

June 2015

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## Ministering to “Jacob”

They will not care how much you know until they know how much you care<sup>1</sup>

*And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.* --Genesis 12:3

On occasion, I have been privileged to dialogue with distinguished members of Israel’s Cabinet, Knesset, and diplomatic core. Cordial meetings have convened in Jerusalem, Washington, DC, and here locally. I have also enjoyed a close working relationship with a handful of Israeli “settlers.” Together, these encounters, some high octane, others recreational, have helped me to see the world through the eyes of a beleaguered, but ultimately blessed people.

My first trip to Israel was in January 2004. The purpose of the excursion to the Holy Land was part Christian pilgrimage and part political briefing. Travel companions included some 24 other Christian leaders from the Pacific Northwest who were also first-timers. It was a thrill to visit significant sites where Jesus lived and ministered, attend meetings in the Knesset and briefings at military installations, and one evening, celebrate Shabbat in a private family home.

Some 20 hours after departing Seattle, we arrived at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, Israel. Boarding an armor-plated charter bus, we headed north into the West Bank for dinner and a night’s rest in the village of Ariel. Climbing quickly from sea-level, we wound our way up through the rocky outcroppings known as the “Mountains of Israel.” The biblical name for the region is Samaria. Judea and Samaria are situated in the center of the Holy Land.

The media chooses not to recognize these historic names, instead, calling Jerusalem, and the regions immediately north and to the south of the great city, the “West Bank.” Israeli villages are typically referred to as “settlements.” But that’s OK with many of the locals who believe they are a prophetic people. For the Lord said, *I will settle people on you as in the past and will make you prosper more than before.* (Ezekiel 36:11).

Rising early our first morning, we were joined by a PBS film crew doing a story for *NOW with Bill Moyers*. We surmised that Moyers was probing for serious discord between President George W. Bush who supported land for peace proposals and evangelicals who generally do not. Our comments and reactions were taped as we visited some of the disputed “settlements” such as Karnei Shomron, and nearby Shiloh, home to the Ark of the Covenant before the first temple was built, where Samuel served Eli.

Even our Jewish hosts (who genuinely admired the President) were curious why Mr. Bush drew different conclusions from scripture about Israel’s covenant land than do most leading evangelicals. While I couldn’t speak for the President, I did think about a chilling verse that says *I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land.* (Joel 3:2).

Nevertheless, we were mindful not to let slip, anything that might end up in the New York Times!

We did, however, pay attention to the controversial security fence that restricts movement between Arab and Israeli settlements. The installation of miles of chain link fence crowned with razor wire and electronic sensors angered the Bush administration even though the artificial boundary had reduced surprise attacks in some areas by as much as 80 percent.

Even so, attacks were (and still are) too frequent. During our stay, a young mother of two blew herself up at a checkpoint near the Gaza Strip, killing four Israeli soldiers and wounding nine others. A day later, Roeel Arbel, a father of five, was ambushed and killed near the village of Talmon as he traveled home from his job at the Motorola plant in Ramat Gan. Fatah's Al Aksa Martyrs Brigade claimed responsibility.

Within a few days of our return to Seattle, ten people were killed and 50 more wounded when a Palestinian "policeman" self-detonated on a city bus as it pulled to a stop near the Prime Minister's residence in Jerusalem. It was the 29<sup>th</sup> suicide in the troubled city.

Unfortunately, many Israelis, especially in media and academia, have defected to a far left point of view that the enemies of Israel are VICTIMS. New textbooks characterize the 1948 War of Independence as an Israeli military complex against outclassed Arab peasants. Students are being told that Palestinians fled the country—not to clear the way for the invading Arab armies—but to avoid Jewish retaliation and brutality.

Middle East expert Daniel Pipes says that most Israelis are sick of fighting and want to concentrate on their expanding high tech economy. He says they are fatigued—to the point of foolishness—convincing themselves "that Arabs feel the same way, and want the same things, they do."<sup>2</sup> But a survey of 1,600 Arab students at the American University in Beirut demonstrates otherwise. Respondents, by a ratio of 79 to 18 percent, rejected the idea of doing business with Israelis even after a total peace, and by 87 to 13 percent, supported attacks by Islamic groups against Israel.

At the outset, I mentioned personal friendships that were struck during that first trip in '04. One of those friends that I hear from regularly (but missed on a more recent trip) is Sondra Oster Baras, an Orthodox Jew who lives in Karnei Shomron. Sondra, a wife, mother, and attorney by training, is a prolific spokesman on behalf of *Christian Friends of Israeli Communities* (CFOIC). A few years back, Sondra wrote:

"What is it about my house, my family, my community that is an obstacle to peace? What is it about our lives that prevents the Arabs in the neighboring villages from [also] enjoying peace and security?"

We live in Judea and Samaria and we love it here. We have taken rocky, barren land and turned it into a paradise. We have planted trees and gardens, built schools and shops and raised our children to love the land as we do. The world has gathered...in part to solve the Palestinian refugee problem. But, in so doing, they have put forward a plan that will create an enormous Jewish refugee problem. I am not willing to be a refugee..."

Over the years, Sondra has found that Christians, especially evangelical Christians, do love biblical Israel, do love G-ds very elect, and do understand the cry of her heart. Confident that Christians in the South Puget region want to "love on her," we have invited Sondra to visit us next week (see below).<sup>3</sup>

May Sondra and her people find comfort in knowing G-d is not asleep, for HE says, *Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.* (Jer 30:7)

Shabbat Shalom!

*Rick Forcier*

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Coalition of America Leadership Manual

<sup>2</sup> Kozodoy, Neal, *The Mideast Peace Process: an Autopsy*, 2002, Encounter Books, San Francisco, CA., pg. 83

<sup>3</sup> Sondra will speak at Faith Assembly of Lacey (360-459-1444), Tuesday, July 7 at 6:30 PM.