

Interview with Pastor Jack Hayford
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Christian Edition: When did the “light” first go on for you regarding the biblical significance of modern Israel? Was there someone or something in particular that had a big influence on your understanding and heart for Israel and the Jewish people?

My most pivotal point in being awakened to Israel’s place today, and my relationship to and responsibility in that regard, took place early in my life. That encounter is unforgettable, and set the direction leading toward how I think, stand, and relate as I do today as a Christian who is concerned and supportive of Israel.

I was a teenager—the year was 1948, and the event was the birth of the modern State of Israel coming into being. My pastor, who was a dynamic and wise Bible teacher, explained the prophetic passages being fulfilled by that event and earlier related ones. From that day I have grown in a lifetime of ministry as a Christian leader, but always with interest in and sympathy for Israel and the Jews—her present and their future.

Q: Did the tragic history of Christian anti-Semitism or the Holocaust play any part in your developing a heart for Israel and the Jewish people?

There is no question that my awakened awareness of the relational and emotional impact of history of Jewish-Christian relations played a large part. It was not until 1970 that I first realized Jews saw the Holocaust as being perpetrated by Christians. This was a startling discovery in two regards; first, it being beyond my comprehension that Nazism would be equated with “Christian,” and second, to find how abysmally ignorant I was of the irresponsible and death-dealing influence of Europe’s Christian community, politically and historically (e.g., in the Crusades, the Inquisition, and in both the U.S. and Vatican’s stances during World War II). Thus had I been dulled to any sensitivity to the influence of Jewish feelings of being abandoned by the people I would have most thought would manifest God’s love and support. To the contrary, history, I found, had driven a spike into Jewish hearts and a wedge between God’s ancient people and Christians at large.

At the same time (1969), I entered my pastorate in the Los Angeles area, in a community situated in close proximity to a large Jewish population; this occurred almost simultaneously with my first trip to Israel (1970). The confluence of these two geographic facts served as an additional means to sharpen and advance my understanding, awaken my sensitivities, and motivate my boldness and actions in supporting Israel and global Jewry.

Q: How do you handle the Holocaust theologically? There are some tough questions to answer like: “Where was God?” and “Why does He allow such suffering?” And do you think the Holocaust had some prophetic significance?

First, yes, I think there is prophetic, albeit poignant and painful, significance in the Holocaust. But I always feel the difficulty of addressing it from a biblical-theological point of view alone, because one can seem solely academic or religiously merciless, when the agony of the Shoah calls forth the utmost in human tenderness in face of the pain and righteous indignation in the face of such injustice. Who can be human and be merely academic in answering your question, when the risk of seeming casual about the death of multitudes, the hate of an evil system, and the passivity of the global community stood by while million were murdered? But I will answer the question as well as I can.

In the Old Testaments covenants God made with Israel, He presented everlasting promises, including the Land and His assured blessings at every point of life. At the same time, He called His people to fidelity and accountability. This pattern is consistent in both the Old Testament and the New; seen in the ways of God with humankind in general, including Christians. But there is a unique role given to Israel. God's sovereign selection of the Jews, and His appointed purpose for their lives, is laden with rich blessings, and the evidence of those endowments has blessed His people and, through them, blessed the whole world.

But there is an awesome responsibility incumbent upon any individual or people whom God chooses in so distinct a way. To violate trust with the God of the universe cannot be regarded lightly, and whether Jew or Gentile, we can't "have it both ways"—that is, "receive (or demand) God's blessing, while disregarding His Word or His conditions related to His promises.

If I am asked if I see the horror of the Holocaust as a punishment from God upon Jews, I urge honest reflection on God's Word. God takes no delight in the suffering of anyone, and His judgments—whenever applied—are not vindictive. Rather, when human actions disregard those ways God's Word has revealed that He wishes (1) to preserve our well-being and (2) to enrich our lives (which He wills and desires for us), then those choices remove those so choosing from His protection from evil. The sore consequences that fall upon us then are infinitely more self-invoked by our sin than lovelessly inflicted by an outraged deity.

Noting these things, let me emphasize: Not I, nor any faithful teacher, rabbi, or pastor representing these truths considers himself the arbiter of human righteousness or an expert analyst as to every case of pain and consequent agony suffered throughout much of Jewish history. But within it all—at the very point the promises of and call to "choose life" abound, Moses prophesied that if a people "turn from the Lord your God, these evils will come upon you" (see Deuteronomy 28). It's frightening to see how clear that is.

However, beyond whatever implications that passage may have manifest in Jewish history, beyond the Law's judgments are the awe-inspiring promises of the Prophets. Most notably, Ezekiel's prophecy of the resurrection of the Jewish nation and the recovery of God's Chosen unto their Land, is laden with tokens of God's fullest heart of love for His ancient people. Viewed through the lens of recent history, not only are all right to rejoice in fulfilled promises, but would be wise to

listen now to God's call to return to Him in heart and spirit. Therein is to find, beyond the horror of the past, His God-given hope for the future—one including His complete restoration and redemption.

Q: In your view, how prevalent and influential is Replacement theology today in the American churches? What sort of "damage" is it doing? How do you address Replacement theology from the Bible?

In terms of its influence in American churches today, there is no question that Replacement theology influences the actions of some, especially those taken in circles of liberal Christianity. On the other hand, it has virtually no place among evangelical Christians.

I see Replacement theology as a tragic deviation from the revelation of the Old and New Testaments—as dulling to the intended spirit of God's Word, and as deluding to the Church, regarding its call to commitment and partnership with Israel and the Jewish people. I don't wish to insult any who have never been taught anything else; there is something of an innocence in ignorance imposed by training, even when it may become destructive. That isn't to excuse, but only to explain.

However, it is a damning commentary on Replacement theology that it established the mood and mentality that allowed the atmosphere which tolerated the Holocaust, and that would seduce any Christian to tolerate anti-Semitism or passivity today toward Israel or Jewish interests.

Q: What about your own biblical view on Israel and why Christians should support the Jewish state? Do you base it on biblical prophecies or on the earlier covenant promises God made to Abraham?

I see three things as central to my commitments, including—as I've already referenced—God's prophecies and promises.

First, Christians should support the Jewish State in the light of God's covenant with Abraham. God said that through that one man's "seed"—both the Jews as a people, and through His Son as the Redeemer—He would bless all the nations of the Earth. This has proven true, for the whole world has been blessed by the gifts and giftings that have flowed to humankind through Jewish people! Further, Christians should uniformly thank God for the instrumentality of the Jews as the avenue by which God has given the world His Son, our Savior; not to mention also giving us virtually all of the Old and New Testaments.

Second, at the same time, God said, "I will bless those who bless you [Abraham's promised offspring], and I will curse those who curse you." Under the imminent threat of those last words, bluntly put, I see it as simply smart to stand on the side of God's chosen people! It appears to me to be approximate to slitting one's own throat—as an individual or as a nation—to stance oneself against Israel, or to take an antagonistic position against the Jews.

Such a view is not to argue that every deed done by every Jew, or by Israel herself, is always right or automatically excusable. But it is to say that it would be foolish for any posture of concern over Jewish or Israeli failures to become one's legitimizing their choice of outright opposition to either.

Third, any view of the Bible involves a view of history, and integrity with Christian history calls true Christian believers (1) to repentance for past violations of and sins against God's timelessly, chosen people; and (2) to stand up for and remain beside Israel as God has brought her into being at this hour, according to His prophetic promise. Israel's land-rights have been covenanted to them by God. I cannot define their precise boundaries, but we know that *eretz yisrael* is divinely appointed by God as theirs.

In the court of human opinion, Christians need to affirm Israel's desire to keep their homeland, which has been covenanted to them biblically by God as an everlasting covenant, and contracted legally as theirs by the 1948 decision of world governments. That today, even a second hearing to opponents be given ear by the world press, much less the give credence to the relentless barrage of ranting against Israel's quest to maintain their boundaries, is unimaginable to the mind informed by history. This is why I see so great a need for Christians to stand up today for Israel today. It is a part of our role as Truth-bearers, not to see this part of our mission as political but as a *spiritual* duty; not to pursue it with rancor or rant, but to speak up with grace and informed insight, helping a generally misguided and uninformed society to rethink and release its prejudices.

So ultimately, standing up for Israel today is not just, "saving my neck by being for God's Chosen because if I don't, He'll curse me." And it isn't only because of God's absolute and everlasting promise of the land of Israel to the Jews. In fact, it finally resolves to even more than a humane issue—a matter of legality. So to be pro-Jewish does not require any person to be anti-Arab or anti-Palestinian, nor does it request you or me to endorse everything that Jewish politicians or the military do. But it is to grant Israel, as a nation, the same legal rights as any other—and to give them a fair hearing in the media of our culture, for it is by the inequities in these fields of law (the UN) and the media (world press) that a constant stream of injustices are leveled against them. As Christians, and knowing God's righteousness essentially refers to His justice, I must rise to speak for Israel as a matter of Christian conviction.

Q: How politically involved should Christians be on the issue of Israel? Should we be criticizing the Israeli government when they are trying to give away lands promised to them by God in exchange for peace?

First and foremost, American believers need to speak out, calling our government to stand by Israel. It is unnerving to me to see any creeping erosion that might indicate any reduced stance of U.S. support for Israel.

Second, insofar as criticizing Israel's ceding land, one regrets the pain and cost that was born by the individuals and the nation—both in the past, and should such action take place in the future. But when such has been or is done (though I am not necessarily an advocate of that course), I still honor the manifest nobility that chooses that path, because it demonstrates such a passionate, self-sacrificing will to be peace-making. This too I see as a Christian posture, for it is exactly in the spirit of Jesus' call to, "when your coat is requested, give your shirt also." While giving away land seems counterproductive (and to some, absolutely unscriptural), it appears to me that such actions—as humbling as they are—could be an introductory means of learning to trust God's grace, rather than human striving, to restore the whole Land to His People.

Q: Given the war that's been going on recently, do you have a message for the Israeli prime minister?

You know, I'm pretty slow to speak to leaders of state about what I think they ought to do. They have their job and I have mine. I would be glad to talk with any leader who directly asked for my input, but I have no public statements to issue. Well, maybe one: My message to the prime minister [of Israel] is this: "I'm standing with you in support of Israel's future and her right to the Land!"

Q: How many visits have you made to Israel? Were you just leading tours of Bible sites? Has the focus of your visits changed over the years?

I have been to Israel 33 times over 36 years. Thirty of those were study tours. I have led thousands of people to the Holy Land. Bible sites were central, of course. But capturing a sense of Israel's contemporary life "in the Land," gaining an understanding of the history of the wars (especially the Six-Day War), prioritizing visits to Yad Vashem, and leading my groups in planting trees and promoting the JNF—all these are expansions I include beyond a traditional "Bible Land Tour." And there's one more thing:

My last three Israel tours with groups I've led have incorporated an added dimension of impassioned intercession—of power-filled prayer. The focus is rooted in the same belief system manifest by Israel's prophets—to do a physical thing depicting a spiritual reality, and to believe God will literally fulfill what is demonstrated.

So, to "build a wall of spiritual defense against the darkness" (while the Light of the World continues expanding a radiance throughout the nation of Israel), we have built altars. I have led my groups in constructing simple "altars" at four inconspicuous locations, praying there and taking action paralleling Jacob's doing so in Genesis 35:10-15—doing this as an affirmation of God's everlasting covenant of the Land to the Jews. South, east, north and west, we have done this as a *physical* testimony, prophetically erected in the Name of the Living God, and indicative of our resistance against any intrusion of evil upon the divinely intended boundaries God has for Israel as a nation. We pray they be preserved, and we pray that all Israel will be saved by His strong hand.

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