

559 “In wrath remember mercy”

The current, terrible conflict between Jews and Muslims centred in the Middle East seems to be unique in this world of many conflicts. First, it involves such constant, implacable, furious hatred of the Jews by their foes, which goes far beyond all reason when confronted with the actual facts of the situation; and second, it risks spreading as a wild fire across the Middle East and beyond. As Bible-believing Christians we sense there is far more to this heartbreaking situation than meets the eye.

For a start we know that the Jews remain in the Lord's sight as “the apple of his eye”, His original covenant people (egs., Deuteronomy 32.9-10 / Psalm 17.8-9 / Lamentations 2.18 / Zechariah 2.8). We know also from Romans Chapter 11 that the Jews are currently “branches broken off” from “the olive tree” (a scriptural image for Israel) because of their unbelief regarding their Messiah (11.20), but that future, abundant, divine blessings upon them are assured (eg., Romans 11.25-32; 33-36).

By contrast we now come to the Jews' many enemies, who, knowingly or not, are fighting against both the Lord's “apple of his eye” and the Lord God Himself. In response to Satan's simple little question in Eden, “Yea, hath God said? ...” (from Genesis 3.1), Eve and Adam sinned, with dire consequences (3.7-24 / Romans 5.12,15-19). Hostility towards the Lord God from His adversary Satan thus became rooted at the heart of God's dealings with mankind. This hostility continues, despite God's mighty victories in Christ by the cross and the empty tomb (I Corinthians 15.57): Satan, despite his defeat, still seeks to thwart God's promises regarding the Jews, (as well as the Church and the nations – another story), and therein lies the key to the ongoing anguish in the Middle East.

The Arab Muslims' narrative is simple: the Jews have stolen our land and violently oppress us; the Palestinians MUST have a state of their own, with Jerusalem as its capital, to be free from “the Jewish oppressors” at last. This message is constantly repeated in the media, and is thus widely accepted as “the truth”.

So some further facts are useful here: 1) In the 19th century “Palestine” (that is, broadly the territory between the Mediterranean and the Jordan valley) was virtually a waste land, a neglected part of the declining Ottoman Empire, with a sparse population of Arabs and Jews, the latter being poorly treated by the Turks. Mark Twain for instance, visiting the area in 1869, wrote, “Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes ... Nazareth is

forlorn ... Jerusalem is become a pauper village ... Capernaum is a shapeless ruin ...”, and so on. 2) With the encouragement of some British Christians who knew both their Bibles and the great potential of the land, small numbers of Jews began to migrate into Palestine and “got to work”. 3) The economy steadily improved from these Jewish efforts, and Arabs of the area tended to move close to the Jewish villages where they benefitted from employment offered by the Jews. 4) The Zionist Congress of 1897, via the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the British Mandate, culminated in the State of Israel being approved by the UN in 1947 and declared in May 1948, on a small portion of the land legally and originally granted for “the Jewish homeland” under the British Mandate. Since then, on several occasions, Arab Muslim states have sought to eradicate Israel.

We see from such facts that demands from “the Palestinians” for a return to their lands “robbed from them by the Jews” have little or no basis in reality. As previously mentioned, Arabs were told to leave their homes in Judea and Samaria in 1948 by their own Arab leaders, and after the conflict was over largely chose not to return and live (well) in the new Jewish state with full citizenship rights. Today there are numerous Arab states, covering far greater land area than Israel, where the now 5 million or so “Palestinian refugees” could settle among their fellow Arabs. But those states, while housing the “refugees”, refuse to grant citizenship to them – so as to keep “the Palestinian problem” in the global headlines.

Israel genuinely longs for peace and has offered many concessions to win such peace, but to no avail. A “Palestinian state” would solve nothing, for at the heart of all these miseries lies Islamic teaching in the Qur’an and the Hadiths concerning hatred of the Jews and the obligation for jihad. Israel says it is now going to smash Hamas – but that is humanly impossible: at great cost in “blood and treasure” the IDF may destroy all the Hamas personnel, tunnels and weapons, but the Qur’anic ideology will remain, surely to spring up again in the lives of a new generation of jihadists.

The situation is grim and dangerous, but the Lord is in charge. We pray that both He, and the Jews, on the journey to when “the peace of Jerusalem” is at last a lovely reality under the rulership of Christ, may, meanwhile, “in wrath remember mercy” (from Habakkuk 3.2 / Psalm 122 / Revelation 20).