



It is a simple fact that Christians who arrive in the Land with open minds leave with their hearts deeply entrenched in support of one side and in ardent opposition to the other.

A Christian Assessment of Israel's Disengagement from Gaza

By Danny Kopp

who arrive in the Land with open minds leave with their hearts deeply entrenched in support of one side and in ardent opposition to the other.

Ironically, both are right in their support – and tragically, both are woefully blind of the other's plight. The modern state of Israel was created and continues to exist in astoundingly miraculous circumstances but inevitably, and not unlike the Israel of the Bible, some of her policies have been less than holy. While Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank have lived without equal rights under Israeli rule, Israelis have had to endure an onslaught of attacks. But where the world has chosen sides, Christians ought to stand out as those who refuse to rescind their hope and support for the reconciliation and ultimate salvation of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Reconciliation and salvation. The world would call it pathetically naïve to believe in the miraculous – the art of the impossible. But we are also called to act in practical

ways, to be wise as serpents in reading the ways of the world and its politics – the art of the possible. So what is possible politically on the national level as we work practically, expecting the miraculous, on a personal level? Jews are fast becoming a minority among the peoples in the biblical land of Israel and it would not be just to continue to withhold equal rights from the majority under their rule. But were Jews and Palestinians to share a government in today's climate of growing Islamic radicalism, the Jewish population would quickly go from being a beleaguered minority to being an endangered species as Christians have become in Islamic lands.

And hence this painful separation – a failure to coexist on all sides, even to the point of partial exile. But strangely, this is where one may find hope. As both sides disengage from conflict, from each other, they have been spared total annihilation, total exile, given a second chance to live righteously, to search for answers, maybe even rediscover the miraculous.

I made one last visit to Gaza earlier this year before moving to the United States. I wanted to imprint in my mind's eye an image of this tiny tract of land that spreads over only twice as much territory as my adopted city, Washington DC, but ranks just second, after Hong Kong, as the most densely populated area in the world. On the eve of Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, this description will have doubtless changed little; however, the political, ideological and even theological concepts of this land will have undergone drastic reformation.

Initially, it was difficult to find any enthusiastic supporters for the proposed plan to evacuate Gaza. The prime minister's own ruling party had voted against the plan; the international community saw it as a diversion from their sponsored peace process; and Palestinians objected to their exclusion from the decision-making process. Yet a majority of the interested parties – Israelis, Palestinians and the foreign governments overseeing the process – all grudgingly accepted the outcome. Perhaps it was for lack of a better alternative. Indeed, most polls among Palestinians and Israelis, though they showed a negative response to the "disengagement," nevertheless displayed a popular preference for change over the status quo.

Of course all eyes are now turned to the West Bank of the Jordan River, the land roughly corresponding to the biblical Judea and Samaria. Some would like to see it become an all encompassing Islamic state; others envisage it as a

land where only Jews are permitted to exert control over the destiny of its inhabitants. Neither of these utopian alternatives is feasible nor morally acceptable. Yet, neither do most Israelis and Palestinians even remotely entertain the option of Jews and Arabs sharing a government in this land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. That has left us with the intolerable status quo, where Israelis and Palestinians have fought for control over the same piece of real estate with endless bloodshed and no resolution to the conflict.

While these facts are well known, what is less immediately clear is where Christians stand on this divide. Prominent traditional denominations such as many of the Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches have called for their members to divest from Israel or from companies which aid Israel's activities in the occupied territories. On the other end of the spectrum are Evangelical Churches largely supportive of Israel both monetarily and politically, most of whom would oppose Israel's relinquishing any land for whatever reason.

How do such vastly diverging positions stem from groups who both claim the Bible as their highest source of reference? Israel's supporters naturally focus on the many promises concerning her fate found in the Scriptures. Her detractors are motivated by the passages that call for justice for the weak and downtrodden. But above all, Christians are moved by the stories they have heard from fellow Christians from either side of the conflict. It is a simple fact that Christians

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Needy Pensioners of Tiberius

Jon "Yoni" Gerrish

Through Jerusalem Cornerstone Foundation's Israel Relief fund and the efforts of Earl and Ruth Davis, as well as the volunteers of the Galilee Study Center, dozens of needy elderly families and individuals have received assistance and relief from privation and from the stress of life in modern Tiberius. In this town of over 40 thousand people there are some 1500 pensioners (elderly individuals). It is estimated that at least 10% of these have fallen under the poverty line in the past 2 or 3 years. With the assistance of local social workers and other contacts, the Davises have been given the opportunity to visit many of these pensioners and found that they are often living in pitiful conditions, usually in tiny apartments without adequate appliances and many without any source of heating during the winter. Some of these in the greatest need are those without relatives, and a number of these are Holocaust survivors. The Davises and the other volunteers at the Galilee Study Center have helped to assist one pensioner each week during the past year or so. Typically, funds are used towards food vouchers, or towards supplementing rent and medical bills. Sometimes these elderly simply need a ride to visit a local doctor or to pay a bill at the post office. Here are a few accounts from the Davis' journal:

One elderly gentleman lives in a tiny apartment in very poor repair, but he is quite thankful for what he has. He has expressed gratitude for the vouchers and, when told they were provided by Christians who care about him, he said "Baruch Hashem" (Bless the Name of the Lord). A Russian

lady whose husband recently died feels very alone, having no family here. She was grateful for the vouchers, which relieved one of her worries, at least for a while. In January, a prayer group in the US began sponsoring a single man on a monthly basis. They send \$50 each month for food vouchers and extra for the Holy Days. Shimon lives in a very small, humble apartment. He "beams" when we deliver the food coupons and says over and over "Todah Raba" (Thank you very much). One well educated couple who owned a successful business, had a financial reversal due to the husband's health issues - stroke, diabetes, and heart disease - and eventually were forced to seek financial assistance and help from social workers. It was very humbling for them to receive help, yet they were visibly grateful. We have also been able to help six pensioners needing dialysis by providing finances for transportation to and from treatment. This outreach has given a positive witness for Christ, not only to the recipients, but also to the Social Services department in Tiberius.

For more information regarding the pensioners of Tiberius, please write us at: info@jerusalemcornerstone.org

"Charity is a very paradise of blessing and almsgiving endures for ever"

(Ben Sira 40:17 Jewish wisdom literature circa 180 B.C.)



Shimon Nahum and GSC volunteer, Kendra Williams

Ruth and Earl Davis



TOURS

Our study tours are thematically oriented and designed to introduce the Land, Language and Literature of the Bible to all ages and interest groups. The following tours are still open to join:

Fall 2005:

Mecklenburg (Oct 17-31) Land only price: \$1593 - 14 nights (Feast registration not included)

Gerrish (Nov 4-18) Land only: \$1500 (13nts)

Pennington (Nov 22-30) Land only: \$1135 (8nts)

SPRING 2006:

Ehrlich (Feb 6-17) \$2350 with airfare from Tulsa or Minneapolis, \$1247 land only (13nts)

Merlin (Feb 26-Mar 14) \$2512 with airfare from San Francisco, \$1452 land only (16nts includes Petra)

Ross (Mar 26 - Apr 8) \$2500 with airfare from Memphis, \$1393 land only (11nts includes Petra)

For more information and specific itineraries please contact us: info@jerusalemcornerstone.org

NEWS



In general news, we are saying goodbye to Gary and Sharon Alley for one year as they will be teaching in the biblical departments of NYACK College/Seminary/Grad School, New York City. At the same time we welcome Sharon's sister, Rachel Buth Shultz, who is set to take over the post of Executive Director of Education, the newsletter production and other administrative functions which Gary has faithfully performed since our inception. Gary and Sharon will return to Jerusalem next summer to conduct Biblical Hebrew Ulpan (BHU) courses and we will make room for them again in the administrative ranks of JCF. We also said goodbye to Francois and Ronel Smit last month as they returned to South Africa for a one-year respite. Their duties as Directors of Charity are being filled by Dania Minor, who began overseeing Israel Relief and Children's Fund this month.