

# The Paradox Newsletter

by The Rev. Tony Higton

## The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Ministry in Israel and the Palestinian Territories

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*Paradox Ministries encourages Christians to understand and pray about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, seeing it through the eyes of both people groups involved, and taking the needs, fear and pain of both sides seriously. Its director, the Rev Tony Higton, who was Rector of a church in the Old City of Jerusalem for a number of years, circulates this email newsletter, speaks at seminars and encourages support of indigenous reconciliation ministry in Jerusalem. The newsletter is available free on request to those who add their email address to our Newsletter update list, available on the top of the ['Newsletter' page](#). Alternatively, send your email address and name to us via our online [Contact Form](#). Please encourage others to join the mailing list.*  
Tony Higton

## A GROWTH IN ANTISEMITISM

There is a virulent new version of anti-Semitism in the UK, according to Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, with many more attacks on Jewish people, schools and cemeteries. It coincided with Israel's incursion into Gaza. However Rabbi Sacks stated that the situation had worsened since the 9/11 terrorist attacks which some blamed on the Jewish people.

In our 21<sup>st</sup> century global village, anti-Semitism is a worldwide problem, although it has always, of course, been widespread. Without an understanding of anti-Semitism it is not possible to understand the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict properly. It is a major factor.

Because of the centuries of vicious persecution and oppression of Jewish people (often, shamefully, by the Christian Church), they understandably feel threatened and insecure. Israel, the (relatively) safe homeland of the Jewish people, is suspicious of the motives of the world powers and wary of the intentions of the Arab world. After all, anti-Semitic statements are made in various Arab countries, not just in Iran.

Some Christians, in their laudable concern for the human rights of the Palestinians, underestimate the insecurity and paranoia which the Israelis feel. They are not careful to try and avoid sounding anti-Semitic in their often justified criticisms of Israel. And we all need to be aware of the possibility of our being affected by unconscious or unacknowledged anti-Semitism. Some vehement critics of Israel might be quite surprised and disturbed by spending a little time analysing their possibly mixed

motives. Anti-Semitism is the worlds longest hatred. Resentment of a people-group being described as the Chosen People and any failings by Jewish people are insufficient to explain it. Rather it has a spiritual origin which is related to divine purposes centred on that most famous son of Israel, our Jewish Saviour Jesus Christ.

Even the Popes advisers do not seem to realise that because of Jewish sensitivities he should, as a German and a Christian leader, have apologised for the Holocaust on his recent visit to Israel. His omission was predictably regarded as a serious failing. The stupid denial by a Vatican spokesman that Benedict was ever in the Hitler Youth didnt help.

Having said all that, there are faults on the other side. It is a convenient propaganda tactic for some Israelis to treat every criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic, which is ludicrous and offensive. Even some Christian Zionists take the same line. We who are concerned for peace and justice for all people groups in the Middle East must not be fazed by this attempt to induce groundless guilt feelings, even when it is related to the Holocaust.

It is important, out of genuine concern for the Israelis as well as the Palestinians, on the one hand to make necessary and constructive criticism of Israel but on the other to make allowances for Jewish/Israeli insecurities and sensitivities. As Prime Minister Netanyahu put it recently, Israel is not like other countries. We are faced with security challenges that no other country faces, and our need to provide a response to these is critical.

It is equally important that Israel does not use accusations of anti-Semitism and even the tragedy of the Holocaust to fend off accurate criticisms which must be faced and responded to positively if there is to be peace.

## **IS ISRAEL SERIOUS ABOUT PEACE?**

At last Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said he accepts the creation of a Palestinian state but he added that it must be demilitarised. Israel is naturally afraid that withdrawal of the IDF from the West Bank would create a huge base for terror attacks on Israel. Netanyahu also said that Jerusalem must remain the unified capital of Israel.

He said Israel would not build any new settlements and would not expand existing settlements in the West Bank. However he added that natural growth must be allowed in these settlements.

Netanyahu is willing to meet Arab leaders to seek peace. But he stressed that the Palestinians must recognise Israel as a Jewish state. He ruled out any negotiations with Hamas whilst they did not recognise Israel.

Israeli President Shimon Peres told the Pope that this year could be the year Israel achieves peace with its neighbours.

On the other hand, Israel is going ahead with a plan to build a new settlement in the northern West Bank for the first time in 26 years and Ehud Barak has approved the building of 300 new homes in West Bank settlements. Also a secret plan by the Government and settlers to create nine national parks around the Old City of Jerusalem, thus radically changing the status quo in the city has been discovered. In addition the authorities plan to build dozens of homes for Jewish people in the middle of the Palestinian neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem. However more recently Israel appears to be moving towards a settlement freeze under American pressure and Netanyahu sent an envoy to Washington to discuss it. Netanyahu stopped the construction of some 900 apartments in East Jerusalem.

A *Peace Now* report indicates that 80 of the 100 outposts in the West Bank were built wholly or partly on private Palestinian land. Sixteen outposts are located entirely on private land, and more than half of the other outposts are on private land. 1750 of the 4,000 acres occupied by the 100 outposts are on privately owned Palestinian land.

A recent survey showed that 64% of Israelis accept the two state solution. However 56% said Netanyahu should not consent to the American demand to halt all settlement construction.

There is a cost for Israel in accepting the two state solution. The economic cost will include:

- the loss of many Israeli jobs which are based on occupying the West Bank.
- the loss of a testing ground for weapons in the Palestinian areas.
- equal sharing of water resources with the Palestinians (currently this is very unequal in favour of Israel).
- the loss of cheap housing for Israelis in the settlements.

However, in return, Israel would have four and a half times the territory envisaged by the Peel Commission and one and a half times that envisaged by the UN Partition Plan.

If Israel is serious about peace it needs to improve the situation in Gaza. A million and a half people are suffering in Gaza. Only a few products listed as food, medicine or detergent are allowed in. Hospitals rely on the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Health, in the West Bank, for supplies but the supply chain often breaks down.

Raw materials, building materials, electric appliances (including refrigerators and washing machines), spare parts for cars and machines, light bulbs, matches, needles, thread, shoes, mattresses, blankets, cutlery, books, toys and thousands of items vital for everyday living - are banned. The Gazans cannot build new homes, use their cars, provide their babies with baby food, use toilet paper, wash, read books or play musical instruments. Yet there are billions of dollars waiting in banks in Arab countries to help reconstruct and develop Gaza.

Clearly the Israelis fear that imports will strengthen Hamas. But, despite the sanctions, Hamas still rules and has just crushed a rebellion by a group aligned with Al Qaeda. Worse, the sanctions give the impression that all a ceasefire achieves is sanctions and suffering.

The U.S. in co-operation with the UN has offered to ensure that building materials are used for civilian purposes and not to fortify Hamas. Also Egypt is discussing a new Gaza ceasefire with Israel.

## **ARE THE ARABS SERIOUS ABOUT PEACE?**

The Palestinians accused Netanyahu of sabotaging the peace process by being unwilling to compromise over the status of Jerusalem and by refusing to accept the return of any Palestinian refugees. It has to be said, though, that any significant return of refugees would seriously threaten the concept of Israel being a safe Jewish homeland. It would appear that compensating the refugees is the only feasible way forward. If the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular continue to demand the return of the refugees they will sabotage the peace process. It may be that they will ultimately be willing to compromise on this issue.

Despite Netanyahu's historic acceptance of the idea of a two state solution the Arabs are refusing to recognise Israel as a legitimate Jewish state. President Mubarak of

Egypt visited Washington recently and made it clear that Arab recognition of Israel will only follow a peace agreement. This will, of course, undermine the peace process. However the Palestinians realise that to recognise Israel would be to lose the right of return to Israel for Palestinian refugees. One encouraging factor is that President Abbas faction Fatah has reaffirmed it will continue with negotiations rather than violence to achieve a Palestinian state.

Syria is still expressing willingness to resume indirect peace negotiations with Israel via Turkey. However Syria continues to arm Hezbollah, and to send terrorists into Iraq. It also maintains a close relationship with Iran. This provides Israel with reason not to discuss the return of territory to Syria. One good sign is that Syria has invited President Obama to visit Damascus for talks.

## **HAMAS ACCUSED BY AMNESTY OF WAR CRIMES**

In our previous letter we outlined Israeli reports about Israeli war crimes in Gaza. Now we can report that, in its recent report Amnesty International accused Hamas of war crimes including firing rockets into civilian areas of Israel.

IDF soldiers have also accused Hamas of war crimes. One report states: "We came upon an ambulance from a local children's hospital. It was suspicious because there was a very old lady in the ambulance of a children's hospital. Inside we found three RPG rocket launchers. We couldn't believe someone would use an ambulance to move them.

## **OBAMA PRESSES FOR PEACE**

In his Cairo address to the Muslim world President Obama said: Israelis must acknowledge that just as Israel's right to exist cannot be denied, neither can Palestine's. The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace. It is time for these settlements to stop. He added that peace is in Israel's interest, Palestine's interest, America's interest, and the world's interest. America will align our policies with those who pursue peace, and say in public what we say in private to Israelis and Palestinians and Arabs.

He went on to urge Muslims around the world to acknowledge Jewish suffering and to repudiate Holocaust denial. The Arab and Muslim world ought to reconcile with the existence of Israel. Threatening Israel with destruction - or repeating vile stereotypes about Jews - is deeply wrong, and only serves to evoke in the minds of Israelis this most painful of memories while preventing the peace that the people of this region deserve.

He also spoke of Palestinian suffering and urged the Palestinians to draw upon the example of African slaves in the United States, saying that peaceful and determined insistence upon the ideals at the center of America's founding had led to their gaining civil rights. Resistance through violence and killing is wrong and does not succeed. For centuries, black people in America suffered the lash of the whip as slaves and the humiliation of segregation. But it was not violence that won full and equal rights.

Obama also stated: I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect. America is not and never will be at war with Islam. We will, however, relentlessly confront violent extremists who pose a grave threat to our security.

It is to be hoped that Obamas intervention will begin a new era in the Middle East. He treated Israelis and Arabs equally and quoted carefully from the Koran, Talmud and Torah. The recent revolt and oppression in Iran may also strengthen the hand of Arab moderates.

A new Obama peace plan is expected in September and Javier Solana, EU Foreign Minister, has suggested that if the Israelis and Palestinians dont soon succeed in achieving a peace agreement then the UN Security Council should establish a Palestinian state. The Obama regime has also established a new more formal relationship with Israel which applies pressure to the Israelis.

Another encouragement is that Hamas leader Khaled Meshal said recently that his group would not stand in the way of a peace deal brokered between the Palestinian Authority under Mahmoud Abbas and Israel.

There has, however, been some tension on the Israel Lebanon border.

## PRAYER TOPICS

1. Give thanks for the attempts by President Obama to achieve peace in the Middle East and to improve relations between the western world and Islam.
2. Give thanks that Benyamin Netanyahu has accepted the principle of a Palestinian state.
3. Give thanks for the continuing interest by the Arab world in peace with Israel.
4. Pray that Obama will succeed in bringing about a just peace settlement and that both Israel and the Palestinians, with their Arab supporters, will take practical steps towards peace.
5. Pray that there will be better relationships between the West and the Muslim world.
6. Pray for Christians and other people of good will to combat anti-Semitism and, where necessary, to recognise it in themselves.
7. Pray that all criticism of the Israelis and the Palestinians will be just and constructive.
8. Pray for the welfare of the people of Gaza.

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*Tony is convinced that one cannot understand Israel without remembering the vivid and enduring memory of the Holocaust, in the context of centuries of anti-semitism which continues today, not least in the Arab world. They feel that long and bitter experience shows they cannot trust the world to protect them. Despite their military strength, they fear extinction as a nation. Tony feels that one cannot understand the Palestinians without remembering their humiliation of not having their own state and their sense of betrayal by the world powers, not least in the re-establishment of the State of Israel on*

*what they regard as their land. They also feel humiliated and oppressed by Israel. Many of them believe that armed resistance is legitimate. Whatever their strengths and weaknesses, God loves both people groups, so should we.*

*The newsletter is available free on request to those who send their name and email address to: [tony@higton.info](mailto:tony@higton.info)*

*Please encourage others to join the mailing list.*

*Registered Charity No.*

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*Tony Higton*

**PARADOX WEBSITE [www.prayerforpeace.org.uk](http://www.prayerforpeace.org.uk) includes history of the conflict of Anti-Semitism and Anti-Arabism, critique of Christian Zionism and Dispensationalism, teaching on reconciliation and justice, material for churches etc. Respond also to Tony Higttons blog [www.prayerforpeace.org.uk/blog](http://www.prayerforpeace.org.uk/blog). Please tell others about the website and blog and it would help if you were to link your own website to it.**

**Tony Higton**