

A Decisive Dilemma

by Jack W. Hayford

The words *dilemma* and *decisive* rarely appear in the same phrase, for the simple reason that they tend to be at odds. A person “on the horns of a dilemma,” as the expression goes, is not likely to make a decisive move. Their perch is too perilously uncertain. Nevertheless, somewhat in the middle of one, I’ve chosen the risky course.

The *dilemma* I face is to know how to address two sets of friends—friends who themselves are usually in agreement, but between whom a stress point has occurred. I’m about to side *decisively* for one of them—but at the same time, do not feel opposed to the other. I’ll explain in a minute, but first, here’s what I’m talking about.

When Prime Minister Sharon was stricken, one of Israel’s greatest friends was reported as explaining this horribly tragic moment as being the judgment of God upon that great man for his having surrendered the Gaza Strip to Palestinian control. Though Sharon’s action was a hoped-for means of brokering peace, it was suggested he had sinned. Pat Robertson, who is also a friend of mine, came under an immediate and very understandable withering blast of criticism for asserting the above. He was rebuked—if not ostracized—from being considered a friend of Israel. That instant, I was forced by convictions to decisively disagree—prompting three things I want to say here.

First, on behalf of Christians everywhere, I want to apologize to the people of Israel and to the family of Ariel Sharon. Though no one—not even the Pope—is authorized to be “the voice” of all Christianity, I have been asked to address this issue, and in doing so have little question that I reflect the feelings of most thoughtful Christians.

Second, I understand the concern of evangelical Christians who protested “the giveaway” (though not attaching Sharon’s suffering to it as a punitive response from God). But I disagreed with the conclusion they drew, though harmonizing with the fundamental proposition underlying their feelings. In short, they were motivated by a conviction held by all evangelicals, including myself. We believe that God has ordained *eretz yisrael* as the domain of the Jewish people as “an everlasting habitation.” We stand with Israel on that. Without question. So it is a peculiar fact that it was from that “friendly” conviction that the possibility of God’s being offended by the Prime Minister’s decision was asserted. Those saying so felt that what God has providentially *restored* to Israel is outside the right of any human to *give away* as a negotiating tool.

Still, though disagreeing with some Christian friends, I reach out to all Israelis with this Christian’s support. I doubt a rush to “judgment” took place by God (though one certainly was by those defining the source of the Prime Minister’s stroke). The irony was in how a few Christians, showing such concern for Israel’s well-being, appeared to be merciless concerning Sharon’s.

However, to my view, it's hard to see that God's purposes were either being opposed or obstructed. First, I am sure God has *both* the time and the power to fulfill His land-commitments to His people Israel. Yes! Israel will have *all her land*. But it will be in God's time, and not man's. As for Sharon's "give-away," I am more inclined, from a Christian perspective, to see his action as "Christ-like" rather than as one subject to God's wrath. The Prime Minister was clearly motivated by a quest to "make peace"—a human pursuit Jesus Himself said would bring God's approval, and His designation of those so doing as resulting in their being "children of God" (Matt. 5:9).

Third, I want to caution all evangelical Christians against ever being quick to declare "judgment" where disaster strikes. I pastored in Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley when the 1994 earthquake ransacked the region. From points north, south, and east in the U.S., it was dismaying when some Christians raced to declare this tragedy as parallel with the God's visitation on Sodom. Where multitudes had been devastated and scores killed, it was hardly comforting to God-fearing, Christ-serving people who were trying to pick their way out of the rubble—at the same time to love and care for non-believing neighbors. Nor were those announcements a trumpet call to righteousness—having only the tinny sound of *self*—righteousness and showing the arrogant sneer of religious pretension.

I am a friend of Israel's—sink or swim. I hold to the promise she shall one day have all her land—that the God who begot His chosen people is committed to "all Israel being saved," including her land-holdings. My hope is that this forthright apology is received by my Israeli friends who may have been wounded by any of us called Christian. I also hope that my being so decisive in saying so won't result in my having addressed a dilemma by jamming its horns through my ribs.

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