

The Future of Israel: Where is This All Heading?

This year has been without question the most significant and consequential year in the Middle East since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Jewish possession of Jerusalem in 1967, and the Wars that followed 9/11/01. Between the "Arab Spring," the evolving Israel/Turkey/Egypt relations, and the current debate over a Palestinian State, the social and geopolitical landscape of the Middle East has changed dramatically from what it was a year ago. And it will continue to change. It would be difficult to exaggerate the critical nature of this present juncture.

Later this week, on Friday September 23, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas will submit a bid for the United Nations to recognize a Palestinian State. This would include the acknowledgment of the Palestinians as a governing body within the United Nations Assembly, the dividing up of the city of Jerusalem, and the dividing up of the Land of Israel back to the pre-1967 borders. It is unlikely that this bid will result in anything material in the immediate. Speeches will be made, politicians will debate, journalists will argue, and the situation in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip will remain as it currently is: divided, contentious, and monotonously unproductive.

Leaders from Israel, the US, and a small number of other nations want to go about Palestinian Statehood through direct negotiations with both parties. A bid at the UN is essentially the bypassing of negotiations and the avoidance of direct communication. This infuriates Israel and worries leaders from the US, Britain and a number other nations (a minority). But if Israel rejects the bid (which they will) and the US and others veto it (which they will) the Arab world will be infuriated (who have already expressed their support for the bid). This is why legal experts, Hamas, Netanyahu, "the Quartet," Hillary Clinton, Barak Obama, Tony Blair and others from across the political spectrum see the UN bid as a hindrance to peace and Statehood.

It's important to understand that this week marks a significant transition in the modern history of the Middle East with regards to the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. The fact that *these* issues are being discussed at *this* level is monumental. It is catalytic and will have long term consequences (regardless of the immediate outcome). The Palestinians know this. Israel knows this. The Arab world knows this. The United Nations know this. The powers and principalities know this. And the Lord knows this.

This stage of the debate over Palestinian Statehood reminds us of the fact that the "controversy of Zion" (Isaiah 34:8; Zechariah 12:2, 9; 14:1-3) will continue to escalate until the Lord returns. And as it does, these issues will continue to divide the nations and the Church in an increasingly heated way.

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In this session my goal is threefold:

1. **WHAT IS HAPPENING?** Give an overview of the current developments in the Middle East specifically pertaining to the mounting controversy over the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.
2. **WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN?** Give an overview of what the Bible says about the future of the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.
3. **HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?** Give an overview of how we should posture ourselves to live in light of these realities.

I. WHAT IS HAPPENING?

- A. **We’re witnessing the outworking of the consequences of 1948 and 1967.** The road to Palestinian Statehood is fraught with difficulty because of Jewish tenure in the Land since the middle of the last century (seen by Palestinians as “occupation” and “apartheid”). Thus the controversy over the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the City of Jerusalem is intensifying because of the debate over the “right to the Land.”



- B. **The “controversy of Zion” is polarizing unbelievers.** It’s becoming more common to hear the State of Israel spoken of as “The Occupation” and an “apartheid State.” In the eyes of much of the international

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community the guilt of Israel is mounting with every year that passes. With that said, there is a significant pro-Israel contingent among the nations (particularly in the US and parts of Europe). Both sides are becoming more passionate about their perception of "justice."

C. **The "controversy of Zion" is polarizing professing believers.** There are 3 primary issues over which the Church is being divided:

1. **JUSTICE:** Perception of social justice for the Palestinians

Israel is "an apartheid State practising repressive and dehumanising measures against the indigenous Palestinians in flagrant disregard of universally recognised standards of human behaviour." (**Stephen Sizer**, *Christian Zionism: Justifying Apartheid in the Name of God*)

Despite the fact that the leaders of the Arab world are (admittedly) responsible for the initial expulsion of the Arabs living in the Land in 1947-1949, many impute the weight of the guilt to Israel. **Mahmud Abbas** himself said:

"The Arab armies entered Palestine to protect the Palestinians from the Zionist tyranny but, instead, they abandoned them, forced them to emigrate and to leave their homeland, and threw them into prisons similar to the ghettos in which the Jews used to live." (The March 1976 issue of *Falastin a-Thaura*, then the official journal of the Beirut-based PLO)

In his 1972 memoirs, **Haled al Azm, the Syrian Prime Minister** in 1948-49, explained the Arab role in persuading the Arab population to leave the Land in 1948:

"Since 1948 we have been demanding the return of the refugees to their homes. But we ourselves are the ones who encouraged them to leave. Only a few months separated our call to them to leave and our appeal to the United Nations to resolve on their return We brought disaster upon...Arab refugees, by inviting them and bringing pressure to bear upon them to leave....We have rendered them dispossessed....We have accustomed them to begging....We have participated in lowering their moral and social level....Then we exploited them in executing crimes of murder, arson, and throwing bombs upon...men, women and children-all this in the service of political purposes..." (*The Memoirs of Haled al Azm, Beirut, 1973, Part 1, pp. 386-387*)¹

¹ For more information about the Arab involvement in the expulsion of the Arabs from Israel in 1948 see: <http://thecontroversyofzion.com/2011/09/israel-the-apartheid-state-who-is-responsible-for-the-palestinian-refugees/>

2. **COVENANT:** The role of the Abrahamic covenant and "the Land" after the first coming of Jesus

In a word, *Jesus spiritualizes the land*...Now Jesus is the sole source of life and hope and future. The land as holy territory therefore should now recede from the concerns of God's people. (**Gary Burge**, *Jesus and the Land*, p. 53, 56)

"There is, therefore, no evidence that the apostles believed that *the Jewish people still had a divine right to the land, or that Jewish possession of the land would be important*, let alone that Jerusalem would remain a central aspect of God's purposes for the world. On the contrary...*Jerusalem as much as land, has now been superceded. They have been made irrelevant to God's redemptive purposes.*" (**Stephen Sizer**, *Christian Zionism*, (IVP Academic; IVP/UK Edition edition, December 1, 2005) p. 170, 204)

3. **JEWES:** The role of the Jewish people in God's end-time purposes after the first coming of Jesus

"It may seem harsh to say that, 'God is through with the Jews.' *But the fact of the matter is that He is through with them* as a unified national group....This does not mean, of course, that the Jews will never go back to Palestine--as indeed some of them have already established the nation if Israel...But it does mean that as any of them go back they do entirely on their own, *apart from any covenanted purpose to that end and entirely outside of Scripture prophecy*. No Scripture blessing is promised for a project of that kind." (**Lorraine Boettner**, *The Millennium*, (P & R Publishing, December 1, 1990) p. 314)

II. WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN?

- A. The "controversy of Zion" will continue to polarize unbelievers.

1. The "siege of Jerusalem" and the "scourge" of Zion

2 "Behold, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of staggering to all the surrounding peoples. The siege of Jerusalem will also be against Judah. 3 On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples. All who lift it will surely hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth will gather against it. (Zechariah 12:2-3)

1 Behold, a day is coming for the LORD, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst. 2 For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the women raped. Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. (Zechariah 14:1-2)

18 ...when the overwhelming scourge passes through, you will be beaten down by it. 19 As often as it passes through it will take you; for morning by morning it will pass through, by day and by night; and it will be sheer terror to understand the message. (Isaiah 28:18-19)

2. The suffering of Israel "in the Land"

15 "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, 18 and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. 19 And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! 20 Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. 22 And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. (Matthew 24:15-22)

***8 In the whole land, declares the LORD, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive. 9 And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'*" (Zechariah 13:8-9)**

3. The suffering of Israel who are "driven" from the Land and "banished" among the nations

12 In that day from the river Euphrates [Iraq] to the Brook of Egypt the LORD will thresh out the grain, and you will be gleaned one by one, O people of Israel. 13 And in that day a great

trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria [Iran/Iraq] and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem. (Isaiah 27:12-13)

12 He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. 16 And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt. (Isaiah 11:12, 16)

- B. The "controversy of Zion" will continue to polarize professing believers.
1. Some will openly oppose Israel before, during, and after the invasions of the "time of Jacob's trouble" begin.
 2. Some will openly and affectionately identify with Israel before, during and after the invasions of "the time of Jacob's trouble" begin.
 3. The middle ground of neutrality will be whittled down as the "controversy" intensifies and the invasions unfold. As it was in Europe in the 1930's and 1940's many will attempt to avoid the issue of the Jew. But this won't be possible without ending up eventually sinning against them by sitting in silence in the face of gross violence and injustice.

III. HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

- A. **Pain** - Enter into the "burden of the Lord" (Zech. 12-14) concerning "the siege of Jerusalem." Feel it. Sense it. Discern it. Steward it. Don't hide from it. Don't ignore it. Jeremiah and Paul were not unfamiliar with pain associated with Israel's past, present, and future.
- B. **Prayer** - Cultivate a Jeremiah 23:18 lifestyle of standing in the counsel of the Lord to hear what He is saying and to pray it back to the Lord like Daniel, Jeremiah, Joel and Isaiah.
- C. **Prophecy/Preaching** - Boldly and faithfully declare what the Word of God says about the Lord's future dealings with Israel's tumultuous future. This will require wisdom and courage (rare commodities at the moment).

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Wisdom to faithfully declare the truth of Israel in light of the matrix of complexities. And courage to resist the opposition that will continue to mount.

- D. **Provision** - Give extravagantly to Messianic believers in the Land. Give extravagantly to poor and oppressed Jews and Palestinians who will bear the brunt of the violence. Care for Jews who escape the Land when the invasions begin.

- E. **Provocation** - Embrace the New Testament mandate to "provoke Israel to jealousy" (Romans 11:11-12) by whatever sacrificial means possible.