

Paradox

by Tony Higton

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Ministry in Israel and the Palestinian Territories Issue 35 November 2012

The newsletter is available free on request to those who send their name and email address to: tony@higton.info
Please encourage others to join the mailing list.

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NEW PAPERS ON OUR CHRISTIAN TEACHING RESOURCES WEBSITE <http://www.christianteaching.org.uk/>

“CAN WE IGNORE WHAT THE NT SAYS ABOUT THE SIGNS OF JESUS’ RETURN?”

This is a neglected subject because of embarrassment about extremist, crazy and paranoid teaching about how the signs are being fulfilled today. And yet Jesus clearly expects us to be watching out for signs of the End and to be teaching about them in the church. This paper is a constructively critical, extensively researched and full-documented study of how the signs are being fulfilled today.

“SOME THOUGHTS ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION”

This paper deals with the following subjects:

How should we interpret Revelation?	What about the wrath of God in Revelation?
Will there be a “Great Tribulation” in the future?	Is there a chronological order in Revelation?
Is there a secret “rapture” of the believers before the “Great Tribulation”?	Are the numbers in Revelation literal?
Will there be an Antichrist?	A brief outline of the Book of Revelation
Will there be a Battle of Armageddon?	An outline diagram of the Book of Revelation
Will there be a literal Millennium on earth?	Appendix: A brief outline of Old Testament eschatology
Will there literally be a New Heavens and a New Earth?	

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“HOW GOD OPERATES IN THE WORLD”

Does God intervene in the world? Does prayer make a difference? How does God work out his purposes in the world? How does God bless people? How does God judge people? This paper addresses these issues.

“HOW DOES THE GENESIS ACCOUNT OF THE FALL OF MAN RELATE TO EVOLUTION?”

Does the Bible teach there was no suffering and death in the whole of creation before the Fall of man (to temptation)? Was creation perfect before the Fall? How can millions of years of “Nature red in tooth and claw” be squared with the Genesis account? Were human beings immortal before the Fall? This paper addresses these issues.

THE GAZA CONFLICT AND THE PEACE PROCESS

It is easy to condemn Israel for its attacks on Gaza which have led to numerous civilian deaths. However no nation can fail to respond if over 1000 rockets (in 2012) are fired at its territory and especially at its own civilians. In 2011 there were 627 rockets and in 2010 231, so the attacks were getting much worse. Hence both President Obama and William Hague blamed Hamas for the crisis. Israel also knows that some 11,000 Iranian missiles had been smuggled into Gaza (many of them destroyed in the recent conflict).

Obviously, negotiation is better than military attack. However, although Egypt arranged an informal truce in late October, the rockets continued, as did minor Israeli responses. It is reported that Ahmed al-Jabari, the Hamas military chief, who was assassinated by Israel on November 14th, had just received the draft of a permanent truce agreement with Israel. If this is true then it is possible the military action could have been avoided. Maybe it is unlikely given the extremist groups in Gaza who were likely to fire their rockets anyway.

Tragically, civilians died on both sides. Because Hamas uses civilians as ‘human shields’ around its weapons, the Israelis concluded they could do no other than to risk serious “collateral damage” as it is coldly described. A ground offensive would have led to even more civilian deaths.

It is clear that Hamas is implacably opposed to Israel. But it is arguable that had Israel lifted the blockade on Gaza the situation may not have got out of hand. The blockade has been relaxed but there are still tight controls on exports which harms the economy and on fishing. The water supply is limited and power supply unreliable. Israel claims the restrictions are essential to prevent the smuggling of weapons to Hamas but

many people see the restrictions as excessive and punitive.

It is also possible that Israel's lack of interest in the peace process has exacerbated the troubles in Gaza.

The truce

We can be grateful that Egypt negotiated the truce and it is vital that it continues. The Palestinians have agreed to stop rocket attacks and Israel has agreed to stop military action. There are also discussions about further relaxation of border restrictions.

The new Middle East

Egypt's President Morsi seems to have performed a very effective balancing act. On the one hand, he condemned "Israeli aggression", and withdrew Egypt's ambassador to Israel. He also sent Prime Minister Hesham Kandil to Gaza. On the other, he didn't offer military support to Hamas nor did he threaten Israel. More important, he negotiated the ceasefire. All this is encouraging that the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt seems intact. However, now there is great unrest in Egypt over Morsi's subsequent assuming of almost dictatorial powers and it is difficult to see how this will turn out.

The situation has changed in the Middle East. So-called moderate Arab states regarded as allies of the West (Bahrain, the Emirates, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia) are preoccupied with their internal conflicts and the danger of Islamists coming to power. Of those opposing the West, Iran is still a threat. Syria is, of course, taken up with its internal conflicts. And both Hamas and Hezbollah have supported the Syrian opposition rather than President Assad. Consequently, Hezbollah could no longer help Hamas by opening up a northern front against Israel, as it did in 2006. If Islamist Sunnis take over in Syria, Hezbollah would be isolated from Iran. Also the supply of arms to Hamas is hindered by the Syrian crisis.

So far, Israel has only had slight problems from Syria: Syrian tanks entering the Golan Heights, some mortar fire which led to an Israeli warning shot into Syria. But if militant Islamist jihadi groups exploit the instability and take over in various nations this would threaten regional stability around Israel. The last state could be worse than the first.

Peace Process

The Peace Process has been on hold for four years. Israel blames the Palestinians' lack of recognition that it is a Jewish state and their demand for a freeze on Jewish settlements on the West Bank. But, for all its past statements, the Netanyahu government seems to have little real interest in a peace settlement with the Palestinians. No-one should doubt that a nuclear Iran is a great threat to Israel. But it is also a convenient way of 'burying' the Palestinian issue, removing it from the agenda, which seems to have happened.

Israel has continued with development of settlements which is, of course, a major stumbling block for the Palestinians. It is true that the evacuation of the illegal settlement of Migron was carried out in September. But later in September Israel decided to enlarge the Itamar settlement to five times its size, adding 538 homes. Also in October Israel approved the building of 800 flats and a military college on contested land in East Jerusalem. Prime Minister Netanyahu said that there would be no restriction on building in Jerusalem.

One controversy due to come to a head in the very near future is the planned application by the Palestinians to be accepted by the UN as a 'non-member' state. President Abbas has said he will resume peace talks after that and there is some indication that he might drop the pre-condition of a settlement freeze because it would no longer be necessary if the UN recognizes a Palestinian state on the whole of the West Bank.

On November 4th Netanyahu invited Abbas to start direct negotiations without preconditions. But on November 7th it was announced that over 1,200 homes are to be built in Jewish settlements. This is seen as a threat against the Palestinians if they continue with their unilateral application for UN recognition. Israel also threatened to withhold the monthly \$100 million tax revenues which it collects for the Palestinian Authority on goods imported into the Palestinian areas. Obviously, Israel objects to unilateral action which could lead to international recognition of a Palestinian state. But there is another reason for their objection. Such

recognition would mean that the Palestinians would have access to the International Criminal Court in The Hague where they could take legal action against Israel. It is likely that many cases would arise over the settlements and over Israeli actions which are seen by the Palestinians as unjust and oppressive.

If Israel were to withhold the tax this could lead to serious unrest on the West Bank. There were violent demonstrations there in September over the rising cost of living. This could weaken the Palestinian Authority, which is not to Israel's advantage and could even lead to violence against Israelis.

Israeli election

The Israeli General Election is planned for January 22nd 2013. At the end of October Netanyahu set up a partnership with extreme right wing Avigdor Lieberman to form a new coalition Likud Beiteinu. If elected this is likely to move the government further to the right.

Interestingly, Abbas said in October that he and former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert were only "two months" away from a peace deal before Mr Olmert had to step down. Olmert is likely to make a political comeback as head of a centrist bloc after being acquitted of corruption charges.

Olmert is making the most of criticising Netanyahu as a liability in the crucially important relationship with the United States. Netanyahu rather humiliated President Obama and came out in favour of Mitt Romney. Israeli Opposition leader Shaul Mofaz described this as "a rude, blunt, unprecedented, wanton and dangerous intervention in the United States election." The Israeli opposition think this has created a bad relationship with Obama which bodes ill for decisions about Iran early next year.

Iran

Netanyahu has used a great deal of pro-war rhetoric against Iran. When he spoke to the UN in September he held a drawing of a large bomb with a fuse to illustrate the danger of Iran developing nuclear weapons, which he believes will be by summer 2013. Shaul Mofaz, who was Defence Minister briefly in Netanyahu's government, said: "Mr Netanyahu is obsessed with an Israeli attack on Iran. In the 70 days that I sat in government, more than half the meetings that Mr Netanyahu arranged with me were spent in attempts to persuade me we should attack Iran without American or Western support." However many people, including the Shin Bet security service and the Mossad secret service have warned against an attack. Over 50% of Israelis are against an attack.

How should we pray? –

Clearly, Israel is facing many problems: tension with Hamas, the Palestinian approach to the UN, the potential nuclear threat from Iran, the danger of extreme Islamists coming to power in surrounding countries, etc. We all need to pray about those issues:

- 1. For the truce between Israel and Hamas to last.**
- 2. For God to curb extremists who might seek to fire rockets at Israel**
- 3. For God to enable Israel to lift the blockade from the people of Gaza.**
- 4. For a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians.**
- 5. For God to overrule the application of the Palestinians to be a non-member state of the UN.**
- 6. For God to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapons.**
- 7. For peace, stability and true democracy in all Middle East countries.**
- 8. For the party of God's choice to be elected in the Israeli election (January 22nd).**

A word to Christian Zionists

(Some on the mailing list are Christian Zionists, others are not. Both are equally welcome. Those who don't regard themselves as Christian Zionists will probably agree with the main things I say here)

The above prayer topics are very important, but there are more fundamental issues.

Christian Zionists believe:

- God has not finished with the Jewish people in terms of election (Rom 11:25-32).
- Jesus will “turn godlessness away from Jacob and take away their sins” (Rom 11:26-27).

However, there are equally important aspects of the teaching of Scripture about Israel:

- Living in the land is conditional on obedience to God. God is, of course, very merciful. In fact, the Jewish people were allowed to return to Israel in unbelief (i.e. in Jesus) in God's mercy because of their great suffering and rejection, culminating in the Holocaust. It was also because of his long-term purposes. Christian Zionists assume God has brought Israel back to the land for keeps, and their military strength seems to support this. But what of the condition of obedience?
- By and large Israel still rejects her Messiah. This is a fundamental point. Sadly, there are (even Evangelical) Christians who believe the “Two-Covenant Theory” – the idea that we Gentiles come to salvation through faith in Jesus and Jewish people come through sincere Judaism. They are profoundly mistaken. We have met (Gentile) Evangelical Zionists in Israel who disapproved of evangelism amongst Jewish people. They are equally mistaken. A true Christian Zionist will support and earnestly pray for evangelism amongst Jewish people (they could, for example, support Rachel Netanel). A true Christian Zionist will earnestly pray that Jewish people will come to faith in Christ. (We should pray similarly for Palestinians).
- I am well aware of the faults on the Palestinian side, the political and security issues, and the propaganda. But it is true that Israel does, to a really significant degree, treat the Palestinians unjustly and oppressively. Yet the Jewish Scriptures are quite clear (in this context, the word foreigner can be ‘non-Jew.’): “Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the foreigner” (Deut 27: 17, 19). “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not ill-treat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God” (Lev 19.33-34). A true Christian Zionist will therefore pray earnestly about the faults of Israel.

The New Testament teaches that:

- We should long for the appearing of Jesus (2 Tim 4:8).
- We should speed the coming of Christ (2 Peter 3:11-12) which would include:
 - Supporting evangelism
 - Praying for his coming (“Your kingdom come”)
 - Repenting and obeying (Acts 3:19-21). The Rabbis said: “It is the sins of the people which prevent the coming of the Messiah. If Jews would genuinely repent for one day, the Messiah would come” and “If Israel would perfectly keep the Torah [Law] for one day, the Messiah would come.”

We therefore can speed the coming of Messiah by:

- **Supporting, praying about and, where possible, doing evangelism amongst Jewish people** (Pray for Rachel Netanel: see the attached pdf file or ask us for her newsletter).
- **Praying that Jewish people will recognize Jesus as their Messiah.**
- **Praying they will repent of their sins, including sins against the Palestinians.**

SUPPORT BEIT NETANEL (“House of Netanel”): the evangelistic and reconciliation ministry of Rachel Netanel in the outskirts of Jerusalem, which seeks to reach Israelis (Jewish and Arab) and Palestinians with the Gospel in their own language and culture, bringing Jews and Arabs together under the love of Jesus, eating and studying together in a family atmosphere. Rachel holds a weekly meeting of some 50 people, group meetings for 10-20 people, bi-monthly meetings for 100-200 and daily individual ministry. Over 2000 people have heard the Gospel. Her newsletter is available through Paradox. Her website is www.rachelnetanel.net

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