

Response to David Zadok on “A Messianic Jewish Response to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”
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Comment [ST1]:

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The Steering Committee has asked that writers of this topic address political, legal and historical issues energizing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (hereafter, IPC). David Zadok has touched on some major areas of relevance to these issues, a number of which are often overlooked in our Messianic Jewish community. I am in substantial agreement with his paper, including his summary of the perspective held by many Palestinian believers. As the other respondent to his paper, Judith Rood, is a scholar on the Arab/Muslim Middle East, I shall present more of an Israeli perspective¹ that is, to the best of my ability, objectively fair and demonstrably accurate. I shall supplement to a far greater degree than respectfully refute David’s paper. My comments are limited to issues he has raised, explicitly or implicitly, beginning with preliminary points of biblical exegesis.

David writes on p. 5: “*God has brought about a partial hardening of hearts in Israel, until the full number [πλήρωμα] of Gentiles will come in and then all Israel will be saved.*” More accurate translations of Ro. 11:25-26 are found in versions such as the KJV, CJB and TLV: “... [A] partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved” (TLV). These translations rightly indicate the manner of Israel’s salvation is primarily related to the fullness of Messiah-likeness expressed by Gentile believers, more than to any given number of Gentile believers.

David writes on p. 5: “*While land has an important place...those of us who belong to God set their eyes on a heavenly land, not an earthly land [citing Heb. 11:10].* The statement and cited verse appear to support the point that “*our concern should be for our eternal destiny and that of others.*” Interpreted in context, Heb. 11:10 and its reference to Jerusalem illustrates a teaching on faith. The passage is not an apostolic directive about Jerusalem or the land. There is no reason to believe the author, addressing Messianic Jews, is denying the *p’shat* or straightforward application to earthly Jerusalem. Instead, he uses it to illustrate expanded applicability, in the realm of faith, to the spiritual city.² To be sure, the Bible teaches us to fix our eyes on Yeshua, the Gospel and eternal things above, but not at the expense of good stewardship over temporal things---such as land---entrusted to us by the divine Owner for His purposes.

David writes on p. 2: “*In preserving the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15) through the patriarchs, God now brought them into the land he had promised.*” The divine pronouncement in Genesis 3:15 of enmity between the seed of the woman and that of the serpent, with the woman’s seed ultimately victorious, reveals the seminal root of the inextricably related phenomena of anti-Semitism and spirit of anti-Messiah. Together these forces comprise the fundamental---but certainly not sole---spiritual engine driving the IPC. These forces manifest through history, politics and law, applying uniquely to our people. Reasoned Messianic Jewish discussion of the IPC cannot ignore them. Biblically, socio-politically and logically, anti-Israelism today cannot be viewed as totally separate from anti-Semitism because Israel exists as the nation-state of the Jewish people. Acknowledgement of these realities is not to be equated with denial of Israel’s responsibility in the conflict, paranoid-like defensiveness, or with resorting to reductionist simplification of complexities.

Certainly not all expressions of opposition to Israel are anti-Semitic. A reasonable and impartial working definition of anti-Semitism in the context of free speech and assembly is used by some international governments, including the US State Department. To summarize, nonviolent criticism of or opposition to Israel is regarded as anti-Semitic where any one of “3D’s” is present: (1) delegitimization of Israel; (2) demonization of Israel; or (3) double standard used for Israel vis-à-vis other states.³ Much or most official and unofficial, public Palestinian expression of the IPC would fall within this working definition. Anti-Semitism that is expressed violently is usually self-defining.

David writes on p.7, *“Though we want to think facts are objective, even the best of intentions lead to interpretation of the facts from one’s own perspective.”* To be sure, individuals perceive reality differently to varying degrees. Therefore, to maintain “natural”/moral law and order, particularly in the context of conflict resolution, civilized societies through history have established principles for ascertaining truth. Western jurisprudence, charged with upholding human rights together with social justice, has developed over many centuries the doctrine of reasonableness. Accordingly, where facts in a narrative (such as the IPC) are controverted, truth is assessed based on the best reliable evidence---as that evidence would be understood by the civilized, so-called “reasonable person.” Without this or a similar standard, it would appear we must dismiss the notion that objective reality exists at all, which is tantamount to denying the existence of objective truth. In that event, nothing, not even God’s Word, is capable of reasonably objective interpretation.

Indeed, the hermeneutical view expressed by some Palestinian Christians and their Western counterparts is that the Bible has no meaning in and of itself. Instead, the meaning of Scripture (especially regarding Israel) is said to derive from subjective interaction between reader and text. Thus Zadok accurately writes, *“Jewish believers and Christian Arabs can read the same...scripture and come to completely opposite conclusions.”* A critical question is how much subjectivity ought to be considered within the bounds of fair discussion in an honest search for biblical truth.

More than a few Palestinian Christians have said that due to their perception of relevant facts, the Scriptures, and personal pain, they do not believe Israel’s re-gathering is divinely inspired. Other symposium papers address this topic so I merely mention: (1) without excusing Israel’s sin, genuine moves of God, including global evangelization, do not occur apart from the exercise of human free will and our fallen nature; (2) Jewish regathering is not the consummate fulfillment of prophecy pertaining to Israel, but an essential step toward our surrender to Messiah; (3) as Dr. Michael L. Brown points out, if Israel’s exile is a curse, none but God can reverse it; and (4) the biblical prophets describe an Arab-related, international opposition to Israel’s regathering as seen in the IPC. In a sadly ironic twist, the IPC itself seems consistent with Bible prophecy.

David’s synopsis of the Palestinian perception rightly challenges our Messianic community to humbly face some serious Israeli misdeeds, hear the hearts of our Palestinian brothers and sisters, and respond in God-sourced love to genuine suffering or injustice on both sides. Thankfully, we see initial beginnings of this in Israel and elsewhere in the Middle East. In the process, we are tasked with establishing and maintaining a biblical rather than secular/universalist perspective of justice. The latter may easily lead to unsanctified mercy, superficial reconciliation or both. In contrast, biblical justice is intimately related to and based on righteousness, or that which is right, upright and true. It cannot exist or result, therefore, apart from discernment of relevant biblical and factual truth.

As mentioned earlier, questions posed by the symposium for this particular topic focus on historical, political, and legal issues energizing the IPC. Due to the extra-biblical nature of the assigned topic, unless otherwise indicated, my response applies to mainstream Palestinian culture, rather than to the Palestinian Christian community. To supplement David’s summary of a highly complex modern history of Israel and the Palestinian people, approximately 150 years ago, early Zionist pioneers began legally purchasing (with relatively few exceptions) the lands on which they settled in then-Palestine. At times this resulted in displacement of Arab tenant farmers who had for generations lived on---but not technically owned---those lands. Decades later, various international agreements led to the legal reestablishment of Israel. These agreements include but are not limited to the San Remo Resolution, lending authority to the previously issued Balfour Declaration; League of Nations Mandate for Palestine; UN Charter Article 80; and UN Resolution 181. These agreements are all consistent with recognized jurisprudential criteria for granting nation-state sovereignty to: (1) an identifiable people group that historically exercised sovereign

control over (2) an identifiable ancestral homeland (3) until forcibly removed by invading conquest, and (4) which homeland is largely undeveloped and relatively sparsely occupied.⁴

Upon declaration of statehood in 1948, Israel faced an immediate, pan-Arab military invasion. During that time most Palestinian Arabs fled the country, either at the explicit direction of their leaders or from fear. Jewish soldiers, however, did forcibly and wrongfully evict a sizeable minority from their homes.⁵ A refugee crisis resulted, which the Arab world intentionally left unresolved, according to its leaders, as a political weapon against Israel. Meanwhile, the Palestinian state Transjordan had been created on 77% of land previously designated for a Jewish homeland. For this and other reasons, Transjordan's establishment arguably violated international law. Nevertheless, and for still other reasons, the Arabs regarded this Palestinian state as insufficient for their purposes. (They also rejected the UN's offer of a second Palestinian state proffered in Resolution 181, another arguably illegal offer.)

Israeli attempts to negotiate for the return, compensation and repatriation of refugees date back to 1949.⁶ For decades, however, no Arab leader would negotiate with Israel, stating that to do so would imply recognition of the Jewish state. This they had collectively vowed never to do; the Palestinians have never rescinded the vow. With the Arab nations refusing to absorb and grant them citizenship, Palestinians adopted the "Phased Plan" in 1964 to liberate Palestine and thereby annihilate the Jewish state. Bear in mind that in 1964 there was no occupation of, or Jewish settlement in, the West Bank or Gaza. Those territories were legally acquired in Israel's defensive war of 1967, in accordance with longstanding principles of customary international law.⁷ Today, both Palestinian governments continue to openly recommit to wiping Israel as a Jewish state off the map. Toward that end, both democratically elected leaderships of the putative Palestinian state persist in systematically inciting hate and violence (usually in Arabic) against Israel. Hamas's charter and Fatah's constitution still call for Israel's extermination. Should either of the two Palestinian governments fail, Iran and the Islamic State threaten to effectively eliminate the Jews.

Some say that Israel illegally occupies the West Bank and Gaza (from which Israel withdrew in 2005). At the same time, some Israelis say there is no occupation because territories recovered in 1967 had been previously set aside by the international community for a Jewish homeland but wrongfully taken away. In any event, under traditional and politically unbiased interpretations of international law, those territories have technically remained "disputed" since 1967. In this dispute, Israel's case to possession and ownership (including settlement) appears stronger than that of any other claimant.⁸ Moreover, until the dispute is resolved, Israel's presence in the West Bank and along Gaza's borders is legally mandated by UN Resolution 242 Paragraphs 1 and 2, and the Hague Regulations Section III, Articles 42-43. The Hague regulations authorize administrative/military occupation by a nation victorious in a defensive war (as occurred in 1967) over a hostile population to maintain public order, until peace can be achieved.⁹ Reflecting those principles, Resolution 242 authorizes Israeli occupation of the territories until genuine peace is achieved. Such peace must include acknowledgement of Israel's right to exist as a sovereign state, within secure borders to be determined through negotiations. Israel's military presence in the West Bank and along Gaza's borders is not, therefore, illegal. At times, however, both Israelis and Palestinians commit specific, illegal acts in the context of occupation.

With customary international law favoring Israel's overall position, today's case against her is founded largely on "lawfare." Lawfare is defined as the manipulation of traditional Western law so as to undermine the principles on which that law is based, and thereby achieve otherwise unattainable, extremist political goals. It is by means of lawfare, and ingenuously overruling preexisting international law, that Palestinian President Abbas now seeks to establish a sovereign state.¹⁰ One of many confounding results of lawfare is reflected in the International Criminal Court's (nonbinding) statement in 2014 that although Gaza is no longer occupied by Israel according to international law, it is occupied---because that is the "prevalent view within the international community."¹¹

Lawfare (and terror) notwithstanding, surveys over the past decade consistently reveal a solid majority of Israelis are willing to live indefinitely alongside a peaceful Palestinian state. The majority of Israeli Messianic Jews would likely prove willing as well, despite land concessions that would be required. Similar surveys, however, show only a fraction of Palestinians are willing to live peacefully, indefinitely alongside a Jewish state. For that reason and others, some Israelis are seriously considering a one state solution in lieu of two. Theoretically, Israel would absorb Palestinians willing to become citizens of a predominantly Jewish state. Palestinian Israelis would hold citizenship in the only democratic country in the Middle East. Their human rights and dignity could be restored and preserved, with economic, social and political freedoms available to them. Social justice on their behalf could, quite possibly, be achieved.

Meanwhile, Israel has not been faultless, free of mistakes or without sin in the IPC. This fact is beyond dispute. Much of the world, however, seems to employ a standard of judgment of those wrongs, particularly in the difficult setting of terror and urban warfare, that applies exclusively to the Jewish state. Some say exaggerated and unfounded allegations of disproportionate force have morphed into a disproportionate farce. In reality, the actual ratio of Israel's combatant to civilian (collateral) casualties is likely much lower than that of other Western nations, especially the US.¹² Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz has pointed out that no nation in history facing comparable existential danger has tried so hard--and so successfully--to require its military to operate within the rule of law.¹³

In summarizing history that is reliably documented, a recurrent pattern emerges. Israeli efforts to negotiate peace with the Palestinian people since 1948 have been met by an Arab/Islamic/Palestinian rejection of Israel's legal and moral right to exist as a Jewish nation-state. According to what may be the predominant Israeli perspective, the core reason for the ongoing nature of the conflict is rejectionism.

Discussion of the Israeli attitude toward the IPC cannot ignore so-called Christian Palestinianism or Palestinian evangelical fulfillment/liberation theology. Presumably, other papers discuss this matter, so I merely note that many believe the emerging movement promotes political anti-Semitism and delegitimization of Israel. Of critical significance is that Israelis do not hear Christian Palestinianists denounce the real engine of the conflict: genocidally anti-Semitic local, regional, and now global, rejectionist Islam. Nor do we hear mention of how Palestinian leaders have borne major responsibility for their people's unjust suffering.¹⁴ To an unknown degree, this silence may be due to fear-driven self-censorship of Palestinian Christians not holding anti-Israel views. In any event, Israelis and Jews worldwide hear themselves targeted (again) as the proverbial scapegoat.

For purposes of a Messianic way forward, at least 3 categories of Palestinians exist, each of which mandates a different response: (1) our evangelical brothers and sisters; (2) sincerely peaceful Muslims and cultural Christians not inciting hate; and (3) Islamists driven by murderous hate for Israel, the Jews or both. My closing comments suggest initial steps applicable to all three categories, but clearly most befitting Palestinian evangelicals with whom we carry the only hope for genuine peace.

While our present ministries may fully occupy our time and energy, we can intentionally try to concern ourselves in positive ways with Palestinians. In most instances this may prove most fruitful alongside Israeli believers, particularly those in good relationship with some Palestinians. We can intentionally learn about and personally hear the hearts of some of our evangelical brothers and sisters. Without compromising biblical truth, we can engage in acts of compassion, ranging from basic humanitarian aid to works of genuine justice in social and political realms. Messianic leaders can share publicly not only about Israel, but where appropriate, about blessing the Palestinian people. We can certainly pray for the salvation and reconciliation of both peoples.

Ultimately, in any fair, forward-looking discussion of the IPC or in building relationship with Palestinians, I believe we are taken back, as Messianic Jews, to our starting point. Our fundamental battle as believers is against spiritual forces and is fought in spiritual realms. Therefore, I propose that in order to go forward, we as a remnant go back to the cross of Yeshua. As David Zadok suggests, let us be among the first to repent of any ungodly pride, however subtle, that has entrenched itself in our Jewish, Israeli and even Messianic culture. Pride is often the flipside of insecurity or fear. Where we lack love for Palestinians because we are consciously or unconsciously frightened, overly defensive, offended or wounded by them, or have succumbed to a critical spirit due to frustration, anger or bitterness, let us meet the Master at the Altar of Atonement.

A few years ago I asked a Palestinian evangelical pastor how the dynamics of the cross shaped his people's heart toward Israel. He replied that Palestinian preachers rarely talked about taking pain or offense against Israel to the cross. With his next breath, he said they should probably start. Perhaps the same could be said of some Messianic preaching and thinking on the IPC. To the extent we have denied our personal pain over the IPC or not taken it to the cross, that pain will likely wend its way into and distort our theology of the conflict--and worse yet, our knowledge of God Himself. It is by identification with Messiah at the cross, and in fellowship with His sufferings in the spirit of Phil. 3:10-11, that both Israeli and Palestinian believers may be set free to fully forgive. Then, through the power of His resurrection, Yeshua can enable us, as a critical mass remnant, to rightly effect on the ground change in the IPC and greater evangelization of our peoples.

I believe that when Palestinians understand and embrace God's covenant love, mercy and grace for Israel, they will experience His love, mercy and grace at new levels for themselves. Healing from heaven for the deepest of wounds will flow to them. Palestinian Christians will begin to walk in the manifest power of Gospel truth as never before. Their identity in Jesus strengthened, they will fulfill their high Kingdom destiny, transforming their communities and testifying to others, including Jews, of redemptive love.

Likewise, to the extent we Messianic Jews humbly embrace the cross, lay down any hurt and even grievous injury, confess our sins and those of our people, repent of spiritual and nationalistic pride, seek righteousness in the IPC, and love the Palestinian people the way Yeshua does, we will come closer to fulfilling our call to serve as a light to the nations, mediating true justice and peace. All Israel will come closer to being saved. As Jewish and Palestinian believers lovingly bless the other, we together make way for The Way, Who will make justice prophetically roll like a river into the IPC. Despite the magnitude of the challenge, as father of Zionism Theodore Herzl said, "If we will it, it is no dream."

¹ Due to space limitations, I do not cover the full spectrum of Israeli views spanning from extreme right to left.

² Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must be Challenged* and works cited therein (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2007), 247-52; David H. Stern *Jewish NT Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish NT Pub., Inc., 1992), 710.

³ US Department of State, "Defining Anti-Semitism," 8 June 2010, www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/fs/2010/122352.htm.

⁴ See Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, 1934 (Montevideo, 1933) and commentaries thereon.

⁵ For a recent left-centrist perspective, see Colin Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel*, 2d ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁶ Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict* (NY: Vintage Books, 2001), 262, citing N. Caplan, "The Lausanne Conference: A Case Study in Middle East Peacemaking" (Tel Aviv: Dagan Center, 1993).

⁷ For example, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1951, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%2078/volume-78-I-1021-English.pdf>; Former President of the International Criminal Court Judge Steven M. Schwebel, *Justice in International Law: Selected Writings* (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 521-26; Professor Julius Stone, *Israel and Palestine: Assault on the Law of Nations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 127.

Yale Law Professor Eugene Rostow, former US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, served as a prime architect of UN Resolution 242, which set Israel's temporary borders after the 1967 war. Rostow and others involved in drafting Resolution 242 vigorously denied that it, the Fourth Geneva Convention or other operative law precluded Jewish sovereignty or settlement in all areas acquired by Israel in 1967. (The Arab position has differed.) Many of Rostow's articles on the subject are compiled at *Countering Bias and Misinformation Mainly About the Arab-Israel Conflict*, www.mauriceostroff.tripod.com/id45.html.

⁸ See all works cited in note 7, above. Regarding Israeli settlements, any case against Jewish settlement in the territories is based largely on the Fourth Geneva Convention, which according to Article 49 (6), does not apply to areas of undetermined sovereignty, where no government-forced deportation or transfer of its population has been involved. (The Israeli government has not forced its citizens to settle in Gaza or the West Bank.) Moreover, Article 2 of the Fourth Geneva Convention limits itself to contracting parties. (No formal agreements between Israel and the Palestinian people bring them within this definition.) See also, Alan Baker, "Israel's Rights Regarding Territories and the Settlements in the Eyes of the International Community," in Alan Baker, ed., *Israel's Rights as a Nation-State in International Diplomacy* (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and World Jewish Congress, 2011), 65-74; generally, Howard Grief, *The Legal Foundation and Borders of Israel under International Law* (MAZO Publishers, 2008); Louis Rene Beres, "Why Palestine Would be a Dangerous Legal Fiction" and material cited therein, 19 December 2014, www.israelnationalnews.com; David M. Phillips, "The Illegal Settlements Myth," December 2009, commentarymagazine.com/article/the-illegal-settlements-myth/#; Eli E. Hertz, "Inappropriate Use of the Fourth Geneva Convention," 4 February 2013, israpundit.com/archives/52693; *Levy Commission Report*, pmo.gov.il/Documents/doch090712.pdf, 21 June 2012.

⁹ Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague IV) Section III, Military Authority Over the Territory of the Hostile State, Articles 42-42 (18 October 1907); UN Resolution 242 Paragraphs 1 and 2 re withdrawal of Israeli armed forces upon termination of claims for conflict and acknowledgement that "every state in the area" has the right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force."

¹⁰ The Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, 1934 (Montevideo, 1933) codifies customary international law and stipulates explicit criteria for statehood, which the Palestinians do not meet.

¹¹ Office of the Prosecutor, International Criminal Court, "Situation on Registered Vessels of Comoros, Greece and Cambodia, Article 53 (1) Report," 6 November 2014.

¹² "Israeli Air Force: Bombing or Pinpoint Strikes?" 11 March 2012, www.idfblog.com/blog/2012/03/11/bombing-gaza-or-pinpoint-strikes/; "Former British commander in Afghanistan: No army acts with as much discretion as IDF does," 4 September 2014, jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Former-British-commander-in-Afghanistan-No-army-acts-with-as-much-discretion-as-IDF-does-374382; Alan Dershowitz, "Targeted Killing is Working," 25 May 2011, www.huffingtonpost.com/alan-dershowitz/targeted-killing-is-worki_b_79616.html. For general combatant to civilian casualty ratios, see UN High Commissioner for Refugees, "The Causes, Character and Conduct of Conflict, and the Effect on Civilian Populations," April 2012, unhcr.org/4f8d606d9.pdf 7-10.

¹³ Alan Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 183.

¹⁴ This includes but is not limited to leaders' misappropriating billions of dollars donated for essential infrastructures; inciting hate and terror against Israel through official media, educational institutions, children's terror training facilities and more; abusing Palestinians' individual freedoms and human rights; and refusing Israel's past offers to concede over 90% of Palestinians' desired land for reasons having nothing to do with the social welfare of their people.

