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THE HATRED OF ISRAEL

Israel is, by landmass, the world's 153rd largest country (over 8,000 square miles), and, by population, the 97th (9 million plus). Yet, larger nations have nothing like the interest of three Abrahamic faiths (numbering half the world's population [Christianity, 2.4 billion; Islam, 1.7 billion, and Judaism, 15 million]), nor the ability to evoke such love and hatred. How the barbaric Hamas attack of October 7 and the subsequent Israel-Hamas conflict highlight this. But why is this so?

I. DIVINE PRONOUNCEMENTS

Lost on many is God's overarching of history. He sees all of it at once, as Abraham's life illustrates very well.

First, recall the promise of the angel of the Lord to Hagar, Abraham's Egyptian servant, that Ishmael, their illegitimate son would be against everyone and everyone against him, and that he would dwell over against all his kinsman (Genesis 16:1-16). Hold this thought, for we shall return to it.

Second, when Rebekah, Abraham's daughter-in-law, inquired of the Lord as to why her twins struggled in her womb, he responded, ***"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger"*** (Genesis 25:23). So it was. Jacob's lineage (Israel) was perennially opposed by Esau's (the Edomites). The Edomites faded into history but hostility to Israel continued. God did not cause this, nevertheless he warned of it ahead of time.

II. JEWISH OPPOSITION TO JESUS

Let's be clear, we are all culpable in the death of Jesus. Our race provided the necessity of atonement, the Romans the accursed means (crucifixion); and the Jews (the rulers especially) the motive (envy, Matthew 27:18) as well as the opportunity (the provision of false witnesses).

We Gentiles, quick to ignore our sin, are nevertheless swift to recall that it was the Jewish crowds who implored Pilate the Roman Governor, ***"Crucify him, crucify him!"*** They added, ***"His blood is on us, and on our children!"*** (Matthew

27:22-23, 25). Alas, the Christian church, called to commend winsomely to the Jews repentance toward God and faith in Jesus the Messiah (as per Romans 11:14), has, at various times, failed the Jews.

III. ISLAMIC JIHAD

Once Mohammad (570-632) founded Islam, Jewish persecution increased no end. The *Quran*, as early as the fifth Surah, proclaims *Jihad* against the Jews, offering them less tolerance than Christians. Dubiously claiming Ishmael to be a distant forebear of Mohammad, positing that Hagar took Ishmael to Mecca, Islam has ironically fulfilled God's forewarning of Ishmael's opposition to his kinsmen.

Islamic hatred for the Jews sky-rocketed after Israel gained its homeland in 1948. The Jews' historic claims to the

land could not prevent Palestinian animosity. Then, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 ensured state-sponsored opposition to Israel, with former Iranian president, Ahmadinejad, urging, if not the wiping of Israel off the map (a mistranslation it is said), at least the dismantling of the Zionist regime.

IV. HOST INSECURITY

Centuries of persecution dispersed the Jews abroad. Taking with them their Judaism, their work and family ethics, and their entrepreneurial brilliance, they became subject to envy and suspicion.

The late nineteenth-century Russian pogroms and the Nazi's "Final Solution" to the "Jewish Question" are well documented. Yet, to exit Jerusalem's *Yad Vashem* with its panoramic view over the city is to realize that even with the evil extermination of six million Jews Hitler failed. The Remembrance Center and the Garden of the Righteous are sober reminders of the necessity of his defeat.

V. ISRAELI POLITICS

Given the foregoing history and now Hamas' brutality, can we be sure that analyses of Israel's defense are objective, and that antisemitism is not at play in them? That said, Israel has lost much of its fear of God, is devoid of the ethics of Jesus, and is accused of Apartheid. So, amid this war between Islam and Judaism, Christians oppose anti-semitism yet cannot whitewash Israel. Here's why . . .



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SUNDAY WORSHIP TIMES



THE LOVE OF ISRAEL

While God is committed to loving Israel, his love is neither blind nor sentimental. To the contrary, God epitomizes his Old Testament proverb, ***“Faithful are the wounds of a friend”*** (Proverbs 27:6). He has lavished his love on Israel, and yet has indicted Israel’s sins just as much. To this day, he calls his ancient people to embrace Jesus as his promised Messiah and to welcome the atonement he has made for sin. To understand this, consider:

THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL

Antisemites deplore the idea that God chose to love Israel especially. Yet, the Bible is clear about it, but underlines that the choice was God’s will and not Israelite merit. As Moses taught the young nation, ***“It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you”*** (Deuteronomy 7:7).

THE PRIVILEGES OF ISRAEL

Out of his electing love, God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt. This deliverance pictured the redemption from sin divinely offered all through the coming Messiah. Three months later, God inaugurated the freed Hebrews into a nation at Mount Sinai. Paul tells us in Romans 9:4 that God gave Israel six unique privileges: a standing as his son (cf., Exodus 4:22), sightings of his glory, covenants bespeaking Israel’s relationship to him, the gift of his law, access to him in worship (depicted by the old covenant sacrifices), and promises of his faithfulness.

Although Israel was God’s treasured possession, his love for his people was not an end in itself. Even under the old covenant God indicated that Israel would serve as a funnel through which our entire race would be offered the same unmerited favor. To convey this to the nations, God called Israel to obey him, grateful for his redemption, becoming in the Lord’s words ***“a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth”*** (Isaiah 49:3, 6). While a son of God, Israel was also God’s servant, called to prepare the world in the darkness of its sin to for the light of the coming Messiah.

THE SINS OF ISRAEL

Instead of standing out from the world, shedding the undimmed the light of God’s grace, Israel often copied the world and became as spiritually darkened as the surrounding nations. God’s people generally kept the ceremonial law which pointed for them Messiah’s sacrifice, yet their repeated episodes of disobedience cheapened God’s grace.

When taking promised possession of Canaan, they failed to complete God’s judgment of the Amorites (Genesis 15:16). During the days of the Judges, they did evil in the sight of the Lord, preferring to do what was right in their

own eyes (e.g., Judges 19). Instead of looking to God for his blessing, Israel hankered for a king to emulate other nations. Notwithstanding the golden age of David and Solomon, sins went unconfessed and ungodly practices were tolerated, Weakened accordingly, Israel came to trust in horses as emblems of power, marriages to devotees of pagan gods, and political alliances. God was displeased.

THE CHASTENINGS OF ISRAEL

Since God chastens those whom he loves, he permitted draconian Rehoboam to force a division of Israel into the northern kingdom (Israel) and southern kingdom (Judah). Although humiliated, God’s people were unhumiliated. Their mockery of the prophets and their aping of the pagan ways of the surrounding nations resulted in both kingdoms being sent into exile; Israel by Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, and Judah by Neduchadnezzar II, King of Babylon. Both the temple and city of Jerusalem were ransacked.

God used the exile to shock the Jews out of their idolatry. After 70 years, he kept his promise to restore his people to the Promised Land (Jeremiah 25 and 29). Yet they had so smashed the covenant that God had made with them that another was needed. Of sheer grace, God promised that the new covenant would be better, sealed not by animal blood but by the Messiah’s. It would be open to all trusting him for pardon of their sins, whether Jew or Gentile.

THE HARDNESS OF ISRAEL

Four centuries later the Messiah came. Yet, after waiting for him for so long, the Jews overwhelmingly refused Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah. He spoke with authority unlike the Sanhedrin, performed the miraculous, was free of sin, died for his enemies, and rose from the dead, yet the Sanhedrin was looking for a Messiah who would confirm its power and rid Israel of the Romans. ***“He came to his own,”*** wrote the apostle John, ***“and his own people did not receive him”*** (John 1:11). This was not a case of mistaken identity but a willful shunning of their Savior. Refusing to shelter in him, their idols, the holy city and temple, were destroyed in the Jewish-Roman wars of A.D. 66–70 (Luke 13:31-35, 19:41-44). Thus, the Jews today have no ark of the covenant, no temple, no Messiah, no atonement, and few Gentile friends.

God, though, ever faithful to his covenant (Romans 11:29), yearns that amid their sorrows they’ll find in Jesus the hope he offers. The One who could hate the Jews, loves them.



THE NEWNESS OF ISRAEL

All the while that God has been offering pardon to the Jews, he has busily expressed his love to Gentiles. Indeed, in the two millennia since Christ's crucifixion, the church has become mainly Gentile. By God's grace, Gentile believers trust a Jew to be their Savior and Lord, having learned of him from another famous Jew, Saul of Tarsus. His God-given conversion, commission and convictions stir hopes that Jews and Palestinians (Gentiles) may yet unite at the foot of Christ's cross.

PAUL'S CONVERSION

No one could have been more of an Israelite than Paul! Raised *"a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city"* (Acts 21:39), his boast was that he was a signed-up (circumcised) member of God's chosen people. Taught by the esteemed pharisee Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3), he clung like few others to Judaism's laws and customs: *"If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more; circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless"* (Philippians 3:4b-6; cf., Acts 23:6; 26:4-5).

Luke records that Saul (as he was then), having witnessed agreeably the first-recorded Christian martyrdom (of Stephen), following this up by *"ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison"*. Ever *"breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord,"* Saul gained authority from the High Priest in Jerusalem to bring back bound from Damascus those of *"the Way"*. Yet, nearing Damascus, the exalted Lord Jesus stopped him in his tracks, rebuking him for his persecution and humbling him under his Lordship (Acts 7:54-8:3; 9:1-5; 26:9-11).

Paul gives us the backstory to his conversion to Christ in Romans 7:7-25. He had been brought to the end of himself. The law of God in which he so delighted began to be applied to him by the Holy Spirit. No longer trusting for his salvation in his zealous outer compliance to God's law, he lamented his weakness in sin. The evil that he would not do, that he did, and the good he would do, that he didn't do. Thus, he despaired, exclaiming, *"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"*

It was this question that the exalted Jesus answered on the road to Damascus. *He* could deliver Saul! Saul, then, rested in Christ's life for his righteousness before God, in Christ's death for his pardon from sin, and in Christ's resurrection for his assurance of eternal life (contrast Romans 10:1-4). Enthralled by such grace, he was ready to follow his Lord.

PAUL'S COMMISSION

Later, Paul testified, *"whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss*

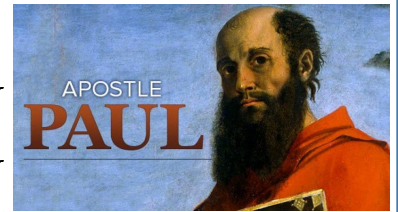
because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish . . . Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Philippians 3:7-9). He lost his status in Judaism for embracing Jesus as his Savior and Lord, but also for heeding Christ's commission to take the gospel of God's free grace to the Gentile nations; yes, to those the Jews considered to be dogs. As a witness to Christ, he was *"to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified [set apart] by faith in [Christ]"* (Acts 26:18). His witness began in the synagogues before it was extended to the Gentiles, even to kings just as Christ had prophesied (Acts 9:15-16; 25:13-26:32). (Painting: "San Paolo" by Bartolomeo Montagna [1450-1523].)

PAUL'S CONVICTION

To his great sorrow, Paul's countrymen sought salvation by their own merit than by God's grace (Romans 9:1-5). During his third missionary journey, after three months ministering to Jews in Ephesus, Paul withdrew. They had shunned Jesus as Messiah and demeaned the Way. Teaching instead for two years in the hall of Tyrannus, *"all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks"* (Acts 19:8-10). Eventually, though, Paul was arrested by the Jews of Jerusalem.

They should have known from the Hebrew Scriptures that it was always God's plan to share his grace with Gentiles. Since the Jews had killed the prophets, bayed for Messiah's crucifixion, and opposed the apostles, that time had come. God had in his sights a new Israel that would consist of believing Jews and Gentiles united to God and to one another by a shared dependence on the shed blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:11-22).

Given this, the role of Gentile believers, says Paul, is to stir Jews to envy over our blessings in Christ (Romans 11:11, 14). This isn't futile. A day is coming when they will be broken (Daniel 12:7), mourning for the one they pierced (Zechariah 12:10). They will cry to God for mercy, and he will grant them it. Thus, we envision hope for the Middle East wherein Palestinians and Jews reconcile to God and to each other through faith in Christ. Amen (so let it be)!



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THE INCREASE OF ISRAEL

We feel so insignificant when faced with the big picture of history and the turmoil ensuing the Hamas attack. Yet, amid it all, God calls to us individually, asking us whether we yet belong to his new Israel. He reminds us that all may do so, whatever our ethnicity.

IF YOU ARE A JEW

Know that the Christian church, for all the ways we have failed you, is not your enemy. We read the Hebrew Scriptures, follow a Jew, and have fought to save Jews in trouble. We honor the fact that Christianity flowered from the history of Israel. The Christ to whom we owe God's grace, and whom we love with undying love (Ephesians 6:24), was born in Bethlehem (the south), raised in Nazareth (the north), ministered throughout the land and beyond, and was crucified, resurrected, and ascended in Jerusalem. Him we humbly commend to you. It was to you and not just to your ancestors laboring under the tremendous burden of law-keeping for their salvation, that Jesus said: *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28). Do take him at his word. You have access to God only through him.

IF YOU ARE A GENTILE

Could it be that, unlike orthodox Jews, you need rest not from exhausting law-keeping but from endless law-breaking. After all, willful sinning inflicts many wounds and much depression. Yet, whereas Jews may be tempted to think that they have no need of Jesus, Gentiles can think their sins are too great for God's grace to cover. Jesus's words offset such thinking: *"Those who are well have no need a physician, but those who are sick . . . I came not to call the righteous [those who perceive themselves to be such], but sinners"* (Matthew 9:12, 13). If, then you know yourself to be sick with sin and sick of sin, hear Jesus beckon to you: *"Come to me"*!



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