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BRIDGES FOR PEACE

Israel Teaching Letter

Vol. # 770610

June 2010





a history of HURT

The front desk clerk at my hotel was helping me print out a draft of the presentation I was about to give on the subject of Christian anti-Semitism. Noticing the subject matter, he wondered aloud, “Christian anti-Semitism? Now, that doesn’t make any sense.” I thought he nailed it. The topic should strike us as the worst of an oxymoron, for we should expect anything Christian to be for the Jews, not against them.

A journey through this shadowy heritage is unpleasant and harder than remaining camped out in our Christian comfort zone where we speak of our love for the Jews. To really get ahold of this enigma, we’ll need to get into the Jewish head and Jewish heart. As one rabbi noted, “Don’t tell me that you love me if you do not know what causes me pain.” Do you know their pain? Have you stepped into their world enough to sample the hatred they have known, and still know? Do you have any idea what it is like to be the object of a universal hatred so endemic that it warrants its own technical term, then to realize that term exists just because of you?

“Anti-Semitism” is a modern term for an ancient condition. German political agitator Wilhelm Marr introduced this ugly hyphenation in 1879 as he tried to form a political movement against the Jews. Sadly, there is a centuries-older Christian brand of this hatred that for many Jews is yet the worst of it they have experienced. In their book *Why the Jews?*, Dennis Prager and Rabbi Joseph Telushkin tell us, “Hatred of the Jew has been humanity’s greatest hatred. While hatred of other groups has always existed, no hatred has been as universal, as deep, as permanent.” Along with these authors, society must ask, “Why the Jews?” Why are they so hated? Why are they so hunted? What is the problem with this group that has generated so much anger and venom—even to the point of anti-Semitism taking on a largely “Christian” identity (i.e. Christian anti-Semitism)?

Having a discussion on this subject, a fellow shot a question at me: “So why are the Jews favored by God anyway?” Hear what is behind his question—the ignorance of truth and the denial of reality. The truth is that God did not *favor* the Jews—He *chose* them. The reality is that the Jewish people, therefore, bear a weighty responsibility, a burden no other nation has had to bear.



“Don’t tell me that you love me if you do not know what causes me pain.”



“Jew” in French



The Jewish Factor

Perhaps the question of “why” regarding hatred of the Jews is only a modern age question due to the attempt to universalize anti-Semitism into common bigotry. In earlier ages, people knew the “why” as the inevitable consequence of Judaism. That distinctly Jewish factor has long involved higher standards (whether living inside or outside of Israel) than their Gentile neighbors in education, family, civil law, and social order. Add to this Jewish snubbing of the pagan gods and daily Jewish prayer to “perfect the world,” the resultant elevated quality of life tends to engender their neighbors’ envy and angst. Add to this that from Israel would come the Messiah, who would be “a light to the Gentiles” (Isa. 49:6).

God called Israel to model three foundational truths: (1) One God—In the face of universal idolatry, the God of Israel is the one and only and will abide no others. (2) *Torah* (usually Gen.–Deut. but can refer to all of the Hebrew Scriptures)—The God of Israel has written His own instructions on how to live holy unto Him, and He expects His people to obey. (3) Israel—As a tree needs soil to stand, so the Jewish people need a land for their roots to run deep. To this day, it is the most contested piece of real estate in the world.

Some have appreciated the light of God’s truth coming through this chosen people of God, for it is the light of redemption for all people. Many more have resented the suggestion of even needing a light. The Jewish people have been scrutinized, analyzed, and commented upon, then loved or hated, by every generation. South African social activist Olive Schreiner observes: “It is difficult for all other nations of the world to live in the presence of the Jews. It is irritating and most uncomfortable. The Jews embarrass the world, as they have done things which are beyond the imaginable. They have become moral strangers since the day their forefather Abraham introduced the world to high ethical standards and to the fear of Heaven.” And Winston Churchill opined, “Some people like the Jews, and some do not. But no thoughtful man can deny the fact that they are, beyond any question, the most formidable and the most remarkable race which has appeared in the world.”

I was sitting with a rabbi once, offering that Christian awareness of the Jewish factor is causing an increase of interest in the Jewish plight with a turning of hearts in love toward the Jewish people. The rabbi responded, “We Jews appreciate that, but we don’t really want so much interest in us. We would really just like to be left alone for awhile.” I considered that then replied, “But that’s one thing you can’t have—being left alone—so you’re going to need friends.”

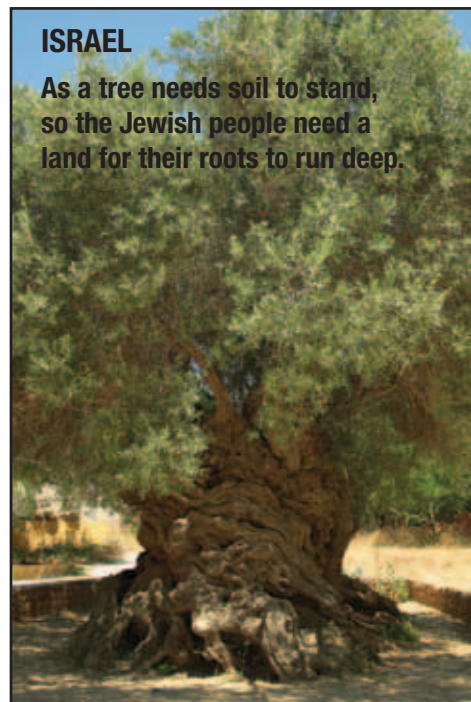


ONE GOD



ISRAEL

As a tree needs soil to stand, so the Jewish people need a land for their roots to run deep.



TORAH



en.wikipedia.org/Carlo Riccardi

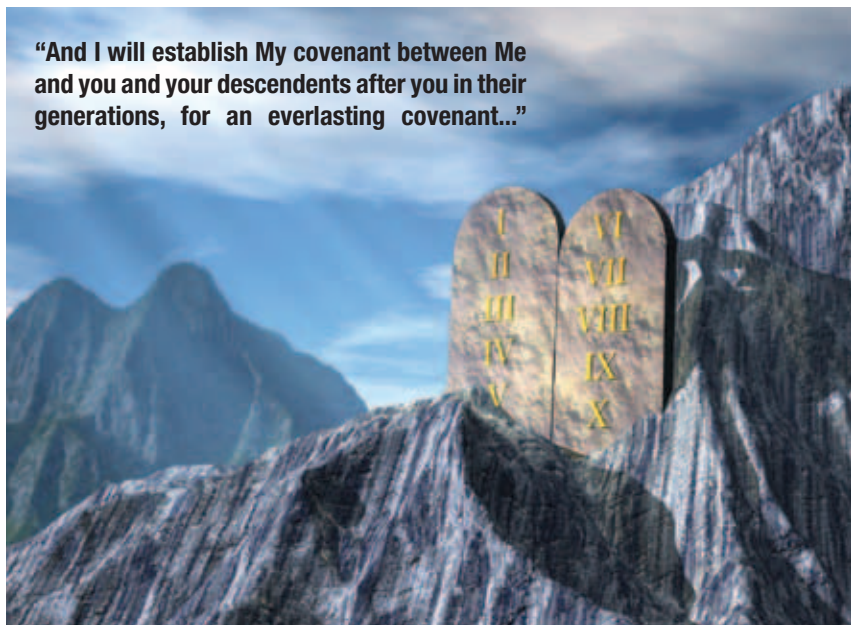
“Some people like the Jews, and some do not. But no thoughtful man can deny the fact that they are, beyond any question, the most formidable and the most remarkable race which has appeared in the world.”

Winston Churchill



Digging Down to the Root

"And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendents after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant..."



There are many depths to plumb when examining the origin of anti-Semitism. Bible-believing Christians must be willing to dig down to the deepest root and there wrestle with the spiritual forces of darkness at work against God's chosen. The root of anti-Semitism is found sociologically, historically, politically, economically, religiously, interpersonally, and spiritually.

Late Christian author and teacher Derek Prince wrote that in 1946 one of his professors at Hebrew University believed the root problem is sociological, the Jewish people being an alien minority with a distinctive culture out of harmony with the Gentiles around them. This educator was sure that the existence of the Jewish state would solve this problem. Prince countered that the root cause is spiritual, so the establishment of the Jewish state will actually intensify the problem by giving Jew-hatred one obvious target. Over 60 years later, we can judge whether the student or the teacher was correct. Sociologists tell us that anti-Zionism has become the new anti-Semitism.

The spiritual root involves the dark reality of a demonic hatred that oozes out of the pit of Hell. It works through people who choose to curse and not bless. Satan and his minions are compelled to oppose the Jewish people, for they are the chosen instrument for God's redemptive program on earth. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob works it all through *b'rit olam*, an everlasting covenant: "*And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendents after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendents after you. Also I give to you and your descendents after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God*" (Gen. 17:7-8). Not recognizing the everlasting nature of God's relationship with Israel, much of Christianity allowed or abetted a demonic and deadly hatred against the Jewish people.

Christian Anti-Semitism

Prager has written, "The founders of Christianity were confronted with the terrible fact that the Jews, merely by continuing to be Jews, threatened the very legitimacy of the Church." While an astute analysis, the fault is in the logic. Some Christian fathers surmised that Christianity could only be valid if Judaism was invalidated. This faulty "either-or" rather than "both-and" thinking set the stage for Christian anti-Semitism, what Prager calls "the most enduring Jew-hatred in history." Someone penned, "The history every Jew has memorized is the history every Christian has forgotten." If we are ever truly to love, to know what pain we have caused, then Christians must remember this painful story.

The Church started out quite Jewish—from the Jewish Yeshua (Jesus) to the Jewish apostles, to the Jewish multitude gathered from all the nations for *Shavuot* (Pentecost) in Jerusalem. A mostly Jewish Church for decades, the early "Christians" were really

The spiritual root involves the dark reality of a demonic hatred that oozes out of the pit of Hell.



Graffiti painted on the walls of the US embassy in Teheran during the Iranian hostage crisis 1979-1981

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Jews of the Nazarene sect, Hebraic in thought and action. The early disputes between the Church and synagogue were really intra-family debates within Judaism about this new “Way” that many Jews were following. The first official Christians were Gentiles who came into this expanding outgrowth of Jewish faith. By God’s design, Gentiles streamed in, grafted into the Jewish root, but with them came Greek thinking that gradually eroded God’s intended Hebraic worldview of life in Him.

The division between Christian and Jew widened as the early Church was torn from its roots by hellenized leadership that had lost its way. Subsequent Jewish revolts against Rome, the Roman sack of Jerusalem, and claims of other Jewish messiahs found Christians fleeing for the hills, leaving the Jews to go it alone. Seeing the Jews expelled from the Land of promise, Jerusalem vanquished, and the Temple destroyed, Hellenistic leaders began to teach replacement instead of enlargement, the supersession of the Church over Israel. The Hebrew Scriptures quickly came to be treated by the Church as merely allegorical. There seemed no more need for the Jews except for some sterile, illustrative purpose.

Centuries of Hurt

In the centuries that followed, hellenized and romanized Christianity proceeded to hurt and humiliate the seemingly defeated Jews. Author Marvin Wilson observed, “One would be hard-pressed to find a single century in which the Church has not in some significant way contributed to the anguish of the Jewish people.” Walk this road and sample the historic anguish of the Jewish people in relation to the views of many Church leaders:

Second Century—Ignatius: Anyone celebrating Passover is a partaker with those who killed Christ and His apostles. Justin Martyr: God’s covenant with the Jews is no longer valid, for the Church replaced the Jews. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon: Jews are disinherited from the grace of God. Clement of Alexandria: God has given the Gentiles Greek philosophy, not the Hebrew Scriptures, to guide them.

Third Century—Origen: The allegorical interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures is sufficient. Tertullian: All Jews are guilty of Christ’s death. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage: All Jews must leave his dominion or die. Eusebius: The Church now claims the Old Testament promises; the curses are left for the Jews.

Fourth Century—Jerome: Jews are “serpents, bearing the image of Judas,” incapable of understanding the Bible. Augustine: Jews survive as a “witness people,” their oppression confirming the validity of Christianity and giving Christians the right to humble them. John Chrysostom, Bishop of Antioch: God has always hated the Jews, and it is “a Christian duty” to hate them too. “I hate the synagogue; I hate the Jews for the same reason...Jews are abandoned by God and for the crime of *deicide* [emphasis added] there is no expiation possible.”

Here then is new term for our vocabulary: “deicide,” the killing of God. Church leaders taught that all Jews for all time were guilty.



As these pictures prove, the centuries of hurt have continued into the 21st century.



"Jews are not served here."



The Crusaders rounded up the Jews in the synagogue, nailed the door shut, set it on fire, and sang "Christ We Adore Thee" as the men, women, and children trapped inside screamed for mercy.



More Ways to Wound

In the centuries that followed, the so-called "Church Triumphant" discovered more ways to subjugate the Jewish people, reminding them of their cursed state. Consider this sampling:

Christians were forbidden to eat with Jews, marry Jews, or use Jewish doctors. Jews were forbidden to pray the *Shema*, the undying declaration of the one true God of Israel that Yeshua spoke in Mark 12:29: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is one..." (quoting Deuteronomy 6:4). Jews were not allowed to keep Passover when it came before Easter. It seems the Church had forgotten that Easter is really the feasts of Passover and First Fruits. An ill-informed European Church made its Easter passion plays prime time for rioting against their local Jews. Many were dragged from their homes, beaten, and killed for the crime of killing Christ.

From 1096 to 1300, Christian soldiers of Europe marched forth under the sign of a blazing red cross to retake the Holy Land from the Muslims in seven distinct Crusades. En route, they seemed obliged to kill Jews and even fellow Christians along with the Mohammedan conquerors. The wounding included 5,000 Jews slaughtered in the Rhineland and an entire Jewish community in France burned at the stake. After killing all the Muslims in Jerusalem, the crusaders rounded up the Jews in the chief synagogue, nailed the door shut, set it on fire, and sang "Christ We Adore Thee" as the men, women, and children trapped inside screamed for mercy.

Christian leaders mandated distinctive badges and humiliating garments for the Jews. Long before the Nazis, it was the Muslims and Christians who required a yellow symbol to be worn. Conspiracy theories arose around the Black Death, desecration of the host, and the blood libel. Due to superior hygiene and diet from obeying *Torah*, Jewish people were much less likely to fall victim to the plague, leading to accusations of poisoning wells or casting spells. It was rumored that Jews spirited away communion wafers to stick them with pins to torture Christ, continuing to murder Him in every generation. The blood libel accusation maintained that Jewish people stole Christian children to use their blood for making their Passover *matzah* (unleavened bread).

Along the way, most of Christian Europe saw fit to expel its Jews. Close your eyes and see the millions driven out and wandering away from the symbol of the cross: Germany in 1012, France in 1182, England in 1290, Spain in 1492, Lithuania in 1495, Portugal in 1496, and Italy in 1550. There's also Hungary, Austria, Bohemia, and Moravia. Then consider Russia with its Pale of Settlement, an open confinement for over a million Jews who suffered repeated pogroms, official state persecutions with the blessing of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Remember the massacres: Germany in 1298, Spain in 1391, Ukraine in 1648, Poland in 1655, and Russia in 1906, to name just a few. In 1492, as King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella commissioned Columbus to go exploring, they expelled over

100,000 Jews and had many more tortured and killed. Their permanent court, the Inquisition, was designed to stamp out heresy in the Spanish Church. For Jews, there was a choice: baptism or exile. Those who through fear submitted to Christian baptism were branded Marranos, or *conversos* (converts). Many still practiced their Judaism secretly, giving rise to brutal investigation and arrest with a sentence of death.

An Opportunity for Change

With the early Reformation (1500–1600), hope dawned for the Jewish people as the Church turned back to the Bible—its authoritative and Jewish root. A courageous theologian and spiritual leader of the Reformation, Martin Luther, penned an essay, “That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew,” thereby recognizing the Jewish identity of Yeshua and the early Church. Yet, like his theological forbears, Luther persisted in allegorizing Israel and the Hebrew Scriptures. Obviously having grace to take on the corrupted Christian religious establishment, Luther assumed the grace to take on a conversion program of the Jews. He did not succeed, but he did grow bitter. Later in life, he wrote *On the Jews and Their Lies*, in it advocating burning of Jewish synagogues, destroying Jewish homes, depriving Jewish people of their prayer books and *Talmud* (rabbinic commentary on Jewish tradition and the Hebrew Scriptures), forbidding their rabbis to teach, denying them travel, and requiring of them the most servile labor.

Subsequent reformers reformed much, but they left unreformed the error of Replacement Theology and the allegorical treatment of the biblical promises for the Jewish people. Anger swelled over the Jews’ penchant for staying Jewish to the point that another reformer, John Calvin, spewed, “Their rotten and unbending stiffneckedness [sic] deserves that they be oppressed unendingly and without measure or end and that they die in their misery without the pity of anyone.”

Any hope of a repaired relationship between Christians and Jews was dashed. A seemingly impassable breach persisted, and this chasm had opened wide enough to allow in the greatest horror yet.

The Holocaust

Two-thirds of European Jewry was lost—one-third of the Jews of the world were annihilated. This is modern history. What does this reality do to a people’s psyche? Might you get a little defensive if you too were so hunted? Add to that the feeling that the Holocaust was the bitter fruit of Christianity. We know Nazism was not a Christian movement, but as one Jewish observer noted wryly, “Those were steeples rising up all around the death camps, were they not? And every guard’s mother was a Christian, wasn’t she?”

Tragically, Hitler’s “final solution” was built on centuries of Christian anti-Semitism. Wilson wrote, “Perhaps the most important reason the Holocaust happened is that the Church had forgotten its Jewish roots.” Author Richard Booker wrote, “The anti-Semitic policies of Christianity provided the theological justification that allowed Adolf Hitler to go forward with his ‘final solution’ to the Jewish problem. He knew that he could implement his plan to exterminate the Jews because European Christendom was anti-Semitic to the core.”



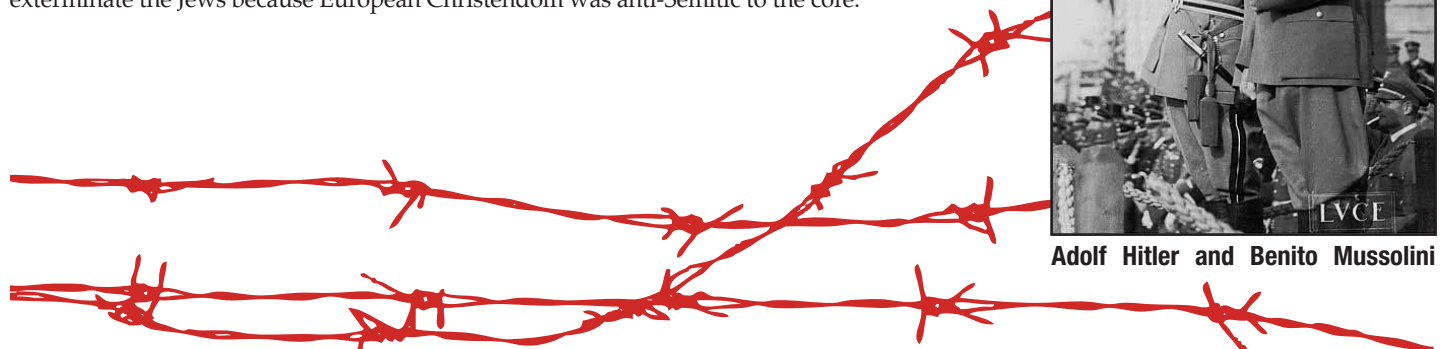
Martin Luther



“Those were steeples rising up all around the death camps, were they not? And every guard’s mother was a Christian, wasn’t she?”



Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini





Holocaust authority Raul Hillberg said, “The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: You have no right to live among us. The Nazis at last decreed: You have no right to live.” For millennia, the Church only seemed to find these options in dealing with the Jewish people: (1) convert them—thereby “validating” Christianity, (2) expel them—thereby comforting the culture, and (3) exterminate them—thereby satisfying ultimate hatred.

God's Final Solution

There is another option: bless them and see what God might do. Christians are rediscovering this biblical option that is profound both in its simplicity and power. Our opportunity is to take God at His word and bless, not curse, His people. Paul taught long ago that “*through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy*” (Rom. 11:31).



We’re down to the spiritual root. Dig even deeper there. Prince explained that once when preaching in his church in Jerusalem, he heard himself quite unexpectedly say, “Anti-Semitism can be summed up in one word—MESSIAH!... at that moment I understood that from its beginning anti-Semitism had one source—Satan—who was motivated by the knowledge that the One who was to be his conqueror, the Messiah, would come through a people that would be specially prepared by God.”

Today, the Jewish people are looking for Messiah to come and deliver. As Christians, we are looking for Yeshua to come and bring salvation. In both of our faith systems, it is the King of the Universe who holds the “final solution” for Satan—his total destruction and the triumph of God over evil. Until then, we have much to do...together.

By Rev. Bill Adams
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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.