

Christian Support for Israel – A Just Cause

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Photo: Tovah Lazaroff

Today Christian Zionism is an ever expanding movement with new adherents being found in all corners of the globe. This will be in evidence over coming days as thousands of Christians ascend to Jerusalem for the annual Christian celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Among our Feast pilgrims this year there will be evangelical Christians not only from Western countries but also from such far off places as Bolivia, Botswana and Cambodia, and even several Arab states will be represented. In fact, the majority of Feast pilgrims will not come from North America or Europe, as you might expect, but from Latin America, Africa and Asia. And no matter their origins, they all will come with a shared love for Israel and a common concern for the safety and preservation of the Jewish people.

Now some are quick to dismiss Christian support for Israel as being driven by ulterior motives.

We are accused of wanting to hasten the Apocalypse or to convert Jews. Others say we are acting out of a guilt complex over the Holocaust or the long, tragic history of Christian anti-Semitism. Yet most of these detractors have their own hidden agenda in denouncing pro-Israel Evangelicals and they often rely on rather shoddy scholarship and reasoning to back up their charges.

Consider, for instance, that most of our larger national delegations this year will come from countries like China, Brazil and Thailand. Many of these Christians come here having never met a Jew in person before and thus they have no record of trying to convert Jews to Christianity. They have not read the latest best-sellers on the “End of Days” and they have received very little education on the persecution of Jews in Christian Europe.

But what they do have in common is the Bible, and from this incredible book they have gained a basic understanding that the election and calling over ancient Israel endures to this day in the restored Jewish state. They simply identify modern Israel with biblical Israel, and thus root for this nation amid all her struggles.

There is nothing sinister or dishonest about their support, and everything to commend it.

Still, it seems that those who hate Israel also detest anyone who stands with Israel, and so Christians are assigned all manner of ill motives for the simple act of befriending the Jews at long last. We are wrongly blamed for blocking the path to peace in the Middle East or for being callous to Palestinian suffering. The list of supposed misdeeds goes on.

Each of these spurious charges can be easily answered, but perhaps it is best to simply spell out

what truly motivates us into caring so deeply about Israel.

LET ME begin by assuring that we are not indifferent to Palestinian suffering. We just don't blame all their troubles on Israel. Yet if suffering is the main measuring stick for determining who deserves our sympathy, what about the Jews? Have they not suffered far more down through history than any other people on earth? According to the Bible, it is not just the depth of Jewish suffering that should move our hearts.

Rather, it is the redemptive purpose behind that affliction which distinguishes the Jewish people's pain from all others. What truly sets Jewish suffering apart is that it was largely inflicted by God for the sake of all other peoples.

The Bible teaches that Israel was called to be a suffering servant for the sake of the nations.

Through much tribulation, God has used the Jews to deliver to us Gentiles all the means necessary for salvation, including the written word of God, the laws of God, the service and worship of God, and ultimately the Messiah of God.

But because the ancient Israelites were not always faithful, God also corrected them through painful uprootings and exiles. The Hebrew prophets even decree that Israel would receive from the Lord's hand "double" for all her sins (Isaiah 40:1-3; Jeremiah 16:18).

This all resulted in a wound in the Jewish people that Jeremiah describes as "incurable" (Jeremiah 30:12-17). That is, no human hand can truly heal it, only God can. But He indeed promises to heal it, including through "Gentile mercy" shown back to Israel.

In the end, God promises to restore to Israel "double" for all their loss and dispossession, and to bring upon them "double honor... Therefore in their land they shall possess double; Everlasting joy shall be theirs" (Isaiah 61:7; see also Zechariah 9:12).

Christian Zionists are thus grateful for the rich spiritual blessings we have received through Israel. And we long to see this people, who suffered so much for our sake, healed from the wounds of exile and restored fully to their God-given inheritance.

That is the very powerful motivating factor behind our biblical Zionism. And quite frankly, anyone who questions it simply does not know our hearts!

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