

Jesus, the Jewish People, and Eschatology

Since the last newsletter, Iran has threatened to manufacture an atomic weapon and North Korea has actually tested one. We live in a world that is nervous, on edge, and ready for the next catastrophe ... and perhaps with very good reason.

Since the last newsletter, a plethora of religious articles have been written, Christian videos have been produced, and sermons have been preached touting that the signs are ripe for the return of Messiah Jesus. And who knows, perhaps all of these predictions and suppositions are correct.

However, and what is of greatest concern, is that many of these predictions and assumptions focus on the role of the Jewish people *simply* as it relates to the return of Jesus.

Please do not read the last paragraph and assume that I am downplaying their significant role in prophecy. The Jewish people are intricately tied to the second coming prophecies of Messiah Jesus. But the Jewish people should not be considered as some talisman or tool of instigation to “force” the return of Jesus. And sometimes this is what I believe we do as it relates to the Jewish people.

We should be focusing on reaching God’s Chosen People with the Gospel message and leave the return of Jesus up to God himself (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32). This is His job and He does it so much better than we possibly can.

Again, please do not read this article as some flippant diatribe. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, it is important to understand the mindset of the Jewish people – how they view us as it relates to Jesus, the Jewish people, and eschatology. Many Jewish leaders and people are wary of Christian support for Israel and the Jewish people. Some believe, and rightly so, it is because of our desire to reach them with the truth of the Jesus’ Messiahship. Others believe that our love and support is based solely on our desire to hasten the Day of the Lord. Unfortunately, the latter supposition may be true as well.

Therefore, the admonition of this article is to avoid the tendency to look up for the return of Jesus (Acts 1:8ff.) and rather to look out to the fields that are ripe unto harvest. Let’s focus on the work of Jewish evangelism and allow Gabriel to warm up the trumpet under God’s direction, and not in our response to human desires. We will reach far more Jewish and Gentile people if we put predictions to the side and focus on the work of evangelism. Shalom and God bless. Acts 20:24.

Amy Downey

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Christian Zionism ... Good Thing or Hindrance to the Gospel Message

President Harry S Truman, a Southern Baptist, led the charge for a Jewish state after the horrors of the Holocaust were brought to light in 1945. The United States cast the deciding vote at the United Nations in 1947 for the partition of "Palestine." And the U.S.A. was the first nation on May 15, 1948, to grant official recognition to the nation of Israel.

The history and relationship between the United States and Israel is one that we as Americans can find great pride. This country is rightfully called the greatest friend of Israel. We have stood with them even as most countries in the world have turned against Israel. This nation has done the right thing even in the face of terroristic blackmail.

However, there is a growing movement within this country, and especially in the evangelical community under the banner of Christian Zionism, to view political and physical support of Israel as all that is required of churches. We go to pro-Israel rallies. We boycott businesses that have divested from Israel due to pressure from the Palestinian propaganda machine. And we believe that we have fulfilled the mandate of Genesis 12:1-3. Nothing could be further from the truth. If our support of Israel is limited to the political or physical, we have **failed** to follow the true meaning of Genesis 12:1-3 much less Romans 1:16; 9:1-5; and 11:11.

I know many individuals who would call themselves Christian Zionists who carry a huge burden to see the Jewish people come to faith in

Messiah Jesus. However, I also know many other supporters of Israel who believe that one must support the nation of Israel regardless of what the spiritual condition of the people of Israel might be.

We as Christians must find a balance to this difficult issue. It is not the either/or proposition that is promoted on television, including and sometimes especially on religious television. You can be a supporter of the nation of Israel and still recognize that the Jewish people are heading for an eternity apart from the God of Israel if they do not receive Jesus as their personal Messiah.

Ultimately, Christian Zionism will fail if a mandate for evangelism is not included. Political pressures and the changing religious landscape will turn the church's attention to other matters if Jewish evangelism is not the first and primary focus in our support for Israel.

A perfect example of this truth can be found through a discussion I once had with a Christian woman. She would gladly welcome the term Christian Zionist and supports the nation of Israel without reservation. However, she does not really care or seem to understand the urgency of Jewish evangelism. She believes that as long as she supports the nation, she has done her part. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Support the nation of Israel. In fact, I have a pro-Israel bumper sticker on my car. But keep in mind that our first and primary task is to share the love of Messiah Jesus with the people of Israel regardless of whether they live in "The Land," New York City, or right next door to you.

Book Review – *The Paradox of Anti-Semitism*

Daniel Cohn-Sherbok is an interesting rabbi. He most definitely does not believe in Jesus as Messiah; however, he is sympathetic to Jewish believers (see *Messianic Judaism*, 2000, pp. 209-13).

Therefore, Cohn-Sherbok's books are valuable for anyone who wants to understand the hearts of the modern Jewish people. Cohn-Sherbok represents the internal struggle being experienced by many Jewish people who struggle with whether it is acceptable, possible, for Jews to believe in Jesus. And even though Cohn-Sherbok's latest book, *The Paradox of Anti-Semitism*, might not appear to continue this intellectual battle, the struggle is present in his analysis of how anti-Semitism has been both evil and restorative for Judaism.

Cohn-Sherbok's latest work provides a historical overview of Judaism by first examining the major forms of modern Judaism. He then provides an analysis of how each major sub-group developed as anti-Semitism increased or decreased throughout the years since the Diaspora of AD 70.

The overarching premise of his book is that as anti-Semitism increases, the Jewish people return to the practice of Judaism. But as the world turns from hatred towards the Jews, the Jewish people will take the route of assimilation.

Cohn-Sherbok, while brilliant, often falls prey to historical generalizations regarding how all Christians view the Jewish people. But the overall value of this book is to see how even a Rabbi struggles with the question of a man named Jesus.

For even though Jesus is not mentioned in this particular work, Cohn-Sherbok affirms the view that those who turn to Jesus as Messiah only do so in the "good times." He obviously is wrong in his assumption because for a Jewish person to believe in Jesus often requires an abandonment of family, friends, and history. Good or bad times play little role in whether a Jewish person believes in Jesus.

The truth of Jesus' Messiahship and the witness of those who care for the Jewish people are what matter. So please read books such as *The Paradox of Anti-Semitism*, and read between the lines, so that you can feel the longing and desperate search for answers that the Jewish people are seeking to find. Answers that can only be found through a personal relationship with Jesus.

Ministry Calendar

**October 8, 2006 – "Ministry Testimony" –
Wedgwood Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas**
**October 29, 2006 – "Missions Fair" –
Wedgwood Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas**
**November 13-15, 2006 – "Ministry Display" –
Baptist Missionary Association of Texas State
Meeting, Convention Center, Lufkin, Texas**

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE ...

- ✧ **Jewish Evangelism in 2007 – What Next?**
- ✧ **The Significance of Purim to the Story of the Jewish People**
- ✧ **Connecting the Jewish Story to the Christian Faith – John 10:22-31**