The Holocaust of Our Grace

By Jeremy Lucas

Among the traditional topics that usually hit our eyes as grace believers, most of them revolve around understanding our present dispensation and the doctrine to which we might find application or instruction. While that is absolutely essential to our progress in the Word of God, there are occasional issues that arise in the world or in our lives that sometimes go ignored in our endeavors to keep things under tight wrap. No doubt there were many of you who awoke on Wednesday morning of September 12, 2001 and sincerely needed a faithful believer to address your state of mind. Or still others remember the events of the Vietnam War and recall how your walk in Christ might have been enriched (or perhaps was) by the words of a pastor or teacher sharing their heart, their insight, or their views on the matters that are affecting your daily vision.

We live in a world that hits us hard from the left and then hits us just as hard from the right. And in many of our assemblies, fellowships, or discussion groups, we can often get so lost in our drive to discuss technicalities of Scripture that we forget the most prevalent issues that are plaguing our homes and relationships like war, divorce, abortion, homosexuality, or even immigration.

The following topic is one that may well hit some of you between the eyes. But most certainly it won't strike you like those fists of the world that would wish your undoing. Rather, if this manages to have an impact, it will race to the hearts of those who have been unsure of how to react. "React to what," you ask?

When you, as a grace believer, see things happening in Israel on the news or in the paper and you're not sure how to react. When you, as a grace believer, know things are happening to the Jews and yet because of your doctrine, somehow reach a position of apathy... not because you cease to care, but because you fear what your compassion might imply about your understanding of the Word. These are the things that we're going to look at in the following presentation.

In preparation for a course on Hitler's Germany, I recently bought a book addressing the history of Anti-Jewish sentiment around the world. For some reason, my association with World War II usually makes a distinction of European powers at war with American coming up the rear for a final victory over Germany and the end of the war. But in the process of reading this non-fiction account of pre-WWII ideologies, it occurred to me just how many views have existed about Israel and the Jews.

Some of the more emotional images of the Holocaust can be seen in the following depiction:

WARNING: THE FOLLOWING IS NOT A COMFORTABLE READ!

"Men had their tongues or eyes cut out, women were raped and murdered, babies thrown to the ground and trampled to death...other groups of Jews were forced to undress, sing, dance and perform

'insane exercises' while Polish peasant onlookers, including women and children, applauded." --Robert S. Wistrich, Hitler and the Holocaust, 2003 by Phoenix Publications in London.

Probably the most devastating image in the above statement is what happened to the most vulnerable Jews... the children.

In the present day of modern culture and progressive notions of "freedom for all men," we (as Americans) have still managed to turn our eyes on the genocide and mass murder of many groups around the world (Rwanda, Sudan, etc.). But what's provocative about the Holocaust is how views have shifted regarding "the Jews" from before Hitler to long after his suicide.

What I'd like to discuss with you today is something that I've seen vary even among "grace believers" and their perception about Israel.

In much of modern Christendom, there is a seemingly underlined agenda to "protect" Israel (and the Jews) from those things that are counter to their safety. As in, the more recent American presidents have appeared to have at their core a desire to "make peace" in the middle east... mainly between Israel and Palestine. But what's interesting is that the Americans (more recently) have tended to play the part of Israel's ultimate protector and savior no matter what they do to initiate problematic situations. For religious reasons? Perhaps.

In the frame of reference that pre-Hitler people had about Jews, there was a prominent view that grew to be called "Anti-Semitism" and it was essentially a belief that the Jews were an alien race without a home... and more spiritually speaking... that they were the alien race who crucified the Lord Jesus Christ (He whom most of the world identifies... calling themselves Christian in wide respect). What came about from this frame of mind was the idea that the Jews were a horrible group who, at their core, had nothing pure to offer any society.

But what's interesting about this frame of mind (not the results of ideology) was that there wasn't anything incorrect about it. Who was it who put Jesus Christ to death according to history and the Word of God? Indeed it was the Jews. Who was it that Peter referred to horribly in Acts 2 as the murderers of Christ? Again, it was the Jews.

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard [this], they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men [and] brethren, what shall we do?" Acts 2:36

The strange thing about "anti-Semitism" is that from 70AD (the final destruction of Jerusalem) to 1948 (the rebirth of Israel as a nation under mandates initiated from World War II)... almost 1900 years... the belief that the Jews were the murderers of Christ was, as already mentioned, not incorrect. So where was the break in logic? Where was it that such a conclusion would lead to the raids of Jewish homes by the First and Second Crusades? Why would anti-Semitism become so obsessive that it would mean ending the lives of tens of thousands of Jews during the Spanish Inquisition? What was it about the belief that "the Jews killed Jesus" that so angered the Christian majority?

As believers in His grace, would we for any reason have our salvation be any different? Would we wish for a history that did not include the sacrifice of Christ Jesus? If you find yourself a little uncomfortable with this question, then you're sitting exactly in the same seat as people have been for 2000 years. Surely we would not BE who we are as His Body if He had not died, been buried, and rose again, but do we reflect on history as a pleasurable thing under which we'd have it the same way again? Would we WANT, in our heart of hearts to see our Lord crucified once again? Absolutely not! And yet we do desire it for the cause of what He has given us in Himself!

"For [it is] impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put [him] to an open shame." Hebrews 6:4-6

For the Hebrew believers, the concept of "crucifying the Son of God" once again was an absurd and shaming idea. By their actions, did they desire that He endure such a crucifixion over and over?

Likewise, a view of the Jews as "those who killed the Lord Jesus Christ" puts all believers (Hebrew or Gentile regardless) into a quandary of consideration. Do we look at them and never forget (forgive) their actions of the past so as to imply that we have some sort of anger for what they did to our Lord? Or on the other hand, do we wish for them to have never crucified Christ and in so wishing, hold out hope for another type of salvation to have come?

Its an issue that cuts so deep to many of our hearts that we are left, as many did in the past, not knowing how to really feel or react to Israel as a nation. When we see Israel on the news and recognize the battles that rage on between they and Palestine, are we numb to these events because of anti-Semitism or worse...in our grace believing reference... believe Israel has been set aside and therefore doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things?

As I continued to read over the accounts of world-wide anti-Semitism, there was an odd thing that stood out to me. While President Roosevelt had every intention of entering the war for the cause of putting Hitler to rest sooner, our legislation would not sign a declaration of inclusion for America. And as a result, Japan managed to get us involved through a very different manner (December 7, 1941 and Pearl Harbor), but it wasn't until nearly 3 or 4 years after millions had been slaughtered across Europe in concentration camps established and instituted for the purpose of removing this "stain" from the human race.

Massive genocide was happening on a grander scale than anything we have seen before it or seen after it, but the world reaction could be summed up like this:

"Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, a fervently Catholic member of the Council for Aid to the Jews (Zegota) founded in late 1942, was profoundly shocked by the demoralization created in Polish ranks by the 'universal, ominous silence' surrounding the massacre of millions of Jews. She also noted with horror the lack of protests in England and America..." --Wistrich

The question is often asked of the world... why did the Holocaust happen? How could it happen in a compassionate world? How could it happen under the watch of Christians who seem to care so much about human rights?

The answer?

[Believe it or not, I've heard this phrasing from a "grace" pulpit.]

"What happens to Israel... what happens to the Jews... it doesn't matter."

Why did such a horrifying genocide happen? Because the Christian public at large couldn't have cared less. "They were Jews. They killed our Savior. If Hitler kills them... if he doesn't kill them... so what? They're murderers."

Seem absurd? It certainly does to me. But you have to consider that this was EXACTLY what was happening 70 years ago and in its own twisted way... is still happening today.

Our Apostle Paul speaks of Israel with a broken heart:

"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:" Romans 9:1-3

While we know that Paul's heart went out to his kinsmen of the flesh, we know that most believers today are not connected to Israel in the flesh as he was. And for some of us, there is a devastating frame of reference that we develop in our goal to "rightly divide" the Scriptures without "rightly applying" what we've learned. Certainly each of us are in agreement on the basic foundations of our present dispensation under grace and through a Body that is neither Jew or Gentile distinctly, but once we have such information, what should we think of this new nation that has developed since 1948?

President Bush supports Israel because they are known as a national "ally" in the world. But does he not also support them for potentially religious reasons as well? Perhaps a feeling that if they were to be successful in their development as a nation, the Lord might come back sooner?

During last semester's course entitled International Relations, I discovered that many Christians in our class have a strong empathy toward Israel because of spiritual and Biblical reasons. As you and I well know, their Biblical reasons aren't necessarily going to be based on anything grounded aside from the fact that Israel remains to be the "original" children of God. But are they far off in left field for supporting Israel as Christians? Does Israel not serve as a relatively underlining body that has produced our Savior and Lord and managed to survive 1900 years without a home to reside?

In some twisted way, there are many of us (perhaps some reading this) who deep down believe that Israel (and the Hebrew people) could be here, gone, dead, alive, thriving, hurting... and it wouldn't matter simply because we are a different group. On the call of our Apostle Paul, I implore you to reconsider your notions of apathy.

"Wherefore remember, that ye [being] in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition [between us]; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, [even] the law of commandments [contained] in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, [so] making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;" Ephesians 2:11-19

The pattern of history took a horrifying turn from this passage as the Gentiles began to idealize their salvation as something that was practically owed to them. And as a devastating result, instead of viewing the Body as an "us" or a "we" between Israel and Gentiles... we, the Gentiles, began to look at the Jews in disgust... believing that whether they live or die... it wouldn't matter. It seemed our subtle and sometimes aggressive goal was to eradicate their presence from the world so that we, the Gentiles, could assume full rights to all things related to salvation. Certainly Paul's turn toward us (and heartbreaking turn from his own people) seemed like a plausible reason to reach such extremes in our thinking, right?

GOD FORGIVE US!

The toughest question in conclusion would be this:

If tomorrow's newspaper shared information that Jews in Israel were being slaughtered left and right under the ideal of an extremist who desired to remove them from the slate of mankind... would you care? Would it matter? Would you be phased? Would your heart break?

Rather than always seeing Israel under the umbrella of our studies through which we all agree that things have changed dispensationally, we mustn't forget that in one of Paul's final letters, he referred to the Gentiles and Israelites as "fellow citizens" of the household of God. Lest we forget that they ought to receive as much compassion as we received in Christ Jesus, I write this as your admonishment in the Lord.

May you not for a minute continue to see "us" on one side and "them" on another. We are FELLOW citizens under the Author of our Faith. When that newspaper arrives on your doorstep or that clip at 11:00 shines troubling images, let your eyes not fall to apathetic reaction. Find your greater knowledge of His Word calling your compassion to those whose citizenship in Christ is equally as far-reaching as ours.

"Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible." Ephesians 6:24

Hebrew Law held Israel back from believing that they could reach across to us because we were considered "unclean." Don't let yourself look back across to them in this present age of grace and allow a further holocaust to exist in your heart, mind, body, or soul.