

## The implications of the Israeli election

The most significant recent event is, of course, the Israeli election when, contrary to the expectation of many, Benjamin Netanyahu was re-elected. We must respect the democratic decision of the people of Israel and doubtless there will be positive aspects resulting from the re-election. But it is clear that there are various negative implications of the whole election process:

### 1. *Netanyahu ruled out a Palestinian State*

Netanyahu said shortly before the election: "If I am elected there will not be a Palestinian state." He added: "I think that anyone who moves to establish a Palestinian state and evacuate territory gives territory away to radical Islamist attacks against Israel." After the election he backed off from that statement saying on US TV that he did want a "sustainable, peaceful two-state solution." But many people find it difficult to believe he didn't mean what he said originally. They believe he is not serious about the peace process but was simply attempting to undo the political damage which resulted from his original statement. After Netanyahu's backing-off President Obama said: "We take him at his word when he said that it wouldn't happen during his prime ministership."

It is clear that Netanyahu made the original statement to enhance his chances of election, and it worked with right wing potential supporters. We should remember that in most opinion polls a majority of Israelis support the two-state solution in principle. But the failure of John Kerry's attempts to bring about a peace settlement in 2014 is a bitter blow. In January Netanyahu said that if he was re-elected he would not evacuate any West Bank settlements. The settlements have continued to grow under his premiership and plans for expansion are in place. In February 400 rabbis called on Netanyahu to stop the demolition of Palestinian homes. He had ordered the destruction of 400 homes built without permits. The rabbis wrote that "Thousands have been forced to build without permits, and great human suffering is caused when hundreds of homes are demolished each year." Some of them were provided by the international community to support vulnerable families.

President Obama commented: "From our point of view, the status quo is unsustainable. While taking into complete account Israel's security, we can't just in perpetuity maintain the status quo, expand settlements. That's not a recipe for stability in the region." The European Parliament has recognised the Palestinian state in principle. The resolution read: "[We] support in principle recognition of Palestinian statehood and the two-state solution, and believes these should go hand in hand with the development of peace talks, which should be advanced."

### 2. *Netanyahu offended the Israeli Arabs*

Netanyahu posted a video on Facebook in which he said: "The rule of the right is in danger. The Arabs are moving in droves to the polling stations. Left-wing organisations are bringing them there in buses." Another Israeli MP commented: "No Western leader would dare utter such a racist comment." One commentator said: "Imagine if a US president broadcast such a message, warning the white electorate that black voters were heading to the polls in 'large numbers.' Or if a European prime minister said: 'Quick, the Jews are voting!' Again, after the election Netanyahu apologised for upsetting the Arabs but the reaction to this was similar to the reaction to his backing off from his statement about there being no Palestinian state. The situation was not helped by the comments of Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman at an election meeting. He was reported by the Israeli press as saying that Israeli Arabs who were disloyal to Israel should have their heads chopped off.

President Obama's press secretary condemned Netanyahu's comments on Israeli Arab voters, saying "The United States and this administration is deeply concerned about rhetoric that seeks to marginalise Arab Israeli citizens. "It undermines the values and democratic ideals that have been important to our democracy and an important part of what binds the United States and Israel together."

### 3. *Netanyahu offended the US administration*

Part of Netanyahu's political campaign was to emphasise national security – a subject which, understandably, resonates with the Israelis. He stressed the danger of Iran developing nuclear weapons and opposed the US sponsored agreement with Iran over the issue. As part of his attempt to press the US government to change its approach to Iran he decided to speak to the US Congress just two weeks before the Israeli election without the agreement of President Obama. His theme was “the very survival of my country.” This breach of protocol was strongly opposed by many US leaders, including many in the Jewish community who saw it as promoting Netanyahu's election campaign. Understandably, the White House was furious and delivered a number of snubs to the Israeli prime minister hinting that the US could stop protecting Israel at the UN and international institutions if it was not committed to a two-state solution. President Obama said there was nothing new in Netanyahu's speech and that it didn't offer any viable alternatives. He also said: “What is apparent is that in the context of the campaign and while [Netanyahu] was the sitting prime minister of Israel, he walked back from commitments that Israel had previously made to a two-state solution.” He condemned his “cynical, divisive election-day tactics.”

#### *4. The Palestinians have taken action against Israel at the UN*

Palestinian President Abbas said after the election that he is still willing to meet Netanyahu for peace talks. But he also went to the UN to seek a resolution, backed by Jordan, to end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank by November 2016. France, backed by Germany and the UK, put an alternative resolution to set a two-year time limit on peace talks. Efforts were made to avoid an American veto on the resolution. In the end the resolution failed and so the Palestinians applied to join the International Criminal Court which would enable them to take legal action against Israel for alleged war crimes. The UN reports that more Palestinians died in Israeli attacks in 2014 (2220) than at any time since 1967.

Whilst this letter was being written UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon announced that a UN inquiry has concluded that Israel is responsible for attacking seven UN school in Gaza used as civilian shelters, despite numerous notifications of the precise GPS locations of the school. It rejected Israeli excuses. It did, however, condemn the Palestinian militants for hiding weapons in three of the schools.

Of course, the world court could also take action against the Palestinians. In fact Amnesty International say the Palestinians in Gaza are guilty of war crimes because of the inaccuracy of their mortar and rocket attacks on Israel. Israel and the US claim that the Palestinians cannot be a member of the ICC because they are not a state but they have been accepted as members.

As a punishment Israel decided to withhold tax revenues from the Palestinians which funds some two-thirds of the Palestinian budget and pays tens of thousands of public-sector employees. This was condemned by the US and eventually the tax payment was restored. The Palestinians then called for an end to all forms of security coordination with Israel “given Israel's systematic and ongoing non-compliance with its obligations under signed agreements, including its daily military raids throughout the State of Palestine, attacks against our civilians and properties.” Israel then decided to urge the US Congress to stop sending the annual \$400 million of American aid to the Palestinians.

#### *5. The likelihood of more violence against Israel*

In December Hamas marched through Gaza with a display of rockets and other heavy weapons vowing to destroy Israel. It fired a rocket into Israel and the Israelis responded with bombs. Hamas recently rejected the offer of a 5-year ceasefire with Israel in exchange for Israel lifting its blockade of Gaza. However Egypt has decided that Hamas is a terrorist organisation and this has led to fears of isolation in Gaza. Perhaps as a result of this there are reports that Hamas is seeking reconciliation with Hezbollah, the terrorist group in Lebanon and its backer Iran in order to unite in fighting Israel. There have been attacks against Israel by Hezbollah recently and an Iranian Brigadier General has vowed to wipe Israel off the map.

Various acts of violence have taken place in Israel including the stabbing of 12 Israelis on a Tel Aviv bus. The Israel Defence Force is preparing for a possible violent uprising in the West Bank and 29 Hamas operatives were arrested in Nablus. An EU report says that Jerusalem has reached a position of “polarisation and violence” not seen since the end of the second intifada in 2005. Muslims fear Israel aims to change the very sensitive status of Temple Mount.

At the same time, the European Court accepted a petition by Hamas to have itself removed from the EU's list of terrorist organisations. This was not because of any change of view about the nature of Hamas but was a technical decision because the evidence used to place Hamas on the list was mainly from press reports and so was not deemed adequate legally. The EU launched an appeal against this decision.

## 6. It will encourage the growth of Anti-Semitism

The growth of Anti-Semitism is very serious and significant so I'm going to major on it in the second part of this letter:

*The New Testament is quite clear that God has a continuing purpose for the Jewish people in Christ. Paul predicts that "All Israel will be saved." Scripture also foretells attacks on Israel in the End Times. The continuation and even growth of anti-Semitism is a clear pointer to all this. It is a pointer towards the End Times.*

### A new anti-Semitism IS growing

The idea that anti-Semitism is growing, including in Europe, is controversial. Some surveys have been criticised as unreliable. What is the truth? I found it helpful to read what Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi says because he is a man of great integrity and intellectual ability. Writing in the Wall Street Journal in October 2014 he said: "This year, Europe's Jews entered Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year, with a degree of apprehension I have not known in my lifetime. Anti-Semitism has returned to Europe within living memory of the Holocaust. Never again has become ever again."

He instanced a French synagogue congregation being surrounded by "a howling mob claiming to protest Israeli policy;" four people being murdered in a Jewish museum and a synagogue being firebombed in Brussels; a London supermarket feeling forced to remove kosher food from its shelves and a London theatre refusing to stage a Jewish film festival because it had received a small grant from the Israeli embassy.

He added: "More than once during the summer, I heard well-established British Jews saying, 'For the first time in my life, I feel afraid.' And Jews are leaving. A survey in 2013 by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights showed that almost a third of Europe's Jews have considered emigrating because of anti-Semitism, with numbers as high as 46% in France and 48% in Hungary. Quietly, many Jews are asking whether they have a future in Europe."

Lord Sacks explained that in the Middle Ages Jews were hated for their religion, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century for their race and today for their nation state. "Israel, now 66 years old, still finds itself the only country among the 193 in the United Nations whose right to exist is routinely challenged and in many quarters denied. There are 102 nations in the world where Christians predominate, and there are 56 Islamic states. But a single Jewish state is deemed one too many."

He believes the new anti-Semitism was started at the U.N. Conference against Racism at Durban in 2001 where "Israel was accused of the five cardinal sins against human rights: racism, apartheid, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and attempted genocide."

Lord Sacks concluded: "Human rights matter, and they matter regardless of the victim or the perpetrator. It is the sheer disproportion of the accusations against Israel that makes Jews feel that humanitarian concern isn't the prime motive in these cases: More than half of all resolutions adopted by the U.N. Human Rights Council since 2006 (when the Council was established) in criticism of a particular country have been directed at Israel. In 2013, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a total of 21 resolutions singling out Israel for censure, according to U.N. Watch, and only four resolutions to protest the actions of the rest of the world's states."<sup>1</sup>

There were a record number of anti-Semitic incidents in the UK in 2014, many of them related to the Israel – Gaza conflict. The Community Security Trust recorded 1168 incidents compared with 535 in 2013. This was the highest number since records began in 1984. Most were verbal abuse but 81 involve physical abuse. In France synagogues were firebombed and Jewish shops attacked. Gangs roam the streets shouting "Death to Jews."

In September 2004, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, a part of the Council of Europe, gave examples of anti-Semitic comments on Israel:

- Denying the Jewish people the right to self-determination, e.g. by claiming that the existence of a state of Israel is a racist endeavour;
- Applying double standards by requiring of Israel behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation;
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic anti-Semitism (e.g. claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis;
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.

- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the State of Israel. Howard Jacobson recently wrote in the Independent: “A calm, responsible view of Israel, which includes understanding the rationale of its existence, might not make you like it or agree with it, but it will make you halt before the malicious caricature of it as a country unlike any other in its blood-thirst and intransigence, a caricature so reminiscent of the medieval figuration of Jews as Christ killers and child murderers that either the medieval imagination had it right and the Jew is indeed uniquely evil, or else the Jew, personified by Israel, is uniquely maligned.”

A 2013 poll of Jewish people for the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) found that 76% thought anti-Semitism had increased over the last five years, and 46% said they worried about being verbally assaulted or harassed in public because they were Jewish. A third were worried about being physically attacked, and 57% said they had heard or seen someone claim over the last year that the Holocaust was a myth or had been exaggerated.

John Mann, chair of the UK’s all-party parliamentary group against anti-Semitism, was shocked by the poll and commented: “It is extraordinary that 75 years after the terrible events of Kristallnacht, Jews are again living in fear. The inaction of the European Commission in combating anti-Semitism is inexcusable.”

Danny Cohen director of television at the BBC has said he has “never felt so uncomfortable as a Jew in the UK” as it was revealed that anti-Semitic incidents in Britain hit record annual levels in 2014. He added that levels of hatred were on the rise across Europe. “You’ve seen the number of attacks rise, you’ve seen murders in France, you’ve seen murders in Belgium.”

## The deceptive nature of anti-Semitism

Some anti-Semitism in various right wing political groups is quite deliberate and blatant. But a lot of it is more deceptive. Rabbi Sacks clearly shows how laudable concerns for justice for the Palestinians and legitimate criticisms of some of Israel’s actions can very easily mask or lead to perhaps unwitting anti-Semitism. The problem is that anti-Semitism (“the world’s longest hatred) is an underlying racist attitude and spiritual problem. It is a particularly pernicious and widespread form of racism. I have said before that the only explanation for its prevalence is that it is a demonic influence opposing God’s continuing purpose for the Jewish people. God has an End Time purpose for the Jewish people in Christ. The time will come, says Paul, when “All Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26) and this will have a dynamic influence on the world when Israel recognises her Messiah and proclaims him as such. The devil’s plan is, quite simply, to prevent this happening by destroying the Jewish people.

Consequently, we, especially those of us who, like me, are deeply concerned about justice for the Palestinians and do have legitimate criticisms of some of Israel’s actions, must be very careful not to fall into anti-Semitic attitudes. That does not mean that we should cease criticising Israel when appropriate. (I believe those who are really positive towards Israel will be critical of her at times. Christian Zionists who don’t make fair criticism of Israel are failing her). But it does mean we need to be self-critical so we don’t fall into an unbalanced, unfair criticism of Israel.

We also need to try to enter into the mind-set of Jewish people in general and Israelis in particular. Whereas most history is a long time ago for us British Gentiles, the Jewish people are one of those groups who feel history is much ‘closer.’ To put it simply, the Holocaust happened yesterday. Not only that, some 2000 years of persecution preceded it. This ‘closeness’ of history engenders insecurity and in some cases understandable paranoia. Israelis have this insecurity. It’s obviously not altogether to do with history. There are countries and political groups today who are determined to destroy Israel. If we don’t understand this sensitivity we shall not understand Israelis and we won’t communicate effectively with them.

The evil of anti-Semitism is a clear sign of God’s End Time purposes for the Jewish people.

## Pray

1. That Israel will renew meaningful peace talks with the Palestinians.
2. For the protection of Jewish people from anti-Semitism around the world.
3. For the international community and its institutions to be even-handed in dealing with Israelis and Palestinians.

See the Maranatha Network brief daily meditation on the Return of Christ for each day of the month at <http://www.christianteaching.org.uk/Maranatha%20Network.html>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.rabbisacks.org/europes-alarming-new-anti-semitism-published-wall-street-journal/>