

Explaining the Elections in Israel

by Sondra Oster Baras- week of Feb 9, 2009

Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: Sondra is an orthodox Jew who was born in America and moved to Israel where she lives with her family. She is not a believer in Jesus as her Messiah but believes (as we do) that God promised to give the land of Israel to the Jews and it is not their land to give away in so called peace processes. It would seem clear that doing so is foolish even from a secular standpoint. Over the years, the Jews have many times given tangible land in exchange for intangible promises of peace from their Muslim neighbors. In every case, instead of peace, they find their remaining land under fire of missiles, mortars, suicide bombers, etc. that were smuggled in, or launched from, the very land they gave up.

Many have asked me to explain the meaning of this week's parliamentary election results in Israel. I think Sondra's letter to her mailing list is very well written and I hope will answer the questions you may have about Israel's form of government.

Dear Kevin,

I fully intended to write an e-mail today that would bring you up to date on the final election results. But, unfortunately, the situation is even more confusing today than it was before the polls opened. With close to 100% of the votes counted, waiting for the soldiers' and diplomats' votes to be included, the Likud, headed by Binyamin Netanyahu, has 27 seats in the Knesset and Kadima 28. However, the right-wing and religious parties command a clear majority of 65 while Kadima, headed by Tzippy Livni, can only count on 44 seats to support her bid for prime minister. The 11 seats which belong to Arab Knesset members will not support either candidate.

A quick reminder of how the Israeli political system works - Israel has a parliamentary government and its legislative body is the Knesset. There are 120 seats in the Knesset. Voters cast their votes for a political party, not for a particular candidate for prime minister, but the larger parties see their party chairpersons as candidates for prime minister. The smaller parties support the leader of one of the larger parties for prime minister, so many voters for the smaller parties keep in mind that party's support for a particular prime ministerial candidate when casting their votes. At the end of the day, the person who can create a government which has the support of a majority of the Knesset seats (61) will be prime minister.

In our case, the largest parties are really quite small and rely on many smaller parties to create a coalition government. The head of the largest party is Tzippy Livni, but there are many fewer Knesset seats that will support her bid for prime minister. The president of Israel, Mr. Shimon Peres, has the job of deciding who to turn to first in order to offer him or her the chance to put together a government. The question is

whether he will ask Livni, the head of the largest party, or Netanyahu, the head of the party with the best chance to put together a government.

Both Livni and Netanyahu claimed victory, but only time will tell who will be the prime minister. Despite clear preferences of each party for their prime ministerial candidate, the post election process is more similar to a middle-eastern market than a political process. The negotiators are clever and tough and the results are not always predictable.

Where am I in all of this? Confused and disappointed for one. When the exit polls were announced last night, I was shocked. I could not believe that Tzippi Livni had surpassed Netanyahu. After so many failures, I can't understand how the Kadima Party still attracts any voters and with Livni having a very slim track record, it is surprising to me that so many would have supported her. On the other hand, the clear majority of the Knesset and the overwhelming majority of the Jewish vote is now solidly right-wing.

The Israeli public has had its day at the polls and declared with a loud voice that it is fed up with concessions, is looking for a tough response to terrorism and wants a more Jewish state.

Bottom line, I think the news is good, but the going will not be easy. If our candidates would have been more inspiring of our confidence, the end result would have been so much clearer. So there is a great deal of work to be done. Unfortunately, politics contains a terrible mix of human ego and ideology. Our job, as ordinary citizens, is to keep the ideology alive, to pressure our leaders to keep politics clean, and to remind our leaders that their job is to implement what is truly in the best interests of the country.

Shalom,



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