



Postscript (P.S.): A Conversation about Israel and Palestine

Most everyone knows what it means to have finished writing a letter, ready to sign your name, when another thought enters your mind. If it had been a phone call, you think of what you wish you'd said before you hung up. But because it's a letter, you simply write, "PS," followed by a final thought or two.

When we finished our presentation on the situation in the Holy Land (a term that both Jews and Muslims use comfortably), we felt good about how it had gone. We had covered for the most part what we had planned to address, especially how we would not be presenting a pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian perspective but rather a pro-humanitarian one. Still, it's that little phrase "for the most part" that stuck with us on the Monday after our presentation. There were things left unsaid. Thus, think of this as a postscript of sorts, five ideas we wish we had developed more fully and/or introduced.

- Amy-Jill Levine, who is an Orthodox Jew and a scholar of New Testament (a most unusual combination to say the least) claims that trying to summarize what Jews believe about anything is impossible. Why? Because Jews have diverse views on things just like other people groups, Muslims, Christians.
- One of the biggest obstacles to peace in general and the two-state solution in particular involves Jerusalem. The city is currently divided into East and West, the former part of the West Bank. On tours, people move back-and-forth between the two regularly, as do citizens. But the Temple Mount is considered holy by both Jews and Muslims. It is hard to imagine either group ever sharing that site with the other.
- We mentioned briefly how the Zionist movement was not a sinister plot on the part of the Jews scattered throughout Europe, nearly so much as a people fleeing the Nazis, trying to find a place to live. Unfortunately, the movement included zealots willing to commit violence in the name of their cause. Anti-Zionism is not the same as anti-Semitism. But the latter can sneak in easily enough when you're not careful.
- The artwork on the first and the last couple of slides was by the highly controversial UK artist Banksy. But for all his perceived biases favoring the Palestinians, it's refreshing to see two boys, one Jewish and the other Muslim, looking at each other with some measure of curiosity and innocence. In the piece, they are separated by barbed wire, true. But we all know that someone would have to teach these children to hate each other.
- We tried so hard to be fair to both sides, to paint not with black and white but gray. Hopefully, we succeeded. If we were not fair to both, that's on us. We will try to do better. That Jewish New Testament scholar, A. J. Levine, used to bring her young son to classes she taught at Vanderbilt Seminary in Nashville. She once told her students, "Don't ever say anything that could hurt this child." Wise counsel. The same goes for Palestinian kids.

Grace and Peace,

Mike Graves and David May

P.P.S. "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me."