

## The West Bank of Palestine: A Prison Whose Jailer Is Jesus

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Meet calm, gentle, forgiving George Sa'adeh, Deputy Mayor of Bethlehem and Principal of a Greek Orthodox high school. It began as a simple shopping trip with his wife and two daughters on March 23, 2003. It ended with four hundred bullet holes in their car, their twelve-year-old daughter, Christine, dead, and George and Christine's sister, Marianna, seriously wounded by exploding bullets from the guns of IDF (Israeli Defense Force) soldiers.

They got the wrong car. Mom was left unhurt to make funeral arrangements alone, while George and Marianna recovered. Christine was the four-hundredth child to be killed in 2003 in clashes

between the IDF and Palestinian nationals

Yonatan Boemfeld is an Israeli citizen who has joined a growing group of former IDF security soldiers in a peace movement called, "Breaking the Silence." He begins his story with

### these words:

The heavy screen that has protected us from the unpleasant things happening one hour's drive from Tel Aviv is slowly lifting. Behind it stand IDF soldiers. They fire on streetlights, on solar heater water-tanks, and on innocent people. They abuse civilians, and take bribes at checkpoints. Drivers of armored vehicles run over cars parked on the streets, and a company commander confirms the death of a 12 yr. old girl. The soldiers abuse corpses, and even take photographs of them as souvenirs. The list is unfortunately long, disgusting, and painful.

### Theology of the Land

John Darby (1800-1882), the father of a Christian doctrine known as Dispensationalism, clearly distinguished between physical Israel and the New Testament Church. His thesis was that there are two Kingdoms of God – an earthly, material Kingdom promised to the Jewish people and a spiritual Kingdom promised to Gentile believers. This theme was picked up by the

very popular Scofield Reference Bible published in 1909, followed by the Ryrie Study Bible in 1994.

### The US Christian Quest for Relevancy

In 1977, the Likud Party came to power in Israel and began to employ religious language in support of its Zionist political agenda. With the rise of the political influence of the Evangelical Christian community in support of Presidents Jimmy Carter in 1976 and Ronald Reagan in 1980, an unholy alliance between the Israeli lobby and the Christian Right was crafted. Carter's focus on the human rights issue between Israel and the Palestinian population assisted in his defeat by Reagan in 1980 and the eventual "merger" of the Christian Right with the Republican Party.

Fanning the fires of nationalism was Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, published in 1970 and selling upwards of seventy million copies worldwide. The eventual fate of Jerusalem was, according to Lindsey, to become "...the spiritual center of the entire world...All the people of the earth will come annually to worship Jesus who will rule there" (Lindsey, 1970).

In 1979, the Rev. Jerry Falwell of Thomas Roads Baptist Church in Lynchburg, VA, began a movement known as the Moral Majority to get people of faith involved in the political process. Millions were enlisted and encouraged to vote as a block primarily on moral issues. One plank in Rev. Falwell's platform was to tie the blessings of America to its treatment of the Jews. Translation: "God has been good to America because America has been good to the Jews" (Garfinkle, 2009).

"There are **70 million of us**," he says. "And if there's one thing that brings us together quickly it's whenever we begin to detect our government becoming a little anti-Israel."

In 1985, a sister organization known as the National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel (NCLCI), formed by Franklin Littell, a Methodist minister and Theologian, launched an unsuccessful campaign to repeal UN Resolution 3379. Adopted in 1975, UN Res 3379 states that "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination."

The US Congress succumbed to the pressure of the Christian Right and intervened in 1990 with House Resolution 457: "Zionism is a national movement of the Jewish people for

self-determination, a legitimate and moral aspiration characteristic of many national groups in the modern world. UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 has had as its overt purpose the delegitimization of the State of Israel.” The US Senate followed suit with Senate Joint Resolution 246. In 1991, the US successfully pressured the UN to repeal Resolution 3379, thus affirming the pro-Israeli agenda of the Christian Right.

It was Littell’s “Israel First” doctrine that appealed to Falwell. That doctrine declared that the security of Israel called for an unconditional alliance between the US and the nation-state of Israel. Support for the Palestinians among main-line Protestant and Catholic churches threatened that doctrine and, by inference, the security of Israel.

Later, with the election of George W. Bush as President through the support of the Christian Right, further interest in Last Days speculation was generated when Tim Le Haye and Jerry Jenkins published their *Left Behind* series of novels that have sold over sixty-three million copies.

### **The Rise of Christian Zionism**

The Christian Right in America is largely unified in its belief that Historic Palestine will be the setting for the unfolding of God’s final plan for redemption. This phenomenon, carried to political extremes, is referred to as Christian Zionism, a movement that views as anti-Semitic all opposition to the expansion of the borders of Israel from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. It is a strange theology that equates land to race – Old Covenant law running concurrently with New Covenant grace.

"The past leaders of our movement left us a clear message to keep Eretz Israel from the Sea to the River Jordan for future generations, for the mass aliya [immigration], and for the Jewish people, all of whom will be gathered into this country," Yitzhak Shamir (*Former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir declares at a Tel Aviv memorial service for former Likud leaders; Jerusalem Domestic Radio Service, November 1990*)

Christian Zionism is a central plank of the growing phalanx of churches, organizations, fellowships and individuals. Much of the Southern Baptist Convention, charismatic Pentecostals and independent Bible churches not only endorse but applaud the Christian Zionist agenda in support of the final wrap-up of human history.

### **Theological Perspective:**

Theologically, Christian Zionists who insist that race and land are indistinguishable reject the holistic, restorative purpose of the coming of the Messiah – the inauguration of the spiritual and transcendent Kingdom of God. They argue that God, who ironically is described as being no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), loves the Jewish people more than all Gentiles.

This powerful movement in the West has exported its dogma to the Middle East by funding illegal Jewish settlements on the West Bank and East Jerusalem and by playing politics with a World War they are convinced God has planned within our lifetimes. If God has not planned WWII, He will be manipulated into the position of being forced to deal with the mess it leaves behind.

It is to this theology of the land – *Am ha 'aretz* – that Christian Zionism bows. God's promise to Abraham remains eternal:

In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates...And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God (Gen. 15:18; 17:8, KJV)

To hold the secular nation-state of Israel accountable to any international standard other than that wrung out of the Bible in the form of dispensationalist doctrine is to call down God's curse on oneself.

"We walked outside, Ben-Gurion accompanying us. Allon repeated his question, 'What is to be done with the Palestinian population?' Ben-Gurion waved his hand in a gesture which said 'Drive them out!'" *Yitzhak Rabin leaked censored version of Rabin memoirs, published in the New York Times, 23 October 1979.*

Popular writers such as Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye have fanned the blaze of *Am ha 'aretz* by encouraging millions of Evangelical Christians to interpret world events in light of prophetic clues in Israel (Katanacho, 2005). Those same Evangelicals and their leaders are enjoying enormous power in the US Congress, where many are said to be unduly influenced by prophetic interpretation in the formation and administration of foreign policy, especially of that in the Middle East.

Once the entire land is strategically secured for God, the next task will be to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem on the Temple Mount that now holds the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of

the Rock. The Antichrist, described as an individual masquerading as a charismatic man of peace, will afterward wage war against Israel and destroy the Temple. Both non-believing Muslims and Jews will be slaughtered, and Jesus will return to set up His Kingdom on earth.

### **Political Perspective:**

Politically, Christian Zionists believe that the Bible, or their interpretation thereof, supersedes even the government of the United States. Every event in Israeli life is sifted through a biblical lens and interpreted as a mandate on US foreign policy. Peace initiatives are openly condemned. Elected officials are cowed into submission by the unholy alliance between American Christian Zionists and AIPAC, the Israeli lobby. Islam is by definition a satanic religion. Annihilation of its adherents is thereby justified as enemies of both Israel and America.

While Pat Robertson and the late Rev. Jerry Falwell were known to have boasted of the support of one hundred million Evangelicals for the Christian Zionist cause, it is more likely between twenty-five and thirty million (Sizer, p. 23). Author Grace Halsell (*Forcing God's Hand*), who calls the movement "a cult," estimates that it is led by eighty thousand pastors, disseminated by one thousand Christian radio stations and one hundred Christian TV stations (Sizer, 2004).

A number of evangelical organizations have sprung up in recent years that are "unapologetically Zionist" (Sizer, 2004). Among those are Bridges for Peace (BFP) and the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ). Their activities include identity with right-wing Israeli causes, lobbying the US Congress and financing of settlements. Sizer indicates that since 1991, ICEJ has funded the transportation of some forty-thousand émigrés. ICEJ Russian team members are very active in the more remote areas of the former Soviet Union by "...locating Jews, persuading them to emigrate, helping them obtain documentation to prove their Jewish origins, distributing humanitarian packages and paying for exit permits, passports, debt repayment, transport and accommodations..." (Sizer, 2004).

Evangelical churches are persuaded to "Adopt-a-Settlement" and to support "brave new Jewish settlers" living in Israel. ICEJ is reported to have provided financial support for projects within the Jewish settlements, including "bullet-proof vests to strengthen the resolve of settlers living among what it describes as '3 million hostile Palestinians.'" (Sizer, 2004).

International law and individual justice are secondary to advocates of God's ownership of the land. Evangelist Pat Robertson is known for his statement that Israel's Prime Minister Ariel

Sharon's stroke was payback from God for withdrawing in 2005 from Gaza in accordance with the 1978 Camp David Accords.

John Hagee, pastor of the twenty-thousand member Cornerstone Church in San Antonio and head of the multi-million dollar Global Evangelism Television, formed Christians United for Israel (CUFI) in February, 2006. Hagee was able to bring together some four hundred Christian evangelical leaders, reportedly representing as many as thirty million Christians, for a [Summit on Israel](#). Its purpose was to prevent the Bush Administration from pressuring the Israelis into turning over more land.

Hagee addressed the AIPAC Policy Institute on March 11, 2007. He stood on the rostrum purportedly representing fifty million American Christians who "...consider the Jewish people to be the apple of God's eye." He declared Iran to be nationalist Germany, and Ahmadinejad as the "new Hitler." He has repeatedly called for war against Iran. He announced that CUFI was politically organizing, Congressional District by Congressional District. He proclaimed 2007 as a year of destiny, with America and Israel at war with a common enemy.

The message is not lost on Washington. Just as President Bush in 2002 was stopped by Jerry Falwell when he called for Israel to withdraw its troops from the West Bank, so one can assume that war with Iran may become a distinct possibility due to the influence of the Christian Right.

### **Turning a Blind Eye**

The Christian Right in America turns a blind eye to the resultant human rights violations on the sole ground that God has promised to Abraham the land that includes the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. To the extent that many high-ranking members of Congress may subscribe to this theology, Mideast policy bends toward self-fulfilling eschatology, the study of last things. The end justifies the means, the end being the herding of all Jews worldwide into Israel (including all American Jews) and the ultimate annihilation of all but a remnant who will convert to Christianity.

This is nationalism in the extreme, a simplistic worldview that contorts current events into a biblical master plan and anoints the populist, charismatic tele-Zionist as the interpreter of that plan. For the moment, the Israeli lobby embraces Christian Zionism even though it

recognizes that it furthers an agenda that looks eagerly forward to the annihilation of all practicing Muslims and Jews of Historic Palestine. The shared objective being the expansion of the state of Israel from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, the Israeli lobby is willing to take its chances on an ultimate outcome that it considers to be nonsense.

### **From a Christian Perspective:**

Were one to assume that these Christian Zionists are absolutely correct in their interpretation of biblical prophecy, we cannot get beyond the matter of their accountability as Christian believers, unless they somehow have received a special dispensation from the commands of Christ regarding the Kingdom of God as delineated in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7).

I stand with President Jimmy Carter in his conviction that Israel has a right to exist within recognized borders and to be accepted by Palestinians and all its Arab neighbors, while the Palestinians are entitled to the right of return to their homeland. The killing, however, is contrary to Christian faith and practice. Apartheid cannot be advanced or ignored by the Christian church or the US government (Carter, 2006). Justice demands that Palestinians and Jews live according to international law and conscience and be judged impartially.

### **Then the Judgment:**

Finally, the biblical picture of a Judgment Day is riveting: “Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and fed you, or thirsty and gave you drink, a stranger and took you in, or naked and clothed you? Or when did we see you sick or in prison and came to you?’ (Matt 25:39).

“And the King shall answer and say to them, ‘I tell you the truth. Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brothers, you have done it to me’” (Matt 25:40).

The obligation of the Christian is to meet the needs of the “least of these my brothers.” To do nothing is a sin of misfeasance; to actively use energy, money and time to oppress the oppressed is a sin of malfeasance – knowing better but doing it anyway. Which is the greater sin?

Jesus gets in the way of an agenda that is racist, power hungry and driven by a micro view of God. To be a servant in the true Christian sense of the word is to do the right thing regardless of the cost and to trust God for the outcome with all one’s heart, soul, mind and strength.

Take any eschatology (study of last things) that appeals to your fancy. Preach any doctrine of the End Times that you believe. Know, however, that your hope is not in your doctrine. Your hope is in the God of the doctrine, or it is no hope at all.

Jehovah God asks of everyone – Jew, Christian and Palestinian – a simple question, “What does the Lord require of you, O man?” The answer is far removed from preparing the Mount of Olives and the Temple Mount for the descent of Christ. What He requires of us is universal – “...to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8b).

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