

THOUGHTS ON THE CURRENT CRISIS: ISRAEL, THE PALESTINIANS, GAZA, AND HAMAS

On October 7, 2023, the terrorist group Hamas unleashed a carnage that certainly was a shock as hundreds of Israelis attending a music festival, and in nearby settlements, were murdered, others captured. Hamas claimed it was a display of justice finally executed while Israelis cry out for revenge. Devastation has been poured out by Israeli reprisals and more is likely to come. One dear Israeli friend expressed the shock this way, "Very hard to keep calm.... Kind of going crazy." Another, "My family and I are safe, although going through a very hard time with the country. Standing strong and looking forward to peace." Another, "There's no doubt that Israel is probably at the worst since establishment of the state of Israel." How can we approach an understanding of what has unfolded? Is there some kind of eschatological meaning in this crisis?

1. Who are the Palestinians?

The Palestinian people are of Arab stock and largely Moslem faith who resided in Palestine prior to the Israeli statehood on 14 May 1948. The declaration of independence resulted in the invasion of the land by three Arab armies (Egypt, Jordan, and Syria). With the Israeli victory, many Arabs fled, fearing Israeli revenge, to neighboring Moslem countries to become a people without a country, without citizenship, and unwanted refugees by any Arab nation.

2. Why are they called Palestinians?

They claim to be the original inhabitants of the Holy Land. The term, "Palestina," is of Roman origin in the second century BC. After the Bar Kocha Revolt (132-34 AD), the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, scattered the nation to non-existence, and renamed the land. Palestinians claim to have historic right to the land having preceded Israel's claim (they say Israel only dates to 1948 and the nationhood claim was stolen from them, a falsity (Israel's existence was guaranteed 3,000 years ago in the Abrahamic Covenant [Gen. 12, 15, 17, 22]) and affirmed in Joshua's conquest of the Canaanites (ca. 1400-1370 BC).

3. How did the Palestinian people come to live in Gaza and the West Bank?

In the 1967, the Six Day War, Israel claimed the Gaza from Egypt and erected several settlements in the area along side the Arab population. In the 1990's the Oslo Accords (directed by then-president William Clinton) created the Palestinian National Authority and in 2005 the Israelis disassembled their settlements in Gaza for the promise of peace through land-concession. The land-for-peace accord was signed by Israel and Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

4. What is Hamas?

The term is an acronym for Arabic translation of the Islamic Resistance Movement (“Hamas” is an Arabic word meaning “violence”), a Sunni faction in Islam. The movement, a terrorist organization, emerged following the intifada (“uprising”) in 1987. A strong military wing known as “Izz al-Din al-Quasam Brigades.” Gradually, Hamas gained political power (2007) usurping the authority of the, then, social-democratic, and secular Fatah party (1965), the Palestinian National Liberation Organization (the PLO), which had formed in a refugee camp in Lebanon. The Fatah Party (President Mahmoud Abbas) still controls the West Bank Palestinians and has not been radicalized by the Hamas, though they do have a presence (Fatah does recognized the Jewish state and is pushing for a two-nation solution through negotiation). Hezbollah in Lebanon is a terrorist organization, a puppet of Iran, which finances them. Iran finances Hamas but has less direct control over them.

5. What is the significance of the crisis as it relates to the “end of times” and the coming of the “king of Kings”? I believe that the past and present is composed of shadows that confirm to us a wonderful day of blessing ahead for God’s children, a picture of things coming for us (weddings, birth of children, vacations, family reunions). However, history is filled also with tragic events to remind us that we live in a fallen world and its judgment is inevitable for much evil, the many anti-Christ exist (Mussolini, Hitler, Po Pot, Rwanda, the Red Scare, the Cuban Missile Crisis, fentanyl, etc.).

Is this crisis another shadow that anticipates a final judgment with the King’s return to bring the final curtain down upon this fallen world or is this that final judgment itself? We will never know until after King comes bringing the final judgment.

Our hope and security are to be found in the character of God, which is the foundation of His promises and the surety of them. Our trust is not in the interpretation of circumstances, of which we are poor discerners at best. We trust the one who said, “I will never leave you or forsake you...” We have no warrant for a “heaven on earth” before the “king of heaven” comes to us. Comfort in our days is not found in “why questions” or “what questions.” It is found in a “who question.” Who will you trust? It is that God will would bring favorable outcomes in a fallen world and that He would provide for you in your deepest need and circumstance carrying you to safety where there will no longer be pain, sorrow, loss, and death. We all seem better at trust when times appear secure; we tend to have less in uncertain moments. Is it not a matter of focus?

John D. Hannah