

The Church's Identification With Israel

by Art Katz

Art Katz's sermon explores the deep connection between the church and Israel, emphasizing the need for unwavering support amidst trials and suffering.

Scripture: Romans 11:1

Topics: "Covenant Loyalty", "Identification with Israel"

Description

Art Katz addresses the complex relationship between the Church and Israel, emphasizing the need for the Church to stand with Israel even in times of moral failure and loss of beauty. He highlights the challenges Israel faces from external threats and the internal struggles of its people, drawing parallels to the Church's own trials. Katz urges believers to embrace a deeper understanding of covenant loyalty, recognizing that true identification with Israel requires enduring love and support despite its imperfections. He calls for a prophetic response to the suffering of both Israel and the Church, encouraging a commitment to God's purposes amidst impending crises. Ultimately, Katz emphasizes the importance of seeing beyond the surface and understanding the spiritual realities at play.

Transcript

I want to quote some Jewish sources to give a sense of the heightened awareness in the Jewish community of imponderables, of things happening now that are almost beyond their grasp, triggered by this unexpected outbreak of hostilities in Lebanon (2006). I am reading from a Jewish publication called The Forward. One of the principal columnists, Leonard Fein, writes: "How can Israel minimize the damage that results from a Hezbollah victory? Specifically, how can Israel restore its deterrent capacity, so much of which depends on the myth of its invincibility?"

Israel has suffered a new kind of slight as a result of this recent altercation; namely, they have lost their mystique that has prevailed in all of the previous wars with the Arab world. There is a certain quotient, a certain dynamic, a certain Israeli capacity that brought an element of terror to the opposition that is gone. In fact, this Hezbollah has been quite defiant in opposing massive troop employment and being stubborn to be rooted out from their emplacements. They are celebrating a moral victory that Israel is not that invincible.

What does that mean for the future? If among fundamental Arab states and among the Islamists the perception that Israel is a paper tiger, or even a cardboard tiger, is allowed to persist, then why bother to make peace? Who in that world will be comfortable speaking in accents of moderation who will endorse a

two-state solution? Let there be no mistake, very many in the world wish Israel dead, and believe that just as the Crusaders were eventually defeated, so too will Israel be vanquished.

Their hateful doctrines now seem less fantastic than a month ago." And another statement I picked up, but I have forgotten where: "The Jewish authorities in America are saying Israel can no longer propose its own programs and stratagems without considering the implications for Jews elsewhere in the world. What you do reacts against us. We will catch it. Therefore we need to be consulted in any decision that you would otherwise have made for yourself." What do you do with 4000 rockets that have been raining down on Israel?

How do you protect against it? And even if Israel could push Hezbollah back a certain distance into Lebanon, what will prevent them from coming again, or firing more powerful rockets from a greater distance that will reach even further targets? In other words, Israel is becoming increasingly indefensible, humanly speaking. We lived through the Cold War, we lived through other crises in modern times, but there is nothing that begins to touch the magnitude of what Islam represents as a threat to Israel and to the world.

In their religious fanaticism, they are assured that they are justified in their violence, and that they intend the Islamic faith to possess the whole world. But Israel's presence is a particular insult to an area that is historically thought to be Islamic. I have often said that those who are so quick in their sentimental affinity toward Israel will be the first to abandon her, and to find fault, and contend against what they formerly purported to love. They loved it when it was fair weather sailing, when Israelis were cute to pinch on the cheek.

When they are no longer so cute, but are acting in ways that offend the sensibility of the world, how do we stand with them then? God has got to bring His ancient people, the Jews, to the end of their own moral presumption, and if they will not receive the Word of God, of the truth that God says is the condition of man, they have got to learn it by their own experience. The principal is the same for us. You have got to become a persecutor, as Paul was, to recognize that even out of your greatest religious zeal and intention, the end of it was persecution and murder against God himself.

This revelation resulted in the conversion of a persecutor to becoming an apostle, and something of a comparable kind will be necessary for the nation Israel. If you do not believe that you are capable of David's adultery and murder, you will become an adulterer and a murderer in your experience to bring you to a place that is Davidic. Only then will you understand how far God is willing, and must go, with a nation for it to fulfill its own divine call as a nation of priests and a light unto the world.

There is a remarkable corollary between appreciating and esteeming Jesus as the Son of man in His glory before His road to Calvary, and then identifying with the same figure in His crucifixion, in His being marred more than any man, without beauty that we should desire Him. It is one thing to be related to an attractive Israel, but when Israel becomes unattractive, and will have no beauty that any nation or any people will desire her, will we still continue to be in identification?

It is the same remarkable parallel. Who can embrace that bloodied figure on the cross? Even the two disciples on the road to Emmaus were completely dejected, disappointed and fallen. So the church now will be tested in much the same way with Israel's increasing death, so to speak, her loss of beauty, her loss of character, and the noble intention that this state would be an example to Gentile nations of what a Jewish state can be. Israel is increasingly being compelled to act in ways by which that intention is

contradicted, and must be contradicted.

How can any nation, let alone Israel, presume to think that it can fulfill its own destiny on the basis of its own virtue and its own ability? Do we, as God's people, understand the process of this emptying, and will we continue to be identified and loyal in our covenant relationship with that people and its God no matter what their appearance, no matter what form they take? Some of us are facing this issue in our marriages, where the wife or husband freaks out, and acts in reprehensible ways that violate every moral sensibility you have.

You want to spit out your guts at the shameful turnabout in completely inexplicable conduct. Your covenant is being tested, your loyalty is being tested, your willingness to believing God is being tested, that however despairing the situation and the condition, it is calculated for your own good. Through the trial brought by the person in that condition, you are being sifted and refined in a way that you never before would have known. There is a remarkable corollary between that and what is ahead for Israel.

We are not just talking about some abstract principle in the world, but something at the heart of the mystery of reality itself, of which covenant is the binding, keeping power, no matter what. No matter how ugly, no matter how disappointing the situation, we are bound to God by covenant, and to His purposes, and to the nation, Israel. We stand with Israel, but not in some kind of sentimental loyalty. We are not crestfallen and disillusioned if Israel fails to show itself admirably.

We are bracing ourselves for greater disappointments, greater failures, greater painful revelations. It will test us as Gentile believers. When the first stones were thrown in the eighties, in the first intifada, something went off in my heart; it was the beginning of the end. Stones thrown by children seemed quite harmless, but the end thereof will be the destruction of the state of Israel. The age is going to end in tragedy, devastation, violence and upheaval, in things that we have not been prepared to face, and it will come to our own shores as well.

There will be Jews in flight, not only from Israel, but from other places in which they have, up to now, enjoyed a measure of safety. We need to anticipate that coming. They will come to us completely unglued, disoriented, panic-stricken and bewildered. They need to be received with calmness by those who have anticipated their coming, and can explain to them their distress, and give it to them in the prophetic context, and heal them of their bruises. This is the great drama of the predominantly Gentile church in the last days.

We have very little anticipation and preparation for it, but the clock is ticking away. We need to come of age, give up our dreams, things that are vain, and any hope that there will be some settlement, some solution, and some way in which tragedy can be averted. We need to realize that devastation and tragic consequence will come and will increase. A tremendous moral burden is coming on that nation, but sorrow and grief precede an everlasting joy. Sorrow and despair must come first, and it will flee away, but not before it has come.

So we need to know how to assuage the pain of those who have not a biblical understanding, who have not a knowledge of God, and who do not understand prophecy. Even in Orthodox Judaism, prophecy is suspect, and rarely alluded to or understood. So our role is critical for the psychological, physical and morally survival of the remnant of Israel as they come to us in their final extremity. How are we doing now with each other? Are we seeing each other according to the flesh or by the Spirit?

It is an important question for us in our relationship in the body of Christ. It will reflect on how we view Israel, as well. We need to see beyond the apparent and the visible things. We need to see the hand of God in the spouse who has freaked out. He is well able to bring that person to a sound mind. We need to bear now with this present aberration that cannot be reasonably or rationally explained, giving an assurance to that person, that no matter how detestable you have become, you are still loved.

We are not abandoning you because you have lost your attractiveness or that you are acting in a reprehensible way. In fact, this is the test of our covenant loyalty, and we intend to persuade you, and by it to win your confidence that this is the very love of God that surmounts disappointment in the things that are outward and external. Marriages are collapsing both in the church and outside of it. So we need to come into a proper covenantal place in which we stand confident in God that He knows the end from the beginning, and He is not going too far, and that whatever is required, He will perform.

Even His judgments need not only to be acknowledged, but to be praised. When His judgments are in the world, the world will learn righteousness. No matter how painful those judgments are, they are needed, and we must not balk or find fault with God by murmuring in our hearts that He has gone too far. Not only have we idealized or sentimentalized Israel, but we have done the same with Christ, and projected a human view rather than the actuality of a crucified, resurrected one.

We need to embrace the Lord in His marred condition, and avoid a sentimental and humanistic embrace of a Jesus who "does us favors." There is a level of sentiment that has come into the church with regard to Jesus. We have garlanded the cross with roses, but we need to come to a foundational embrace of the Lord in His bloodied and battered condition. Having come to that, we are protected from unreality. The embrace of the Lord in the heart of His suffering is a provision from God for all that would offend our humanity and our sensibilities.

Once we can embrace the crucified Christ, what is there to offend us, either in Israel, or in our spouses, or in man, or the church? The fact that we are so easily offended and will move from one fellowship to another because somebody looked at us crosswise, or didn't give us the recognition we thought was our due, shows how thin-skinned we are, living an idealized and imaginative Christian life that is not real. So, we need to get to the heart of reality, which is the cross.

We talk about our priestly identification, our pathos, our identification with a grieving Israel, but we need also an identification with a sorrowing God, to come into the bowels of His own concern and hurt. Not many believers talk like that. Who is willing to stand with Jesus in His present suffering, His present anguish of soul? The priest has a double obligation to stand before God on behalf of men, but also to stand with God for God's own sake in priestly commiseration and identification.

That is rare to be found, and probably a painful thing to obtain to make yourself a candidate for those sorrows. All of a sudden you have covenanted with the Lord: "I want to share the sorrows of your heart as you look over your stricken nation and people, and even the condition of the church." Then you find out on Monday that your wife is in bed with another man, or some other devastation of a kind you could not have imagined, that would never have befallen you if you had not covenanted to come into such a sharing of His grief.

We should not see ourselves as disconnected and isolated individualities, but rather a body that is corporate, tempered and one. The issue of Israel is a requirement to come into this unity, this reality of the corporate body of Christ, and break the power of our individual and private self, our identity apart from the

rest of the body. So the great issues are not with Israel. Israel will be acted upon; she will be incapable of any act in defense or support or fulfillment of herself.

Anything that comes to her must come from outside of herself; namely, from that one who will succor her, and prevail for the birth of the nation, someone who will suffer the wracking pains of someone else's labor, because the nation itself will be too weak and too inept to perform it. I am always praying, "Lord, bring us into your high seriousness." There is so much play-acting in Christendom. You only have to watch the tele-evangelists to know what I mean. It is so contrived, and my poor, dear black brethren are most responsive to the hype, yet they are in more urgent need of the reality of the Gospel than anyone else.

They are suffering a racial genocide even now in America, and they can't afford to be entertained and come to a "spiritual high" that will soon enough dissipate. They need authentic messengers of the Gospel of the cross beside the fact of the role to which God will call them to the Jew in the last days. We visualize, especially in urban centers, believing blacks standing between the defenseless Jew and their outraged kinsmen, and give their lives and shed their blood for the defense of Jews who would otherwise have perished.

So there is a remarkable drama taking place at every level, of which we need to be aware. We did not elect ourselves to be in this world at this time. We are moving toward crises that will make us to stagger, that is painful to behold, and yet will become increasingly painful. Therefore, we need to be free of sentiment, of imagining, of idealizing, of romanticizing, of all of those kinds of things that are at war with reality. We need a love for the truth, even hard truth, for truth by nature is hard before it is glorious.

Only in that condition will we be able to be for Israel an island of calm and peace in a time of their deepest hysteria and panic, and to show her another reality. We need priestly identification with the things that caused Jesus sorrow. We should not count it a surprise if we are suffering new physical ailments, new distresses, new marital discord, collapse of the economy, loss of income, or things that take us by surprise. They are gentle provisions to bring us increasingly to the place of trust and confidence in God.

We are privileged to be elected to be the last generation. God has saved us from an easier time, a more comfortable hour. This is our calling, our destiny, our privilege. We receive it with gratitude and joy, for so much greater will be our reward. Transcribed from a Ben Israel prophetic school 2006 message.

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