

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

This year has been a very traumatic time for the Palestinian people.

**WITHIN 24 HOURS YOU WILL RECEIVE ANOTHER EMAIL
FROM ME ABOUT**

A new Christian Teaching Resources website

Patricia and I have spent months preparing a new website of free, practical, user-friendly, resources for church leaders and churchmembers based on updated material which we have produced over the last 42 years of ministry, together with new material.

It will cover apologetics (defence of the faith), biblical material, church development, church issues, devotional, eschatological (teaching on the End Times) evangelistic, interfaith and pastoral resources plus sermons and guided meditations and the books we have written. We hope eventually to include audio material too.

My apologies if you receive two copies of the next email about the new website. Some of you will be on my main Contacts list as well as my Paradox list and it is too difficult to prevent all duplication

DOES ISRAEL WANT PEACE?

I see myself as a friend of Israel (but also a friend of the Palestinians). I am against unfair criticism of Israel, let alone the anti-Semitism which is sadly alive and well in the West. However I sometimes wonder if Israel is serious about the peace process. I am wholeheartedly in favour of the Jewish people having a secure homeland, which I believe to be Gods will. But that does not require claiming every inch of the traditional homeland and it certainly does not justify injustice to the non-Jewish, non-Israeli person in the Holy Land which conflicts with the Torah (biblical law).

Israel-Palestinian peace talks are on hold. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas insists that direct talks can only take place when Israel completely freezes the settlements and agrees to withdraw to the 1967 borders. Israel rejects these preconditions. Abbas has however recently agreed to indirect talks with the Americans as mediators, and with support from the Arab nations.

We probably all allowed ourselves a degree of optimism that Barack Obama would achieve more than his predecessors in the Middle East peace process, despite its great complexity. But it seems that this opportunity has been wasted so far, and one factor is the intransigence of a right wing Israeli government.

It was encouraging to hear Netanyahu's acceptance of the two state solution. But Israel is determined to build more settlements in the Palestinian territories. When the government agreed to a 10-month freeze on such settlements (which was itself seen as very inadequate by the Palestinians and others) building didn't actually cease. Israel:

- has approved construction over the Green Line for schools, public buildings, housing units, a synagogue etc.

- has allowed Jewish people to settle in the East Jerusalem neighborhoods of Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah.

- approved the construction of 110 housing units in Beitar Illit, a settlement for the ultra-Orthodox sandwiched between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

- is building a new site for the Ariel settlements industrial estate

- has annexed Highway 443 in the West Bank.

- has decided to include the Tomb of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb (both in Palestinian territories) to the list of historical heritage sites due for renovation.

The most spectacular example of this settlement development was the decision to allow 1,600 homes to be built in Ramat Shlomo, and to announce it during the visit of U.S. Vice President Joe Biden. President Obama's chief political adviser, David Axelrod, commented: It was an insult, but that's not the most important thing, [it] seemed calculated to undermine [the impending resumption of the peace talks], and that was ... distressing to everyone who is promoting the idea of peace and security in the region.

It has to be remembered that this announcement was made by a civil servant on the Jerusalem District Planning and Building Committee, not by the government. Prime Minister Netanyahu reprimanded Interior Minister Eli Yishai

for the decision's wretched, displaced, insensitive timing. But it must also be pointed out that ultimately it is the governments responsibility and is evidence of the inconsistency between what Israel says and what it does.

Netanyahu has also

insisted that the Palestinians accept verbal agreements made privately by Israel with President Bush (without Palestinian agreement) that settlement blocs and natural growth would be excluded from a settlement freeze.

affirmed that Israel will never share Jerusalem or withdraw to the 1967 borders.

refused to start negotiations where they left off in the past. In other words he is ignoring past agreements.

These do not seem to be the actions of a government and prime minister who are serious about the peace talks.

However, under pressure from the Americans, Netanyahu has agreed to ease the blockade on the Gaza Strip so that the UN can transport construction materials to Gaza to rebuild sewerage systems, a flour mill and 150 apartments in Khan Yunis.

to discuss all core issues (borders, return of Palestinian refugees, settlements, Jerusalem, justice over water supplies and security arrangements) during the indirect talks (via the Americans) with the Palestinians, with the assurance that final decisions will only be reached in direct talks with the Palestinians.

to release hundreds of Fatah prisoners.

It should be noted, though, that the Americans are also saying Netanyahu should reverse the decision about the 1,600 homes in Ramat Shlomo.

Netanyahu has defended his views over building in East Jerusalem by pointing out that since 1967 no Israeli government stopped building in Jerusalem, east or west. But Israel President Shimon Peres responded: Previous governments built in Jewish neighbourhoods, but not in Arab ones.

A recent poll shows that 69% of the Israeli public believes that Obama's approach to Israel is fair and even friendly. 48% said Israel should continue building in all parts of Jerusalem, whatever the consequences, 41% said Israel should stop building in East Jerusalem until the end of the peace talks. In another poll 46% said building in East Jerusalem should be frozen and 51% disagreed. These are very significant figures showing the division in Israeli opinion about Jerusalem.

Israel has had to fight for its existence and feels insecure because it is confronted by nations who would like to see it destroyed. It is understandable that it does not want a terrorist state on its doorstep, which it sees as the real danger with a strong Hamas and a weak Fatah. Israel has often had to go it alone and to defy international opinion. However it is important that it only does so when really vital issues are at stake. The settlements and particularly settlement expansion are not such vital issues.

Recently, Israel has seriously offended its main friend the USA. Michael Oren, Israel's ambassador to the US has described the current situation as the worst crisis between the two countries in 35 years. Then Israel has offended other western countries by misusing their citizens' passports in the Dubai assassination, despite previous assurances that they would not do so. Consequently, the head of Mossad in London was asked to leave.

Israel does not seem to have realised that its friends have changed. Dov Weisglass, who was senior adviser to Ariel Sharon, has said: Netanyahu should have taken into account the change within the American Jewish community. Their support for Israel is decreasing and they will defend Israel in the face of the administration only on matters where there is a real threat to Israel. I have serious doubt that U.S. Jews see the Netanyahu government's territorial aspirations in Judea and Samaria [West Bank] and the Palestinian neighbourhoods in Jerusalem as an existential matter.

GAZA

Conditions remain bad in Gaza. There have been sporadic rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza and Israeli reprisals, although Hamas has recently pressurised four militant groups to cease firing rockets. Israel is developing an Iron Dome rocket defence system which uses cameras and radar to detect incoming rockets so that they can be shot down.

Israel comes under extensive criticism for its blockade which, as mentioned above, will hopefully improve. However Hamas is also at fault. During and after the war in Gaza the IDF offered to treat Gazans in a field hospital near the Erez crossing but this was resisted by Hamas. The IDF delivered hundreds of thousands of tons of food and medical aid to Gaza but Hamas intercepted them. Also Hamas is more concerned to smuggle missiles and explosives into Gaza, rather than food, medicine and vital building materials. However, under Egyptian pressure, Hamas has recently shut down smuggling tunnels into Egypt. The Egyptians are building a security fence between them and Gaza, which weakens Hamas.

Hamas called for a Day of Rage on March 16th and there were clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces on Temple Mount, East Jerusalem and elsewhere with nine security officers injured. Some Israelis fear another Intifada (Palestinian uprising).

SYRIA

Other recent developments in the Middle East are the growing economic, security and diplomatic links between Syria, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. This is replacing the old axis of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia and gives Syria a new strategic importance. It is little wonder, therefore, that the US has decided to send an ambassador to Damascus after a four-year absence. Israel would be well-advised to seek peace with Syria in order to undermine the link between the Syrians and the Iranians. Hezbollah, backed by Iran, will soon have restored its military strength after the Lebanon war. Syria has a great deal of influence in Lebanon and over Hezbollah, which is another reason for Israel pursuing peace with Syria.

On the other hand Syria has made aggressive comments towards Israel recently. They have spoken of responding to any Israeli aggression. The

Syrian Foreign Minister said: You know that war at this time will reach your cities. Also Syria has supplied Hezbollah with Scud missiles. Syria accused Israel of making allegations about the Scuds as a pretext for a possible attack on Syria.

Nevertheless there are reports that Syria is willing to consider a gradual withdrawal by Israel from the Golan Heights leading to normal relations between the two countries. Netanyahu has offered to meet Syrian President Assad without preconditions. Turkey has also offered to mediate.

PRAYER TOPICS

1. Pray for a sincere commitment to peace on behalf of both Israel and the Palestinians, and that the extreme views of both Netanyahu and Hamas will be moderated.
2. Pray that President Obama will be successful in facilitating peace in the Holy Land.
3. Pray against men and women of violence in both the settler and the Palestinian communities.
4. Pray for the citizens of Gaza facing serious hardships.
5. Pray for peace between Israel and Syria.
6. Pray that Iran will be prevented from producing nuclear weapons.

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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

Please encourage others to join the mailing list.
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PARADOX WEBSITE 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. Please tell others about the website and blog and it would help if you were to link your own website to it.