

The Paradox Newsletter

by The Rev. Tony Higton

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

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The newsletter is available free on request to those who send their name and email
address to: tony@higton.info

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See www.prayerforpeace.org.uk
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BALANCED TEACHING ON THE END TIMES

(the Return of Christ, Judgment, Heaven etc.)

As you may already know, I have begun a whole new ministry of seeking to encourage a sensible approach to eschatology (the doctrine of the End Times) which many Christians (including Christian leaders) neglect, either because they don't feel competent to deal with it or because they are embarrassed by unbalanced extremists. In order to fulfil this, which I feel is a divine calling, I need to reach as many people as possible with the message.

WILL YOU PLEASE HELP ME IN THIS CAMPAIGN by encouraging anyone you know who might be interested in this important subject to link up with me, by Facebook ([facebook.com/tony.higton.1](https://www.facebook.com/tony.higton.1)) or Twitter (@Tony Higton) or by going on my Eschatology Email Mailing list via tony@higton.info.

(I am open to invitations to speaking engagements and conferences about Eschatology on an expenses-paid basis).

SOME RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE BLOG ON ESCHATOLOGY

The meteor/asteroid coincidence – what does it mean?

(<http://www.christianteaching.org.uk/blog/?p=256>)

Recent Tweets/Facebook messages

(<http://www.christianteaching.org.uk/blog/?p=247>)

Should we be thinking frequently about the Return of Christ?

(<http://www.christianteaching.org.uk/blog/?p=224>)

Hastening the return of Christ

(<http://www.christianteaching.org.uk/blog/?p=222>)

SOME RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE WEBSITE ON ESCHATOLOGY

Can we ignore what the New Testament says about signs of Jesus' return?

(<http://www.christianteaching.org.uk/CanWeIgnoreSignsOfJesusReturn.pdf>)

Some thoughts on the Book of Revelation

(<http://www.christianteaching.org.uk/SomeThoughtsOnTheBookOfRevelation.pdf>)

HOPE FOR THE PEACE PROCESS?

MIXED MESSAGES FROM HAMAS

One of the great hindrances to peace is, of course, the refusal of Hamas to recognise Israel and its commitment to armed struggle. Hamas felt it had won a victory against Israel in the conflict which took place in November last year. Back in December Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal stated: "We are not giving up any inch of Palestine. It will remain Islamic and Arab for us and nobody else. Jihad and armed resistance is the only way. We cannot recognise Israel's legitimacy." Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu noted that Palestinian President Abbas did not condemn this statement. On the other hand, Meshaal is reported as telling King Abdullah of Jordan that he was prepared to accept a two-state solution. Also an Islamic cleric in the Gaza Strip issued a fatwa which stated that violating the truce with Israel would be a sin.

Nevertheless a rocket was fired from Gaza into Israel at the end of February and five were fired in a 24 hour period last week causing Israel to make an air attack. One of the causes is the death from cancer of a Palestinian activist in an Israeli prison. Such people are held in very high regard by Palestinians and they accuse Israel of not providing sufficient medical care. Israel has admitted an appeal for early release on medical grounds was not heard quickly enough.

Last week also the UN closed its crucial aid programme in Gaza after

violent demonstrations took place against financial cut backs in its programme.

Hamas also saw their victory as undermining the diplomatic approach of Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of Fatah in the West Bank. However there have been signs of reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah which included a large Fatah rally in the Gaza Strip celebrating the anniversary of Fatah in January and Hamas held rallies in the West Bank. Also Hamas and Fatah leaders met in Cairo with President Morsi to work towards a unity government.

PALESTINIAN APPROACH TO THE UN

The Palestinian Authority officially asked to become a “non-member observer state” at the UN on November 29th – the anniversary of the 1947 UN division to divide Palestine and create an Israeli state. The UN voted overwhelmingly in favour (138 for, 9 against, 41 abstentions) despite Israeli and US objections. A Palestinian flag was unfurled on the floor of the General Assembly. President Abbas signed a presidential decree changing the name of the Palestinian Authority to the “State of Palestine.”

This is not just a symbolic victory (particularly for President Abbas, including over Hamas). It allowed the Palestinians to join various UN bodies including the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice. This means they could take Israel to that court over what they see as illegal actions. Various European countries tried unsuccessfully to get the Palestinians to state officially they would not do this, particularly seeking prosecutions against Israeli troops for what they see as war-crimes and against the West Bank settlements.

Israel decided to punish the Palestinians for their successful application to the UN and planned 3000 new homes including in the E1 area, north-east of Jerusalem, which will bisect the West Bank and hinder Palestinian hopes of sharing Jerusalem in a future two-state solution. It also withheld millions of pounds worth of Palestinian Authority tax money, which was intended for Palestinian salaries, claiming it was being used to pay Palestinian debts to Israel (but without any agreement from the Palestinians).

ISOLATION OF ISRAEL

Predictably, punishment of the Palestinians increased Israel’s isolation in the world because various countries, including its main ally - the

US, strongly disapproved. It also led to Palestinian threats to take Israel to the International Criminal Court. One of Israel's concerns is that such legal action could encourage the trend, already underway in Europe, for foreign banks and companies to refuse investment in the settlements. The UN Human Rights Council strongly condemned Israel at the end of January and urged economic and political sanctions against it. Some countries, of course, have an anti-Israel bias but even friends of Israel were very critical. This included some overseas Jewish people. Rabbi Rick Jacobs, head of the US Union for Reform Judaism said that American Jews (who fund pro-Israel members of Congress) are beginning to think Israel doesn't share their values. This view is shared by other US Jewish leaders and is deeply worrying for Israel. Israeli President Shimon Peres told the New York Times in January: "We must not lose the support of the United States. What gives Israel bargaining power in the international arena is the support of the United States... Without US support, it would be very difficult for us. We would be like a lone tree in the desert."

Last week 100 prominent US Jews wrote a letter to Netanyahu: "We believe that this is a compelling moment for you and your new government to respond to President Obama's call for peace by taking concrete confidence building steps designed to demonstrate Israel's commitment to a 'two-states for two peoples' solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We urge you, in particular, to work closely with Secretary of State John Kerry to devise pragmatic initiatives, consistent with Israel's security needs, which would represent Israel's readiness to make painful territorial sacrifices for the sake of peace."

Barack Obama, who had been humiliated by Netanyahu before the 2012 US election, appointed Chuck Hagel as Secretary of Defence. This was a very controversial choice with Hagel being accused of being anti-Semitic and criticising the pro-Israel lobby in Congress. Hagel strongly denied these charges. However the message coming from the US after Obama's re-election was critical of Israel, and Netanyahu in particular, over the stalemate in the peace process.

ISRAELI ELECTION

It was widely expected that Netanyahu would win the Israeli election in January and this would lead to the most right wing government in Israel's history. However Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman resigned in December after being indicted for breach of trust and that removed one right wing influence. Netanyahu's Likud party linked up

with Yisrael Beiteinu, which rejects a Palestinian state and said recently: “The demand to establish a Palestinian state, and for the ‘Right of Return’ [of Palestinian refugees to what is now Israel] were designed to camouflage the real objective, which is to erase the State of Israel as a Jewish and Zionist state.”

In the end Netanyahu only won with the narrowest of victories. He lost some 25% of his support. Israel showed it was worried about the rightward drift of politics and the strained relationships with the US. Eventually a coalition was formed of Likud (centre-right), Yisrael Beiteinu (right wing), Yesh Atid (centre, pro-peace), Hatnua (liberal, strongly pro-peace) and Jewish Home (right wing).

The right wing has dominated Israel since 1977. Many believe Israel has rights to the biblical territory occupied in 1967. They are sceptical of the peace process. They feel that the negative result of Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza, which has led to what it regards as a terrorist government (Hamas) taking over, confirms their scepticism of the effectiveness of a land for peace policy. But the election has seen a reaction against the problems caused by a right wing policy. So there may be more hope for the Peace Process. After all, previous Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had agreed with Abbas on how to divide up some 99% of the West Bank. Also the Fatah leadership seems increasingly to have concluded armed struggle is futile.

Israel ceased its freeze on Palestinian Tax money in January and also decided to allow more building materials into Gaza. It is considering easing other restrictions.

OBAMA’S VISIT

Israel is virtually surrounded by political instability, especially after the “Arab Spring” and the civil war in Syria, which has already led to minor military action between Israel and Syria. There are fears that the Arab Spring might affect Jordan. Then there is the threat of Iran developing a nuclear capability. Major-General Aviv Kochavi, Israel’s head of military intelligence said there was “a very deep and fundamental change” - social, economic, religious and ethnic in the Middle East and “the reaction and counter-reaction have only just begun.” Another military leader spoke of Israel “being in the middle of a storm whose outcome we cannot know” and of “Turkey, Iran and Egypt still playing out their ancient contest for control of the region.”

In this context Obama’s visit was particularly welcome. He came to

discuss all these issues but also to promote the Peace Process. His visit followed a Gallup World Affairs survey published in February which showed that 54% of Israelis favoured the establishment of a Palestinian state (although many thought a peace deal with the Palestinians would be practically impossible). It is interesting that, amongst the right wing, 57% of Likud voters and 58% of Jewish Home voters favoured a Palestinian state so long as it is demilitarised and Palestinian refugees could only return to that Palestinian state, not Israel.

When he arrived in late March, Obama said: “Given the demographics west of the Jordan River, the only way for Israel to endure and thrive as a Jewish and democratic state is through the realisation of an independent and viable Palestine. It is not fair that a Palestinian child cannot grow up in a state of her own. The Palestinians also deserve justice. Put yourself in their position; see the world through their eyes.”

In December the Palestinian Authority said it was launching a new initiative to restart the Peace Process, which has been stalled since 2010, and this would include calling on Israel to release Palestinian prisoners and to cease settlement development.

Obama didn't pressurise Israel over the settlements but he did urge Abbas to drop his demand for a freeze on settlements, saying “that if the expectation is that we can only have direct negotiations when everything is settled ahead of time then there is no point for negotiations.” He also urged Abbas not to take Israel to the International Court, and Abbas has agreed to suspend such action. American Secretary of State, John Kerry, is continuing efforts to bring a resumption of peace talks and is prepared to invest three to six months to achieve this. America is enlisting the support of Turkey and moderate Arab states to encourage a resumption of the peace process.

If the Peace Process remains in stalemate and Israel continues to expand the settlements and not to control extreme settlers, there is a danger of another Intifada (violent Palestinian uprising) despite the Palestinian Authority leadership's reaction against violence. One hindrance to peace is that there are 650,000 Jewish settlers on the West Bank (10% of the Israeli voters) which can make a big difference in Israeli coalition governments.

One good result of Obama's visit was the reconciliation between Israel and Turkey after the killing of nine Turkish citizens on a ship bringing aid to Gaza in 2010. Netanyahu apologised for their deaths to Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan.

Meanwhile there are reports of injustices and abuses of Palestinians by Israeli military and stone throwing and other disturbances by Palestinians. In March Israel introduced Palestinian-only buses (because of demands by Jewish settlers on security grounds) which has led to accusations of racism and apartheid.

How should we pray? –

GIVE THANKS

1. That the election has produced a government which may be more likely to seek peace.
2. That Israel has loosened its restrictions on Gaza.
3. For President Obama's visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories.
4. For the reconciliation between Israel and Turkey.

PRAY

1. For God to curb extremists on both sides: violent Israeli settlers and Palestinians who might seek to fire rockets, etc.
2. For a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians and for John Kerry and others seeking to facilitate it.
3. That Hamas will become committed to a peace settlement (despite the mixed messages).
4. For God to bring peace and justice to Syria.
5. For God to frustrate the intentions of extremists throughout the Middle East.
6. For God to prevent Iran from gaining nuclear weapons.
7. For peace, stability and true democracy in all Middle East countries.
8. Pray for the evangelistic and reconciliation ministry of Rachel Netanel in Jerusalem

TWO ARTICLES I HAVE WRITTEN WHICH MAY INTEREST YOU:

Is it right to divide the Promised Land? See <http://www.christianteaching.org.uk/blog/?p=284>
My attitude towards Israel and the Palestinians. See <http://www.christianteaching.org.uk/blog/?p=277>

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

Please send your cheque made out to “Paradox Ministries” to Rev Tony Higton, 17 Church View Marham, King’s Lynn, Norfolk PE33 9HW. If you are a UK taxpayer please Gift Aid your donation. Also request a standing order form to support the ministry regularly. Registered Charity No. 1125582