

PROCLAIMING THE PRINCE OF PEACE: MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BIBLICAL RECONCILIATION

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One of the names given to the Messiah prophetically in Isaiah 9:6 (MT 9:5) is שֶׁרֵר־שְׁלוֹם, “Prince of Peace.”¹ The term affixes purpose regarding peace to the ministry of the Messiah and through His authority (John 4:34; 17:4; Rom 5:1). Jesus declared that the manner in which he brings peace is distinct from that of humanity, saying in John 14:27: “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.” It follows that all aspects related to peace will be shaped by this distinction. This paper seeks to establish the parameters associated with one peace-related dichotomy, namely that of reconciliation, and will show that reconciliation exists both as the world gives and as given by Jesus, and has relevance in the Holy Land.

THE MEANING OF RECONCILIATION

The primary Greek term in verbal form translated as “reconcile” is καταλλάσσω.² It is generally used in circumstances with parties involved in some form of dispute, where “enmity is exchanged for peaceful relations.”³ Louw and Nida define καταλλάσσω as “to reestablish proper friendly interpersonal relations after these have been disrupted or broken.”⁴

Reconciliation in extra-biblical literature

καταλλάσσω is used in classical Greek literature in both secular and religious contexts, including the way that regional disputes were settled,⁵ the exchange of equal amounts of money through mediation,⁶ a rebellious nobleman acquiescing and becoming friends again with a king,⁷ and in Greek tragedies with reference to ridding one’s anger with the gods.⁸

Both Josephus⁹ and rabbinic sources¹⁰ treat the concept in a similar fashion to their

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¹ See *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Isaiah 9:5 as an example of pre-Christian era interpretation on the verse.

² From the roots κατα, meaning “downward” and ἀλλάσσω, meaning “change” or “exchange.” The noun form (“reconciliation”) is καταλλαγή.

³ Stanley E. Porter, ‘Peace, Reconciliation’ in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: The InterVarsity Press, 1993), 695. See also BDAG, 521, who define the term as “the exchange of hostility for a friendly relationship.”

⁴ J.P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988) §40.1.

⁵ Herodotus, *History* 5.29; 6.108. See also Plato’s discussion on “coming to terms with exiled enemies” in *Republic* 8.566e, and Thucydides on the importance of warring parties identifying common interests in the course of making peace in *The Peloponnesian War* 4.59.

⁶ Aristotle, *Economics* 1348b.

⁷ Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.6.1.

⁸ Sophocles, *Ajax*, line 744.

⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 5.137; 6.143; 7.184; 11.195.

¹⁰ *Avot* 5.4.85. For an expanded rabbinic discussion on peacemaking, see *Midrash Rabbah*, Num 11:7.

Hellenic counterparts. When considered in their totality, extra-biblical sources provide us with a depiction of secular reconciliation, or reconciliation as the world gives. These references consistently convey the following characteristics:

- The *initiator* is usually the offending party seeking to appease the offended party.
- The *means* is based on justice and equity.
- The *extent* is unidirectional—limited to the parties of the dispute.
- The *result* is a change from enmity to peaceful relations that may or may not endure.

Reconciliation in the Old Testament

The language of the Old Testament lacks a term equivalent to καταλλάσσω, although some English versions use “reconcile” or “reconciliation” to translate Hebrew words that are normally rendered in a different manner.¹¹ The Old Testament does contain stories depicting some elements of reconciliation, despite lacking the use of grammatically-precise terminology. The most prominent account involves the estranged brothers Jacob and Esau coming together, along with the contribution of assets by Jacob (Gen 32-33).¹² In the LXX καταλλάσσω is used only once in the Hebrew canon in Jeremiah 31:39 (MT 48:39) and is generally considered to be a tenuous translation.¹³

Altogether there is no term in the Old Testament that corresponds with significance to the meaning inherent in the way that Paul uses καταλλάσσω in the New Testament. The reason for this absence can be characterized as a function of incapability.¹⁴ The Law was incapable of reconciling humanity to God (cf. Rom 3:20, 28; Gal 2:16; 3:11) and the Old Testament authors could not write about a means of reconciliation that was not yet evident. It is only after the death of Christ that a writer such as Paul, writing in Koine Greek, could describe the nature of godly reconciliation.

THE BIBLICAL USE OF RECONCILIATION

The use of καταλλάσσω in Scripture is exclusive to Paul in five of his epistles.¹⁵ He maintains the fundamental meaning of exchanging enmity for friendship, while refocusing the actions of the initiating agent and deepening the nature of the friendship. In Romans 5:10 he

¹¹ In the KJV “reconciliation” corresponds in three cases to כִּפּוּר (Lev 6:30; 16:20; Ezek 45:20), which ordinarily appears as “atonement,” and six times for קָבַץ (Lev 8:15; 1 Sam 29:4; 2 Chr 29:24; Ezek 45:15,17; Dan 9:24), which normally is used for “accept.” In a similar fashion, the ESV uses “reconcile” for קָבַץ in 1 Sam. 29:4. Neither the NASB nor the NIV applies “reconcile” to any Hebrew term.

¹² It can be argued that the reconciliation was never fully completed as they went their separate ways never to be united again in spite of assurances to the contrary (Gen 33:14). Alternatively, it may have been a completed reconciliation and their lack of reconnection can be a logistical function of managing sizeable families and flocks.

¹³ Here it corresponds to נִתְּנָה, (elsewhere rendered as “dismayed, afraid, or broken”). Three additional uses are found in the Apocryphal portion of the LXX regarding attempts to mitigate God’s wrath through prayer (2 Macc 1:5; 7:33; 8:29).

¹⁴ In a general sense, the absence of a word in a particular language describing a concept does not necessarily imply the absence of awareness of that concept. However, in the case of the Old Testament, we are also not given multiple words in phrases that approach the meaning articulated by καταλλάσσω in the New Testament.

¹⁵ One Pauline usage, in 1 Cor 7:11, is parenthetical in nature, dealing with a wife being reconciled to her husband. In one other passage, Matthew uses a related term διαλλάσσω, which has the sense of “mutual reconciliation” and is used regarding the importance of peace between brothers in the midst of worship (Matt 5:24).

writes, “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

Here we have a picture of people being enemies with God because of sin. That status is changed to peace and exultation (vv. 1, 11) by virtue of justification being given by God through the death of Christ on the cross (v. 9). Paul’s use of καταλλάσσω here deviates from secular reconciliation in a very important way. Unlike the offender taking the initiative in bringing about the elimination of the enmity, the reverse is true—God, as the offended one, takes the initiative, “while we were yet sinners” (v. 8), in parallel with God initiating reconciliation “while we were enemies.” As D.A. Carson states, “He is the judge, yet he is always the most offended party.”¹⁶

When we consider 2 Corinthians 5:18 we see the same sense of people being reconciled to God and of God as the initiator: “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” In his discussion on this passage, Christoph Schwöbel calls this “a sharp emphasis on God as the sole author of reconciliation.”¹⁷

In Colossians 1:19-20 Paul employs an intensified form of the verb, ἀποκαταλλάσσω, which has the sense of “reconciling completely.” He writes, “For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” Here Paul expresses a corollary aspect of reconciliation with God being extended to τὰ πάντα (“all things”). This phrase is consistent with the eschatological redemption awaiting Creation after the Fall (Rom 8:22; cf Gen 3:17-19) and, according to F. F. Bruce, a “totality is intended in reconciliation” through Christ.¹⁸ This would, by its broad scope, allow for the restoration of broken relationships among fallen humanity in the interim.¹⁹

The same thrust is found in Ephesians 2:13-16, although in this passage Paul gives specificity to the reconciling of “all things” by adding the dimension of interpersonal reconciliation:

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

The text directly states that Jesus is our peace and descriptively states he is our reconciliation by virtue of breaking down the “barrier of the dividing wall” and eliminating enmity (v. 14). The subject of the barrier is said by some commentators to refer to the physical wall that separated Jewish and Gentile courts of the temple, while others refer to the rabbinic

¹⁶ D.A. Carson, *Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books; 2010), 66.

¹⁷ Christoph Schwöbel, “Reconciliation: From Biblical Observances to Dogmatic Reconstruction,” in Colin E. Gunton, ed., *The Theology of Reconciliation* (London: T and T Clark, 2003), 16. For alternate views of the subject of reconciliation, see William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2, third ed., (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1891), 395-7 and Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (London: Clarke, 1960), 486-90.

¹⁸ F.F. Bruce, “Christ as Conqueror and Reconciler,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (Jan. 1984), 293.

¹⁹ For a discussion on this topic, see Gary L. Shultz Jr., “The Reconciliation of All Things in Christ,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167 (October-December 2010), 442-59.

“wall” or “fence” around the Torah that excluded Gentiles.²⁰ What is certain, however, is that at the time of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, a state of enmity existed between Jews and Gentiles related to the Law that kept them separated. It is the power of the cross that breaks this division because the enmity inherent in the Law has been eliminated. The ultimate result of our reconciliation to God is the formation of an entirely new identity for redeemed humanity, expressed by the phrase, “one new man.” This new identity is consistent with the meaning of *καταλλάσσω* being a change from hostility to a friendly relationship.

Based its usage in Scripture, biblical reconciliation—and thus reconciliation as Jesus gives—bears these characteristics:

- The *initiator* is not the offender (humanity), but the one who is offended (God).
- The *means* is forgiveness of sin through Christ’s death on the cross.
- The *extent* is bidirectional—a concurrent process vertically with God and horizontally with other people.
- The *result* is a change from hostility to peaceful relations with both God and people that endures. This result is further enhanced by the removal of the barrier between humanity and a holy God, justification through Christ’s imputed righteousness, and provision of the means for breaking down barriers separating people.

An examination of the broader context of these chapters establishes the central role of forgiveness in this ministry (2 Cor 5:19; Col 1:14) and the advancement of reconciliation by the proclamation of the gospel (2 Cor 5:20; Eph 2:17; Col 1:5, 23-28). Altogether, biblical reconciliation can be characterized as a gospel-centered transformation. Noticeably absent in Paul’s discourse is any mention of the issue of social justice.²¹ Its absence does not negate its importance in the totality of human interaction, but it does not place the role of justice at the core of biblical reconciliation. We have a clear distinction, then, of the nature of reconciliation as the world gives and as Jesus gives. Neil Anderson affirms this distinction in this way:

We must be reconciled to God before we can be reconciled to others, because the ministry of reconciliation is a supernatural ministry. That is what sets the ministry of reconciliation apart from conflict management, peace-keeping and secular attempts of conciliation. The latter may be helpful for facilitating coexistence and may even set the stage for further ministry, but they fall far short of true reconciliation.²²

For Paul, the reconciliation between people is not directly sought, but is a beneficial byproduct of the reconciliation established between people and God. So we can draw parallels between the two dimensions, with the vertical aspect serving as the perfected model for the horizontal. This is the essence of the “ministry of reconciliation.”

²⁰ For an assessment of these interpretations see Tim Hegg, “The ‘Dividing Wall’ in Ephesians 2:14—What is it? Who Made it? How was it Broken Down?” TorahResource.com, accessed November 7, 2013, <http://www.torahresource.com/EnglishArticles/Eph%202.14.pdf>. For a description of the rabbinic inferential reasoning called *diyyuq* used to exclude Gentiles from the Law, see Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 109.

²¹ The nearest Paul comes to this issue is his reference in 2 Cor 5:10 to the judgment seat of Christ being a reckoning of our deeds, “whether good or bad.”

²² Neil T. Anderson, *The Path to Reconciliation: Connecting People to God and to Each Other* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2008), 11.

THE NEED FOR RECONCILIATION IN OUR PRESENT DAY

The need for reconciliation is often expressed in the context of Palestinians and Israelis. Lisa Loden, a Messianic Jewish believer who brings considerable experience and a balanced approach to the discussion, calls the family of God in the region, “wounded and broken.”²³ She acknowledges:

There is agreement between all parties that the conflict has affected the entire population. On the Palestinian side, large numbers have been displaced, land has been confiscated, families have been separated and homes have been demolished. On the Israeli side, the threat, as well as the actuality, of random acts of terrorism has traumatized the entire population.²⁴

Perception of the identity of the offender and the offended most often are a function of which side a person is on. Israelis point to bombed municipal buses and Palestinians point to the separation wall as symbols of the victimization of their own communities. Salim Munayer, who leads the ministry of Musalaha,²⁵ observes, “Palestinians and Israelis often see one another as the enemy, and not as a people with lives and families. . . . A victimization mentality blinds one group to the suffering of the other.”²⁶

Some voices can be heard among Orthodox Israelis equating Palestinians to the biblical Amalekites and thus subject to God’s invectives against them (Exod 17:16; Deut 25:19) and justifying their harsh treatment.²⁷ At the same time, the recurrent Palestinian refrain is that the occupation is to blame for the entire conflict,²⁸ without mention of sources within their greater society working toward the destruction of Israel. Elias Chacour epitomizes this position by saying, “Yes, we know the evil is not in our resistance but in the ongoing occupation of more and more of our homelands.”²⁹

Israelis and Palestinians have respective narratives that establish blame for the conflict.³⁰ With the land claimed by both sides, theological justifications have become a key point of contention. Much of the dispute has been directed against Christian Zionism. Naim Ateek, the founder of the Palestinian advocacy organization Sabeel, calls Christian Zionism “a biblical and

²³ Lisa Loden, “Towards Reconciliation: Messianic Jewish Believers and Palestinian Christians,” in *Chosen to Follow: Jewish Believers through History and Today* (Jerusalem: Caspari Center, 2012), 220.

²⁴ Lisa Loden, “Israel/Palestine, Reconciliation Between Women,” in “Reconciliation as the Mission of God: Faithful Christian Witness in a World of Destructive Conflicts & Divisions,” Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 51, in *A New Vision, A New Heart, A Renewed Call (Vol. 2)*, David Claydon, ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005), 530.

²⁵ Arabic for “reconciliation.”

²⁶ Salim Munayer, “The Cross and Reconciliation in Palestine” in *Jesus and the Cross: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts*, David Emmanuel Singh, ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 90-91.

²⁷ See Robert Eisen, *The peace and Violence of Judaism: From the Bible To Modern Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 105, 153-59.

²⁸ In spite of lacking a biblical basis, the Church of Scotland has adopted a similar position. See “The Inheritance of Abraham? A Report on the ‘Promised Land,’” (The Church of Scotland Church and Society Council, 2013), 10.

²⁹ Elias Chacour, *Blood Brothers* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2003), 230. Writing from a differing Palestinian perspective, Yohanna Katanacho candidly concedes that the writings of Chacour and other similar biographers “present the issues in black and white” invariably with the Palestinians as the oppressed and the Israelis as the oppressors. See Yohanna Katanacho, “Palestinian Protestant Theological Responses to a World Marked by Violence,” *Missiology: An International Review* 36 No. 3 (July 2008), 290.

³⁰ For a comprehensive assessment of the conflicting narratives, see Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict: History’s Double Helix* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).

political menace to justice and peace” and a “heretical teaching.”³¹ His position is derived from a hermeneutic that is gaining traction in the region, echoing Marcionism in which much of the Old Testament is considered to be irrelevant and racist.³² The debate has even expanded beyond theology to genetics as a means of delegitimizing the right of Israelis to the land.³³

This difference of views, exacerbated by the polemical approach of liberation theologians, has led to a sense of indifference among Messianic Jews toward comprehensive reconciliation beyond their borders. This indifference is intensified by the situation of Messianic Jews within Israeli society. As Richard Harvey observes, “Their loyalty to the Jewish people and the State of Israel is already under suspicion because they believe in Yeshua as Messiah.”³⁴ As a result, “a Messianic Jewish theology of reconciliation has yet to be written.”³⁵ Palestinian Christians face similar threats. With criticism and risks abounding from all sides, clearly the need for reconciliation between these groups is very acute today.

MODELS OF RECONCILIATION

Justice as the basis for reconciliation

The Palestinian path to reconciliation is a resolute cry for justice. Lutheran pastor from Bethlehem, Mitri Raheb, says that the most important need within the conflict is “justice, nothing but justice.”³⁶ In a similar fashion, Ateek takes the position that the realization of justice must precede reconciliation and forgiveness.³⁷ In his non-negotiable formula, “Israel must admit that it has committed an injustice against the Palestinian people” as the first step toward peace and that “Justice alone guarantees a peace that will lead to reconciliation.”³⁸

Within Arab culture, justice is considered not only a social need, but meeting a deeper felt need for vindication.³⁹ Reconciliation structures in this context reflect this emphasis. One such structure is called *sulha*, which predates the onset of Islam, but is permissible within Islamic *sharia* law and is authorized by the *Quran*,⁴⁰ while also having an influence in Arab

³¹ Naim Stifan Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 78,91. For similar charges, see Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 21, 259; and Donald E. Wagner, *What is Western Fundamentalist Christian Zionism?* (Limassol, Cyprus: Middle East Council of Churches, 1988), 12.

³² *Ibid.*, 82-3,

³³ Mitri Raheb, “Contextual Palestinian Theology as it Deals with Realities on the Ground,” speech at the Christ at the Checkpoint conference, Bethlehem, March 17, 2010. http://www.christatthecheckpoint.com/lectures/Mitri_Raheb.pdf. Raheb raised the notion that Palestinian Christians have closer DNA to King David and Jesus than Israeli Jews. For a refutation of Raheb's claims by a molecular geneticist, see David B. Goldstein, *Jacob's Legacy: a Genetic View of Jewish History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

³⁴ Richard Harvey, “Toward a Messianic Jewish Theology of Reconciliation,” in Salim J. Munayer and Lisa Loden, eds., *The Land Cries Out: Theology of the Land in the Israeli-Palestinian Context* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 84.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁶ Mitri Raheb, *I am a Palestinian Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 26.

³⁷ Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, 187.

³⁸ *The Jerusalem Sabeel Document: Principles for a Just Peace in Palestine-Israel* (Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, 2000).

³⁹ Felt needs may be defined as those that are deemed important and necessary for fulfillment, but may or may not be personally healthy or consistent with Scriptural principles. For a gospel-centered means of addressing felt needs without syncretism, see Pat Hile, “Communicating the Gospel in Terms of Felt Needs,” *Missiology: An International Review* 5 (1977), 499-506.

⁴⁰ *Quran*, *an-Nissa* 4:114, 128; *al-Hujraat* 49:9.

Christian settings. Based on the root *sulh*, meaning “the act of settlement,” *sulha* refers to the ritualistic process of resolving conflict as a means of preempting vengeance while allowing the saving of face. Subsequent to an offending act, the process of *sulha* follows a series of steps that entail mediation, confession of guilt, renouncing retaliation, the payment of compensation, and forgiveness in a ceremonial fashion.⁴¹

At the core of *sulha* is the exchange of money or goods as “just compensation.”⁴² The process also facilitates the restoration of honor for the offended family. Since 1948, there has been only one documented *sulha* between Arabs and Jews.⁴³ But the principles of *sulha* are still evident among calls for reconciliation by Palestinian Christians in a more general sense.

There is some nascent interest in *sulha*-oriented reconciliation among Israeli Jews.⁴⁴ This interest may be an extension of *tikkun olam*, a core concept of Judaism meaning “repairing the world.” *Tikkun olam* is expressed within the Jewish culture (with or without religious overtones) as participation in charitable causes and social welfare programs.⁴⁵

Another manifestation of the fervent desire for justice among Palestinians is the pursuit of what is known as the BDS movement. It is an attempt to pressure Israel through economic boycotts, divestment and sanctions to capitulate to their demands. “Kairos Palestine” is a document drafted by Palestinian clergy and promoted by the World Council of Churches that formalizes their support of such methods.⁴⁶

The question becomes, how does Scripture address this emphasis on justice? An assessment of the justice-based model of reconciliation shows that it is limited for the following reasons:

The demand for justice is prone to unbiblical approaches

Structures based on justice like *sulha* correspond to reconciliation as the world gives in terms of the initiator (the offender), the means (justice by virtue of compensation), and the exclusion of the atonement of Christ in the process. It is driven not just by a demand for justice and obligatory forgiveness, but by the fear of vengeance and retribution.

When Jesus referred to “peace as the world gives,” the world was not just a place where

⁴¹ See Elias J. Jabbour, *Sulha: Palestinian Traditional Peacemaking Process* (Montreat, NC: House of Hope Publications, 1996), 31-43, 52-57. See also Doron Pely, “Resolving Clan-Based Disputes Using the Sulha, the Traditional Dispute Resolution Process of the Middle East,” in *Dispute Resolution Journal* (Nov. 2008/Jan. 2009), 80-88; and Rial Abu El-Assal, *Caught in Between: The Extraordinary Story of an Arab Palestinian Christian Israeli* (London: SPCK, 1999), 119-22. The steps are: 1) In order to prevent an act of retribution, the family of the offender initiates the process by seeking the help of community leaders, who form a *jaha* (mediating delegation). 2) The *jaha* hears the grievances of the victim’s family. 3) The offended family renounces retaliation and agrees to truce and also receives a cash advance as a token of good faith on the part of the offender’s family. 4) The *jaha* arranges for the payment of justice-based compensation in the form of money or material goods. In the case of fatalities, it is called *diya* (“blood money”). 5) The families meet for a shaking of hands ritual. 6) The senior member of the offended family makes a declaration of forgiveness. 7) The offender’s family serves a meal to the offended family.

⁴² George E. Irani and Nathan C. Funk, *Rituals of Reconciliation: Arab-Islamic Perspectives*, Kroc Institute Occasional Paper #19:OP:2, August 2000, p. 20.

⁴³ See Menahem Benhayim, “Reconciliation: Jews and Arabs – A Personal Account,” *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 35 (2001), 47.

⁴⁴ For example, the Sulha Peace Project is a non-Christian organization that follows the *sulha* model—using tribal fires, listening circles, and a supper to enable Israelis and Palestinians to tell their stories.

⁴⁵ For a complete description of *tikkun olam*, see Elliot N. Dorff, *The Way Into Tikkun Olam: Repairing the World* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2007).

⁴⁶ “Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth” (<http://www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/Documents/English.pdf>), 2009, p.12.

nations amicably practiced reconciliation, but they sought to impose their will forcefully. The peace of the world in Jesus' day was dominated by *Pax Romana*, which insisted on suppressing enmity by forcing opposition to submit. The enmity, however, would merely go underground and remain unresolved.⁴⁷ In contemporary vernacular, it was the ultimate form of bullying. The BDS movement may be more genteel than *Pax Romana*, but forcing others to submit to your will through boycotts, divestment, and sanctions is nevertheless a manifestation of bullying that is inconsistent with the teaching of Jesus in the way of solving the problem of enmity.⁴⁸

No group is completely and exclusively innocent

The Proverb “every man’s way is right in his own eyes” (Prov 21:2; cf. Deut 12:8; Judg 17:6) is apparent in circumstances of conflict, where groups tend to think of themselves as wholly innocent and others are wholly at fault. Miroslav Volf, takes the stand that no one is innocent in such settings:

Especially after conflicts have been going on for some time, each party sees itself as the victim and perceives its rival as the perpetrator, and has good reasons for reading the situation in this way. As a consequence, each can see itself as engaged in the struggle for liberation and the pursuit of justice, and thus the Christian faith ends up providing primarily legitimation for the struggle. Reconciliation is not even attempted—at least not until “our” side has won.⁴⁹

Jesus is often cited as taking the side of victims (Matt 25:31-46; Luke 14:12-14). Yet Jesus also confronted those who perceived themselves as being victimized (Matt 7:1-5; 18:15-35; Luke 19:1-10; John 5:1-14). He never classified people into separate groups where some needed repentance and others were so virtuous they were exempt. Their respective sins might be different, but they are equally in need of repentance.

The demand for justice fosters the demand for revenge

The inclination toward revenge is especially inherent in clan-based societies. Arabs and Jews share a common tribal heritage from the times of the biblical patriarchs characterized by *lex talionis*—the law of proportionate vengeance, or עֵין תַּחַת עֵין, “an eye for an eye” (Exod 21:24; Deut 19:21), and אָוֶן, the kinsman redeemer who was responsible for avenging familial loss of blood (Num 35:9-34). The Middle East today continues to exhibit cycles of revenge for perceived offenses.

Within rabbinic Judaism the concept of *lex talionis* has been reconfigured to a call for monetary rather than physical compensation.⁵⁰ Islam makes a similar accommodation but also permits physical retribution.⁵¹ It is within Christianity that we encounter the greatest distance between *lex talionis* and vengeance. Jesus confronted the potential for abuse by enjoining an even higher standard, namely that of “turning the other cheek” when offended, and elevating giving over receiving (Matt 5:38-42; cf. Rom 12:17-21).

⁴⁷ Examples of latent Judean-Roman enmity that led to tragic results are the two revolts by Jewish zealots in AD 66 and 132.

⁴⁸ For a discussion on the inadequacy of forced justice, see Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, “For He is Our Peace:” Ephesians 2:11-22,” in Mary H. Schertz and Ivan Friesen, eds., *Beautiful upon the Mountains: Biblical Essays on Mission, Peace, and the Reign of God* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2003), 227.

⁴⁹ Miroslav Volf, “The Social Meaning of Reconciliation,” *Interpretation*, vol. 2 no. 54 (April 2000), 163.

⁵⁰ Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Kamma* 83b-84a.

⁵¹ *Quran Al-Baqarah* 2:178

The inclination toward physical revenge is rightly constrained among Israeli and Palestinian believers. However, demands for justice and positions of silence or mild rebuke in response to violent actions within their greater ethnic communities can be perceived as their tacit acceptance.⁵²

True justice originates in and proceeds from the cross of Christ

Jesus affirmed a prioritization of love that was the foundation of the Law, in that our first love must be for God and our second must be for other people (Matt 22:39; cf Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18; 1 John 4:20). The former is associated with justification and crediting of righteousness through Christ (2 Cor 5:21), and the latter is associated with acts of righteousness that should arise from our love of God (Heb 6:10). These acts of righteousness include caring for “the least of these” (Matt 25:34-46) and the oppressed (Zech 7:10), which altogether can be rightly characterized as social justice.

It is possible to have the second love without the first, however, and that is the case when the call is for “justice and only justice.”⁵³ But as Jesus warned the Ephesian church in Revelation 2, that kind of exclusion requires repentance because of the disregard of the first love of God. And the demand for “only justice” fosters a perpetual quest that cannot be fully satisfied.⁵⁴ The recurring message of Scripture is horizontal ministry such as social justice extending outward from the salvific justice of the cross. John Piper prioritizes the two aspects of justice well by saying, “churches should labor to relieve suffering in the world, especially eternal suffering.”⁵⁵

Forgiveness as the basis for reconciliation

The priority of forgiveness varies significantly among people. One view sums up a dormant value of forgiveness in the region: “There is a willingness to engage in forgiveness, and the moment there is a sense of optimism for peace, I am confident forgiveness will happen.”⁵⁶ Another view relegates forgiveness to the very end of a six-step process.⁵⁷ In contrast, the highly successful process of reconciliation practiced in South Africa called *ubuntu*⁵⁸ assigns the role of

⁵² See Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, 123-5, where he gives an ambiguous treatment of vengeance by suicide bombings.

⁵³ See Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice, and only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989). The inclusion of the word “only” is a unconvincing exegesis of צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּדְרֹשׁ in Deut 16:20—literally “justice, justice you shall pursue.” The repetition of צֶדֶק indicates an emphatic or exceptional nature of the term, but not an exclusionary form that is manifested by inserting “only” between the repeated words. For discussion on this unique part of speech in Hebrew, see Wilhelm Gesenius, trans. George Wolseley Collins, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), 416.

⁵⁴ Miroslav Volf, “The Social Meaning of Reconciliation,” *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* 35 (2001), 24.

⁵⁵ John Piper and Justin Taylor, eds., *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 224.

⁵⁶ Sami Awad, phone conversation September 10, 2013.

⁵⁷ Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, 185-86. His steps are: 1) Confront and analyze the roots of the conflict. 2) End the Israeli occupation and Palestinian violence. 3) Implementation of international law, forcing “Israel to put an end to its injustice.” 4) Accepting peace. 5) People of faith work toward healing. 6) Forgiveness.

⁵⁸ Meaning “human solidarity” in the Xhosa language.

forgiveness to a much higher priority in the process.⁵⁹

The elevation of forgiveness to the heart of reconciliation is necessary to the realization of the biblical model in Scripture. God's message is that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8) and "if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt 6:15).

Forgiveness-based reconciliation is a gospel-centered transformation that leads to the healing of relationships and societies from the inside out. It produces "new creatures in Christ" (2 Cor 5:17) who strive for authentic change in their surrounding culture. It does not neglect issues of social justice, but includes it within what Volf calls an "overarching framework of reconciliation."⁶⁰ The result is not just spiritual in nature but the satisfaction of having material and social needs met, like personal freedom, ethnic identity, and economic vitality. The difference is the *manner* in which it is derived because instead of it being coerced in a worldly way, it arises from a willingness to exercise grace and compassion because of having received forgiveness and a changed heart. Forgiveness, then, is the essential foundation of reconciliation for the following reasons:

A high regard for forgiveness frees all parties to initiate the process

Reconciliation is uncomplicated when both parties are receptive to the process. But what if one party resists the practice because of a lack of repentance or the perception of self-innocence? In this regard, Gregory Jones affirms persistence in reaching out to them.⁶¹ Moreover, Jesus gives no exemption in terms of the number of attempts—"seventy times seven" (Matt 18:22) or the deservedness—"love your enemies" (Matt 5:44).

In the Pattaya Covenant study on reconciliation, the issue of initiative is stated well: "In Biblical understanding, no one party in a historic conflict—whether majority or minority, powerful or powerless, aggressor or afflicted—has the greater burden to take the first step toward reconciliation."⁶² Rather than becoming embittered because of a perceived lack of responsiveness by others or experiencing a paralysis of motivation because of a false sense of self-innocence, it is essential for everyone in situations of conflict to think of themselves as being needed to initiate reconciliation. For that to occur, both sides need a high regard for forgiveness and the transformation it brings.

Forgiveness restrains the inclination toward vengeance

Anderson takes the position that, "Reconciliation without forgiveness is impossible. Conflicts leave emotional scars, and many people bear the pain of wounds inflicted upon them by others. Most do not know how to let go of the past and forgive them from the heart."⁶³ The

⁵⁹ Janez Juhant and Bojan Zalec, eds., *Reconciliation: The Way of Healing and Growth* (Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2012), 254-6. The five *ubuntu* stages are: 1) Acknowledging guilt. 2) Repentance. 3) Seeking and receiving forgiveness. 4) Making reparations. 5) Committing to preserve reconciliation. For a similar pattern in a global context, see Christopher Wright, ed., *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 39-40.

⁶⁰ Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," 22.

⁶¹ Gregory L. Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 243, 195.

⁶² "Reconciliation as the Mission of God: Faithful Christian Witness in a World of Destructive Conflicts & Divisions," Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 51, in David Claydon, ed., *A New Vision, A New Heart, A Renewed Call (Volume 2)*: (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2005), 508.

⁶³ Anderson, 96-97.

corruption of human nature because of sin is revealed in a propensity toward self-interests and disrespecting the interests of others. Oppression and vengeance are the prime manifestations in settings of conflict. The corrective measure for the corruption of human nature is the forgiveness of sin made possible through the atonement of Christ. Thus Volf can assert: “the injustice of oppression must be fought with the creative ‘injustice’ of forgiveness, not the aping injustice of revenge.”⁶⁴

Forgiveness is essential in facilitating reconciliation between people groups

In his evaluation of the role of forgiveness in large-scale conflicts, Alan Geyer attests, “repentance and forgiveness have been and may be the preconditions of reconciliation.”⁶⁵ This was clearly the case in South Africa where their Truth and Reconciliation Commission discovered that the reconciliation that occurred in their country was, in part, the result of “an astonishing willingness to forgive”⁶⁶

An approach that begins with changing of individual hearts through forgiveness is able to lead to the changing of societies, something that will never be accomplished through compulsion and imposition. Thus the concept of forgiveness must be part of the discussion on each of the points of contention, especially among believers who value the forgiveness they themselves have received in Christ.⁶⁷

MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

As an area of practical theology, a missiological approach enables us to investigate the efficacy of the response of the Church to biblical principles. It seeks to identify points of commonality and cultural differences that are essential for communication.⁶⁸ And it seeks to identify existing social structures that can be adapted for intercultural settings. The *sulha* process has the potential for adaptations that will conform to biblical reconciliation. It employs an intercessor and works toward the elimination of violence, both of which are consistent with Scripture. In keeping with the attributes of biblical reconciliation, however, it needs a diminished demand for justice and a stronger emphasis on forgiveness. The key is the role of Christ. Because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23), yet he died in our place (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13), the great

⁶⁴ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 122.

⁶⁵ Alan Geyer, “Acknowledge Responsibility for Conflict and Injustice and Seek Repentance and Forgiveness,” in Glen Stassen, ed., *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1998), 80.

⁶⁶ *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, vol 5, (1998), 350, <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume5.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Forgiveness even provides the basis for confronting the highly contested issue of land rights, where it intersects with the biblical concept of the jubilee and its fulfillment in Jesus (Lev 25:8-13; Isa 61:1-3; Luke 4:14-20). Christopher Bruno strongly makes this case in “‘Jesus is Our Jubilee’ But How? The OT Background and Lukan Fulfillment of the Ethics of the Jubilee,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53/1 (March, 2010), 99.

⁶⁸ The seminal work in this area is Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, 3rd Ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill USA, 2010), and Geert Hofstede, *Culture’s Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nation*, 2nd Ed. (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications, 2001). Using four indexes, he shows that in Palestinian culture, as part of the Arab world, respect is a function of who you are in society, loyalty to the community is important, offenses bring shame and loss of face, and fighting for success is valued. Likewise, in Israeli culture, respect is earned through actions, loyalty to society is important while individuals have the freedom to take responsibility for their own actions, accomplishment and the quality of life are valued, and there is a very strong felt need for security.

sulha (settlement) has already been accomplished and must guide interpersonal applications.

Above all, since the exegesis of Scripture establishes the redeeming work of Christ at the center of reconciliation, this kind of ministry in the Israeli-Palestinian context necessitates the active proclamation of the gospel. It is also a call for the greater Christian community to support existing evangelistic works and to encourage the development of new endeavors.

A measure of reconciliation is already taking place, especially within the boundaries of Israel. The successes have been consistently marked by the centrality of reconciliation to God leading to reconciliation between people. An examination of existing ministries shows both dimensions being addressed:

- Musalaha is an organization in Jerusalem that conducts desert encounters between Palestinian and Israeli youth, attempting to build relationships and while discussing historical narratives and grievances. It also organizes meetings for women, where “The clear focus was always the unifying fact of the commonality of salvation in Jesus held by both communities.”⁶⁹
- Jerusalem House of Prayer for All Nations led by Tom Hess, located on the Mount of Olives, brings Arab and Jewish leaders together for prayer and intercession. Many stories of reconciliation attribute their success to these convocations.
- The Annual Forest Meeting is an outdoor gathering of Israeli Messianic Jews and Arab Christians in the Lavi Forest of the western Galilee for prayer, worship and fellowship, resulting in realized reconciliation and unity that continues after the event.⁷⁰

A number of local ministries follow the biblical way of reconciliation:

- Reuven Berger, Jewish pastor of *Kehilat ha'Seh al Har Zion* in Jerusalem states, “We believe that as God fills our hearts with love for each other and we express life in community, God will enable Jews to bring the gospel to the Arabs and will use the Arabs to bring the gospel to the Jews.”⁷¹
- Bishara Deeb, Arab leader of *Al Hasad* in Nazareth presents the gospel and provides assistance to African refugees. According to Pastor Deeb, “We try to show how people can live together. We cannot work with Arabs alone or Jews alone, because we are all the

⁶⁹ Loden, “Case Study #3: Israel/Palestine, Reconciliation Between Women,” 532-34.

⁷⁰ The story of the establishment of this event is, by itself, an example of biblical reconciliation. Suhail Ramadan grew up in Nazareth with a sense of bitterness toward Jews. He later became the pastor of a church that he built in the Arab village of Turan. But his work was failing because of a lack of attendance, and he began asking God for understanding on this apparent failure. God’s answer was in the form of conviction over his hardened heart toward the Jewish people. During that same time in the mid-1980’s the newly formed Peniel Fellowship, a Messianic congregation in Tiberias, was under severe persecution by militant Orthodox Jews who eventually destroyed their building by fire. Having no place of their own, pastor Ramadan heard about their plight and offered to let the Jewish congregation meet in his church building in Turan, which they accepted and began having services there on Saturdays. A short time later, people in Turan began coming to faith in the Lord and God blessed with growth the Arab congregation that was meeting in the same building on Sundays. Instead of failing, it succeeded and pastor Ramadan recognized it as the result of his repentance of hating his Jewish neighbors. Although the Peniel Fellowship later moved out and in time grew into a large congregation in Tiberias, it did not end their relationship with their Arab brothers. These two churches started a tradition of gathering together every year in the forest not far from Turan and Tiberias. Then they opened up the extent of the meeting to other Jewish and Arab congregations, and that has continued until today.

⁷¹ Quoted in Tom Hess, *Sons of Abraham: Egypt, Israel, and Assyria Worshiping God Together As a Blessing on the Earth* (Jerusalem: Progressive Vision International, 2003), 109.

church together.”⁷²

- Ofer Amitai, Jewish pastor of *Kehilat El-Roi* in Jerusalem, asks, “How will we ever arrive at true reconciliation if we change what the Bible says? . . . We are careful to seek out ways in which we can demonstrate love, compassion, and grace to our Arab brothers now, especially to those who are Palestinians, acknowledging their suffering and their need.”⁷³
- Victor Elias Bahbah, Arab pastor of Fountains of Salvation congregation in Jaffa, admits being “locked in hatred and a desire to avenge” against Israelis. But when he became saved through faith in Christ, God took away his hatred.⁷⁴
- Belay Birlie, Ethiopian Messianic Jewish pastor in Jerusalem confesses seeing Arabs as his enemy, “but when I accepted Yeshua as my Savior, He changed my heart towards them. I repented of my ill feelings towards them. Through forgiveness and healing God put a great love for them in my heart.”⁷⁵
- Naim Khoury, Arab pastor of First Baptist Church in Bethlehem, asserts, “We need to carry the message of peace, the message of reconciliation to be able to let people know that Jesus is the only hope. . . . Unless we put God’s word first in our lives we will never understand what reconciliation is.”⁷⁶

These real-world situations demonstrate the efficacy of biblical reconciliation and serve as models for emulation on a broader scale. They share in common the characteristics of addressing alienated humanity because of sin, taking the initiative of going to one’s neighbor without regard of who has offended whom, basing their ministry on the forgiveness Christ brings, emphasizing the proclamation of the gospel, and finding solutions for social needs.

CONCLUSION

Enduring peace and reconciliation comes at a cost, as reflected in the underlying meaning of *שלום* being the safety that comes from a completed transaction.⁷⁷ Our debt to sin has been paid “once for all” by Christ as we are told in Hebrews 7:27. Messengers of peace and reconciliation ought to uphold that message, in spite of the personal price they may be asked to pay. Anderson links these payments well, saying: “Reconciliation is costly. Our heavenly Father had to sacrifice His only Son in order for our sins to be forgiven. . . . If you are not willing to sacrifice something of your time or self, then don’t consider the ministry of reconciliation.”⁷⁸

This cost can include what Volf calls the “risk of embrace” in which our actions may not be reciprocated.⁷⁹ People committed to biblical reconciliation may be considered to have

⁷² Bishara Deeb, phone conversation June 9, 2013.

⁷³ Quoted in Hess, 115-17. For another account of his ministry, see Julia Fisher, *Meet Me at the Olive Tree: Stories of Jews and Arabs Reconciled to the Messiah* (Oxford and Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2012) 163-178.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 173-74.

⁷⁷ From the root *שלם* meaning “completed payment.”

⁷⁸ Anderson, 22.

⁷⁹ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 147. An embrace entails opening the arms as a gesture of invitation reaching toward and creating space for the other, waiting for a response of acceptance, closing the arms in reciprocation, and opening the arms again as a release to maintain unique identities.

betrayed their own community and will find resistance on both sides because it does not blindly adopt the common position of advocacy for one's own group alone. There may be the price of physical harm. A poignant example is that of Naim Khoury, who has been shot and his church has been bombed fourteen times since publicly stating his love for the Jewish people. Yet the rewards outweigh the risks.

In the midst of a seemingly impossible situation, we have been given a workable solution in the Word of God, namely to set aside reconciliation as the world gives, to rise up from indifference, and to make a commitment to reconciliation as Jesus gives. This gospel-centered transformation starts with individuals becoming reconciled to God and then believing communities becoming reconciled to each other, thus providing godly motivation for social justice. One can rightly conclude such an occurrence would be a powerful testimony to the greater people groups of the Holy Land and even to all peoples on earth. Our only hope for realizing true peace here in this world is by making a total commitment of submission to the Prince of Peace, in the same way that he has secured everlasting peace for us in the world to come.