

A Response to Ralph Winter's Editorial Reflection "What No One is Saying about the Palestine Gridlock"

by Bill Bjoraker

I find that the points posited in the editorial by Ralph Winter in the last issue of IJFM to be factually inaccurate and contrary to Biblical truth, offensive to most Jewish people and missiologically counterproductive.

What Ralph Winter Said

Frequently our news media brings us nose to nose with problems and we find it hard to stand back and get to the bottom of it all. The following thoughts will probably be considered utterly idealistic or unthinkable, although I would hope that might not be the case.

First of all, how in the world did four million Jews get into Palestine? (The other two million in Israel are Arabs.) European and American powers simply decided that they could have that land. This was the first huge mistake. There is not the slightest possibility of validating that seizure of land in the eyes of their neighbors, is there? What if the Senate decided to give Long Island to New Jersey? No, what if the Alabama state legislature decided to give Long Island to New Jersey? Or give Cuba to the USA?

The second huge mistake—but much more understandable under the immediate post-WWII circumstances—was for a group of Jews to unwisely accept the "gift." If a bank robber gives you \$10,000 you do not become owner of it, and better not start spending it.

What is bizarre about this huge acceptance on the part of the Jews—of what to many seems to be stolen goods—is that very few of today's Israelis take the Bible seriously anyway. Even if they did, the Bible does not guarantee the Jews that God will not take away their land under any circumstances. In any case, even if there were no conflict, the Jews will soon lose control since the one-third Arab population in Israel will shortly outvote the more slowly growing Jewish population.

One solution would be to allow all to vote, not just those who live in the specifically Israeli portion. This would mean that the Jewish people would be a minority in a Muslim country of Palestine. I can see that they would not like that. But that, as mentioned, is where demographic trends are irresistibly taking them anyhow.

Thus, however hypothetical it may seem, the best solution would seem to have been, and may still be now, to find a different home for Jewish refugees. They were once offered space in Uganda. I can see how they might object to that. Why wouldn't they want to run their own country? But many countries have room to spare for four million Jews. The USA has room for 11 million illegals, apparently. Australia has a land area 375 times as large as the area Israel occupies. Surely Australia could give or sell 1/375 of their land to the Jewish element in Israel today.

To be practical, four million Jews could not all take the same flight out. But four million Palestinians have successfully fled. Why can't four million Jews

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leave unplanned stages, selling their properties and houses to Arabs and buying and building in, say, Australia.

Obviously, if you add up all the costs of conflict since 1948 it would readily resettle four million Jews elsewhere.

But you say, there is no other Holy Land. However, Israel is a secular state and it is likely that there are five times as many U.S. Evangelicals who want to see Jews in Palestine, as there are Jews in Israel today who would not readily opt for a new land of peace and quiet.

What I am saying in no way suggests that godly Jews will never inherit the land, just that a lot of secular Jews didn't get there in the best way. The Japanese tried to take Pearl Harbor by force. They failed. But now they own most of Hawaii. The Mormons were forced out of the largest city on the Mississippi River, Nauvoo. But in 2001 they moved back in simply by buying back the property they left behind. The British "repatriated" thousands into North Ireland. That has not worked out well—they did not buy their way in. We now live in a world wanting to settle boundaries. The lands the Nazis seized and the Russians seized have mainly been returned. Why should the Middle East be different?

Let me elaborate in eight points:

1. *Winter's counsel to Israelis to take the path of least resistance is an insulting counsel of despair.*

Ralph Winter states that there are "four million Jews" in Israel, and that the Jews in Israel today would "readily opt for a new land of peace and quiet." There are now 6.5 million Jews in Israel, surpassing the number in America. The "aliyah" (return of Jews to the land of their fathers) continues apace. During the recent Hezb'allah war (summer 2006) there were record numbers of Jewish immigrants from North America to Israel, indicating that these Jews are motivated by something other than finding personal peace and affluence for themselves; this

they had and left it behind in North America. Most understand the Return to Zion as an issue of destiny and consider it to be worth any suffering it may entail. Winter's advice to the Israelis in this editorial is, in essence—Give up the fight. Accept defeat at the hands of Hezb'allah's rockets and Hamas' suicide bombers who murder your women and children in your buses and cafes. Forget the land for which your forefathers and brothers and sisters and sons and daughters have bled and died. Forsake your age-old dream and go and buy outback land in Australia and live a peaceful life.

This is surely an offensive counsel of despair to most Jewish people.

Winter: Speaking of factual accuracy, the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise reports in 2006 the 2005 Jewish population of the USA and Israel to be:

USA: 5,914,682 2% Jewish
40.5% of all Jews

Israel: 5,021,506 80% Jewish
34.4% of all Jews

Did Israel suddenly gain 1.5 million Jews?

Winter: Someone's good (and non-insulting advice) to tens of thousands of English Puritans in the early 1600s must have sounded like this:

Give up the fight. Accept defeat at the hands of a tyrannical church which murders your leaders, your women and children. Forget the land for which your forefathers and brothers and sisters and sons and daughters have bled and died. Forsake your age-old dream of peace where you are. Go and buy outback land in the dangerous New World and live a more peaceful life.

Thousands did so (considering where they found land "the Promised Land") and it worked out well.

2. *Winter minimizes the necessity, the significance, and the justice of the Zionist movement that culminated in the rebirth of the State of Israel.*

This was not just "a group of Jews" that accepted a "gift" from the British, as Winter claims. The Zionist movement was a national movement representing the whole Jewish people. They had learned from centuries of Christian anti-Semitism that they could not live as Jews except in their own land. The Holocaust dramatically confirmed this. The history of European Christendom's anti-Semitism can be roughly (and starkly and shamefully) summarized in three stages:

Phase 1: You cannot *live among us as Jews* (conversion to Catholicism)

Phase 2: You cannot *live among us* (expulsion, as that from Spain in 1492)

Phase 3: You cannot *live* (the Holocaust).

Winter: This is exactly the reason they might consider seeking uncontested land. And speaking of uncontested land, the Israelis don't have a clear title to their much contested State of Israel, but in any case they certainly don't have clear title to the West Bank. They face United Nations demands, over the last 40 years, to withdraw their forces and settlements from the so-called West Bank. There, against colossal international objection they have essentially been a harsh, abusive, invasive force for all these years, on someone else's turf. They have bulldozed a thousand Palestinian homes, killed thousands of Palestinians, driven two million out, reduced the remaining three million to such rigid restrictions that 60% are unemployed, thrust 400,000 of their own people into hundreds of settlements blanketing the entire West Bank, clearly intending to annex the territory once they can outvote the rest. All of this flying in the face of the United Nations and world opinion. Is it surprising that they are meeting guerilla opposition despite their controlling the media to call their aggression mere "retaliation" to provocation?

Since ancient times there have been Jews in Jerusalem, Tsefat, and other

cities in Israel. The connection between B-nei Yisrael (the children of Israel) and Eretz Yisrael (the land of Israel) has never been fully severed. By the early twentieth century the roaming Bedouins in what was then called "Palestine" had no more claim to the open lands than did the Jews. There were some absentee Turkish, Syrian, and Egyptian landlords who owned land, mostly in the more urban areas. The Jews bought and paid for most the land they acquired. Some was gained as the spoils of war after Arabs had attacked them. Jews settled the open land where some Bedouins roamed, draining the malarial swamps, cultivating it, and building kibbutzim that made the deserts bloom with fruit as it had not done since they were driven into exile at the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Apart from any appeal to Biblical claims or prophecy, this national Jewish restoration movement was an eminently humanitarian movement and as right and just as could be expected under the conditions of a fallen world and the fierce opposition to their very survival.

Had the Zionist movement been initiated fifty years earlier, and European Jewry been back in the Land, there would have been no Holocaust.

Winter: This is all true, but if you want to argue in terms of actual presence then the Muslims would win the argument. They for thirteen centuries were in charge of Jerusalem and guarded the area inside the walled city in four equal portions, one Muslim, one Jewish, one Christian, and one Armenian (Christian). One of the Crusades for 88 years came crashing in and destroyed that balance. Now the Jews wish to turn back the clock thirteen centuries and solely occupy. Not a strong case.

3. *The intent of Israel's enemies in every age has been to destroy her and take her land; this war against the Jews is part of the larger cosmic war against God's purposes. Winter's advice puts him on the wrong side in that war.* I affirm Ralph

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Winter's "warfare missiology," highlighting the real cosmic war of Satan against God's people and purposes. Surely this cosmic war breaks into the physical dimension at various times and places. Certainly the age-old war against the Jews and their integral connection to their promised land is one of attrition that frequently breaks out into hot flashpoints (e.g., the summer war of 2006). A fresh reading of Psalm 83 makes clear the perennial intention of Israel's enemies, called "God's enemies" in verse 2: "Come, they say, Let us wipe out Israel as a nation" (vs. 4a, NLT), and "Let us seize for our own use these pasturelands of God." (vs. 12). Surely Bible-believing followers of the Jewish Messiah must align themselves with Israel and against the intentions of God's enemies.

Winter: Surely my advice does not imply "wiping the Jews out" as mentioned above, but the very opposite—allowing them to thrive without such a huge military budget.

4. *"The restitution of all things spoken of by the holy prophets" includes the repatriation of the people of Israel to the land of Israel. Bible-believing evangelicals have reaffirmed this.* At the end of his editorial, Winter speaks of restitution of lands and repatriation, by which he means that the Jews must surrender the State of Israel to the Palestinian Arabs and leave (How Hamas and Islamic Jihad must rejoice in this advice!). Winter closes with the question, "Why should the Middle East be any different?" This is my point exactly! Putting this in the larger historical perspective, I urge a fresh reading of Acts 3: 19-21, where Peter speaks of "the times of restitution of all things spoken of by the mouth of all his holy prophets since ancient times." The restitution of the people of Israel to the land promised

to Abraham's physical descendents is surely one of the major themes of the prophets. It has been underway in the twentieth century and is in process as I write and as you read. His editorial puts Dr. Winter on the wrong side of this providential movement and advocates the defeat of Israel's restoration.

Winter: This is precisely the question, "Is it God, or is it rapture-thirsty American Evangelicals, who desire right now to restore Israel?" It seems to me that is a better question than an assumption.

Following the great Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century (Wesley, Whitefield, etc.), the great missionary societies were established; in 1799 the "Church Missionary Society" (CMS) and in 1809 the "London Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge Among the Jews" (now CMJ) were born. Lord Wilberforce and Lord Shaftsbury changed British government policy in favor of a return of the Jews to their homeland and lobbied the Ottoman Empire to that end. At this time there was a movement to embrace Jesus as Messiah among Jews in Europe; people like Franz Delitzsch, Alfred Eidersheim, and Adolf Saphir, great Biblical scholars all, embraced Jesus as Messiah. Political Zionism and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 ("His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people . . .") made headlines. It was a spiritual movement begun by men saved in the Evangelical Revival that motivated these advances on behalf of the Jewish people. These men put aside their old supercessionist theological lenses and read the Bible afresh.

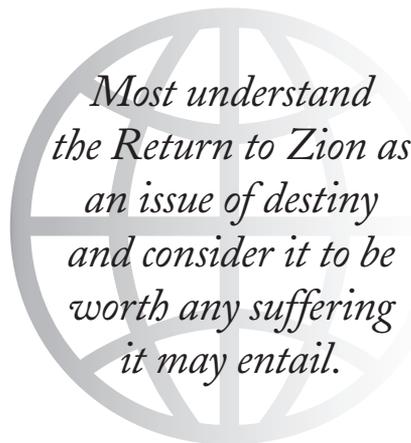
Winter: That is all true but none of these entities had any legitimate authority of that land.

5. *The providence of God over an elect people makes it inconceivable that the rebirth of Israel in the face of such adversity was a mere accident of history.* The European colonial powers had not simply "decided that they could have that land," as Winter says. The land was acquired as the spoils of World War I and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Spoils go to the victors in a war, but ultimately there is the hand of Providence at work in how land is dispersed (Acts 17:26). God judges some nations through other nations in history. The land—especially the land of Israel—belongs to God, and He gave it to Israel in fulfillment of an irrevocable promise (cf. the Genesis promises to the patriarchs and Psalm 105:9-11, "... an everlasting covenant, to you I will give the land of Canaan"). The possession of the land was and is conditional on Israel's faith-obedience; however, after exile there was always return. As Israel returned in the sixth century B.C. from the Babylonian Exile, so has she returned in the twentieth century from the Great Diaspora that began in 70 A.D. (called in Ezekiel 20:35 "the wilderness of the peoples"). Israel/the Jewish people are an elect people, "... beloved for the sake of the fathers." (Romans 11:28). As such it is inconceivable that the rebirth of the nation of Israel, culminating in statehood in 1948, now is a mere accident of history.

Winter: If you cite the Patriarchs you are dealing with a land given to more than the Jews. As for considering Jewish occupation of a portion of what since Roman times has been called Palestine to be an accident, that is not my word for it. I have suggested that it was a gravely serious *mistake*.

6. *The providential process of restoration underway involves a return to the land in unbelief and then a return to God through the Messiah Jesus.* What about Israel's sin? Winter notes that Israel is a "secular state," which is true. But the land of Israel is the Holy Land to the Jews, regardless of their faith condition. The

Qur'an does not mention Jerusalem even once, whereas the Hebrew Bible mentions Jerusalem several hundred times. This fact in itself speaks volumes about who is most bonded to the land by the deepest convictions. Throughout Israel's 4000-year saga since the call of Abraham, the land of Zion has been the meta-narrative of the Jewish people. It is the very essence of their corporate identity as a people. The Jewish people have been brought back to the land in sovereign providence while still in unbelief, but now in the land there is a movement to Messiah Jesus.



Winter: The question is not merely who should own the land but whether in practical terms Israel should at this point want the land.

Certainly Israelis, like all people in all countries, are sinners, but I would argue that just as God would have spared Sodom for ten righteous people (Genesis 18), so for the sake of this faithful Jewish remnant (the small minority of Jews who embrace Messiah) God is giving them the land even while the majority are still in unbelief. This is because there is a restoration process underway. Ezekiel 36 (a prophecy transcending the return from Babylon) presents a sequence of restoration. The first stage is restoration of the people to the land in unbelief (verses 1-15). Then comes the spiritual restoration (verses 16-38), when God will give them "a new heart and a new spirit" (verse 26), a restoration to God through their turning to Messiah.

7. *The name "Palestine" is currently an anachronism and has been used historically to expunge the connection between B'nei Israel and Eretz Israel.* It is inaccurate to call the land "Palestine." Biblically the land is called "Canaan," "the land of Canaan," or "the land of Israel." The Bible never calls it "Palestine." The word p'leshet is used in seven places in Scripture; sometimes it is translated "Philistia" and sometimes "Palestine." Regardless of the English word, it is always a reference to the land of the Philistines (the coastal strip from Jaffa south to Gaza). The term "Palestine" did not come into use as a designation for the land of Israel until the second century, when the Romans applied the term to Judea after they had crushed the Bar Kokhba rebellion. It was intended as a punishment and to signify that the Jews would never again live there. It was their attempt to expunge the biblical connection between the Land of Israel and the people of Israel/the Jewish people. There is, nonetheless, an indissoluble association between the land and the people of Israel.

Certainly the Roman, Turkish and British empires called the land "Palestine." Since the return of the Jewish people to the land in our century (reversing the Roman decree) and the reestablishment of the State of Israel in 1948, however, no such place as "Palestine" any longer exists. To speak of "Palestine" is an anachronism comparable to calling France "Gaul" or Zimbabwe "Rhodesia." In fact, to be completely consistent with the old terminology, one would need to go all the way and call Jerusalem "Aelia Capitolina" (Emperor Hadrian's term for the city). Thus to use the term is anachronistic and unbiblical, perpetuating the intent of the Roman decree.

Is it not a curious blind spot, if not a more sinister anti-Jewish bias that we have inherited in the western church, that almost none of the Bibles sold and published today have maps of Israel? They have maps of "Canaan," the "Holy Land," "The Empire of

David,” “The Divided Northern and Southern Kingdoms,” and “Palestine in the Time of Christ,” but seldom maps of “Israel.”

The name “Israel” is conveniently ignored. Its referent is often called the “Holy Land,” although Israel is a real and valid country, while no country called “Palestine” exists. In trying to be politically correct, we become factually incorrect. This reflects the tenacious supercessionist (or replacement) theology that has distorted Christian theology since the early centuries, in which it is held that God has rejected and the Church displaced Israel/the Jewish people, contrary to Paul’s vehement stand against this view: “. . . Did God reject His people? By no means!” (Romans 11:1). The Jewish people are one continuous people throughout history; Gentile Christians have been grafted into their “olive tree.” They have not killed the olive tree (though they have tried), and today the natural branches are being grafted back in through the Messianic Jewish movement (11:17-24).

Winter: I for one do not believe the church supercedes Israel. I am not a supercessionist in any sense—any more than I believe the Lutheran movement supercedes the Roman Catholic church. But speaking of the church and Israel, neither term requires any geography. They are spiritual movements. If the magnificent Jewish tradition down through the last two millennia were to have required land to survive, it would not have survived.

Since 1948 there has been no “Palestine.” Certainly it exists in the minds and aspirations of a good portion of the Palestinian Arab people, and perhaps some day a State of Palestine may come into existence on the West Bank and Gaza. Most of the Israeli people, as well as President Bush, are in favor of a two-state solution—on the condition that the Palestinians recognize Israel’s right to exist and truly renounce, cease, and desist from violence. This they have

been unwilling to do. Hence, the war goes on.

Winter: the State of Israel is a political term which was never accepted by both of the two groups involved. Many political/military takeovers of territory in history have created (temporary) names that are never accepted by all of the people involved. For example, who named “Burma.”? The people involved chose Myanmar. Who named “The Belgian Congo”? The people there eventually were able to reject that name. The State of Israel is a term that is similarly shaky.

8. *Winter’s views are contrary to the Apostle Paul’s and perpetuate the barriers between Jesus and the Jewish people erected by historic Christian anti-Semitism.* This editorial is missiologically unhelpful. However one interprets Romans 1:16, “to the Jew first” (For a full exegetical and missiological exposition of this principle, see IJFM 21:3 Fall 2004, “To the Jew First. . .”—The Meaning of Jewish Priority in World Evangelism” by Bill Bjoraker), it is clear that the Church has a mandate to win the Jewish people to Jesus, their Messiah. The Apostle Paul, though the apostle to the Gentiles, made it his practice to go always to the Jewish synagogue first when he entered a city. This was more than missiological strategy; Paul gives the theological basis for this practice in Romans 9-11. It is more that just a historical obligation which has now been fulfilled, as the verbs in 9:1-5 and 11:28-31 are in the present tense. God used Israel/the Jewish people to bring to us Gentiles our Bible and our Savior. Paul’s theology in these chapters speaks of a reciprocity by which the Gentile Church should now do all we can to “move them [the Jews] to jealousy” (11: 11, 14) by being winsome toward them and assuming a posture of humility and great respect for the Jewish people as the vehicle through which the Scriptures and the Messiah came to the world.

Tragically, the church has blatantly disobeyed Paul’s exhortation “not to be arrogant” toward the natural branches (11: 17-18). He exhorts the Gentile church, “Remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root that supports you” (11:18). Every Christian is indebted to Israel.

Historical Christian anti-Semitism has erected massive barriers between Jesus and the Jewish people. We are called to break down those barriers and build bridges to the Jewish people, to “provoke [them] to jealousy” rather than perpetuate their alienation from Jesus the Messiah.

Psalm 137 expresses the heart cry of Jewish people, and especially Messianic Jews, the faithful remnant of Israel today, who best understand and believe the Bible:

How shall we sing the Lord’s song in foreign land?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem,

Let my right hand forget its skill!

If I don’t remember you,

Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—

If I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy. (vss. 4-6).

And if this is the age-old cry of the Jewish people, then I submit to us all that the age-encompassing cry of the Christian people was well articulated by one who knew well Satan’s war against the Jews and their destiny, “Only he who cries out for the Jews may sing Gregorian chants.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer).

Winter: I agree with all of this last point. However, I don’t see how it counters my hope for Jews to be able to dwell in peace in a land that is not contested. Let God decide about the contested land, not rocks and machine guns. **IJFM**

[Editor’s note: See also Robinson’s letter to the editor and Ralph Winter’s response on page 181.]