

Beyond Our Borders

Why Israel Matters to Christians

In April 2013 I made my first visit to Israel, where I walked in the steps of Jesus. I saw the Sea of Galilee and the Old City and encountered places so central to Christianity that it changed the way I read the Bible. I saw many incredible things on that trip, but the most powerful to me was Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum. Yad Vashem has beautiful architecture, a series of structures on a hillside overlooking Jerusalem. Inside, however, it is made of concrete. The atmosphere is stark and depressing as the museum chronicles a history so outrageous it's difficult to fathom: the systematic murder of six million Jews and others.

Yad Vashem serves as a reminder to me of what happens when people of faith don't speak up against a culture moving in the wrong direction. Because with a few notable exceptions, Christians around the world averted their eyes to the evil in front of them when it came to the Holocaust. Even the United States was slow to give sanctuary to Jews, severely restricting immigration and making it difficult for refugees to obtain entry visas. Although church leaders spoke out after Kristallnacht, or the "Night of Broken Glass," on November 9, 1938, when Jewish businesses and synagogues in Austria and Germany were attacked and thirty thousand Jews were rounded up and taken away to concentration camps, few leaders demanded concrete action from the American government or from within the church community.¹ Sadly, the American church ignored its responsibility along with the rest of the country. It was not until 1944, when the United States had become aware of the extent of the Nazi policy to exterminate Jews, that President Roosevelt finally implemented a specific policy to rescue European Jews.² By that point, millions had already perished at the hands of the Nazis.

The one ray of light and hope at Yad Vashem is a grove of trees outside that parallels the museum's walls, where Israel recognizes Christians who tried to save the Jewish people. The trees represent "the righteous

among the nations"—more than 25,000 people from many different countries who risked everything to protect Jewish people from 1933 to 1945. As I walked along the avenue of trees, I couldn't help but wonder how many more lives would have been saved had the church chosen to act.

My questions increased after seeing the horrific pictures of men, women, and children victimized by the Nazis: If I had been alive during the Holocaust, who would I have been? Would I have risked being sent to a concentration camp like Auschwitz in order to do what was right? What if I had kids—would I have been willing to risk the safety of my own family in order to protect others? This question in particular nagged at me. Later on the trip I met a Jewish woman visiting from New York, and she asked me what I was learning on my trip. I told her about the question I had asked myself, "Would I have made the right choice?" She replied, "You say you are a Christian. Don't you think God would give you the grace to do the right thing?" *Of course I do*, I thought, but the question is not his character—it's mine.

Upon my return to the United States, within a day or two I was called to do a Fox News segment, and it hit me: the Jewish people need me right now, today, and I have an incredible platform from which to speak up. As I prepared for the segment, I realized that I will never know if I would have had the courage to act on behalf of the Jews during the Holocaust. Would I have been like Corrie Ten Boom, acting as a living embodiment of the love of Jesus by taking in strangers to spare them? I don't know if I would have had the courage to act as she did. But this I do know: I am responsible before God for what I know today. And what I know is that the Jewish people and the Jewish state of Israel are still in danger. Anti-Semitism is on the rise again, and I am committed to speaking out against it at every opportunity.

The United States and Israel are closely linked. Israel's welfare directly blesses us as a nation. We must send the signal to the world that American Christians will defend Israel and the Jewish people, not only because of God's everlasting, unbroken covenants with the Jewish people but because of our love for our own country.

Why Christians Must Stand with Israel

For nearly 3,400 years, the land of Israel has been the heart and soul of the Jewish people. It is the homeland from where its ancient traditions, culture, and values have emanated. As Christians, we recognize



At the Old Testament serves as the Israelites' deed to their home, the Promised Land. In Genesis, God establishes a unconditional covenant with Abraham: "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you" (Gen. 17:7). That covenant passed from Abraham to his son Isaac, and then to Isaac's son Jacob. In Genesis 35, God renames Jacob "Israel," and reaffirms his covenant with his people: "And God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.' So He called his name Israel. Also God said to him: 'I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land'" (vv. 10–12 NKJV).

God gave the land of Israel to Jacob's descendants—the Jewish people of today. God's covenant is unconditional and everlasting; nothing can take away his establishment of the land of Israel or his declaration that the Jews are his precious people.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul reaffirms this everlasting covenant: "What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise" (Gal. 3:17). The Abrahamic covenant is dealt with consistently in forty-six verses, all of which confirm God's promise of the land of Canaan to the Jews.⁴

In addition to the biblically stated divine right for Israel to exist, we also have historical truth supporting the Jewish claim to their homeland. The Jewish people first established an independent nation-state, with Jerusalem as its political and spiritual capital, around 1000 BC, when Saul became the first king of Israel. In the three millennia that followed, the Jewish nation was repeatedly conquered by foreign empires, including the Persians, Greeks, and Romans. Despite intense persecution by invading foreign forces and mass expulsion from Israel, many Jews remained in their homeland, continuing the Jewish inhabitation of the land of Israel, without pause, to this day.

While many were forced into exile, the Jewish people never lost hope of one day returning to the land of their forefathers and foremothers. They dreamt of returning to their ancient capital of Jerusalem, a city mentioned more than eight hundred times in the Old Testament and nearly 150 times in the New Testament. The concluding words of Israel's



national anthem, "Hatikvah" (The Hope), summarize the Jewish people's desire: "The hope of 2000 years: To live as a free people / In our own land, / The land of Zion and Jerusalem."⁵

The deep-seated yearning to return to their homeland, coupled with increasingly unlivable conditions for Jews in Europe, spawned the political movement of Zionism in the nineteenth century. Although Jews had lived in Europe for quite some time, the situation had become untenable; Jews were persecuted and massacred en masse, and they faced no choice. Many came to believe that they would only escape persecution and murder in a state of their own. That state was Israel.

In 1917, the British issued the Balfour Declaration, pledging to support the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in what was then called Palestine. In 1947, the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into two states—one Arab and one Jewish. Even though more than half of the area allocated for the Jewish nation was desert, the Jewish community in Palestine immediately accepted the compromise. The Arabs, on the other hand, opposed the creation of two states and joined forces with neighboring countries to wage a war against their Jewish neighbor.

Sixty-seven years and six unwanted wars later, the state of Israel continues to fight for its existence. As Christians, we must never forget this simple fact: the Jewish people have a God-given right to live in their ancient land, and the modern state of Israel is the fulfillment of that historic right.

The Danger of Replacement Theology

Despite the clear biblical call for us to stand with Israel, differences exist within the Christian community in our outlook on the Jewish state. Some Christians adhere to the idea that the church has replaced the Jewish people. In this understanding, the Jews are no longer God's chosen people; instead, his promises to them are fulfilled in his blessings to the church. This outlook is called replacement theology.

Although some who believe this concept have never even heard this term, this idea was born centuries ago. Part of this thinking seems to come from our embrace of the New Testament at the expense of—almost the disdaining of—the Old Testament. Because of the centrality of the Gospels and Jesus' earthly ministry to our faith, some Christians elevate the New Testament and undermine the Old, even if unintentionally.



However, this replacement theology is both wrong and dangerous because it carries an undercurrent of anti-Semitism, rooted in the early years of Christianity when many held the Jewish people responsible for sending Jesus to his death. What they seemed to forget is that he was a Jewish Savior with Jewish disciples and that it was Jewish missionaries who brought the gospel to non-Jews. Despite this fact, history is plagued with enduring anti-Semitism—even though God himself chose this particular people as vessels to transmit his Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, and to provide our Savior, a Jewish rabbi, to redeem us.

Let me be clear: the belief that the Jews are to blame for Jesus' crucifixion is a distortion of Scripture. Jesus himself says, "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father" (John 10:17-18).

Jesus' arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection were completely in God's hands. Pontius Pilate; the Jewish religious hierarchy; the high priest, Caiaphas; the Roman soldiers; and Judas Iscariot could have done nothing to prevent God's plan of salvation for his creation. Jesus had to die as a substitute for our sins. The crucifixion had to happen: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16). After Jesus' resurrection and ascension his disciples and many other Jewish believers brought the gospel to the known world. Despite these facts, anti-Semitism is alive and well in the church.

I was a little girl of seven or eight the first time I was confronted with this anti-Semitic understanding of the Scriptures. I remember another child telling me that "the Jews killed Jesus." I was confused, but I knew that didn't sound right. In response, I said something about the Roman soldiers carrying out the crucifixion. But I was smart enough to go to my resident biblical authority, my dad, who was a pastor (Reverend Young recently retired after fifty-one years!). I have never forgotten his wise response. He said "Yes, Penny, the Romans nailed Jesus to the cross, but it was actually me. I killed Jesus. He willingly died as a sacrifice for my sin, and he died for yours." Wow, what an astounding reminder. *My* sin is why Jesus died. He chose to die for my redemption and yours. He chose to lay down his life of his own accord. The Jews and the Romans were carrying out his plan of salvation. He could have stopped it all with a word, but he willingly died for all of us.



It's risky business for Christians to cling to the idea that the church and Christians have replaced the Jewish people in God's covenants. If God changed his mind about the covenants with the Jewish people, might he change his promises to us as well? We mischaracterize his unchanging nature and promises when we accept the ideas of replacement theology. The truth is that Jesus completed the law without dismantling his promises, and we need to cling to the Old and New Testament promises as the word of God.

The US-Israel Relationship

It is critical that Christians stand with Israel. It is equally important that Americans support Israel because it is our closest ally in the region and reflects the democratic ideals of our home country. A beacon for humanity, light, and hope in the Middle East, Israel fervently protects all holy sites and guarantees freedom of religion for all its citizens: Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Druze, and others. Furthermore, the United States has maintained a special bond with the nation of Israel since its establishment. As Senator John McCain has stated, the most "profound tie between our two countries . . . is a moral one. We are two democracies whose alliance is forged in our common values."⁶

The US-Israel relationship is strategically important for many reasons. We have common national interests, ranging from the desire to prevent nuclear weapon proliferation to promoting stable borders among countries in the Middle East. Our close cooperation has yielded military technologies and strategies that benefit both countries, and Israel's strong military and geostrategic location are crucial to the United States' interests in the region. Our relationship with Israel is necessary in addressing the rising specters of global terrorism and radical Islam.

Unfortunately, there are constant threats to Israel's safety and preservation, as there have been for centuries. Despite its commitment to peace and freedom, however, Israel has been recognized by only two of its twenty-two Arab neighbors: Egypt and Jordan. Most of the rest refuse to accept Israel's statehood or to maintain diplomatic relations. Many are outright hostile; Iran in particular has long called for the destruction of the Jewish state.

Most recently, the negotiations between the United States and Iran over Iran's nuclear program have brought things to a boiling point. Israel was rightly concerned about this deal, negotiated up through the



summer of 2015, because a nuclear-capable Iran represents the greatest possible threat to Israel's existence and its people. The White House was dismissive of Israeli concerns, and their rhetoric surrounding the deal became increasingly harsh. In the run-up to the 2015 Israeli elections, it was so bad that even the *New York Times* noted that "the unrelenting White House criticism . . . has helped sink relations between Washington and Jerusalem to a nadir not seen for more than 25 years."⁷

When Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, came to the United States in March 2015 to address Congress about the Iran deal, Obama refused to meet with him, claiming that the meeting would come too close to the Israeli elections. And after Netanyahu won reelection, despite US tax dollars being secretly funneled to his opponent, the president pointedly waited two days before calling to congratulate him. This dismissive, even hostile attitude toward Israel has gone too far, and is detrimental to both our great nations. If Israel is going to remain the bastion of democracy and freedom in the Middle East, America must become once again its most supportive ally.

In the midst of this tumultuous and even dangerous environment, our support as American Christians for the Holy Land and the Jewish people is more critical than ever.

Anti-Semitism on the College Campus

Last year, researchers at Tel Aviv University found that anti-Semitic incidents had risen 38 percent over the previous year. "The overall feeling among many Jewish people is one of living in an intensifying anti-Jewish environment that has become not only insulting and threatening but outright dangerous," the report concluded.⁸ In the United States, this disturbing trend is particularly prevalent on college and university campuses.

The BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement, begun in 2005 by Palestinian organizations in an attempt to increase pressure on Israel to acquiesce to Palestinian demands, has taken hold on campuses in recent years. Calling on the international community "to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era," the BDS movement has found strong support from liberal student governments and groups.⁹ Student groups target companies that do business with Israel and pressure their universities to divest their interests in such organizations.

They also call on consumers not to purchase Israeli products and to boycott Israeli academic and cultural institutions.

This movement is growing. In the 2013–2014 academic year, student governments at fifteen colleges ranging from Cornell to the University of Michigan voted on nonbinding divestment resolutions against organizations conducting business in Israel.¹⁰ In the 2014–2015 year, the number of BDS campaigns initiated on campuses had risen to twenty-nine.¹¹

The trouble is not just the votes but also the anti-Semitic feeling and rhetoric behind such actions. Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), the main group behind the BDS movement, has been spewing hatred against Israel since the group's inception. As the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) recently reported, "SJP has consistently demonized Israel, describing Israeli policies toward the Palestinians as racist and apartheid-like, and comparing Israelis to Nazis or Israel to the Jim Crow-era US."¹² Sadly, such inflammatory rhetoric plays well on college campuses, where student-led groups carry out a variety of anti-Israel events that range from disrupting speakers, holding student-led teach-ins on why Israel is an apartheid state, and even setting up mock Israeli military checkpoints around campus.

The BDS campaign has been relatively ineffective on a global scale—most boycotts are soundly defeated, and no US school has sold any stock in response to resolutions passed by student governments—but it has nonetheless created a hostile environment for Jewish students and professors.¹³ As the national director of the ADL, Abraham H. Foxman wrote in the *Huffington Post*, "Regardless of the fact that the BDS campaign has not gained much traction on campus in terms of having any impact against Israel . . . it is creating a great deal of noise on campus and beyond, raising a lot of attention, and contributing to the sense of discomfort of Jewish students."¹⁴

At multiple universities over the past few years, including NYU and Harvard, Jewish students have been harassed by false eviction notices shoved under their dorm room doors.¹⁵ There have also been reports of physical violence.¹⁶ During a divestment vote at UC Davis in January 2015, students waved Palestinian flags and shouted at Jewish and pro-Israel supporters. After the vote, the Jewish fraternity on campus was painted with swastikas.¹⁷ After a failed vote on a divestment proposal at Cornell last year, one student told the *New York Times*, "There definitely is a sharpness to the anti-Israel side that's uncomfortable."¹⁸

Boy, that's an understatement. Uncomfortable doesn't begin to cover it.

Anti-Semitism on a Global Scale

Make no mistake: anti-Semitism is on the rise, across America more generally and also beyond our borders. As the *Times of Israel* reported in February of last year, nearly 60 percent of all hate crimes in the United States are committed against Jews.¹⁹ Whether verbal or physical, attacks on Jewish Americans occur at an alarming rate, and they are happening more often: the ADL reported a 21 percent increase in anti-Semitic incidents in 2014.²⁰ Some of these are high-profile incidents, like the 2014 shooting of four people outside a Jewish community center in Overland Park, Kansas, by a white supremacist intent on “killing all Jews.” But such large acts of violence also occur alongside more everyday assaults, ranging from the painting of swastikas on thirty homes in Madison, Wisconsin, in February 2015 to the recent trend of hacking into Jewish community and synagogue websites.

The increasing anti-Semitic sentiment in the United States is worrisome; in Europe, it is downright alarming. After the January 2015 terrorist attack on the Paris offices of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, which we talked about in the previous chapter, the attackers proceeded to a kosher supermarket, where they killed four people and took several others hostage. The supermarket had no connection to *Charlie Hebdo*; it was merely run and patronized by Jewish people. Four weeks later, a man, possibly inspired by the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, opened fire outside of a synagogue in Copenhagen, killing a Jewish man and wounding two police officers. That same weekend, the graves of three hundred Jews were desecrated in a cemetery in eastern France.

While highly visible, these are just three incidents in a wave of increased violence and intolerance toward Jews in Europe. As Stephen Pollard, editor of Britain's *Jewish Chronicle*, wrote, the attack on the kosher supermarket in Paris was no fluke. Home to Western Europe's largest Jewish population, France in particular has seen a huge increase in anti-Semitic sentiment and activity—the number of incidents today is seven times higher than it was in the 1990s.²¹ “Every single French Jew I know has either left or is actively working out how to leave,” Pollard said.²²

Indeed, anti-Semitism has become so widespread and vicious across Europe that governments have been scrambling to respond; after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggested that European Jews ought to come home to Israel in the wake of the Copenhagen shootings,



European leaders insisted that they would do everything in their power to protect their Jewish citizens. "An attack on the Jews of Denmark is an attack on Denmark," Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt declared. "They are a strong part of our community, and we will do everything we can to protect the Jewish community in our country."²³

Along with a stronger vocal stance against such attacks, many countries have ramped up their security measures; in the wake of the attacks in Paris, France deployed ten thousand troops across the country to protect Jewish sites and citizens, and in Amsterdam, military police guard sites like the Anne Frank museum and the city's seventeenth-century Portuguese synagogue.²⁴

Even the United States has felt compelled to speak out against the state of affairs in Europe. In February 2015, the Senate introduced a bipartisan resolution condemning the rise of anti-Semitism across Europe and calling on US authorities to work with European leaders to combat it.²⁵

Incidents are continuing to pile up week after week; remaining silent is no longer an option. While visiting Germany in May 2015 to mark fifty years of relations between the two countries, Israel's president, Reuven Rivlin, delivered a dire message: "Once again, fascist and neo-Nazi movements are growing stronger and stronger on European soil. Apathy, indifference, or denial is not the answer."²⁶

Jews in the Middle East and the Rise in Extremism

Where is this increased hatred toward Jewish citizens coming from? While there are a variety of factors that contribute, much of the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe has been tied to the growing population of Muslim immigrants there.²⁷ Although many Muslims hold no ill will toward Jews, extremists have begun to exert a greater influence. With the rise of social media and the ability of extremist groups in the Middle East to inspire and support attacks abroad, the danger has continued to grow.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the recent rise in Islamic extremism presents a severe and alarming threat to the region and to the West. Yet while this reality becomes clearer and more frightening by the day, the danger posed by these groups has long been foreshadowed in the treatment of Jews and of Israel. There is a saying in the Middle East, "First the Saturday people then the Sunday people," meaning that

whatever happens to the Jews happens next to the Christians. This is clearly true in terms of the decimation of religious minorities.

Consider the obliteration of Jews in Iraq. In biblical times Iraq was part of ancient Mesopotamia. It was the home of the civilizations of Sumer, Babylon, and Assyria, and the site of some of our faith's earliest roots; one of its largest cities, Ur, is believed to be the birthplace of Abraham.²⁸ Judaism has had a significant presence in Iraq since at least the time of the Babylon captivity in 586 BC.²⁹

As recently as 1950, there were 150,000 Jews living in Iraq. Today, the best estimates suggest that there are between four and ten, all living in Baghdad.³⁰ You read that right: less than ten Jews in the entire country. Facing extreme persecution in the 1950s, many Jews immigrated to Israel; of the several thousand who remained in Iraq, their numbers have slowly dwindled among the hostile environment and anti-Semitic atmosphere of the country.

A similar story is now playing out for Christians and other religious minorities in the region. With Israel standing as the only pillar of democracy and religious freedom in the Middle East, it is essential for those now suffering at the hands of Islamic extremists that we support our ally and work to protect Israel from threats to its homeland.

Threats to Israel

Anti-Semitism endangers Jews around the world, and radical Islam threatens religious minorities in the Middle East and abroad. But Israel's greatest threats are close to home. Terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah and the antipathy of neighbors like Iran and Lebanon all pose significant dangers to our ally.

HAMAS

One of the greatest threats comes from Hamas, a Palestinian terrorist organization and political movement that has long sought the destruction of Israel. Designated a terrorist organization in 1997, it still operates as one of Palestine's major political parties, and effectively rules the Gaza Strip, an area of land Israel gave back to the Palestinians in 2005.³¹ Unfortunately, that act of good will has only placed Israeli citizens in more danger due to the election of Hamas by Gaza's citizens. Hamas' founding charter from 1988 calls for the obliteration of Israel and the establishment of an Islamic state in Palestine, and Hamas has dedicated itself to

FEISIA 3
8

this goal. It has provoked three conflicts with Israel in the past seven years and killed more than five hundred civilians in terrorist attacks.³²

You've seen the rallies and heard the chants, particularly during Operation Protective Edge, the conflict between Israel and Gaza in the summer of 2014, when Hamas was lobbing over rockets—more than 4,500 of them—from Gaza, and Palestinians were upset that Israel fired back.³³ They yelled, "From the river to the sea Palestine will be free," meaning from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea the Jews will be driven out of Israel.

Let's be clear: that is the entire width of the nation. The Palestinians want it all. They do not want a two-state solution; they want one state of Palestine.

It might surprise you to know that Hamas sending rockets into Israel isn't a new thing. There have been at least 15,200 rockets shot into Israel from Gaza in the last fourteen years.³⁴ I saw some of these on my last trip to Israel in April 2015. Upon my arrival, the head of security in the tiny town of Sderot drove me to the border of Gaza. It's so close, just a small swath of land a few miles away, yet a world away in terms of worldview. As I stood on a hillside looking over Gaza, I tried to imagine what it would be like to live in constant fear from my neighbors. It must be terrifying. And Hamas isn't done fighting; they are currently expanding their network of terror tunnels into Israel, assembling hundreds of rockets each week and smuggling illegal materials into Gaza for weapons building and tunnel construction.³⁵

While writing this chapter, the Red Alert app on my phone went off, notifying me of rockets being shot into Sderot. Many of the elderly people living there are Holocaust survivors. I met some of them who were making cookies for Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers at the International Fellowship of Christian and Jews Senior Center I toured. They kept trying to feed me. It is such a sweet memory, and I mourn for the violence they are continually facing. The media won't cover these as acts of war because Israel refuses to fire back.

Hamas clearly states that its immediate goal is to destroy Israel. You will remember that these are the same people who condemned the United States for killing the "holy warrior" Osama Bin Laden. As long as Hamas remains armed and Gaza militarized, the six million citizens of Israel live under the shadow of further deadly conflict.

Can you imagine if even one rocket came over our borders from Mexico or Canada? What do you think our response would be? Many in

the international community have condemned Israel for defending itself against this aggression, but Israel has an absolute right and responsibility to defend and protect its citizens. Furthermore, they do so with the utmost care to limit civilian casualties and provide humanitarian aid. During Operation Protective Edge, Hamas used schools and hospitals as rocket-launching sites and deliberately placed Gaza residents in the line of Israeli fire by ordering them to ignore evacuation warnings.³⁶ Israel, on the other hand, went out of its way to warn Gaza civilians who were in the vicinity of military targets, sent medicine and medical supplies to them, and helped restore electrical power, sewage, and water to the Gaza Strip.³⁷ Sadly, there are still innocent victims in Gaza who are held hostage by Hamas. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said it well: "Here's the difference between us. We're using missile defense to protect our civilians, and they're using their civilians to protect their missiles."³⁸

Israel has not always done everything right, and certainly there are innocent Palestinians who deserve our compassion and prayers. But Hamas is a terrorist organization using terrorist tactics. Israel must be allowed to defend itself against this threat and deserves the support of the international community as they pursue peace. Prime Minister Netanyahu is also credited with saying, "If the Arabs lay down their arms there will be no more war, but if Israel lays down its weapons, there would be no more Israel."³⁹

True that!

IRAN AND HEZBOLLAH

Hamas is not the only danger Israel must contend with on a daily basis. Iran has been hostile toward Israel since its foundation as a state. It refuses to recognize the legitimacy of Israel's statehood and has severed all diplomatic and commercial ties. More significant, Iran has set itself up in direct opposition to Israel and openly calls for the destruction of the Jewish homeland. In November 2014 Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, took to Twitter to demand that Israel be "annihilated," and in April 2015, an Iranian militia commander stated that "erasing Israel off the map" was "nonnegotiable." For this reason, Iran's work to obtain nuclear weapons represents perhaps the most pressing threat to Israel, and one that must be carefully considered by the United States. Iran's promises to limit their nuclear program must have immediate and verifiable results.



Iran's threat to Israel is particularly acute because of the actions of Hezbollah, the Iranian militant group based in Lebanon. US officials have described Hezbollah as the "most technically capable terrorist group in the world."⁴¹ Established in the 1980s and pledging loyalty to Iran's supreme leader, Hezbollah opposes any Western involvement in the Middle East and, like Hamas, longs for the destruction of Israel. Their founding manifesto reads, in part: "Our primary assumption in our fight against Israel states that the Zionist entity is aggressive from its inception, and built on lands wrested from their owners, at the expense of the rights of the Muslim people. Therefore our struggle will end only when this entity is obliterated. We recognize no treaty with it, no cease-fire, and no peace agreements, whether separate or consolidated."⁴²

Hezbollah's hatred for Israel is deep seated and represents a clear and constant threat to the Jewish homeland and people. Hezbollah is financed by Iran and acts as an Iranian proxy. The US State Department must remember this fact and maintain an awareness of the best interests of our ally.

These are other terrorist groups who want to destroy Israel. I don't have the space to get into all of them, but you get the point. Now is the time to stand firmly with Israel. They are facing direct threats to their homeland, and the region is awash in terrorist activity driven by radical ideology that threatens Jews, Christians, and others. We need Israel to be able to stand as a stable, democratic partner in the region and offer religious freedom in a land where almost none exists.

Increased Anti-Israel Sentiment within the US Government

Unfortunately, relations between the United States and Israel have become increasingly strained under the leadership of President Obama. The Obama administration's relationship with Israel has always been—shall we say rocky? Obama has long been accused of holding anti-Zionist views, and his links with Palestinian extremists and commentators, such as Palestine Liberation Organization spokesman Rashid Khalidi, are well known.⁴³ Obama has done little over the course of his presidency to acknowledge the growing threat of Hamas or Israel's other enemies in the region, and his lack of support for the nation has caused tension since the earliest days of his administration. With Obama's reelection in 2012, political commentator Daniel Pipes predicted, "the coldest treatment of Israel ever by a U.S. president will follow."⁴⁴ History has proven him correct.



We need our next commander in chief to be supportive of Israel and to maintain a strong relationship between our two nations. In most cases, what is good for Israel is good for the United States, and we need to work together to achieve our common goals.

What Can Esther Women Do?

When I reflect on the persecution of Jews and of Israel, I think that perhaps it's all evidence for God's eternal covenant with the Jews. What else can explain the vicious attacks and plots for annihilation of the Jewish people from the earliest days of history to the present than satanic vengeance against God himself? And I know how much the suffering of his chosen people must grieve God. As a parent, I suffer along with—maybe even more than—my children when they are threatened in some way. It's the same, I believe, with God and the Jewish people. Yes, God loves all of his children, but to Satan the Jews are symbolic. This is both a physical and a spiritual battle.

So what can we do? In the midst of this unstable and dangerous state of affairs, is there anything tangible that conservative women can do to make a difference?

SPEAK OUT AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM

The most important and most direct step we can take is to address anti-Semitism on our own soil. We can't stand for the persecution of *anyone* based on their faith; as Christians, we know how crucial the freedom of religion is. We need to be aware of the anti-Semitism that is cropping up in our cities and towns and speak out against it. The BDS movement, for instance, is not a political statement; at its core, it is an anti-Semitic movement, and we ought to work to counter it. If your alma mater or your child's school has passed a divestment proposal or participates in any boycotting or censoring of Israeli academic institutions, write a letter to the president or board to alert them to the anti-Semitic underpinnings of this movement. James 2:20 reminds us that faith without works is useless. We must actively live out our faith by working against evil and those who would seek to persecute or discriminate based on religion or cultural background.

We must also speak out against anti-Semitism more globally. As Christians, we are called by God to stand against injustice, hatred, and evil. The passage by our Senate of the bill condemning anti-Semitism

in Europe was an important step, and we need to continue to hear language like this from our leaders. The international community cannot remain silent, and neither can we, or history is destined to repeat itself. We should not think that because Jews are the ones being persecuted, we are not all at risk. The rising specter of radical ideology and global terrorism threatens us all, and persecution of Jews is only a harbinger of what's to come.

I'm reminded of the famous words spoken by the German pastor Martin Niemöller about the need to speak against evil, whether those who suffer share our beliefs or not:

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.⁴⁵

Niemöller, a Protestant pastor who opposed the Nazis, spoke these words as an indictment of the German people, particularly church leaders, who remained silent and effectively allowed the Nazis to persecute and murder millions. While it might sound dramatic to say it, we're facing a similar situation once again. None of us can afford to remain silent, or we may find ourselves left with no one to speak on our behalf when the evils of global terrorism and extremist ideology reach our doorstep.

STAND FIRM WITH ISRAEL

As Christians, we also have a particular duty to support Israel, a land and people that God loves. The Israelites are God's chosen people and always will be. We must reject the incorrect notion of replacement theology, which can slip into Christian communities without our even realizing it. And we must be active in affirming the right of Israel to exist in a region struggling under the encroaching darkness of radical extremism and religious intolerance. For as God promised Abraham, those who bless Israel and the Jewish people will be blessed, and those who curse them will be cursed (Gen. 12:3). It is in our best interest to support them, as God affirmatively promises to bless us if we do.

We also need to encourage nonbelievers to advocate for Israel. Whether one affirms the biblical basis for Israel or not, Americans recognize that



it is a crucial strategic ally. Our ties with Israel are important for defense, security assistance, energy development, and cooperation in academics and business, among other things. Under the current administration, the relationship between the two countries has been strained to the breaking point. We must not stand for this any longer.

CWA took this stance in October 2014 when we hosted a Stand with Israel rally with Governor Mike Huckabee. During the war with Gaza in the summer of 2014, I watched the Palestinian student demonstrations and their threats to Jewish students. I kept waiting for Christians to rally on the side of Israel. Finally, I realized that God was calling *me* to respond. I knew that it would create a ton of work, and our CWA staff was already doing so much. So I laid a fleece before the Lord (Judg. 6:37). I said, "Lord, if you want me to do this, I need Mike Huckabee to agree to help!" Governor Huckabee was still doing his TV show, *Huckabee*, on Fox News at the time. I emailed the governor and said that I was thinking about doing a rally to give Christians an opportunity to respond and asked if he would be interested in helping.

Almost immediately, I received the governor's reply: a hearty "Let's do it!" *Okay, God*, I thought, *now I actually have to pull this off.*

Putting together an event on the National Mall is a lot of work and a lot of money I hadn't budgeted for, and getting people to show up is even harder. But Governor Huckabee was all in. He helped promote the rally on his show, and people responded. I was so proud to cohost an event in which several thousand, mostly young, Christians, along with some of our Jewish friends, linked arms and pledged to support Israel. People came from all over the nation, from as far as Iowa and North Dakota. Lee Greenwood showed up to sing, "God Bless the USA." In reporting on the rally, Jennifer Rubin of the *Washington Post* noted, "But in the sea of troubles [for Israel] there is a bright spot, namely the unflagging support for the Jewish state from American evangelicals."⁴⁶

The proudest moment came for me at the end of the rally, when I was able to meet an elderly couple from Baltimore who are Holocaust survivors. They were accompanied by their beautiful granddaughter. Having been told they were in the audience, at the end of the event I called out to them from the stage and asked them to look around at all the Christians standing in support of Jewish people everywhere and pledged to them that they would never stand alone again. They were stunned. They had suffered so much at the hands of the Nazis, some of whom identified as Christians, and yet here we were finally getting it right. When we met

face-to-face, they said to me, "We felt so loved. Thank you!" Step-by-step, I am working to answer my question from Yad Vashem.

As I saw that day on the National Mall, we can do this. We can't right the wrongs of the past, but we can work to do the right thing today, right now.

ADVOCATE FOR STRONG SUPPORT AND AID

We also need to encourage our government to get our policies right—particularly when it comes to foreign aid. This starts with increasing awareness about the countries that threaten Israel and about the dangers posed by groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. There is a lot of misinformation out there when it comes to Israel and its enemies, and being educated on this topic is important in order to bring about civil debate and encourage fellow Americans to advocate for strong support and aid to our ally.

The need to support Israel financially through foreign aid is critical. I realized this last year when I joined Yael Eckstein of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews as we toured several military bases, including one referred to as the Lions of the North. This strategic base is staffed by Israeli Defense Forces, very young men and women whose job is to monitor the border with Lebanon for attacks against the Jewish state. These kids—well, eighteen- to twenty-five-year-olds, but I think of them as kids because many are the same age as my daughter—were so poised and resolute in their commitment to their nation. They are willing to die and know others who have died defending Israel's borders. They shoulder the tremendous responsibility of having about fifteen seconds to decide whether something they see on-screen is a missile, a commercial plane, a hijacked plane, or something else. The stakes are extremely high because they are near strategic ports and populated areas that I won't discuss further for security reasons. Remember, Israel has had ongoing conflict with Lebanon for decades, including two major wars in 1982 and 2006.

As part of my tour, I was shown the key to their safety, the American-developed-and-built Patriot missile system. A tactical air defense system, the Patriot missile system uses radar and long-range missiles to intercept and destroy enemy aircrafts and drones to protect Israeli civilians. The United States began supplying Israel with the Patriot system during the Gulf War, and we have collaborated with them since to develop a highly effective defense system.



I rounded the corner and there it was, an impressive, enormous apparatus that can take down very large threats. Seeing the missile system, I was proud of my own country's ability to innovate and create such impressive technology. However, essential defense systems like the Patriot system, or others like the Iron Dome (which protects civilians from short-range missiles and mortars) and David's Sling (which intercepts medium-to long-range threats), are very expensive. I was told by the IDF agent accompanying me that each Patriot system holds four missiles and that each missile costs Israel one million dollars.⁴⁷ Wow. Suddenly, what I already knew about foreign aid to Israel clicked in.

Despite what you may have heard, foreign aid is only 1 percent of the overall US budget, and Israel receives only 6 percent of that.⁴⁸ Of the roughly \$3.1 billion they receive, at least 70 percent is invested back into the US economy by purchasing our goods, many of which are manufactured by the defense sector.⁴⁹

Now, consider this. We are \$18 trillion in debt in this nation, and \$7.5 trillion of that has happened during the Obama Administration.⁵⁰ I am a fiscal hawk and strongly believe we have to get our financial house in order. However, our debt is mostly from entitlement spending (Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security), not foreign aid. It's dishonest to suggest that we can't afford to continue to help support Israel with foreign aid. As we've seen, Israel is the only democracy in the region and an essential strategic partner in the Middle East; foreign aid there should be a no-brainer.

I joked when I left the base that if Congress tries to cut aid to Israel, I will chain myself to the Appropriations Committee door. I am only half-way kidding. We must not be penny wise and pound foolish with US resources. The money we spend helps both countries, which is not the case with many other nations.

On that note, we need to start speaking out against the millions of dollars our government sends to countries who support terrorism—countries like Pakistan, which has received almost \$30 billion from the United States in direct aid in the past thirteen years.⁵¹ Lifting sanctions on Iran will also likely free up more money to flow into the coffers of those who threaten and terrorize Israel and religious minorities in the Middle East, and our government needs to work with Israel regarding such concerns. We can't be aiding Israel with one hand while we indirectly support its gravest enemies with the other; that's ineffective and misguided.



As voting citizens of this nation, we need to demand that the administration adopt laws and policies that strengthen our relationship with Israel, not undermine it. That means advocating for things like foreign aid and strategic partnership acts. Most crucially, it means that we need to act to empower the right people. We need to vote for candidates who understand the significance of our relationship with Israel and who have a coherent view of our interests in the Middle East and the threat of Islamic terrorism. Weak leadership only allows room for our enemies to maneuver, and it threatens our nation as well as Israel. We need leaders with a clear plan and strong resolve, not haphazard policies and cloudy vision.

We aren't voiceless when it comes to this issue. There has always been strong bipartisan support for Israel in Congress, and it's important that we continue to encourage this. Congressmen across the aisle have championed to preserve our ties with our ally, something that benefits all Americans, and we can't be apathetic about using our voices to raise concerns about the direction the Obama administration has taken us. The unity I see on Capitol Hill when it comes to supporting Israel gives me great hope that our country will continue to prioritize this important relationship to make the Middle East and the world a safer and more democratic place.

Ultimately, Israel is a strategic partner and a moral ballast. And as Prime Minister Netanyahu stated in his speech before Congress last year, "The remarkable alliance between Israel and the United States has always been above politics. It must always remain above politics."⁵² Our countries are bound by a commitment to peace, human rights, freedom, and democracy. As Christians, we are bound to the Jewish people by our shared heritage and faith in God. In a dark world that seems at times to be on the brink of spiraling into chaos, it is critically important that we stand with our allies in the face of evil. As Esther Women, we must raise our voices to ensure this happens.



Charmaine Yoest

PRESIDENT AND CEO, AMERICANS UNITED FOR LIFE (AUL)



Dr. Charmaine Yoest is a leading voice of the pro-life movement. She heads Americans United for Life, an organization that works through the law and legislation to stop abortion in our nation. AUL has been involved in every abortion-related case before the US Supreme Court since *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, and since Yoest took the helm in 2008, their wins have only continued to grow as they make gains in states across the country.

Dr. Yoest has always recognized the importance of political and social engagement in our nation. As a teenager, she went door-to-door for a Republican candidate for Congress, and after college she served in the White House under the Reagan administration. From there Dr. Yoest went to the Family Research Council, where she studied the breakdown of family in our country.

In 2008, Dr. Yoest took an even greater leap into the political realm, agreeing to serve as senior advisor to Mike Huckabee's presidential campaign. She and her husband took their children out of school to campaign across the country for a man who represented the conservative values and Christian morals our country desperately needed.

Following the campaign, Dr. Yoest joined AUL, where she has devoted herself to fighting for life for all human beings. Dr. Yoest has helped refine the AUL's mother-child strategy, which takes into account the well-being and interests of both the mother and the baby and seeks to protect both from the abuses of the abortion industry. A mother of five herself, Dr. Yoest knows the beauty and value of every human life, and her work in this arena is a testament to the power of conservative women when we refuse to be silenced.