

Articles about the Israel-Gaza War

1. Hasten God's purpose for the Jewish people

A few days before my wife and I moved to Israel to live and minister in Jerusalem in 2002, the Israeli prime minister, announced "Israel is now at war with the Palestinians." So, we moved there at a difficult time. We heard the suicide bombs going off and received dreadful reports of the consequences. But it was nothing like the horror which has recently taken place. How we need to pray both for Israel and for the many innocent Palestinians.

Attacks from Gaza are not new. For example, earlier in 2023, 104 rockets were fired into Israel on one day and 40 on another day. One Israeli organisation which is critical of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians wrote "We've enforced the Gaza blockade since 2005. We limit the entry and exit of people and goods, control the air and sea, and regulate the digital sphere and population registry. In these unlivable conditions, Gaza is always on the edge, complete with sky-high unemployment and undrinkable water. So, while we claim we don't have permanent forces inside the strip, we still fully control the entire area and its population." We need to pray that Israel will treat the Palestinians correctly.

Israel certainly had the right to respond strongly to the absolutely appalling attack by Hamas. The Law of Armed Forces includes the Principle of Proportionality which allows attacks on a military target which causes incidental or collateral damage, eg to civilians, so long as the loss of life and damage to property is not excessive. The problem with Gaza is that Hamas deliberately uses civilians as shields, which, of course, causes greater loss of civilian life. A few days after the attack Hamas appealed to civilians not to listen to warnings from Israel about moving out of target buildings and areas. This appears to be an attempt by Hamas to increase civilian deaths, so creating bad PR against Israel.

However, I find it difficult to defend Israel's cutting off water supplies, medical supplies, electricity etc. I note that Israel said this could cease if Hamas released the Israeli hostages.

One of the other serious threats facing Israel is the possibility of attacks by Hezbollah in Lebanon. Hezbollah is a terrorist group backed by Iran. Even before the Hamas attack, Hezbollah chief, Hassan Nasrallah, was growing emboldened and believed he could alter the balance of power with Israel. Hezbollah was intensifying preparations for an imminent confrontation with Israel before the Hamas attack. It has in the past year constructed 27 military posts along the border with Israel.

Israel has been getting closer to direct action against Iran (which is not far from producing nuclear weapons). In May 2023 Israel's military intelligence warned Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that their enemies, including Iran, saw the very serious political division in Israel as "a historic opportunity" to attack. That month, the Israeli government scrapped the "reasonableness" standard that allows the supreme court to overrule government decisions, if they are deemed unreasonable. However, some Israelis pointed out that other countries, such as the US don't have the equivalent of a reasonableness standard. This led to many huge demonstrations and increasingly violent street protests for 30 weeks before the Hamas attack. Over 1,000 Air Force officers and personnel threatened to stop defending the nation, as did 10,000 military reservists. A survey discovered that 58% of Israelis feared a civil war. The controversy continues. Little wonder that Israel's enemies thought this weakened Israel and gave an opportunity for attack. How we need to pray for Israel's protection from those, like Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas, who want to destroy her completely.

Yes, we need to pray that Israel will treat the Palestinians properly, including in Gaza, and will correct people, including some West Bank settlers who don't. But we also need to see the big picture. Why is there so much antisemitism? Why is there such widespread hatred of Jewish people? Such hatred can only be understood if there is some very important reason for it. Why do Iran and other groups want to destroy Israel completely?

The answer is that God has a special purpose for the Jewish people and the devil is working overtime to hinder it. Many Christians believe God has finished with the Jewish people and replaced them with the church (Replacement Theology). But that is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. Paul writes in Romans 11 "Did God reject his people? By no means! God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew Again I ask: did [the Jewish people] stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come

to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring! ... I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:1-2,11-12, 25-26). Bearing in mind the context, it is clear that the word “Israel” in verse 26 is not referring to the church (as some claim) but to the Jewish people. So, what Paul is foretelling is an End Time massive turning of the Jewish people to Christ. Imagine the impact of that in the world! Yes, Israel is taking some wrong actions which legitimately cause antagonism. But this prophecy is the real reason why the devil has inspired the Hamas attack, the threats from Hezbollah and from Iran. We need to pray regularly for God’s purpose for Israel – a massive turning to Christ – to happen. We need to pray against these hindrances and attempts to block God’s purpose for the Jewish people.

There are hindrances in Israel itself. A recent survey found that 45% of Israel Jews self-identified as "secular." 29% said they were Orthodox, but don’t necessarily practise the religion, and 22% said they were practising Orthodox. There has been a growth in antagonism to Christians recently and one controversial manifestation of this has been Orthodox Jews spitting in the direction of Christians. It is an old Jewish tradition of warding off evil and impurity and has led to some arrests. We need to remember that Jews have been very badly treated by the church in the past, which has, of course, made them more antagonistic towards the gospel. So, the church has been seriously hindering God’s special purpose for the Jewish people. We need to pray for God to overrule the damage caused by antisemitism in the church over the centuries.

The number of Messianic Jews who believe in Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus the Christ) is growing around the world. It is estimated that there are some 100,000 worldwide. In Israel there are 15,000-16,000 who meet in some 130 congregations. I had a lot to do with Messianics when we were living in Israel and was inspired by what God was doing amongst them. However, the numbers are still relatively small.

I believe we need to pray for Revival amongst the Jewish people. Revival comes primarily to the church but history shows that it has a great effect on unbelievers and on secular society. One of my main priorities is to pray for God to bring revival amongst the Jewish people worldwide, in order to further his great purpose that “all Israel will be saved” i.e. that there will be a massive turning of Jewish people to Yeshua HaMashiach. This revival could well be centred on the Messianic Jewish believers but have a great effect on non-Messianic Jews.

The devil has shown his power in many ways including in the horrific, evil attack on Israel by Hamas. Let this be an incentive not only to pray for Israel’s protection but also for us to pray regularly, and passionately, that God will come in Revival to the Jewish people, to hasten the time when “all Israel will be saved.”

The re-establishment of the State of Israel by the United Nations in 1948, after an almost 2000-year gap, is nothing short of miraculous, and is a clear Sign of the End Times. A massive turning of the Jewish people to faith in Jesus would be an equally significant sign.

Appendix: The explosion at the Al-Ahli hospital in Gaza

We must pray for healing for the people bereaved, injured and traumatised by this terrible disaster. But we must also pray for the very dangerous implications of this event. I am aware that Israel has called for hospitals to close and has taken action which is open to criticism – temporarily cutting off essential supplies to Gaza etc. But I am convinced that the Al-Ahli hospital explosion was not caused by Israel. This is not just because of the evidence given by the Israelis that they were not responsible. My main reason is that for Israel to deliberately attack an overcrowded hospital in this way would not only be very cruel, but would be one of the most stupid and pointless ‘own goals’ in military history. For Israel to be held responsible would cause enormous damage to her reputation, greatly undermine support for her and place her in very serious danger of wider military attack. The Israelis would do all they could to avoid any such disaster.

Sadly, however, many people will never accept Israel was not to blame. This includes the Arab world which surrounds her, with which she had been achieving more positive relationship recently. The fact of the matter is that this event puts Israel in very great danger. The Palestinians are up in arms, including those on the West Bank. Iran and its proxy Hezbollah in Lebanon are making serious threats against Israel and could well take military action. If this were to happen, it would destabilise the Middle East and could create a major disaster for Israel.

So, we need to pray more than ever for Israel's safety. Palestinian extremists, Hezbollah and Iran all want to destroy Israel totally and they could well take this great opportunity to seek to bring that about in the immediate future. The devil's intention in all this is to prevent God's important purpose for the Jewish people being fulfilled.

We also need to pray for the many people in Israel and Gaza (including fellow Christians) who are suffering so dreadfully. The Israel-Gaza conflict is also seriously stirring up antisemitism, including in the UK. Pray as never before!

Tony Higton

2. Understanding the Israel-Gaza war

Israel is far from perfect and may well have perpetrated some wrong action in the war with Gaza. But, the purpose of this article is to combat *unfair and antisemitic* criticisms of Israel. Such criticisms increase her vulnerability to military attacks.

What is behind the Israel-Gaza war?

We must never forget that the re-establishment of the State of Israel by the United Nations was a remarkable fulfilment of biblical prophecy about the End Times.

It is true that the re-establishment happened in very controversial circumstances resulting in the Palestinians rejecting the UN decision to set up a State of Palestine, and the surrounding Arab countries taking up arms to seek to destroy the new Jewish State. This, of course, forced Israel to take up arms as well, leading to many Palestinians fleeing their homes, so creating a refugee problem.

We must not forget that the prime motive for such attacks, which have recurred over the last 75 years, is to destroy Israel. But, more important, we should obey Jesus in keeping watch for the signs of the End Times. This will include seeing that the devil's intention through these conflicts is to hinder God's End Time purposes being fulfilled including turning to Jesus as Messiah. The scourge of antisemitism, which the Israel-Gaza war will increase, has a similar Satanic purpose. We can parallel this with the growing persecution of Christians in many countries, especially Muslim countries. The aim of this is to hinder the church fulfilling God's End Time purposes for her, alongside Israel and Jewish people who have come to accept Jesus as Messiah.

In view of the growing antagonism to Israel, and the huge growth of antisemitism, which is likely to last a long time, it is important to try to get an accurate, informed view of the moral and legal issues raised by the conflict. Israel and the Jewish people were, and still are, in serious danger. (Obviously, the people of Gaza have suffered a great deal too, and our hearts should go out to the innocent Palestinian victims of this war).

Israel experienced a horrific, inhuman attack from Hamas on October 7th, and they have every right to defend themselves. But were they right in the way they did it?

Palestinian support for Hamas

According to an average of polls conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) during 2022, approximately 60% of the Gaza Strip's residents on average supported the "armed struggle" (i.e. terrorist attacks) against Israel, compared to approximately 40%-50% of West Bank residents. In March 2023, support among Gaza residents for armed struggle rose to 68%.

Hamas actually depends upon tens of thousands of ordinary Gazans who assist it. These enablers feign innocence and ignorance.

Some members of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees have expressed praise for the atrocities committed by the Hamas, according to a report by the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education.

Palestinian children are indoctrinated about Hamas and its extreme Islamist philosophy. Hence Hamas enjoys the support of student unions at leading Palestinian universities.

Are Palestinian civilians in Gaza in favour of a two-state peace settlement?

Gallup reported in 2023 that only 24% of Palestinians support a two-state solution, down from 59% in 2012. Only one in six Palestinians between the ages of 15 and 25 said they support a two-state solution, compared with 34% of Palestinians aged 46 and older. Given that 69% of the population of the Palestinian territories is under the age of 29, this suggests a diplomatic solution to the conflict is very unlikely.

Before war broke out, 81% of Palestinians, including 84% living in the Gaza Strip, said they no longer believe that a permanent peace of any kind will ever prevail.

Hamas has imposed strict sharia law and education throughout Gaza during its 16 years in power. Its official charter defines its goal as “to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine” by “obliterating” Israel. It adds “There is no solution for the Palestine question except through Jihad. Initiatives, proposals, and international conferences are all a waste of time and vain endeavours. Palestine is an Islamic land.”

What is the legal position on the war in Gaza?

Having read what lawyers are saying I can point out that:

- Israel’s adheres to its military operations being governed by international law (the Geneva Convention) and overseen by the attorney general and the IDF’s military advocate general.
- The IDF itself provides its soldiers and commanders with education and training in international law.
- It is proven that Hamas deliberately uses civilians as shields. They put their military centres in, under or near hospitals and schools. This is to discourage Israeli attacks, or if civilians are killed, to gain powerful anti-Israel propaganda. From a legal point of view, any building used by Hamas becomes a legal target. (But morally, this surely should not include a hospital with patients in it.)
- Israeli troops found four underground launchers some five meters from a children’s swimming pool, and around 30 meters from residential homes in the northern Gaza Strip. Troops located a number of rocket launchers within a children’s playground and amusement park compound. Also, Hamas fires rockets at Israeli villages from rooftops of civilian apartment blocks
- However, armed conflict must be proportional, which means collateral damage to civilians and civilian property must not be excessive compared with the military advantage of the attack. So, for example, killing a Hamas commander or destroying a command and control centre justifies more collateral damage than killing a Hamas operative. One lawyer said “In my view, even if many civilians are killed, even in an excessive manner, it is not necessarily illegal.” Another lawyer said that assessment of proportionality must be on the basis of information available at the time of the attack, not hindsight. However, he did refer to the questions raised about whether all of the huge number of attacks Israel made were, in fact, lawful military objectives and whether the very widespread harm to civilians complied with the rule of proportionality. But he added that without the full information the Israel Defence Force had, it was impossible to know for certain.
- The previous lawyer pointed out that the Hamas attack was an existential threat to Israel, especially when the threats posed by Hezbollah and Iran are taken into account.
- This lawyer pointed out that Israel did warn the civilian population about planned attacks, which is legally required.
- A third lawyer responded to the criticism of Israel telling the population of Northern Gaza to move south. Amnesty International said it “may amount to forced displacement of the civilian population, a violation of international humanitarian law.” He said the fact is that those moving South would be safer. However, it was only after four weeks of war that 4-hour slots without military action were created by the Israelis for people in the North to use two routes to flee south. Also, what about those physically unable to move.

- However, two of the lawyers criticised Israel's decision to drastically cut the water supply to Gaza as "indefensible."

Israel's dilemma in the light of the tactics of Hamas

My heart goes out to all those suffering in Gaza. But Israel is facing a very complex dilemma:

- Hamas has made it quite clear that, given the opportunity, they would repeat the horrific attack perpetrated on Israel on October 7th. It is obvious, therefore, that Israel needs to destroy Hamas, including where it is present in the south of Gaza, in order to prevent many horrific deaths **on both sides** in the future. It is the lesser of two evils. I therefore don't think a ceasefire is appropriate, apart from possibly a short-term humanitarian ceasefire.
- The Israelis found that a list of seriously wounded people booked to go into Egypt included numerous Hamas fighters. They also discovered oxygen concentrators for Hamas tunnels hidden in an aid truck from Egypt.
- Hamas is cynically using civilians, including hospital patients, as shields, to prevent Israel capturing the Hamas operatives. Hence Hamas has built its HQ under the Al-Ahli Hospital. This makes the hospital a legal target, but innocent, vulnerable civilians are in it and some couldn't move out. One BBC report said that Hamas was forcing Gazans, even at gunpoint, not to move down south.

It should also be remembered that Hamas propaganda is not to be trusted. I am not convinced by Hamas reports and statistics about civilian deaths. We must remember that Hamas is an evil organisation. Israel may not be responsible for the numbers of deaths, including of children, which Hamas has claimed. A BBC reporter claimed that some civilian deaths in Gaza were caused by rockets fired by Hamas.

What is Israel to do in this dilemma? They have to take the risk of harming or killing civilians to prevent worse suffering in the future.

However, they must be as careful as possible. It is difficult to see justification for:

- Continuing to use bombs, including in South Gaza, as opposed to soldiers who can be more precise in their attacks.
- Preventing power reaching the hospitals causing unnecessary deaths.
- Cutting off food and medical supplies from hospitals.
- Stopping supplies because Hamas can make some use of the supply vehicles to transport their military supplies or the power for its own purposes? Is this really the lesser of two evils.

On the other hand, Israel has now (as of the second week in November):

- Offered to assist the evacuation of babies from the Shifa Hospital.
- Briefly ceased military activities in certain areas to allow civilians to escape.
- Allowed some 14, 320 tons of humanitarian aid to enter Gaza (by Nov 12th).
- Offered fuel supplies to the Shifa Hospital on Nov 12th (but it was refused by Hamas).

Israel may have perpetrated some wrong actions, but it is possible that most of what it has done is justified. Perhaps we should also remember the military history of the UK in World War II. For example, a British Air Staff paper, stated on the 23rd of September 1941: "The ultimate aim of an attack on a town area is to break the morale of the population which occupies it. To ensure this, we must achieve two things: first, we must make the town physically uninhabitable and, secondly, we must make the people conscious of constant personal danger. The immediate aim, is therefore, twofold, namely, to produce (i) destruction and (ii) fear of death." This was written before the Geneva Conventions of 1949, but that doesn't justify what the UK and other countries did. A huge number of civilians were killed. That doesn't justify any wrong action Israel may have taken. But it should remind us that our country is not spotless, either.

Israel's treatment of Gazans before the October 7th attack

We are also hearing unrelenting condemnation of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians over the decades, and yes, there was maltreatment. But we need to remember the other side of the story. Israel was giving help to Gazans before the war. Many Palestinians from Gaza worked in Israel. In 2021, approximately 2,000-3,000 work permits

were issued to Gazans. This number climbed to 5,000 and, during the Bennett-Lapid government, rose sharply to 10,000

Palestinians were given help from Israeli hospitals. Israel received Palestinian babies from Gaza and from other Palestine areas, like the West Bank, and brought them to Jewish hospitals for free medical care. In fact, for decades many serious cases have been given hospital care in Israel.

How should we respond?

We need to pray for Israel's protection

- **from a surge of antisemitism (which is increased by the false criticisms referred to above).** For example, The Community Security Trust, British Jewry's watchdog on antisemitism and security, documented a tenfold increase in antisemitic incidents in October 2023 over the same month the previous year, meaning a net increase of hundreds of cases, most of them non-physical.
- **from attacks from Hezbollah, backed by Iran.** The current activities of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah are part of Iran's 'ring of fire' strategy. Their strategy is to develop a multi-front attack from Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank. Israel may largely destroy Hamas in Gaza but that doesn't mean that other extremists will not revive the organisation, or something similar.
- **from the devil's aim to destroy Israel, through the extremists.** He is desperate to prevent the fulfilment of God's End Times purpose for Israel to turn to Jesus resulting in a profound spiritual effect on the whole world, alongside the church.

We do, of course, also need to pray for innocent Gazan civilians who are affected in terrible ways by the present crisis.

Tony Higton