

The Gentile Problem

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The phrase *The Jewish Problem* has been used both in an openly antisemitic manner as well as in a somewhat naive manner, by those ignorant of its grave implications.

I suggest that the spirit in which the phrase is usually used, and the Gentile antagonism that has been evident for millennia, can be aptly named *The Gentile Problem*.

The Gentile Problem is as old as Jewish identity itself. Furthermore, *The Gentile Problem* is inseparable from, and directly consequential to, the divine calling and covenantal origin of the Jewish people.

Let me turn briefly to a familiar passage and consider it afresh from the perspective of the Gentile and *The Gentile Problem*. In Genesis 12 God announced, among other things, that He would *bless*. Five times in two verses he used the word *bless* or *blessing*. Israel, the nation he would bring forth from Abram was to be the vehicle or agent of that *blessing*. The transcendent God chose to reveal himself to mankind through the Jewish people.

From a Gentile perspective the Abrahamic covenant, as it unfolds through subsequent chapters in Genesis, operates first of all as a *mechanism of exclusion*. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their physical descendants are chosen in Genesis narrative, while all others are excluded. And yet, for the Gentile, there is the promise that through this chosen nation *all* the families of the earth will be blessed.

Of particular relevance to the subject of *The Gentile Problem* is Genesis 12:3a:
I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you (esteems you lightly), I will curse.

Numbers 24 confirms the object of this principle as the nation Israel, not merely Abraham as argued by some supersessionists.

For the Gentile then, to be in right relation to the agent of God's blessing is to *bless* that agent. To be in a wrong relationship with that agent is to *curse* that agent. In both cases, God's action toward the Gentile is described as *reactive*. As expressed in this text, God's action of *blessing* or *cursing* the Gentile is logically subsequent to the action of the Gentile.

Two Gentile groups are in view, and only two. The *blessed* and the *cursed*. Israel, and *all* that Israel entails, thus becomes a mechanism of division for the Gentile world.

The promise of Genesis 12:3b that *All the families of the earth will be blessed through you* has been correctly understood as primarily a reference to the supreme blessing of Messiah, the gospel and its application to all mankind. And yet, there has been a tendency to create an artificial demarcation, separating the earlier section of the same verse from its context. *I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse* has been frequently seen as merely a kind of divine foreign affairs policy regarding Israel. It *is* that but it is *more* than that. I suggest that this text ought to be viewed in its context and treated more holistically.

Am I arguing that a right attitude toward the people of Israel is in fact the condition upon which the Gentile may receive the blessing offered by the supreme Israelite?

No.

I *am* arguing that a correct relationship with the Jewish people, one of blessing, is seen biblically as a *normal characteristic* of a Gentile worshipper of the God of the Jews.

Centuries of church history have shown there to be shamefully few examples of correlation between a Gentile's professed commitment to the God of Israel and his desire to bless the people of Israel. I need not explain here that for centuries Christendom was the chief persecutor of Jewish people. The implications of such a phenomenon are obvious, critical and far reaching.

Nonetheless, from a biblical perspective, a commitment to the people of Israel remains a normal characteristic of the Gentile committed to the God of Israel. For the Moabitess Ruth and the centurion of Luke 7, worship of the God of Israel naturally expressed itself in love for His covenant people.

I am aware that many eschatological views are represented at this conference. Allow me to present my own perspective concerning Matthew 25:31ff and *The Gentile Problem*. Given the immediate and broader context, the specific wording used, and the parallels with passages such as Joel 3, I am persuaded this speaks directly of Messiah's judgement of Gentiles at the time of His return to this earth. The *sheep* are those Gentiles who have aligned themselves with the God of Israel and, consequently, with the people of Israel. A right relationship with the God and Messiah of Israel has produced in these Gentiles a right relationship with the people of Israel. These Gentiles are described as *blessed*.

The *goats* are those Gentiles, who, under the circumstances described in Matthew 25, have remained passive. These Gentiles are described as *cursed*.

Two groups, and only two. The *blessed* and the *cursed*, just as in Genesis 12:3.

Those who spoke of *The Jewish Problem* proposed a *Final Solution*. I have suggested that the phenomenon is better described as *The Gentile Problem*. *The Gentile Problem* is ultimately a problem to which only Messiah can apply a *Final Solution*. His *Final Solution* is twofold: a heart transformation as can be wrought only by the Holy Spirit upon saving faith, or, final and irrevocable judgement.

Let me turn now to the Holocaust and the present period. In the unfolding of past, present and future biblical history, we stand between Genesis 12 and Matthew 25.

To those of you who reject a futurist, restorationist eschatology or those who hold the view that the Holocaust was a never to be repeated event, may I instead present as evidence the marked increase in antisemitism worldwide. While we may respectfully agree to differ concerning the biblical data, I suggest that the trajectory of contemporary events is sufficient to show at least that the world has already reentered a vortex of antisemitism.

The Holocaust may have ended in 1945 but the spirit that inspired it lives on. The attempt to annihilate European Jewry was not an historical anomaly. *The Gentile Problem* merely found its greatest historical expression in the Holocaust.

For a number of reasons I believe we find ourselves once more in the 1930s.

The 1930s saw the gradual isolation and demonization of European Jews. The Nazi strategy utilized propaganda, lies, bad science, and even worse theology. And the passive cooperation of professing Christians is a matter of record.

History has shown that the fundamental difference between passivity and complicity is only time.

By 1942 *The Gentile Problem* bore its deadly fruit. Some of those "good Lutherans", who had earlier chosen to stand by, were fully involved in the systematic murder of Jews on an industrial scale, while others continued to try to look away.

Today, we again see the gradual demonization and isolation of Jewish people. The lead antagonists have changed. The stage on which *The Gentile Problem* is played out has moved to a different theatre. With the establishment of the state of Israel the game has changed. The antisemite now has the opportunity to sanitize, repackage and rebrand the hatred of the 1930s. Anti-Zionism is generally considered acceptable and it of course now has the support of ostensibly Christian scholars, a few highly visible "non-Jewish Jews" (to use Dennis Prager's term), and the left wing media. (I am aware that some here may argue that anti-Zionism is not usually antisemitic. I will choose to differ).

In the West, antisemitism, once a far-right phenomenon, now has a greater presence on the left. Groups as disparate as the liberal left wing media and radical Islam find themselves co-belligerents in the anti-Israel cause. Once again we witness propaganda, outright lies, bad theology, and the usually passive, but increasingly active, cooperation of professing Christians.

Yet, for all this, the issue of Israel is simply not on the radar for too many Christians.

It is my contention that the passivity of the present day will show itself to be comparable to the passivity of the 1930s. It is merely human to be reluctant to take a firm stand on an issue that will necessarily put one at odds with one's friends, family or fellow congregants. This tendency is compounded by the postmodern culture in which we find ourselves - a culture which seems to view with disdain any position that is held strongly, particularly when the assertion of that view would necessarily render other views false. While anti-Zionistic argumentation can be adequately answered historically, without reference to Scripture, in the final analysis the conflict over Israel and the Jewish people is a spiritual conflict. Only in the light of this reality can antisemitism be properly understood.

Even for those whose eschatology is broadly premillennial and restorationist, there is often a peculiar unwillingness to see the issue of Israel as "here and now", current and relevant. Some argue that it is a matter that relates only, or perhaps principally, to the future. A disjunction exists between the Israel in their eschatological scheme and the Jewish people in their neighborhood or newspaper. Too easily it is forgotten that 1942 did not happen apart from the 1932; that the events of 1940s happened only in continuity with the events of the 1930s. My contention is that what we see

beginning to unfold today *is* in continuity with the eschatological horror revealed in the Scriptures - a biblical scenario that for many remains merely technical, faceless and impersonal.

Israel's prominence and covenantal centrality in the biblical text is incontestable (for those still willing to grant the text objective meaning). Despite this, many schools of Christian thought banish the issue of Israel to the outer recesses of theological consciousness. Israel is deemed a "peripheral doctrine", a minor detail in the theological landscape.

Such systems of theology may, in the minds of their advocates, bear a kind of protestant *imprimatur* but their treatment of the biblical data concerning Israel shows them to be inadequate, or worse. Theological systems are usually *internally* consistent, and for that reason can take on a life of their own, independent of the biblical text. My assertion is that any system of theology that lacks an adequate and accurate treatment of Israel will *necessarily* lack a truly biblical worldview. Such a system can therefore only leave its adherents vulnerable and exposed in the days ahead, unable to discern or to respond biblically to the rising antisemitism.

There is an undeclared war for the hearts and minds of believers and the issue is Israel. The theological battle is often between Scripture and quasi-Marcionite theological systems that strip the biblical covenants of force and specificity, denying objective meaning, impugning God's reputation, and rendering the One who is the source of all language an incoherent babbling. Such systems, in the final analysis, seem to operate from the same mindset as that first question in recorded history: *af ki amar elohim...? Did God really say...?*

Even in many conservative theological circles a free pass is granted to those who profess one thing while practicing another - to those who boast that their theology is based on Scripture, all the while selectively applying a hermeneutical approach that evacuates words of their meaning, imposing instead an understanding that would have been alien and inconceivable to the original recipients.

If, as I believe, these are the 1930s, the days of Israel as a side issue will soon be over. Pressure and difficulty have a way of demanding a response to questions we would rather set aside for another day. They also tend to bring into plain view what might otherwise remain hidden in the heart. The world will divide over the issue of Israel and that is God's intention. Christendom will also divide over the issue of Israel and that too, I believe, is God's intention.

There are a number of scenarios that could elevate the level of anti-Zionism virtually overnight. However it happens, the issue of Israel will take on the status of the elephant in the room for many believers who till now have maintained a studied indifference. In the case of unbelievers, most will merely follow the spirit of the realm in which they dwell.

In the meantime, popular Christian culture will probably continue its illicit romance with the delusional and self-refuting aspects of postmodern thought. God's purposes as revealed in the biblical text, however, will remain as clear as ever. While many will try to avoid issues that divide, God's decree that the issue of Israel *will divide*, remains firm.

Many otherwise sound evangelical leaders will continue to dance the ecumenical two step, in order to maintain status, influence and, of course, the almighty donor base. They may soon find, however, that they are dancing in a minefield. The band plays just too many tunes from the anti-Zionist supersessionist songbook. The dance may soon be over.

Many will dismiss my assertions as alarmist or overdramatic. To them I say, remember the 1930s. Voices were raised then but what was said was too unpleasant to believe, or simply... ..inconvenient.

Dennis Prager made the observation that there are three kinds of nations: those that want the Jews dead; those that ignore or aid this hatred; and America. I thank God for America and admire much about this great nation. But may I say, as an outsider, that America appears to have despised its birthright. It is in decline. When America is sufficiently weakened, the world can readily move from the 1930s to the 1940s.

The seedbed into which the Holocaust was sown was not laid overnight. That seedbed is now being relaid with different soil, but this time it is a broader and deeper field. The sower may have changed his garb, but his name is still Satan.

These are the 1930s.

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