

MID-EAST e-NEWS

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Welcome

As we watch the news on TV, the events of this month in Iraq, Israel and Lebanon may shock us, make us feel impotent. In this issue I want to remind readers that under God we are not powerless to have an impact on the situation. We do not need to leave it to our politicians, or military. We are more than spectators, and we have a responsibility to intercede where we see suffering.

Email your responses to pkclark@pmbx.net & check the web for back issues.

Spectate or Participate?

We have to do more than

spectate on world events. For some their position in government enables them to have an impact – hopefully positive – on events elsewhere in the world. For others of us, we are fortunate in having even more of a role in the warfare, not because of our location on the globe but because of our position in God's Kingdom. Sometimes we forget that we are observing spiritual warfare in the Middle East – you name it: Iraq, Israel, the Palestine territory, Syria, Iran.

In an early issue (*e-NEWS 6*) I urged readers to consider how they could more effectively participate in the conflict; how their prayers could be directed more specifically – strategically, even. Here I want to develop that further.

After the recent bombings in Iraq (more than 200 dead in one!), continued violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, and seemingly fruitless negotiations between various parties, surely we can see that the missing pieces are spiritual? Lack of trust, vengeance, hatred, evil goals, corruption, self-seeking politicians – sometimes it's hard to distinguish between the sickness and the symptoms, isn't it?

I want to encourage us to look at how we can intervene in this.

Firstly – recognize the cause. (Spiritual warfare, Satan wanting to destroy, violence & death being his nature.)

then – recognize the authority we have. (God is in control, wants our prayers, wants 'all to come to know him', See 1.Tim 2:1-6)

then – identify our heart. (Do we really have a heart for God's plan in the ME, or do we have an agenda in our hesitation to pray? Are we hoping for destruction because we think it will bring Jesus' return sooner? Are we hurting for the Middle East? Pray that pain to God.)

then – target our weapons. (Pray **specifically** for where we are hurting: Iraq, Israel, the Jews, Arab Christians in any of these countries. Surely we hurt for them somewhere? Have we been taking it to God?)

then – be persistent in use of our weapon. (Pray continually, emotionally, with authority.)

then – encourage others to participate in this war.

Having prepared this article, I went back and re-read the original article in *e-News 6*. For the three areas mentioned there – Israel, Iraq, Palestine – it is surprising how little has changed. I want to use these pages as an opportunity to encourage use to lift up these areas – to participate in the struggle for the lives & hearts of these peoples – and to consider how God has called us to apply our prayers towards His kingdom.

No Starting Point

In Christian Zionism we are discussing a Christian position on an essentially Jewish phenomenon. Zionism - the presence of Jews once again in the Holy Land - does however impact both religions. Christians are interested in it from the point of view of prophecy, the significance of this new-old state in the land. Another aspect of the interest Christians have in the return is the renewed recognition of the presence of Jews amongst us, and the responsibility seen towards them, in urging them to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Even as the return to the land in 1948 attracted new interest in Biblical prophecy, so a fresh endeavor to witness to Jews was aroused, the two coalescing in increasing sympathy for the Jews, after centuries of isolation.

Whereas in some Christians this sympathy seems to be expressed without reserve – Love without Justice, one might say – in others the reverse seems to be the case: emphasizing justice and legality apparently without respect for the special case presented by the Jews.

One of the reasons for this focus on justice (and it has its echoes from within Israel, particularly from the Peace movement, but elsewhere too) is the view that at some level, historically, the Palestinians have been dealt an injustice. History has dealt many peoples similar injustices, but this has occurred on the world stage in a century in which international law has been applied to wartime events. It has thus remained an untreated sore that at some point must be dealt with.

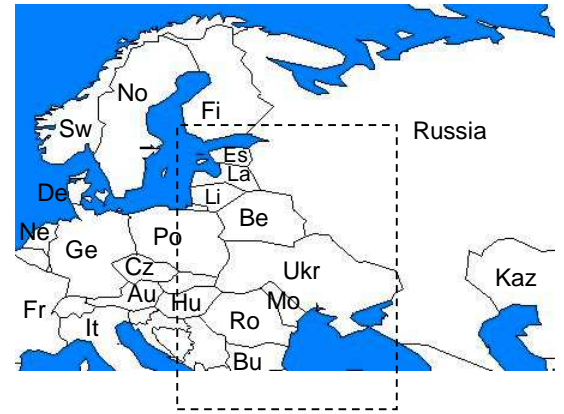
Similarly, Christians who look at the Holy Land are in a quandary. How can the love of God for his chosen people be reconciled with the loss of land and heritage for those who are displaced? How can the evangelical message be promoted when the scales of justice seem so lopsided? In consequence, Christians are divided. Some see the need for adjusting the wrongs committed, and look at the state of

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The Pale

In late 18th century Russia integrated portions of Poland and also of Ottoman land into its territory. This included a large number of Jews who had been persecuted under Polish rule. In Moscow, during the reign of Catherine II ('the Great') the Russian commercial interests saw Jews as serious competition and put Catherine under great pressure to deal with this problem. The largely unpopulated Ottoman territory acquired in 1772 was a solution.

Between 1782 and 1794 Catherine established a region of southwestern Russia (now the Baltic republics, Belorussia and Ukraine) that was known as the Pale of Settlement. The word *pale* is still sometimes used to mean a stake, or pole, and in this case it would suggest a boundary



Focused on the scriptures and the Midrash, perhaps because of the difficult living conditions, Hasidic dynasties flourished in the Pale. In Gerrer was Rebbe Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (known as the Sfas Emes), and Chernobyl and Vizhnitzer had their own Rabbis. Their followers would flock to these towns for the Jewish festivals.

spiritual heritage to leading Rabbis of the 1700s and 1800s, and their roots in the Pale, sometimes in Polish provinces that were once part of the Russian Pale.

Vulnerable to German invasion, thousands of Jews fled east during World War I. Soon afterwards, on March 20th, 1917, the Pale was abolished by the Bolshevik government.

marker. In the poor conditions of this territory Russian Jews were forced to live, pay double taxes, and were prevented from leasing land or receiving higher education. More than 90% of Russian Jews were herded into the Pale.

There, their population grew fivefold to 5.6 million by 1910. Meanwhile, they fell victim to the pogroms of the 1870s and 80s, and new laws enacted in 1882 limited Jews to urban areas within the Pale, though excluding them from certain cities (3, 4, 5, 6). About 500,000

The modern Yeshiva system developed in the concentrated Jewish population centers. During the 1700s the advanced students of each town would study with the local synagogue Rabbi, eating meals in different homes daily.

were forced to leave their homes and move into separate towns, *shtetls*.

Additionally, by 1891 another million Jews were forcibly moved into the Pale either from the western border, or regions east of the Pale (1, 2). In 1891 20,000 Jews were expelled from Moscow, to the Pale, and another 2,000 were taken, many in chains, from St. Petersburg.

As a result of the persecution and deprivation under which they lived, a mass emigration began in the late 19th century from the Pale. From an initial starting point of Brody (7), in northeastern Poland, as many as two million made their way to the USA, Britain, Europe, South America, and Palestine; there joining other participants in the First Aliyah (see e-NEWS 27) of immigration to the nascent Israel.

Israel today evinces the heritage formed in the Pale, in the styles of dress of the various branches of Orthodox Judaism.

Orthodox Jews today trace their

A law adopted in 1822 allowed Jews to enter the city of Riga (3) if they were involved in a court case.

In 1860 Jewish recruits were allowed to serve in Guards units of the Army and those who had terminated their service could settle anywhere in the Empire. (Conscripts, however, did not have the same freedom.)

Rabbinic Judaism

When one reads about the traditions of the Orthodox Jews (whether in Mea Shearim, Jerusalem, or the Bronx, New York) and their traditions and rules on what can or cannot be done on the Sabbath – and their ways to avoid these restrictions – it sounds very reminiscent on the Pharisees we read of in the Gospels. Why is it that Orthodoxy reminds us of the Pharisees, rather than, say, Elijah, David or even Joshua? Why is it that the legalistic aspect of Judaism is so emphasized? And why is it that much of their reasoning refers not to the Bible but to the ‘Mishnah’ or the ‘Talmud’?

From the Bible we find that the center of Jewish religious life was the Temple. One does not develop the impression that the local *synagogue* was significant, if even present in Jewish life.



Remains of the ancient synagogue in Capernaum

of *government* was separate from the *priestly caste*, even as the kingly line, Judah, was also distinct from that of Levi.)

This new manifestation of Judaism taught and reflected the Torah, which was compiled during the Second Temple period. This focus on the Torah continued to the time of Jesus – in fact, right up until the destruction of the second Temple by the Romans in AD 70. However, alongside the Torah study had grown a tradition that accepted an *oral law* as having been communicated (but not written down) by Moses.

“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”

Matthew 23:2-4

During the intertestamental period the Pharisees developed as a class of scholarly priests (but not High Priests) that had taken oral traditions from as far back as Moses, and made them of equal significance with the Tanakh. Their assertion was that rulings derived from the *oral Torah* could override the written Torah of Moses (the *Tanakh*). It was these rulings that Jesus criticized in Matthew 3, and throughout his ministry: not the Biblical commandments of God, but the oral *replacements* of the Pharisees. Today, Judaism is primarily founded upon these oral laws, the Talmud.

The *synagogue* had probably developed as a meeting place (the word means “meeting”) during the Babylonian captivity. During the period of the Second Temple it grew in popularity as a place to meet for prayer at the same time as the Temple sacrifices were taking place, each morning and evening.

Next Issue: Surviving the Destruction of Jerusalem

Israel as an anachronism until this is done. Others see God’s judgement on those who have rejected Him (though this is not always consciously expressed) and the return of the Jews being no more than just penalty.

David Stern, a Messianic Jew, responded to this kind of attitude in his Commentary:

“Joshua had a clear and direct commandment from God both to conquer and to kill the inhabitants of the seven Canaanite nations. It was a very specific ad hoc commandment, and it did not extend to all living in the Land, only to certain nations that had had 400 years in which to repent of their evil ways (Genesis 15). It cannot be stated rationally that the Palestinian Arabs today are in the category of the Canaanites. ... Such an ethnic comparison expresses an unbiblical attitude of racism, nationalism, and hate which cannot be disguised by calling it ‘faithfulness to God’s promises.’ Moreover, the prophetic vision of resettlement of the Land after the exile is not based on violent takeover but on divine intervention (Isa. 60-61, Ezek. 36-37).”

Stern, D. 1992. *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., Maryland.

However, the return of Jews to the Holy Land has occurred, and the Jews are sharing the land with about an equal number of Arabs, primarily Muslim but with some Christians amongst them. The question, then, has to be, ‘how is the land to be shared in the long term?’ Perhaps the question is moot, since most participants would recognize that God is the One whose will will be done. Our own choice cannot be evaded, however: from Biblical principles, what are the options? How can we approach what seems to be an intractable problem? And, will the participants – *stakeholders* seems an appropriate term: will the stakeholders allow a solution?

At least these thoughts will give *us* a starting point for further discussion.

Jewish religious writings
the *Tanakh* (the Bible),
the *Targum* (Bible in Aramaic),
the *Mishnah* (highly respected oral law, compiled AD200),
and the *Gemara* (Rabbinic commentaries on the Mishnah).
The *Talmud* is the combined Mishnah and Gemara.
the *Midrash* (Rabbinic commentaries, including laws & custom *Halakha*, and lore, *Haggadah*),
(See e-NEWS 59 for more detail.)

