our hope and confidence in God during sorrow or crisis can be contagious. Muslims will never believe that Christ is the source of profound security if they perceive that we are intimidated by *them*. Witness that is both bold and gracious says, in effect, 'I am not afraid.'

At the cognitive level, it is worth pointing out to Muslims their lack of ultimate security before God's judgment, and the folly of trusting in oneself. We can point out the difference between assurance of forgiveness based on the mediation of the Living Prophet and the anxiety of the final exam, the Day of Reckoning. Stereotypes of the gospel as corrupted can be countered with assertions about God's power to preserve his word and challenges to prove charges of corruption.<sup>17</sup> Stereotypes of the gospel as weak can be countered with exciting stories of Jesus' power and authority in all sorts of situations. One Sunni follower of Jesus draws the attention of Muslim friends to the fact that Jesus never needed to say the *isti'adha* because the Father had given him authority over devils.

New believers from a Muslim background need help in learning to live in the confidence that comes from the witness and guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is especially the case because they are often in the most vulnerable position, humanly speaking, in which they have ever been. Although one's faith and hope are ultimately in God alone, the people of God are responsible to show His love and protection to believers from Muslim families in tangible ways.

## Conclusion to the Series

What is the burning issue in the heart of your Muslim friend? Every woman is different, but there is a very great chance that it has to do with one or more of the topics of this series:

- 1 the value of honour,
- 2 a need to belong,
- 3 an obsession with correct behaviour,
- 4 a desire to be approved by God, tied to an ambivalence toward his nearness,
- 5 a longing for affirmation in their identity as women,

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<sup>17</sup> A friend recommends the use of the Qur'anic passage that refers to the Qur'an as a safeguard for the Bible. She has found particularly helpful in this regard the book by Fouad Elias Accad, *Building Bridges: Christianity and Islam* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1997), Chapter 17, 'The Bible Was Not Corrupted,' 142-151.

- 6 a need for logical consistency, rightness and meaning in religion, and
- 7 a sense of vulnerability and need for security.

By addressing your neighbour's heartfelt needs and longings, you help her to understand the personal nature and the power of the grace of Jesus. The good news of the gospel is that through Jesus we can gain honour, membership in God's family, divine guidance for daily living, God's full approval and intimacy with Him, confidence and self-respect as women, truth, meaning and security. That is very good news indeed.

## PART 3: BOOK REVIEWS

## WHOSE LAND? WHOSE PROMISE? WHAT CHRISTIANS ARE NOT BEING TOLD ABOUT ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS.

by Gary M. Burge  
Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003

If, after living and ministering in and on behalf of the Arab world, any of us still have lingering sympathy with Christian Zionism, then this book is a must read. Gary Burge writes to American Evangelicals, seeking to show them that it is a serious mistake to support the modern nation-state of Israel without paying attention to the historical and political realities on the ground in the Middle East. His book is a sobering wake-up call that unveils the extent to which violence and injustice were at the heart of the foundation of the Israeli state, and that their ongoing unjust treatment of the Palestinian people stands under the judgement of the God whom evangelicals seek to obey. It is an impassioned attempt to refute some of the core arguments of evangelical Zionists. It is a call to all Christians to support Israel only in so far as it practices justice and hospitality to the people from whom they have stolen the land they now dominate by force of arms.

*He concludes his concise and insightful historical review by arguing that Israel's seizure of the land is the core issue in this ongoing conflict. Israel came into the region and took the land from those who had lived there for generations*

expresses the dilemma Christians feel as they struggle to know how to understand and respond to the modern nation-state of Israel. Burge's visits to the region began when he was an exchange student in Lebanon in 1973. In the years since he has returned frequently for visits as well as for extended research and teaching stints. His love for the people of the land is clearly visible, as is his deep sorrow over the suffering and injustice perpetuated against Palestinian Christians and Muslims in the 62 years since Israelis took possession of the land through intimidation, manipulation, slaughter and terror. He tells of having been earlier influenced by Hal Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, and of how he came to much greater insight into the land and its people through developing

In this review I will first lay out the main points in Burge's argument. Then, I will reflect on his conclusions and offer some suggestions as to their significance for ministry in the Arab world.

In a sobering preface, Burge describes some of the immense suffering happening in the Middle East and among the Palestinians and Israelis. Then, in his first chapter, Burge

friendships with Palestinian Christians in Israel and in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967.

Burge suggests that there are four main reasons why Christians have too often become paralyzed on this subject (pp. 8-12) and why Western Christians are torn when it comes to *understanding* what is happening in what we think of as 'the holy land'. First, we often bear a sense of guilt for the horrors of the twentieth century that were perpetrated against the Jews. Since this was only the most recent horror after centuries of Christian mistreatment of the Jews, we are very reluctant to criticize a people who have been so cruelly mistreated throughout history—and slaughtered in our living memory—even when they appear to be going too far in their treatment of the Palestinians. Secondly, we share the same spiritual heritage as the Jews, and we feel a sense of spiritual linkage with the Jews who worship the same God as we do. Thirdly, many of us sense God's hand in the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland and a sense that the modern state of Israel's very existence must be a miraculous work of God. We are thus hesitant to criticize this nation that we sense exists thanks to God's sovereign work. And lastly, many of us believe that this restored state of Israel has a special place in God's plan for the end times. Though we may not agree with many of the more fanciful interpretations of Revelations and Daniel being applied to the twenty-first century, we are nevertheless cautious; we do not want to be caught on the wrong side of what we expect to be the culminating events in world history that may well be worked out at the heart of the Middle East, in and around the modern state of Israel.

*These four significant factors make it difficult for us to be objective and clear in our understanding of the conflict that appears to be intractable.* They also tend to push us to expect the best of Israel and make us hesitant to believe the accounts of Israeli atrocities committed against the Palestinians. Thus, Burge sets the context for the rest of his book: He acknowledges that he is addressing a thorny topic, but is nevertheless committed to wade through the issues in his attempt to sound a clear call for evangelical understanding and commitment.

Burge divides the rest of the book into three main sections: (1) The Background to the Problem (Chaps 2 & 3) (2) The Old Testament and the Land (Chaps 4-8), and (3) The New Testament and the Land (Chaps 9-13). These sections are varied in length, and the categories are quite loosely applied as he covers a number of topics that do not fit clearly into these three sections titles.

In **Part One** Burge describes the physical geography of the land and gives a brief overview of the history of this piece of real estate. He details the land's possession through the past 4000 years, concentrating mostly on the past 62 years. He discusses in turn each of the eight wars that have torn through the region since

1948 as well as the many failed peace plans in between the wars. He concludes his concise and insightful historical review by arguing that Israel's seizure of the land is the core issue in this ongoing conflict. Israel came into the region and took the land from those who had lived there for generations. Israelis also occupied large territories and effectively imprisoned the Palestinians in their own land, thus rendering Palestinians unable to come, to leave, or to build a viable regional economy or life under Israeli occupation. The rest of the book explores what perspective we, as Bible believing Christians, should have on Israel's current possession and stewardship of the land of Palestine.

In his study of the Old Testament's perspective on Israel and the land in **Part Two**, Burge comes to the conclusion that *God owns both the land and the water in the land*. Within the OT, Israelite tenancy of the land was always *conditioned* on their remaining true to the covenant requirements of justice and proper treatment of the land. He argues that rather than having a legitimate claim to the land of Palestine, Israel has in fact been guilty of the sin of Ahab, who stole land that was not his through deception and force. Thus, they have no moral right to the land and instead stand under the judgement of God for their crimes against the Palestinians who still live in the land that Israel stole and occupied. He supports his argument by citing a number of OT prophets and their condemnations of the Israelite power elite and their corruption and violence and flagrant disregard for the law of God. He also describes the growing contemporary movement within Israel of Jews who are today standing in the tradition of the ancient Hebrew prophets, and are increasingly outspoken in their opposition to their government's ongoing abuse of power and oppression of the Palestinians.

Burge concludes this section with a discussion of Jerusalem. Burge conveys how the Israelis annexed to Jerusalem appropriated Palestinian villages, which Israelis have continued to steal since 1967, and how they continue to abuse and oppress most Arab residents in the city to ensure that Jerusalem has a Jewish majority. Here, too, historical perspective is significant. As Burge points out, '*For the last two thousand years, Judaism has dominated Jerusalem for only two hundred years*' (p. 118). After describing something of the current reality of life in Jerusalem, especially for its Arab residents, Burge concludes (in the last chapter) that: 'Jerusalem must be a shared city, celebrated by Jew, Muslim, and Christian, each of whom have equal access. It would be a "city set on a hill" that would directly model how the entire country might work toward reconciliation' (p. 268).

**Part Three** is the final and largest part of the book. First, Burge presents a concise study of the understanding of the land in the NT (he is a NT scholar). He examines how Jesus viewed the land, how it was seen in the book of Acts, and then looks at Paul's understanding of the land. The conclusion that he draws is quite clear, and is hinted at in his opening comment: 'We cannot read

the Old Testament and talk about its application today as if the New Testament had never been written' (p. 167). Jesus redefined who obtains the land—those who are humble. 'Jesus himself is in reality that which the land had offered only in form' (175). Jesus 'has forever changed the *place* of God among men and women.... Jesus is the new place of God's dwelling' (176,177).

Though those who disagree with Burge's reading of the NT on this question disparagingly call this 'replacement theology' there is no getting around the compelling reading of the NT that it is based on. Listen to Burge's forceful and clear statement of how the OT promises are fulfilled in Christ and his new people:

[Jesus]... also announced that his kingdom would give birth to a new following, a new people, a fulfilment of the Israelite community sought in the Old Testament. Selecting twelve apostles was his first signal that now a restoration of the twelve tribes was at hand. Yet, this group was a new community, a messianic community, whose *heritage* would stretch back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but whose *identity* now would be found in Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus uprooted the assumption that locale (the land, Jerusalem) was a sacred premise in God's plans, once again he implies that religious heritage or even ethnicity does not necessarily make exclusive claims on God. The benefits of God's blessing will be shared by those men and women living in concert with his dawning kingdom.

God's plan for Israel was that those who accepted the Messiah became the new Israel.... Jesus is a new Moses, he inaugurates a new exodus, and his twelve apostles symbolize the twelve tribes. His new covenant stands in contrast to the covenant of Sinai... Jesus' followers, therefore, represent Israel's remnant. They are at the center of God's new effort in the world. And if this is the case, they are heirs to the promises God has always extended to his faithful followers. (pp. 177, 178)

He goes on to look at representative views in the rest of the NT and concludes that everyone, starting from Jesus himself, is agreed that the new covenant is not connected to land.

The New Testament refers to previous covenants as "obsolete" and "vanishing away" (Heb. 8:13). Nor can Christians simply move from Abraham's promises in Genesis directly to modern Israel, skipping entirely what the New Testament says concerning Abraham's heritage... God's people no longer are called to build an empire based on the books of Genesis or Joshua. The Israeli attempt to take land forge a nation is religiously misdirected. God's people are called to infiltrate the empires of the world, bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to all, regardless of history, race, or religious persuasion. (189)

Following his look at the NT, Burge has two chapters in which he describes the ongoing presence of Christians in the land since NT times, and gives some moving portraits of Palestinian Christians living for Christ in the land today. He then describes some of what he sees as the disturbing actions, statements and commitments of Evangelical Zionists and their claims to speak for all American Evangelicals.

His final chapter asks 'Where do we go from here?' He presents what he believes to be the six essential foundations upon which lasting peace can become a reality in the land of Palestine (I do not have space to repeat those points here). He suggests that our stance toward Israel must be like the Hebrew prophets of old who decry injustice and cry aloud for redressing of wrongs. We should remind Israel that they had 'pursued nationhood at the expense of true spiritual devotion; they had pursued national religion without pursuing the demands of justice. Isaiah spares no words: God rejects all worship, all devotion, if it is not joined to righteousness' (269).

I read most of this book while Israel was bombing Hamas soldiers and installations in Gaza in January 2009. Daily I received emails from contrasting perspectives. Some roundly condemned Israel's action, while others pointed to Israel's right to defend itself against continuous rocket attacks on its territories. This newest war pushed me to dig deeper to understand this troubled region. Having long ago abandoned premillennial eschatology, I have been sympathetic to the Palestinians and due to the injustices committed by Israelis and by the Israeli Defence Force. Yet this book gave me fresh insight into the recent conflicts and fresh hope that there could be a way out, a way to see peace and stability return to the land and to the peoples who dwell in it.

As evangelicals living in and labouring amongst Muslims, especially for those of us whose primary calling is to love Muslims in this region, we'd do well to have an understanding of the role of Israel in God's plan that is based on careful and solid exegesis of the entire Bible, and not on an unhistorical reading of the Old Testament. This book helps us sort through the complex issues, and it presents deep understanding of the political and economic situation in the land now. I encourage many to read it, and I also encourage you to recommend it to pastors and other evangelical leaders whom you know. Burge writes clearly and is also empathetic with evangelicals who disagree with his perspective. Most of us working in the region would find little that we disagree with in Burge's reading of current events and of the Bible.

Visit [www.emeu.net/about](http://www.emeu.net/about) for info on 'Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding', which Burge has been involved with in various capacities.

***Reviewed by Don Little***

## ONE STATE, TWO STATES: RESOLVING THE ISRAEL/PALESTINE CONFLICT

Benny Morris

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010

During the 1980's and 1990's the universally accepted approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict was the two-state solution, that is, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel on the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. However since the failure of the Camp David peace talks in September 2000, the gospel of the two-state solution has been called into question by leaders and intellectuals on both sides of the dispute and, for the first time in many years, some are calling for a return to a one-state approach to the problem.

How could such a drastic shift in thinking come about? And how should we view this unexpected development? To speak intelligently about such questions requires a firm grasp of both the history of Zionist movement and the history of Palestinian nationalism. And I think it is fair to say that the author, Benny Morris, a professor of history at Ben Gurion University and an author of many books on the Arab-Israeli conflict, is qualified on both counts.

The approach that Morris takes in addressing these questions is a comprehensive review of the events that have led us to the current state of affairs and the approaches that both sides have adopted in their pursuit of a resolution of the conflict. Despite their obvious differences, it is surprising to learn that both the Jews and the Arabs have followed a similar pattern, that is, both sides began with a one-state approach, then they adopted a two-state approach, and more recently they have moved back toward a one-state approach. On the Jewish side, the shift to a two-state approach began in response to the Peel Proposals put forth by a British commission in 1936 and reached its culmination in their acceptance of the UN Partition plan announced in 1947. On the Arab side, the shift took place in the late 1980's in the wake of the first intifada as a means of gaining western support for Palestinian independence.

*Israel's policy of settlement building is itself a one-state approach that is being relentless pursued to the detriment of the peace process. So whatever the Israelis may tell the West about their commitment to the two-state approach, their actions reveal their true goal, namely, a single Jewish state between the Mediterranean*

However Morris argues that these similarities are misleading. In fact, the central thrust of his book is that the PLO's adoption of a two-state approach was purely tactical and never sincere. And the proof that he offers in support of this

claim is the fact that the PLO never amended its charter, which calls for the destruction of the state of Israel. As further proof of the PLO's duplicity, he also points to Arafat's refusal to compromise or even seriously engage with Clinton and Barak at Camp David. From Morris' perspective, the failure of Camp David should be laid at the feet of Arafat. Furthermore, Arafat's refusal to compromise at Camp David is seen as proof that the PLO's is still clinging to its original one-state solution, namely, the destruction of the state of Israel.

From Morris' point of view then, Arafat's refusal to negotiate in good faith at Camp David marked the Palestinian rejection of the two-state approach in favour of a one-state approach.

What about the Israelis? Do they bear any responsibility for the failure at Camp David? And do they still advocate a two-state approach? On these questions Morris acknowledges that the failure of the Israeli left to achieve peace at Camp David strengthened the hand of the Israeli hardliners and opened the way for a more aggressive policy of settlement building in the Occupied Territories. However Morris plays down the significance of this development and continues to blame Arafat and the PLO for their duplicity.

But Morris' attempt to lay all the blame on Arafat for the failure of the peace process seems unjust. After all, Israel's policy of settlement building is itself a one-state approach that is being relentlessly pursued to the detriment of the peace process. So whatever the Israelis may tell the West about their commitment to the two-state approach, their actions reveal their true goal, namely, a single Jewish state between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. It seems then that the Israelis are just as guilty of duplicity as the Palestinians.

As you are approaching the end of the book you begin to wonder if Professor Morris, with all of his academic qualifications, will be able to offer the reader a solution of his own. But I am sad to say that he has none to give. Nevertheless the strength of the book lies in its comprehensive and, for the most part, objective treatment of the material. Consequently, I would not hesitate to recommend it to anyone who wants a concise history of the Arab-Israeli conflict and a clear assessment of where it stands today.

***Reviewed by Gregg Doolittle***

*Gregg has lived with his family and worked in Israel/Palestine for thirty years.*

# THE CRUSADES, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

(THE OCTOBER 2007 BAMPTON LECTURES IN AMERICA  
AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY)

by Jonathan Riley-Smith

New York: Columbia University Press, 2008

Riley-Smith's four lectures on the historical record of what the Crusades actually were do a great job, in just 80 pages, of unveiling the true nature of the Crusades. He shows how vastly different those holy wars were from what uninformed Westerners and Islamists alike usually perceive them to have been. Riley-Smith argues persuasively that the perception most contemporary Muslims have of the Crusades dates only from the *end* of the nineteenth century. In his lectures (which became this book) he sought to help people see the enormous gulf that has opened between the *historical actuality of the Crusades as understood by historical specialists* and the common *modern convictions about the nature and meaning of the Crusades* (pp. 5-6). Riley-Smith's explicitly states what he intends to be the main, and urgent, message of the book:

It is that we cannot hope to comprehend—and thereby confront—those who hate us so much unless we understand how they are thinking; and this involves opening our eyes to the actuality—not the imagined reality—of our own past (p. 6).

In this review I am going to give an overview of Riley-Smith's argument and then suggest a few implications that this understanding of the role of the Crusades in history could have for our understanding of Islamists and the ongoing permanent state of hostility that Muslim Arabs have toward the state of Israel and more generally, against the West and particularly against the United States.

There are so many assumption-destroying 'revelations' in this book that it is hard to decide which ones to mention, and which ones to leave for you to discover when you read the book yourself. For example, Riley-Smith suggests that Christian leaders, both Catholic and Protestant, are in a state of denial about the Crusades when they suggest that the Crusades really had very little to do with the true teachings of the church. He quotes an Oxford church history professor who suggested that the Crusades were 'a bizarre centuries-long episode in which western Christianity wilfully ignored its Master's principles of love and forgiveness' (p. 4). Riley-Smith suggests that such perspectives are totally unfounded historically, and that:

*Augustine believed that temporal rulers, even pagan ones, could rightly wage war, but he also believed that God could personally order war, and if he did so, it would be*

as recently as the seventeenth century, and perhaps more recently still, *most Christians*—Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant—*had in general no problem with the idea of holy war*. From the twelfth century to the seventeenth the consensus of the teaching of the Catholic bishops was that qualified men had *a moral obligation to take the cross*. This was reinforced by the support of a succession of men and women generally recognized as saints: Bernard of Clairvaux, Dominic, Louis of France, Thomas Aquinas, Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Siena, John of Capistrano, even probably Francis of Assisi (pp. 4-5, emphasis added).

Riley-Smith calls the Crusades penitential war pilgrimages. ‘To crusade meant to engage in a war that was both holy, because it was believed to be waged on God’s behalf, and penitential, because those taking part considered themselves to be performing an act of penance’ (p. 9). Before Christians gained political power, the Roman doctrine of just wars warranted the exercise of state force only when three conditions were properly met: (1) the motives must be good and for a just, or legally valid, reason, (2) it must be formally declared by an authority recognized as having the power to declare war, and (3) it must be waged justly (pp.12-13). Augustine adapted this and added some Christian nuances by arguing that a just cause for war was ‘an intolerable injury, usually taking the form of aggression or oppression’ (p. 12). Augustine believed that temporal rulers, even pagan ones, could rightly wage war, but he also believed that God could personally order war, and if he did so, it would be ‘without doubt just’ (p. 12). Augustine helpfully insisted that the *right intention* had to be present; those undertaking war had to be motivated by love and should use only as much force as necessary, so as to mitigate the suffering of the innocent as much as possible.

Unfortunately, Augustine also advocated two other principles that were not so great: (1) that it was God who authorized wars when his ministers declared war, and that (2) such authorized violence was morally neutral because it was undertaken in obedience to God. Thus, following Augustine’s lead, holy war came to be understood as authorized directly, or indirectly, by God, and being fought to further God’s intentions. The moral force of the violence was all in the intention of the perpetrators. Killing was not bad, since men will die anyway, but the suffering is bad. If they were rightly motivated, then the violence committed was morally neutral (pp. 12-13). Further, the Crusades, like all holy wars, could only be reactive, and never wars of aggression or oppression (p. 15). Moreover, since Crusades were fought by volunteers, a convincing case had to be made for every war. A powerful theme in persuading people of the need for the Crusades was that an endangered Christ was personally calling on men to hurry to his aid.

But one central aspect of the Crusades which made them exceptions to normal ‘holy’ wars was that these wars were undertaken, by the participants, as

wars of penance. All crusaders were expected to behave as thought they were penitents on a pilgrimage. When not in armour crusaders were supposed to dress simply as pilgrims. It is said that after the liberation of Jerusalem in 1099 the survivors of the first crusade threw away most of their weapons and armour and returned home carrying only the palm fronds that showed they had completed their pilgrimage (p. 30). This was a revolutionary re-conceiving of holy war.

It was a belief that the Crusades were collective acts of penance, repayments through self-punishment of the debts owed to God for sin, which distinguished them from other holy wars.... It is no exaggeration to say that a crusade was for an individual only secondarily about service in arms to God or the benefiting of the church or Christianity; it was primarily about benefiting himself, since he was engaged in an act of self-sanctification.... The penitential nature of crusading helps to explain why, after the often revolting violence, the most characteristic feature of any expedition was how liturgical it was. The first crusaders began each new stage of the march barefoot and they fasted before every major engagement (pp. 33, 34).

Over time the cross began to be strongly associated with the Crusades. In the devotional life of the Middle Ages, the cross gave meaning to everything, and the Crucifixion was the centre of piety and imagery of that devotion. Cross-centred language grew around 1200 and was pervasive in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (p. 41). One 'James of Vitry' in seeking to inspire volunteers for a crusade made this appeal:

What greater almsgiving can there be than offering oneself and one's belongings to God and risking one's life for Christ, leaving behind one's wife, children, relations and birthplace for the service of Christ, exposing oneself to dangers on land, dangers at sea, dangers from thieves, dangers from plunderers, the danger of battle for the love of the Crucified (p. 40)?

Those undertaking a crusade had NO thought of material gain from the pilgrimage. Crusades were dangerous (with a death rate exceeding 40% for some), inconvenient, always very expensive with few rewards and very costly. They were a severe drain on family resources throughout their history. Yet, in spite of these hardships, most devout Christians believed, for centuries, that war against perceived enemies of Christendom and the church had both necessary and beneficial qualities, not the least of which was that those taking part in the crusade pilgrimage could repay the debt their sinfulness had incurred (p. 43-44).

In the second half of his book, Riley-Smith shows that Crusading was not an early kind of European imperialism. He then goes on to show how late nineteenth century European imperialists drew on the distorted romantic images of Crusading, such as those portrayed in Walter Scott's novels, and sought to appropriate these images for their own imperialistic ends. By the end of the

nineteenth century, however, most Muslims had entirely forgotten about the Crusades, which they viewed as having been decisively won by their own side.

But then, as Riley-Smith shows in his fourth chapter, the emerging Arab nationalists in the early twentieth century took the nineteenth century imperialist crusade rhetoric literally, and came to believe that the West was embarking on yet another crusade because they had lost the first round of Crusades. This nineteenth century romanticised reinterpretation of the Crusades, manufactured by European imperialist, is now taken as fact throughout the Muslim world; this perception is a central part of the motivation that drives Islamists today—the need to fight against the crusade that Westerners are perpetrating against Islam in its heartland. Many Muslims see the European installation of the Jewish state of Israel as one of the primary instruments of crusading efforts in the twentieth century. The Islamists' commitment to destroy the state of Israel and push the Jews into the Mediterranean sea is understood to be a necessary act of holy war against the crusading West that has installed a vassal state in the Muslim heartland. The West must be defeated again, just as, after the initial successes of the Crusaders in the eleventh century, they were eventually soundly defeated.

Riley-Smith comments that in our Western efforts to counter *jihadism*, little effort has been made to counter this seriously distorted Muslim reading of Crusade history. We tend to see Crusading in much the same way that Muslims see it, and are often ashamed of it. Recent attempts to apologize to Muslims for the Crusades are pointless, for 'an apology for past events would have been futile as far as the Muslims are concerned, since crusading is for them still a reality, conducted in more sophisticated and effective ways than ever before' (p. 77).

Reading this short presentation of the penitentiary nature of the Crusades—and of how the Crusades were re-interpreted and appropriated by nineteenth century imperialists, and then used by first Arab nationalist, and more recently by jihadists—has been very illuminating. I now better understand the nature of the Crusades, why they were defended and justified by the vast majority of Christians for 6-700 years, and how it is that present day Muslims have come to believe a distortion of this ignoble history and use it as fuel for their jihadist zeal against the 'crusading West'. One's reading of history certainly impacts one's deeds in the present, and both sides of the continuing clash between Islam and the Western powers are not being helped by this serious misreading of crusader history.

***Reviewed by Don Little***

## THE SEVENFOLD COMMISSION OF THE CROSS AND THE MARSH ARABS

by Brother Samuel

(Available online: [www.marsharabs.synthasite.com](http://www.marsharabs.synthasite.com), 106 pages)

Wilfred Thesiger's classic book entitled *The Marsh Arabs* fascinated me as a young man and any related article still attracts my attention. I met Brother Samuel, the author of *The Sevenfold Commission of the Cross & The Marsh Arabs*, a few years ago when I was the speaker at a mission's conference in Africa. Brother Samuel shared with me his vision for this unreached people group. In this work he brings together what he describes as two streams; the traditional last seven words of Christ on the cross as expounded at many Good Friday services, and the Marsh Arabs of southern Iraq. The Biblical framework becomes the scaffold for theological reflection, ethnological information, and missiological application. For those of us more familiar with mainstream Sunni Islam, we are given insights into Shi'a Islam. However, this is not intended in any way to be a study of Shi'a doctrine.

The list of Contents sets the scene for what follows with single-word chapter titles and the related Biblical texts, which are frustratingly omitted in the actual chapter headings. Brother Samuel quotes extensively from a broad range of revered divines, from John Calvin to John Piper. Baby-boomers will enjoy the ever-insightful comments of FF Bruce, J Stott, L Morris, and WW Wiersbe.

The introduction and first two chapters entitled 'Ignorance' and 'Paradise' challenge the reader to take the Great Commission seriously, especially in the context of the Marsh Arabs to whom there is no known outreach. This people group is introduced along with some information about Shi'a Islam. Chapter two contains a valuable comparison between paradise in the Bible and in the Qur'an (Djanna/Jannah). Brother Samuel quotes repeatedly from Mufti Zubair Bayat's book entitled *Maidens of Paradise* and then asks, 'Do "good" Marsh Arabs go to paradise?' (p. 24) Using the 'great balances' (Mizan) image for judgement in the Qur'an we are reminded that they are indeed in desperate need of Christ. He writes, 'Their paradisiacal chimera promises plenty but Mizan reduces to penury' (p. 25). As the dying criminal is promised paradise by the crucified Jesus, so the proclamation of the Gospel gives hope to the Marsh Arabs.

I found chapter three, 'Family', the most interesting. Brother Samuel draws our attention to Jesus' concern for the welfare of his mother. The primacy of the family, especially the extended family, and the relationship between sons and

their mothers characterize all ‘collective’ societies, not least the Arab world. There is a helpful aside regarding the use of the term ‘woman’ rather than ‘mother’ in the dialogue between Jesus and Mary (p. 31). He also touches on the suffering of Mary, a theme to which he returns several times. The application to the daily experience of Marsh Arab women, especially in the context of their people’s near genocide under Saddam Hussein’s hegemony, is excellent. For example, this quote from Deborah Meroff sums up the position of women in post-war Iraq, ‘This country’s population is 60 percent women, and as many as 300,000 are war widows’ (p. 35). The Calvary application of the filial respect Jesus shows to his mother and her suffering transfer easily to the Marsh Arab milieu. The classical Qur’anic denial of the death of Jesus on the cross averts our eyes from the foot of the cross. We should pay more attention to the Golgotha tableau. On a visit to the Philippines, a Christian brother told me of a believer from a Muslim background who had come to faith in Christ as a result of contemplating Mary at the cross. In a Muslim society who knows their son the best? His mother. If Jesus had been substituted by another, his mother would have known.

Chapters four (Forsaken) and five (Thirst) address the two hard sayings of Jesus from the cross. They raise the question for the Muslim that if Jesus was divine how could he insult God. Brother Samuel quotes one Muslim commentator, ‘Further, it is incredible that such words should come from a Prophet of Allah because Allah never breaks His Promise and His Prophets never complained against His Promise’ (p. 42). The argument follows that the Scriptures must therefore be corrupted. Brother Samuel reviews the Christian explanations of the ‘forsaken’ words, drawing on Stott and Bruce. He concludes that the cry of Jesus expresses the profound agony of a ‘very special death’ (p. 47) of the only sacrificial Lamb of God who could take away the sin of the world. The application of such suffering to the Marsh Arab context is transparent. Brother Samuel provides six quotations that vividly portray the terrible suffering that these people have endured. A brief foray into the Shi’a doctrine of martyrdom follows. This doctrine can become a means of delivering the Gospel meaningfully to a Shi’a Muslims and, in my observation, often sustains Christians from Shi’a Muslim backgrounds during persecution. (Chapter 6 expands this theme.) Brother Samuel writes, ‘The massacre of Husayn on the plains of Karbala has created the sad opportunity to repeatedly reiterate the refrain of suffering.’ (p. 52) I am not going to elaborate on the theme of water, either from Scripture or the Marsh Arabs’ dependency upon it. Life-giving water for those who thirst physically and spiritually needs no further amplification.

In Chapter six (Completion) the author expands the theme of martyrdom and the special role of Husayn. He writes, ‘Husayn is more than a striking memory—to the Shi’ites he is a ransom for his people. He is the intercessor

before God.’ (p. 74) Brother Samuel brings the doctrine of martyrdom into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with Khomeini himself who ‘enjoined martyrdom for Islam as a religious duty’. (p. 75) ‘It is finished’ is the great victory cry from the cross. Shi’ites need no longer perpetuate the barbarity of the Ashura; salvation has been secured in Jesus.

Chapter seven (Destination) summarizes the previous six words of Christ on the cross, and as Brother Samuel describes, ‘their glorious crescendo cascades out in the seventh’. (p. 83) This chapter concentrates on the person of the Father into whose hands Jesus confidently entrusts himself. He writes, ‘*Father* is foreign to Islam’ (p. 84). We are introduced to one distinguishing Shi’ite doctrine best defined in a quotation to be found in the *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* in the section on the Shi’a, ‘The Qur’an is neither creator nor created; it is the word of a creator.’<sup>1</sup> This fine distinction distances Marsh Arabs from God even further than the Sunni doctrine of the uncreated word which is equal to God. Using this apologetic, Brother Samuel seeks to build up the picture of the immense separation between God and humanity for this people group. He develops this argument in discussing the one name of the 99 attributes of God that implies love—Al-Wadood. The Most Loving. He writes, ‘No glimpse in Al-Wadood of preceding, pre-eminent grace and love . . .’ (p. 87). He then applies the truth of the Fatherhood of God to the Marsh Arabs by way of judgment.

The final chapter is entitled ‘Further Thoughts’. Among several helpful comments I found this to be the most interesting. Brother Samuel writes, ‘I want to see more of Scripture in missionary correspondence. I want to understand your work in the framework of Scripture. I want to enter your world on the supreme authority of Scripture’ (p. 94). The writer prefaces a selection of cross-centred quotations with this sentence, ‘There is no more eloquent call to the Marsh Arabs to embrace the Crucified Saviour than His cross’ (p. 96).

This book is a model of how to present the Great Commission mandate to the Christian community using the great themes of Scripture through an unreached people group in order to reach them with the Gospel. I encourage people to access it, read it and apply it in their own situations.

***Reviewed by Keith Fraser-Smith***

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<sup>1</sup> Gibb, H.A.R and Kramers J.H., *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, E.J. Brill 1991, p. 536



'The state of Israel, as a geopolitical entity, is a present reality in our world but is not synonymous with God's Kingdom. That role belongs to Christ alone, not to any political entity anywhere in the world. The current state of affairs in Israel and Palestine is a missiological emergency. Muslim nations are deeply offended by what they perceive as impartial political, military and economic support of the Israeli state by Western Evangelicals. The truth is that the Western church has become enmeshed in the political and monetary support of this state. The church must realize that her theology of Israel implicates her in responsibility for atrocities committed against Palestinians and Israelis. This calls for deep contrition and humility on the part of the church.'

– Mike Kuhn, pages 18-19



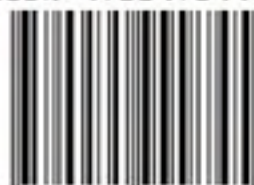
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