

Are We Palestinians' Keepers?

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Today, the world seems to be asking itself, “are *we* Palestinians’ keepers?” (i.e., should we care for Palestinian survival and the restoration of stolen land, rights, and resources?). Before the question is asked, the answer is already “YES!” (Genesis 4.9). And as violent injustices persist and worsen in Israel/Palestine (notwithstanding cease-fires), this obligation is more important now than ever.

Following the genocidal antisemitic Holocaust of Nazi Germany and its allies, *surely*, we agree that Jews and all who were persecuted needed – and need keeping (i.e., protection). We sympathize with the founding of modern-day Israel on 14 May 1948 *because* of these very oppressive genocidal circumstances. However, in order to establish the modern-day state of Israel, countless Palestinian people, Arab people, were violently displaced and killed. Palestinians’ rights to and safety in their indigenous land have been stripped since the establishment of modern-day Israel.

Sadly, some of us have been convinced by corrupted evangelical “Christian” rhetoric and incomplete biblical exegesis that it is the right of Jewish people to return to Israel and that this is part of G*d’s salvific plan. Some of us believe that this right should be realized regardless of who must suffer – even if it means the denial of rights and self-determination to others. The United States not only helped establish Israel but has also contributed untold sums of money for its militarization. Geographically, Israel is just a bit larger than New Jersey (without its post-1967 expansions), but it boasts the most technologically advanced and eighth most powerful military in the world. Meanwhile, over 70,000 Palestinians displaced as a result of the most recent airstrikes join the ranks of more than seven million before them, water is undrinkable, electricity is unreliable, and the free movement of Palestinians is prohibited. Again, we empathize with and accept the call to “keep” our Jewish siblings following the persecutions of the Holocaust and generations of antisemitism preceding and succeeding it – especially as people of African descent surviving the aftermath of the genocidal Transatlantic Slave Trade. However, we cannot suffer the lie that says that some can and should be protected at the expense of the rights and protections of others. We *cannot* defend the idea that *our* salvation should come through the suffering of others.

Jesus sets *this* example for us: through his actions he says *I* would rather suffer and die than that any of *you* (i.e., any of *us*) should have to suffer and die. How many of us would suffer first? Why do the liberation struggles of some always seem to demand the suffering, persecution, and death of others? Who can accept that the liberation struggles of post-reformation Christians justifies the genocide of indigenous people in the stolen states of “America”? And as these indigenous people still ask: how can the liberation struggles of those who fled Egypt for Beulah land justify the oppression of those found in Canaan?

Consider the ethics of Jesus, who was Black – and a first century, Palestinian Jew (James Cone):

(1) **Jesus does not protect abuses of power.** Jesus does not protect lies. Jesus does not protect those who crush others to save themselves. Jesus does not protect those who step on others to benefit themselves.

(2) **Jesus makes sacrifices.** Though he suffers (including suffering for defending those he defends), Jesus will *not* be completely destroyed. And though *we* may have to suffer – despised, rejected, and even accused of the hate we seek to dismantle, we defend the defenseless – those who throw stones at tanks, those without the missile defense of an iron dome. We, too, prevail.

(3) **Jesus empowers those with less power.** We never see Jesus trying to become the Roman Emperor; Jesus never tries to unseat the Chief Priest because he wants that job. To the contrary, notwithstanding Jesus’s relative poverty and powerlessness as he walked the earth, Jesus was *always* finding those who had *less* than him and strengthening them in mind, body, and spirit. Jesus was not looking up to climb. Jesus was looking down to lift.

Today we must take “risks of faith” (James Cone) to be Palestinians’ keepers – to give an account for their survival, for their access to resources for thriving and just peace, and for the security and belonging of their land. Their blood, along with the blood of our Black, first century, Palestinian, Jewish ancestor, Jesus, cries out from the soil. Listen. Yes, we are Palestinians’ keepers.

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