

HARD QUESTIONS

ISRAEL

JUNE 19, 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Using your favorite search engine, simply type in the words Israel, Palestine, Hamas, Gaza, Zionism, antisemitism, and you will have more information than you can process! Most importantly you will find many varying perspectives and beliefs concerning the nation of Israel and the crisis in the Middle East. The hard question we must answer is simply, "What should a Christian think about Israel?" The nation of Israel and Jewish people are center stage in the news today. What does the Bible say about the nation of Israel and Jewish people? How does this impact you as a follower of Christ?

The Bible clearly reveals that the nation of Israel is important to God.

KEY TERMS

If you look up various terms that are often connected to Israel and/or the Israel/Palestinian conflict, you will find that even the definitions are often based in a person or organizations' ideology. Listed below are terms that are needed to be better informed about this subject:

Geopolitics – a study of the influence of such factors as geography, economics, and demography on the politics and especially the foreign policy of a state¹

Geopolitics is about territory!

Theopolitics – "Theopolitics is about ideology."²

Ideology – the study of ideas

- : a manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture
- : the integrated assertions, theories, and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program
- : a systematic body of concepts especially about human life or culture³

1 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/geopolitics>

2 Should Christians Support Israel, Jeff Myers, p. 14.

3 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ideology>

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Zionism – a movement that resulted in the establishment and development of the state of Israel and that now supports the state of Israel as a Jewish homeland

“The modern movement of Zionism, which began in the late 1800s, has had many definitions and aims. Some religious Zionists say it refers to the Jewish yearning in the Bible for Zion, or Jerusalem. More secular Zionists saw an unspecific word meaning Jewish self-determination, freedom, the desire to be masters of their own destiny. Today’s settler movement sees the expansion of Jewish control into the West Bank as a demonstration of Zionism.”⁴

Antisemitism – “Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”⁵

Hamas

- Hamas is an Islamist militant group that spun off from the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in the late 1980s. It took over the Gaza Strip after defeating its rival political party, Fatah, in elections in 2006.
- Governments including the United States and European Union have designated Hamas a terrorist organization over its attacks against Israel, which have included suicide bombings and rocket attacks.

Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) are foreign organizations that are designated by the Secretary of State in accordance with section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), as amended. FTO designations play a critical role in our fight against terrorism and are an effective means of curtailing support for terrorist activities and pressuring groups to get out of the terrorism business⁶

- Israel has declared war on Hamas following its surprise assault on the country’s south in October 2023, the deadliest attack in Israeli history⁷

Hamas, an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya (“Islamic Resistance Movement”), was founded by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, a Palestinian cleric who became an activist in local branches of the Muslim Brotherhood after dedicating his early life to Islamic scholarship in Cairo. Beginning in the late 1960s, Yassin preached and performed charitable work in the West Bank and Gaza, both of which Israel occupied following the 1967 Six-Day War.

Palestine – 1917-1947 British Mandate: Palestine was among former Ottoman territories placed under UK administration by the League of Nations in 1922. All of these territories eventually became fully independent States, except Palestine, where in addition to “the rendering of administrative assistance and advice” the British Mandate incorporated the “Balfour Declaration” of 1917, expressing support for “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” During the Mandate, from 1922 to 1947, large-scale Jewish immigration, mainly from Eastern Europe took place, the numbers swelling in the 1930s with the Nazi persecution. Arab demands for independence and resistance to immigration led to a rebellion in 1937, followed by continuing terrorism and violence from both sides. UK considered various formulas to bring independence to a land ravaged by violence. In 1947, the UK turned the Palestine problem over to the UN.⁸

4 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2024/05/03/zionist-definition-explained-protests/>

5 <https://www.state.gov/defining-antisemitism/>

6 <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>

7 <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-hamas>

8 <https://www.un.org/unispal/history/>

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West Bank – The West Bank is an area of land located within the country of Israel covering 2,173 sq miles. The West Bank stretches across the eastern border of Israel along the west banks of the Jordan River and most of the Dead Sea, thus how it received its name.

Gaza – The Gaza Strip is 140 sq miles of land located in the southwest corner of Israel, along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It also shares a border with Egypt to the south.

Intifada – means “shaking off” or “uprising” in Arabic

Replacement theology – Replacement theology (also known as supersessionism and fulfillment theology) essentially teaches that the church has replaced Israel in God’s plan. Adherents of replacement theology believe the Jews are no longer God’s chosen people, and God does not have specific future plans for the nation of Israel. Among the different views of the relationship between the church and Israel are the church has replaced Israel (replacement theology), the church is an expansion of Israel (covenant theology), or the church is completely different and distinct from Israel (dispensationalism/premillennialism).⁹

Jihad – The term jihad is derived from the Arabic verb jahada, which means, to endeavor, to strive, to struggle. It is sometimes translated as holy war. The closest Arabic words for war are harb or qital which are found in the Qur’an and its companion commentary-the Hadith. In religious contexts jihad means to struggle against one’s evil inclinations, to strive for the moral strengthening of society, or to promote the spread of Islam. However, in many circles jihad is understood in a military sense, rather than its universal meaning in the Qur’an and Hadith.¹⁰

WHAT SHOULD A CHRISTIAN THINK ABOUT ISRAEL?

The only way to answer that question is to begin with a biblical worldview. Christians must allow God’s Word to determine how they think, view, and respond to Israel. We must look to the Bible to see what God says about Israel...

Typically, people are going to explain, understand, or respond to world events with a combination of ideas and information from the following perspectives:

1. Historical
2. Political
3. Spiritual/Theological

How one interprets and responds to the world around them is usually filtered through the lens of their worldview. According to Summit Ministries with Dr. Jeff Myers, a worldview is “a pattern of ideas, beliefs, convictions, and habits that help us make sense of God, the world, and our relationship to God and the world.” There are hundreds of worldviews in operation in the world today, including the Christian worldview.¹¹

As Christians, we should always evaluate, interpret, and respond to the world around us from a biblical worldview. A biblical worldview is the filter we should use to understand why things are the way they are and how we can/should respond.

9 <https://www.gotquestions.org/replacement-theology.html>

10 <https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/understanding-jihad-in-muslim-thought-and-developing-a-christian-response/>

11 <https://www.summit.org/christian-worldview/>

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What does the Bible say about...

1. Israel: God's Chosen People (Gal. 3:6-9, Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:6; Deut. 14:2; Psalm 135:4; Isaiah 43:10)

2. Israel: The Place (Genesis 13:15; 15:18-21; 17:7-8; Deut. 30:1-10)

Despite its small size, about 290 miles (470 km) north-to-south and 85 miles (135 km) east-to-west at its widest point, Israel has four geographic regions—the Mediterranean coastal plain, the hill regions of northern and central Israel, the Great Rift Valley, and the Negev—and a wide range of unique physical features...¹²

The country is bordered by Lebanon to the north, Syria to the northeast, Jordan to the east, Egypt to the southwest and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. The width of the country, from the Mediterranean Sea in the west to the Dead Sea in the east, can be crossed by car in about 90 minutes; and the trip from Metulla, in the far North, to Eilat at the country's southern tip takes about nine hours. In the United States, Israel is a bit smaller than the state of New Jersey.

3. Israel: God's Purpose (Deut. 7:7-9; Isaiah 49:6)

God's reason for choosing the nation of Israel was not solely for the purpose of producing the Messiah. God's desire for Israel was that they would go and teach others about Him. Israel was to be a nation of priests, prophets, and missionaries to the world. God's intent was for Israel to be a distinct people, a nation who pointed others towards God and His promised provision of a Redeemer, Messiah, and Savior. For the most part, Israel failed in this task. However, God's ultimate purpose for Israel—that of bringing the Messiah into the world—was fulfilled perfectly in the Person of Jesus Christ.

4. Israel: God's Plan (Romans 11:11-32; Isaiah 11:11-12, 43:5-6; Zech. 8:13,20-23, 12:8-10)

- There is only one way of salvation, faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. (John 14:6)
- The Jewish people do not have a different path for salvation, they too must be born again. (Romans 1:14-17)
- God made future promises to Israel that will be fulfilled. (Romans 11)

CONCLUSION

Common Questions about Israel and its Biblical significance:

1. Is Israel still the Promised Land? (Genesis 13:15; 15:18-21)

The Abrahamic Covenant promises a specific land for Abraham and his descendants. The Mosaic Covenant outlines conditions for Israel's possession of the land. The New Covenant ensures restoration and forgiveness. Biblical prophecies and Jesus' words confirm that Israel's rejection of Him is temporary. God's promises to Israel will be fulfilled, and they will permanently inhabit the promised land.

2. Why are Jews known as God's chosen people? (Romans 3:1-2; John 4:2, 25-26, 29, 42)

While arguing that both Jews and Gentiles are under the power of sin and cannot be justified through their own efforts, Paul raises a rhetorical question about the advantages of being Jewish. He eagerly answers by stating that there are many advantages, one being that the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.

12 <https://www.britannica.com/place/Israel>

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3. What level of support for Israel should a Christian offer? (Luke 21:23-24)

When discussing “support” in the context of standing with Israel, it’s vital to clarify that we are not advocating for a blanket endorsement of every action or policy. The Old Testament is replete with instances where God and the Hebrew prophets called out Israel for their sins. Supporting Israel does not imply agreement with every political move or condoning all behaviors, as even Israelis themselves are often divided on these matters. Instead, what we mean by support is affirming their belief that the land of Israel has been promised to them by God.

4. Does Israel matter in end time prophecy? (Ezekiel 38:1-6)

In the context of end-times prophecy, Israel is significant because it is mentioned in Ezekiel 38 as a nation that will face opposition from several other nations in a future battle. Mentioned in Ezekiel 38:1-6 are: Gog (interpreted as an individual leader), Magog (likely associated with nations in Central Asia), Rosh (seen by many as part of Russia or Russia and its neighboring countries), Meshek and Tubal (located in modern-day Turkey), Persia (modern Iran), Cush (not modern Ethiopia but the land south of Egypt, which is now Sudan), Put (known as Libya today), Gomer (part of modern Turkey), and Beth Togarmah (also part of modern Turkey). These nations are geographically surrounding Israel and are often seen as having strong anti-Israel sentiments. While the timing of the events in Ezekiel 38 is uncertain, it is believed that God will eventually bring these nations against Israel, and they will be defeated by the Lord.

5. Why is Israel so prominent in global politics?

In the Middle East, Israel stands out for its democratic values which include significant freedoms and a wide range of political and religious expressions. These values are not commonly seen in many neighboring countries. Israel upholds principles like democracy, the rule of law, and freedoms related to religion, speech, and human rights, aligning it with countries like the United States. Additionally, its democratic system benefits everyone. Israel creates a safe and supportive environment not only for its Jewish majority but also extends opportunities and rights to Palestinians and other minority groups. These minority groups actively participate in various professional sectors and government structures, making Israel a government that genuinely serves its diverse population.

6. How should a Christian view Palestinians? Galatians 4:29

When discussing support for Israel, it is important to clarify that our support is based on their rightful ownership of the land and does not mean devaluing or mistreating people of other ethnicities or religions. We should love all people, including Palestinians, Arabs, Israelis, and Jews, as they are created in God’s image. Our role as the church is to love everyone impartially and sacrificially, being a beacon of God’s love in a broken world. While God has promised the land to Israel, His salvation extends to all. The key way to support Israel is by helping them discover their Messiah, as true restoration and fulfillment of God’s promises are found in Him.

“For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:14–22, NASB95)