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Israel-Hamas War: Resisting an Impulse

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When our preacher began his sermon Sunday morning, he wanted to say something about the Israel-Hamas war but was not sure what to say. With some hesitation he acknowledged the tragic loss of lives on both sides and the need to pray for peace. Then he added, “I wonder what Evertt Huffard thinks about this.” At that point I was not sure but what he would call me to the podium to say something. He didn’t, but he motivated me to write my thoughts.

The region has a special place in my life. My grandfather died in Israel and is buried in Jaffa. I went to high school with Palestinians on the West Bank for four years and our family was evacuated with 6,000 Americans during the 6-Day War. For five years I served a church of Israeli Arabs in Nazareth and taught in a Christian High School in Galilee. My wife and I have hosted more than 25 tour groups to Israel. We have friends in Israel today living in fear of what will happen next with threats from the north and increasing shortage of food and supplies due to 450,000 reservists called into military duty.

What could I say to a church on a Sunday morning?

First, I would say something, because it has dominated the news for more than a week and creates a context to exercise our Christian worldview—a worldview rooted in the will of God revealed to us through the prophets and Christ. Micah would tell us to do what is good and what the Lord requires of us, namely: “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (6:8).

Jesus challenged religious leaders in Jerusalem who were living under the oppression of Rome to focus on the “weightier matters of the law”—justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Mt. 23:23). Any response we give that reflects these values will likely be in stark contrast to much of what we are exposed to in the media. Some news sources use such loaded hateful terminology that if I listened to it for more than an hour I would be filled with hate. As a Christian I am resisting the impulse to let them shape my emotions and reactions.

Second, we cannot be instruments of peace when we are subject to the bias narrative of either side that is seeking justification for violence and global approval for a war. “Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand it completely” (Prov. 28:5). As we watch the news, with discernment, we need to watch our attitudes. I resist the impulse to be drawn into a mindset that would not lead to peace. I want to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with my God.

The violent attack on Israelis by the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and other terrorists near the Gaza strip on October 7 created a greater shock wave through this small nation than 9/11 did in the US. Using the ratio of victims to population, the Hamas attack would be

comparable to 40,000 people killed in the US on 9/11 rather than 3,000. The intense hatred that fueled their violence will only grow deeper with the anticipated retaliation. Granted, Hamas must be held responsible for its deadly attack. They have not cared for the Palestinians in Gaza, have been brutal to Israelis, and seriously thwarted a peace process anytime soon. The level of human suffering they are causing is difficult to comprehend. The images are difficult to look at or get out of our minds. We want justice, swift and clear. But justice must consider context, not just one tragic event. Decades of tension and five wars should alert us to the fact that if Hamas ceased to exist today, this human tragedy will not end. We must ask what or who created Hamas? Decades ago, Israel supported Hamas, a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, to overthrow Arafat and the PLO, which has now returned to bite them. The same justice that would implicate Hamas will also have to implicate Israel for six decades of oppression of the Palestinians. It's the reason Hamas portrayed their military mission as "enough is enough."

Samuel Huntington, in *The Clash of Civilizations*, would call this a "fault line war" that could only be resolved by a balance of power among the primary parties and satisfying the interest of the secondary parties. "Fault line wars bubble up from below, fault line peaces trickle down from above" (1996:265, 298) Or as Jimmy Carter concluded, "It has always been clear that the antagonists cannot be expected to take the initiative to resolve their own differences. Hatred and distrust in the Middle East are too ingrained and pride is too great for any of the disputing parties to offer invitations or concessions that they know will almost inevitably be rejected" (*Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*, 2006:15). If true, the US has the responsibility to facilitate peace, but in all humility, our foreign policies reflect the dysfunction of our current government. Our foreign policy will have to radically change to bring peace to the region. I resist the impulse to put all the blame on anyone in the region when our own nation has contributed to the problem. None of the national leaders walk in righteousness. Only God can intervene and judge.

Third, we can pray for the Arabs and the Jews who are crying for peace but living in fear for their lives and their family every day of this war, in the region and around the world. An awful irony of the massacre of Jews on the kibbutz and at the music festival near Gaza is that many of them were advocates for peace with the Palestinians and opposed the hawkish policies of their government.

The US never initiated a serious peace process in the Middle East until after a war. Pray that after this one they will have the determination to do so. Pray for the Christians in Gaza, especially those who are suffering as they give medical care and aid to the victims. Pray for restraint among all sides in the region that this conflict will not escalate into an even greater one. Pray that through it all, the people of God will bring light into the darkness as they do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. I know there will be days when I must face the reality that Jesus faced when all he could do was weep over Jerusalem. Even though I have known this conflict my whole life, I resist the impulse to give up hope.