

Where Evangelicals fear to tread ?

During the reception at family wedding last weekend my father reached across the restaurant table and with a deliberately hushed, voice he whispered 'how is the work for Israel going?' Without realising it he gave me a perfect illustration for what I see happening in the broader evangelical church. Many of us know that we should be engaged with the 'issue' of Israel, or that we should at least be talking about Israel and Scripture, and yet many of us even in the evangelical world feel a pressure to only talk about Israel in hushed, whispering voices, hoping that no-one else will actually hear us!

Perhaps this reluctance to engage with the issue, never mind be supportive of Israel from a scriptural basis is hardly surprising. On the whole, when the Nation of Israel is mentioned, it is often negative, often alongside emotionally loaded (and usually technically incorrect) terms such as 'apartheid' and often in the context of attempting to elucidate emotional and political responses even from people of faith such as to boycott, diversify and to call for sanctions. Israel has become a dirty word in our culture, a word that many would prefer to not have to use.

There are those who argue that this negative view of the Nation of Israel is entirely justifiable. I wholeheartedly disagree, and yet the purpose of this article is not to retrace these well-worn arguments or further antagonise this emotive subject area. Rather I would merely seek to raise questions for those of us who consider ourselves to be evangelicals. When did we stop engaging with scripture and in conversation on Israel? and indeed is it possible that our opinions on this have actually been conformed to those of the world around us? Something we know that shouldn't define us in any area of faith (Romans 12:2).

It hasn't always been this way. There was a time in the not too distant past that the mainstream evangelical church in the United Kingdom cared about Israel and looked to show love and concern to Jewish people. A time when the evangelical church used its voice to tell what it was for, not just what it was against, to be pro-God and pro the authority of Scripture. In the midst of this bold, strong unbending evangelical voice was a voice of support for the Nation of Israel based upon scripture. The welfare of Jewish people and their continued purpose before the Lord, Israel, her existence and her continued wellbeing were important Spurgeon, McCheyne, Lord Shaftesbury and Edward Bickersteth (one of the founders of the Evangelical Alliance) to name but a few. When did they stop being important for us? Has scripture changed? are we somehow more enlightened now? or is it at least possible that we have missed the scriptural teaching concerning Israel in the midst of emotional sensitivities and the rise of 'replacement theology', an erroneous doctrine that falsely teaches that somehow God has finished with the Jewish people and that consequently that have been replaced by the church in the purposes of God.

I would describe myself as an evangelical. I believe in the authority of scripture and I am pro-God, pro-scripture and pro allowing scripture to shape and build my life in all areas. I am not ashamed of what I believe, neither am I afraid to talk on the many issues that we must confront in churches from a scriptural basis. With regards to Israel, in essence I believe that the Jewish people and the Nation of Israel remain important to God because I believe that Scripture clearly teaches this. Have you read Romans 9-11 recently, and perhaps more importantly have you ever heard anyone teach these scriptures in your church? Being pro-God and pro the authority of scripture doesn't make me anti-Palestinian and neither does it make me naively supportive of everything that Israel does, scripture clearly testifies of the Lord's love for all humankind (John 3:16). It just means that I see in scripture that Israel and the Jewish people remain important to God. I believe that if something remains important to God it should also be important to those people who say that they follow Him. For me,

therefore and for the church that I Pastor, raising a voice that seeks to support and do good to the Nation of Israel and her people is an expression of our faith and trust in God.

We care so passionately about this that we have a Church ministry that seeks to help people understand why this is important. The Jacob Plan exists to help people understand where our faith comes from. That it has a Jewish (or Hebraic) root and that we follow a Jewish Messiah whose teaching is best understood in the context of first century Jewish culture and traditions. The Jacob Plan also exists to help people understand the scriptural basis for blessing Israel. The largest outworking of this ministry is through our annual Scottish Night to Celebrate Israel where in 2012 we gathered over 320 like-minded people from across Scotland to celebrate and bless Israel. This spectacular night united Christian and Jew across the generations in thanksgiving to God for His faithfulness to Israel; the Land and the People. It was truly an amazing night of blessing! If we can be of assistance to you, or if you would like any information about us please contact us jacobplan@churchatstirling.co.uk.