

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. James P. Eckman, President
Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska
11-12 July 2009

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

A FEW HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT (1948 TO THE PRESENT)

During the presidential administrations since the creation of the nation-state of Israel in 1948, Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush put significant pressure on Israel to negotiate with its enemies. Threatening to cut off or diminish financial aid and/or military support was the tool most effectively used. In contrast, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush were the most consistent friends, rarely pressuring Israel unrealistically to negotiate. Our current president represents a significant change. In his now famous Cairo speech, Obama demanded that Israel freeze its settlements in the West Bank and enter into peace negotiations with the Palestinians based on the principle of two states. Obama has also seemingly lined up Israel's allies in Congress to support his policies with Israel. This was most obvious during the recent visit of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the US. Netanyahu heard a consistent and fairly unified message—end the settlements and negotiate with the Palestinians.

The problem with our new president's strategy is that the Middle East situation is not the same as it was during the Carter and Bush-1 years. Israel has mortal enemies to its north (Hezbollah), to its West (Hamas in Gaza) and of course to its east (Iran). Each is forcibly determined to eradicate the nation of Israel. Even if Israel agrees to a peace treaty based on the two-state solution with the Palestinians (i.e., Fatah), its mortal enemies are still at its borders. For that reason, the list below summarizes some vital facts about Israel, the world and the Middle East. The United States alone remains the unique friend and supporter of Israel. If we pull that support, the very existence of Israel is in jeopardy.

1. Nationhood and Jerusalem—Israel became a nation in 1446 BC [called so in Exodus 12:2—“The whole community of Israel”], over two thousand years before the rise of Islam.
2. Arab refugees in Israel began identifying themselves as part of a Palestinian people in 1967, two decades after the establishment of the modern State of Israel.
3. Since the Jewish conquest of Canaan in about 1400 BC, the Jews have had dominion over the land for one thousand years with a continuous presence in the land for the past 3,300 years.
4. The only Arab dominion since the conquest of Palestine in AD 635 lasted no more than 22 years.

5. For over 3,300 years, Jerusalem has been the Jewish capital. Jerusalem has never been the capital of any Arab or Muslim entity. Even when the Jordanians occupied Jerusalem, they never sought to make it their capital, and Arab leaders did not come to visit.
6. Jerusalem is mentioned over 700 times in the Jewish Holy Scriptures. Jerusalem is not mentioned once in the Koran.
7. King David founded the city of Jerusalem. Mohammed never came to Jerusalem.
8. Jews pray facing Jerusalem. Muslims pray toward Mecca, with their backs toward Jerusalem.
9. Arab and Jewish Refugees: In 1948 the Arab refugees were encouraged to leave Israel by Arab leaders promising to purge the land of Jews. Sixty-eight percent left without ever seeing an Israeli soldier.
10. The Jewish refugees were forced to flee from Arab lands due to Arab brutality, persecution and pogroms.
11. The number of Arab refugees who left Israel in 1948 is estimated to be around 630,000. The number of Jewish refugees from Arab lands is estimated to be the same.
12. Arab refugees were INTENTIONALLY not absorbed or integrated into the Arab lands to which they fled, despite the vast Arab territory. Out of the 100,000,000 refugees since World War II, theirs is the only refugee group in the world that has never been absorbed or integrated into their own people's lands. Jewish refugees were completely absorbed into Israel, a country no larger than the state of New Jersey.
13. The Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Arabs are represented by eight separate nations, not including the Palestinians. There is only one Jewish nation. The Arab nations initiated all five wars and lost. Israel defended itself each time and won.
14. The PLO's Charter still calls for the destruction of the State of Israel. Israel has given the Palestinians most of the West Bank land, autonomy under the Palestinian Authority, and has supplied them. Hezbollah and Hamas (along with Iran) call for the liquidation of the state of Israel.
15. Under Jordanian rule, Jewish holy sites were desecrated and the Jews were denied access to places of worship. Under Israeli rule, all Muslim and Christian sites have been preserved and made accessible to people of all faiths.
16. The UN Record on Israel and the Arabs: Of the 175 Security Council resolutions passed before 1990, 97 were directed against Israel.

17. Of the 690 General Assembly resolutions voted on before 1990, 429 were directed against Israel.
18. The UN was silent while 58 Jerusalem synagogues were destroyed by the Jordanians.
19. The UN was silent while the Jordanians systematically desecrated the ancient Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives.
20. The UN was silent while the Jordanians enforced an apartheid-like policy of preventing Jews from visiting the Temple Mount and the Western Wall.

The Bible is rather clear—Israel is the center of Bible prophecy, and God blesses those who bless Israel (Genesis 12:3). The above factual statements should help us maintain a proper perspective about Israel and the Middle East and they must inform US policy in this region.

See Jacob Weisberg in *Newsweek* (22 June 2009), p. 30.

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

ANIMALS, INSECTS, PETA AND THE BIBLE

Most of us have either seen a report on TV or have heard that this summer the White House is experiencing an invasion of common house flies. They are presumably everywhere in the people's mansion. Indeed, when our president was being interviewed by CNBC correspondent John Harwood, President Obama killed one of those flies as it buzzed around his head. During the interview, it was lying dead on the floor next to the president. Rather unbelievably, the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) protested in a letter that in the future they would appreciate it if the president treated flies "more humanely." Further, PETA sent him a Humane Bug Catcher, which traps flies, which can then be released outside. Obviously humorous and perhaps even rather bizarre, PETA and its response to our president illustrate a profoundly important worldview question: Is all life equal, morally (and ethically)? If the answer is yes, then all life must be treated equally. Therefore, killing a fly is the same as killing a human being. Is this the biblical view?

- **First, a proper biblical view of the physical creation begins with a proper view of God.** The challenge is to keep in balance God's transcendence and His immanence. God's transcendence focuses on his radical separateness from creation; He is both above and beyond His physical world. God's immanence focuses on His presence in His physical world. To stress His immanence at the expense of His transcendence is to land in pantheism where everything is god. To stress His transcendence at the expense of His immanence is to see the physical world as insignificant and a tool for exploitation. Neither is satisfactory nor God-honoring. There needs to be a balance between both God's transcendence and His immanence, between His intimate involvement in all aspects of His physical creation (see Psalm 139) and His radical distinction from creation. Where it is finite, limited and dependent, He is infinite, unlimited and self-sufficient.

- **Second is a proper view of humans.** Human beings are both interdependent with the rest of creation and unique within it, because humans alone bear His image and have stewardship over the Earth. Christians frequently forget our interdependence with the rest of God’s world. Our daily existence depends on water, sun and air. There is indeed a global ecosystem. It matters how we treat the water, the trees and the other animals. If they are harmed, so are we. There is this vital, interdependent relationship that comes from the creative hand of God.

But the Bible also declares human uniqueness—humans as image-bearers of God. No other physical part of God’s world can claim this. Humans also have dominion status. God declares in Genesis 1:26-30 that humans have the responsibility to rule (have dominion) over the nonhuman creation. Tragically, this dominion has frequently turned to exploitation. Genesis 2:15 is the corrective to exploitation. Humans are to serve and watch lovingly, almost worshipfully, over God’s creation. We are God’s stewards over His creation. He has the sovereignty; we have the dominion.

Francis Schaeffer, in *Pollution and the Death of Man*, argues that humans have two relationships—one upward and one downward. The upward relationship accentuates the personal relationship humans might have with God, a relationship not enjoyed by the rest of the created order. The downward relationship accentuates the “creaturely” relationship that humans share with the rest of the created order (see Genesis 2:7 and Job 34:14,15). As with most issues, the struggle is to keep the two in balance. We can highlight the upward relationship to the virtual exclusion of the downward. This leads to horrific neglect or ruthless exploitation of the physical world. Or we can highlight the downward to the virtual exclusion of the upward. This is the gross error of the evolutionary hypothesis, which sees humans as the product of the impersonal force of natural selection, not of God’s purposeful design.

- **Third, the non-human creation is of great significance to God.** He created the physical world as a deliberate act. God also takes pleasure in His physical world. This is clear from the creation ordinance in Genesis 1 and 2 and from 1 Timothy 4:4: “For everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude.” [See also Psalm 104:31 where we see God rejoicing in His works.] The point is that if the physical world is of importance to God, then it must be to us—His creatures—as well (see also Job 39:1-2, Colossians 1:16 and Psalms 19:1-4).

It is likewise imperative to note that God has a covenant, not only with humans but also with nonhuman creation. After the flood, God made a covenant with the physical creation: “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark” (Genesis 9:9-10; Sider, 29). The physical world has dignity, worth and value quite apart from its service to humanity.

Incredibly, God’s plan for redemption has a cosmic quality to it. As Ron Sider has argued, “This fact provides a crucial foundation for building a Christian theology for an environmental age.” The biblical hope that the whole created order, including the material

world of bodies and rivers and trees, will be part of the kingdom, confirms that the created order is good and important. Romans 8:19-23 demonstrates that at Christ's return the groaning of creation will cease, for the creation will be transformed: "The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (v. 21, NIV).

So, can we be guilt free in killing flies? Can humans exercise dominion over God's world and thereby use animals and other creatures to serve us? Can we use the natural resources of this planet to make our lives easier? The answer is yes. But this does not mean humans have the freedom to exploit and then wantonly destroy parts of God's world. We are God's dominion stewards and it matters what we do. Killing pesky, germ-ridden flies is part of our dominion status and we do not need to feel guilt in doing so.

See "Breakpoint" (24 June 2009) and James P. Eckman, *Biblical Ethics*, pp. 89-95.