



PDF Edition

Test The Spirits:
**A Christian Guide to the
Anti-Israel Boycott Movement (BDS)**

Father Gabriel Naddaf

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Dear brothers and sisters,

It takes great wisdom to understand the heart of God, and the matters closest to him. God teaches us in his Word that Israel is the apple of his eye (Zechariah 2:8).

Yet there is much confusion in the global church about Israel, and God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). Rather, God wants us to seek after his heart; to get wisdom and to get understanding (Proverbs 4:5).

God does not want his church to be ignorant about such an important topic as Israel, yet there are many in the church today sowing confusion, spreading hatred of the Jewish state.

We learn from James that if anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:5).

God's wisdom is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (James 3:17-18). Yet God laments that "my people perish for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).

We present this guide to you humbly, knowing that we will one day stand before God and give account of every word we utter (Matthew 12:36).

As the spiritual leader of the Christian Empowerment Council here in Israel, it is my responsibility to encourage Christians across the world to think about Israel in Biblical and moral ways. As you consider personally your own spiritual towards Israel, it would be prudent to consider these points. I pray God will guide you in great wisdom.

Blessings in Jesus Christ,

Jfr. Gabriel Naddaf



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A Christian Guide to the Anti-Israel Boycott Movement (BDS)

By Father Gabriel Naddaf

As the spiritual leader of the Christian Empowerment Council here in Israel, it is my responsibility to encourage Christians across the world to think about Israel in Biblical and moral ways. As you consider personally your own spiritual towards Israel, it would be prudent to consider these points. I pray God will guide you in great wisdom.

Have you prayed for the peace of Jerusalem?

It is easy sometimes to get caught up in activism and politics, without first praying and seeking God's will. I would encourage Christians to always seek God's will and to read the Bible before making dramatic decisions which could affect the spiritual life and the lives of others. The Psalmist commands us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6); I would encourage you to pray and learn rather than act out of ignorance. Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance (Proverbs 1:5)

What does it mean to boycott Israel?

Many Christians today find themselves very suddenly in a situation where their church quickly becomes involved in a debate about the Middle East, and threatens to boycott Israel. Most Christians have simply never thought about the Middle East conflict very deeply, but just know that the region has seen many difficulties over the years. There is a concerted, co-ordinated effort to boycott Israel which is managed by the Arab League, the Palestinian Authority, and activist groups across the world, including activists now seeking to influence their churches against Israel.¹ It is important that churches maintain their integrity and independence of thought, and not allow themselves to be used as tools of corrupt foreign policy, which what the BDS (Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions) movement targeted against Israel essentially is. There has been a three-layered boycott of Israel by the Arab

¹ <http://www.reviewjournal.com/opinion/coalition-fights-efforts-sanction-boycott-israel>

League since Israel's inception², and in addition OPEC has used Arab League policy towards Israel as a way to pressure the West economically.³ The BDS movement is an attempt to export this hypocritical and corrupt Arab League policy, and infuse it into Western thought and political life via the help of political and religious institutions, including Western churches.

In such a climate, it is easy to overlook the fact that Israel today is the only country in the Middle East where the Christian population is actually growing, due to freedom of worship in the region's only stable democracy. At a time when Christians sadly are fleeing many parts of the Middle East (In Iraq of 2003 there were 1.5 million Christians, today there are only 250,000; In Syria of 2012 there were 1.75 million Christians, of which 450,000 have already left, and the rate of ethnic cleansing is climbing), their numbers continue to grow in Israel, where the Christian population has more than quadrupled from 34,000 at the time of Israel's independence, to 160,900 today⁴. There are many positive lessons that the region could learn from Israel's treatment of its Christian community.

Can the Bible guide our decision-making process towards the Jewish people, in matters of trade and money?

A guiding principle for Christians thinking about Israel is Genesis 12:1-3, where God speaks to Abraham about the nation that he will be the father of, saying "I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you." The first man in Scripture to bless the Jewish nation is Melchizedek, King of Salem, who brought bread and wine to Abraham. Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of all his belongings (Genesis 14). Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is celebrated in the New Testament as a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7).

In the book of Esther, Haman's wicked plan to annihilate the Jewish nation is accompanied by a desire to deprive the Jews of their material goods (Esther 3:13). In a similar way, the BDS works hand-in-hand with the strategy of terror groups such as Hamas, who wish to destroy the Jewish nation.⁵ Esther is

² <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/arab-states-still-clinging-to-israel-boycott-the-45yearold-trade-embargo-of-the-zionist-state-persists-despite-the-recent-peace-agreement-writes-charles-richards-1465211.html>

³ <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/oil-embargo>

⁴ http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ_shnaton.html?num_tab=st02_02&CYear=2014

⁵ <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/5940/bds-hamas>

celebrated for her principled and courageous opposition to Haman, and the story of Esther can guide the attitudes of Christians today.

The nation of Israel is told throughout the Old Testament, and in Jeremiah 31, God promises never to let Israel cease from being a nation before Him. God's promises to Israel in Jeremiah 31 are reaffirmed by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans, where in chapter 11 he reminds Christians in Rome "not to boast" against the Jewish people of Israel. Paul compares the nation of Israel to an olive tree, to which individual Christians have been grafted on; but they should remember this and not be arrogant towards Israel's Jews. Furthermore, Romans 15:27 specifically encourages Gentiles to bless Jews in material ways, as Jews have blessed Gentiles in spiritual ways.

How does a boycott of Israel impact the church?

Firstly, we will be dividing the body of Christ, by consciously alienating Christians from one nation. The BDS movement deliberately targets Israelis from academic and cultural institutions. We can see how Israeli Christians from Bible colleges and Christian think-tanks may be targeted if BDS is adopted by church bodies. Moreover, Israeli citizens are being excluded from European universities in the name of BDS⁶. If BDS is accepted in the church, we may see Israeli Christians excluded from Western theological seminaries. This would violate the idea of a global body of Christ, without distinction between believers (Galatians 3:28).

In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul describes the church of Christ as a body, with different people representing different parts. To adapt Paul's analogy, if Christians are one body, and if Israeli Christians are even just the little toe, then how can the body say to the little toe "We don't want anything to do with you"? If the body rejects its own little toe, the body will lose balance. There are Israeli Christians across our society, showing the light of the gospel and shining like stars among our people (Philippians 2:15).

The global church is obligated to pray for us; the New Testament encouraged people from churches across the world to pray for each other, even if they had not met. Hebrews 13:3 encourages Christians to remember those who are being mistreated, therefore through the Emergency Mission for Christians, we

⁶ <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17067#.VX16XflViko>

Israeli Christians support our brothers across the Middle East in practical ways, seeking to bring them aid and to remember them as if we ourselves were suffering alongside them.

But we also ask for the global church to remember our plight; as Israeli Christians we face a constant terror threat from neighbours such as Hamas, Fatah, Hezbollah and ISIS. In addition, some of us live in towns and cities and Israel where we face persecution and intimidation from those who think we should despise our own nation. Yet we are proud Israelis and proud Christians, and we seek to honour Jesus Christ by living in an honourable way before all (Romans 12:17), in order to bring glory to God.

So for the global body of Christ to boycott Israel, would also mean they would boycott a part of the body of Christ here in Israel. This is un-Biblical and unjust. We as Christians must abstain from even the appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

Can we stop the cycle of violence in the Middle East by boycotts?

Some Christians speak of a 'cycle of violence', but this is a dangerous term that brings moral equivalence between Israel's defensive attitudes and the murderous terrorism of the groups seeking to destroy Israel. Whilst Hamas release videos teaching how to stab Israelis⁷, teach children to kill Jews⁸, blesses the hands of their own child-murderers who shot Jews⁹, and calls on Palestinians to use knives and bulldozers to murder Jews,¹⁰ Israel seeks ways to protect civilians on all sides. Its military operations are targeted, and Israel engages in military activity in order to curb Palestinian terror activity. Israel seeks to limit civilian casualties, as acknowledged by the international community.^{11 12 13}

⁷ <http://www.algemeiner.com/2014/12/28/after-failed-attack-in-jerusalem-hamas-releases-%E2%80%99how-to-stab-jews%E2%80%99-clip-video/>

⁸ <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/douglas-murray/2014/05/hamas-tv-teaches-children-to-kill-all-jews/>

⁹ <http://www.timesofisrael.com/mashaal-admits-hamas-members-killed-israeli-teens/>

¹⁰ <http://sheikyermami.com/2014/08/hamas-savage-dont-you-have-knives-dont-you-have-bulldozers-dont-you-have-trucks-to-kill-jews/>

¹¹ <http://www.timesofisrael.com/top-us-general-israel-protected-civilian-lives-in-gaza/>

¹² <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/generalelection/david-cameron-says-israel-was-right-to-defend-itself-over-gaza-attacks-last-year-10210203.html>

¹³ <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-did-not-commit-war-crimes-in-gaza-says-multi-national-military-group/>

Does the Bible encourage boycotting nations? No – there is nowhere in the Bible where Christians are encouraged to stop trade with a nation, just because the nation is not perfect. In fact, the Bible tells the story of Jews who rose to prominence as officials in foreign nations prone to great sin, who helped their nations to thrive. We think of Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon. When the Prophet Jonah wanted to avoid speaking to the people of Nineveh because of their sins, God corrected him. God does not boycott people from any nation, and does not encourage boycotts of any nation.

Furthermore, the modern state Israel is not especially terrible, and is actually commendable in many many ways. Israel is in fact the only country in the Middle East where Christians are safe from persecution. In Iran for example, house churches are routinely closed down and pastors are put in prison. Muslims who choose to convert to Christianity in Saudi Arabia face a death sentence. Yet Western churches consider a boycott of Israel – a democracy where Christians are safe – when they would never consider boycotting despotic regimes where Christians are persecuted.

Does the Bible encourage boycotting nations in unique political situations?

There are some who argue that because Israel has oversight over security measures in Judea and Samaria, and over the movement of its residents, therefore Israel is cruel to the Palestinians. It is important to note that the checkpoints and the security barrier are crucial for Israeli security needs, drastically reducing Israeli deaths at the hands of Palestinian terrorists.¹⁴ To seek to punish Israel for seeking to protect the lives of its own civilians is perverse and un-Biblical.

Some people suggest that Israeli control of Judea and Samaria therefore justifies a boycott. Yet the Gospels of Jesus sets Jesus' life in a political context where another nation – Rome – has control over Judea and Samaria, and does not advocate a boycott of Rome at all.

When Jesus Christ was asked whether he should pay his taxes to Rome, he answered "Give to God what is God's and give to Caesar what is Caesar's". Jesus lived at a time when Israel was under Roman rule, yet never advocated

¹⁴ <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/terrorism/palestinian/pages/saving%20lives-%20israel-s-%20anti-terrorist%20fence%20-%20answ.aspx>

any form of violent rebellion against Rome. When the Apostle Peter attacked a Roman soldier in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus immediately healed the soldier and declared "My kingdom is not of this world." Jesus befriended Roman soldiers as well as local people, and did not encourage overt political activism to deliberately undermine a state or its officials. In addition, the Apostle Paul writes in chapter 13 of his letter to the Romans that Christians should honour state authorities and be in submission to them.

So there is no precedent for boycotting a nation simply because it maintains a military presence in a disputed territory.

In addition, it is important to bear in mind that before Israel had control over Judea, Samaria and Gush Katif (commonly referred to as the West Bank and Gaza), Jordan and Egypt occupied these areas, and no-one called for a boycott of either nation. Additionally Judea and Samaria have never been part of a Palestinian state before, but are the historical heartlands of Israel.

What is Zionism?

Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people with equal rights to all minorities, which has been a state since 1948 (formally recognised by the UN, and voted into existence by the UN), and a nation since the days of Abraham, when God promised to make a nation from Abraham's descendants. The 'seed of promise' went through Abraham's son Isaac, and then to his son Jacob or "Israel." From Jacob's twelve sons came the twelve tribes of Israel, out of which came the people of Israel, the prophets, and our Lord Jesus Christ. The nation of Israel has remained a nation throughout the millennia, but often scattered in various Jewish communities across the world, known collectively as the Diaspora. Whilst anti-Semitism rose violently during this time, Jews continued to pray and hope for a return to Zion and to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. The concept of Zionism was developed a positive, practical step to give Jewish people a homeland, and also to respond to the negative attitudes Jews faced in the Diaspora. The Jewish state became a reality in 1948, and Arabs, Arameans, Druze, Bedouins and other minorities have been given full, democratic rights as Israeli citizens. So "Israel" refers to the Jewish nation throughout the Bible, and today there is a modern, democratic nation Jewish state of Israel which is flourishing economically, academically and culturally.

The Zionism of the Jewish people has always gone hand-in-hand with Christian Zionism; the fruit of Christians sensitive to God's word, who understood God's eternal promises to Israel, and prayed and worked to make a Jewish state possible. Such Christians realise that Israel is the apple of God's eye (Zechariah 2:8), and that He who keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. (Psalm 121:4).

How can I understand the history of Israel in the Middle East?

Since 1948, Israel's neighbours have been ideologically opposed to the existence of a Jewish state. Prior to 1948, the land of Israel fell under the terminology "British Mandate of Palestine." Furthermore, the right of the Jewish people to the land had been outlined clearly in the San Remo Resolution of 1920.¹⁵ A state was promised both to the Jews and the Arabs in this area; the Arabs however rejected the UN's partition plan. The day after Israel was declared a nation, five Arab armies invaded, and were repelled by the nascent Jewish state, which nevertheless suffered significant loss of life. Many Arabs left the Jewish state at this time due to the war situation, responding from a call from the Arab Higher Committee to flee the Jewish state until it would be defeated by the Arab armies. Around the same time, many Jews were forced out of Arab countries after a string of anti-Semitic pogroms, creating two refugee scenarios.

Israel survived the war, and built up the Jewish state as Egypt occupied the coastal territory of Gaza (Gush Katif), and Jordan occupied the areas of Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). During this time, Jordan and Egypt did nothing to build up state institutions, and did not suggest giving the Arabs of these territories sovereignty in a Palestinian state. In 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was established. In their founding Palestine charter, the PLO rejected all Palestinian claims to Gaza or the West Bank, and said they were only interested in taking over the territory currently held by the Jewish state.

Does Israel want peace?

¹⁵ <http://www.cfr.org/israel/san-remo-resolution/p15248>

In 1967, Israel was threatened again by its Arab neighbours, and following an Israeli pre-emptive strike, it won the war in six days and this time it took control over the Gaza strip, the Sinai Peninsula, Judea and Samaria and the Golan heights. These lands which were previously occupied by Arab armies now fell under Israeli control. The same year, the Arab League met in Khartoum to discuss their response to Israel's recent military victory. They produced the famous "3 No's" – no to peace with Israel, no to recognition of Israel, and no to negotiations with Israel.

This rejectionist attitude underpinned the outlook of PLO leaders towards Israel. Under Yasser Arafat, the PLO started carrying out terror attacks against Israeli civilians, murdering them in cold blood and massacring Israeli Jews on buses and on highways. The PLO's brutal terror tactics spawned several Palestinian terror organisations like the PFLP, the PFLP-GC, Hamas, Fatah and Black September.

Meanwhile, Israel did eventually sign peace deals with Egypt and Jordan – proving Israel's willingness to reach peace with its neighbours. In the case of Egypt, Israel handed over the Sinai Peninsula to Egyptian control.

Israel entered into peace talks with Yasser Arafat and the PLO, starting Israeli-Palestinian negotiations following agreements made in Oslo. Following Oslo, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was created, with the responsibility to manage the affairs of Arab citizens in certain areas of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza, and prepare for a peace deal with Israel.

Following Israel's handover of Bethlehem to Yasser Arafat in 1995, the Christian community was repeatedly targeted by the Muslim majority. Christian business owners were intimidated, their land was stolen, and churches and holy places were attacked and desecrated. At the same time the Palestinian Authority's redrawing of the municipal boundaries of the city led to a dramatic fall in Christian representation in local elections further disempowering the Christian community. By the end of the first decade of PA rule, the number of Bethlehem's Christians had dwindled by two-thirds.

Yet peace talks repeatedly broke down. Rather than wanting a Palestinian Arab state to co-exist peacefully next to an Israeli Jewish state, the PA wanted something else. The PA sought a Palestinian state with no Jews living there (thus ensuring an Arab state), and additionally for Israel to be flooded with millions of

Palestinian Arabs so that it would no longer be a Jewish-majority state (thus undermining a Jewish state).

This position is enshrined in the Arab Peace Initiative, which offers peace to Israel according to these unacceptable terms. Arabs who left Israel in 1948 were never absorbed into their neighbouring Arab countries and given full citizenship, but rather they and their descendants were given refugee status, in order to weaponize them and so pressurize Israel. Such cynical policies are rooted in pan-Arab nationalist and Islamist political thought; both of which make the elimination of Israel an ideological goal.

Additionally, the PA used its new status to incite its population against Israelis, and seek to demonise and pressure Israel internationally. The PA indulged and encouraged Palestinians to attack Israelis in violent ways, especially during the Second Intifada from 2000-2005.

In 2005, Israel handed the Gaza (Gush Katif) to the PA. The PA was soon overcome by Hamas, who used the territory as a base for launching terror attacks against Israelis. Such attacks are given little attention in the Western media, until Israel responds in military operations, when TV stations and newspapers become more interested.

Since the Hamas takeover, attacks and intimidation against Christians in Gaza have taken place, and Christian shops and schools in Gaza have been firebombed.¹⁶ Christian pastor Rami Ayyad was murdered in Gaza in 2007¹⁷, which has contributed to a climate of intimidation and fear for Palestinian Christians.

Peace talks in 2013-2014 broke down as the PA welcomed Hamas into a unity government with the PA President, Mahmoud Abbas. Israel does not negotiate with Hamas terrorists, who have been attacking Israeli communities near to Gaza for years. Soon afterwards, Hamas terrorists murdered three Israeli teenagers from a religious community, who were on their way home from school. When Israel arrested Hamas leaders in Judea and Samaria, Hamas responded by launching rockets at Israel from Gaza. Israel responded with a limited and targeted military operation.

¹⁶ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704304504574610022765965390>

¹⁷ <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/insideisrael/2007/October/Gaza-Bible-Society-Worker-Murdered/>

Since that operation, ISIS-linked groups have also launched rockets at Israel from Gaza. Because terror groups have been given freedom to incite and act against Israel in PA-controlled areas, any future Palestinian state in Judea and Samaria is in danger of immediately collapsing and being taken over by Hamas and ISIS, just like Gaza was quickly taken over by Hamas.

Why is Gaza in such a bad way?

Hamas could have chosen to build up Gaza to be a thriving series of city-states, using a model like Singapore or Hong Kong. But rather than building infrastructure overground with schools and hospitals, Hamas prefers to build a terror network underground. Hamas uses construction material it receives in order to build terror tunnels. Hamas uses these tunnels to burrow into Israel and murder Israeli civilians. They also use material coming into Gaza to build rockets and mortars to fire into Israel and kill Israelis. One such mortar killed four-year old Daniel Tregerman last summer, as he was running to a bomb shelter. Hamas also fires at Israel from near to residential areas, and when Israel fires back, Gazan civilians are at risk. Hamas intentionally puts its own people at risk, cynically banking on the hope that they can then claim "Israel is killing our people", and that the world will not want to look closer at Hamas' tactics, but instead just blame Israel.

Because of Hamas' determination to fight Israel instead of developing Gaza, Israel has to maintain a stringent security blockade to prevent advanced weapons from reaching Gaza. These weapons are often delivered to Hamas from Iran, via Sudan. However, Israel still allows tons of food and construction material into Gaza on a regular basis. EU diplomats recently praised Israel for its efforts to see Gaza restored.¹⁸

Hamas has allowed Gaza to become a breeding ground for Islamist fanatics seeking Israel's destruction. So there are traditional Palestinian terror groups operating in Gaza like Hamas, Fatah and the PFLP, and now also Salafi Palestinian terror groups linked to ISIS, leading to in-fighting in Gaza too. Much of the international community rightly calls for Gaza to be demilitarised.

Christians need to focus their energy on combatting the poisonous ideology and practices of such terror groups, and bless rather than curse the world's only Jewish state, which is a healthy democracy that enshrines the rights of all

¹⁸ <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/192702#.VX1lt IViko>

its citizens, and strives to protect and defend them, to the benefit of the entire world.

And finally...

In the words of the Psalmist, "He who watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps." Therefore I exhort you to pray and seek God's guidance. If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:5).

God's wisdom is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (James 3:17-18).

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About the CEC:

The Israeli Christian Empowerment Council led by Father Gabriel Naddaf, was created to fully integrate Israeli Christians into national society, professionally and culturally. The Council strives to absorb Christian affiliation into Israel by showing Israeli Christians that their own religious, historic and ethnic identity is tied exclusively with Jewish history and culture. We encourage the Israeli Christian community to warmly accept the opportunity of a safe and prosperous life in the State of Israel, and to stand up as proud Israelis, to serve in the Israeli Defense Forces and prosper in a vibrant Israeli society.

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