

A Brief Statement About the Conflict in Israel (Rev. Dave Latham)

I stand with Israel and against the brutal attacks and strategies of Hamas. I stand against the brutal slaughter of civilians, particularly the murders of young children, women, and the elderly. The attack on Israel was senseless, wicked, evil, and was an act of terror. There can be no room for equivocation in this. War is terrible and we should pray for the peace that only Christ can bring. I stand with Israel, like I stand with Ukraine, a nation fighting and defending itself against aggression. I pray for Israel and for Gaza, especially for our Christian brothers and sisters in both regions. I even pray for Hamas. I pray for them to repent, turn to Christ, and to stop the horrible violence. I pray for Israel to defend itself with wisdom and humility, with courage and even with mercy. I pray for Jewish people in America and abroad, that they would be protected against foolish attacks and senseless violence and prejudice, from brutal persecutions from Christians and Muslims and others. I stand with Israel as I stand with Ukraine. I pray for peace in Ukraine. I pray for Ukraine and for Russia, for repentance, and for a turning away from pride, foolishness, and war.

It can be a bit risky as a pastor because almost anything I say on this subject will be met with rolled eyes, pursed lips, and strong reactions. My objective is not to make you angry, it is actually my objective to comfort and encourage you. My call as a pastor is to help you see and interpret your world through a biblical worldview. We interpret Scripture with Scripture, we do not interpret Scripture with the news cycle. Some will clamor “We are in the last days!” - I agree. But, we have been in the last days since Christ ascended to heaven and promised to return again in glory. On the mount of Olives, Jesus spoke to His disciples (in Matthew 24:3–6): *As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.* War, strife, and bloodshed are all reminders that we live in a fallen world and we, as Christians, look with great hope to the return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We have seen this type of thing before, and we will continue to experience it until Christ returns. So, we are called to trust Christ, to be faithful to Him, and, as Jesus said in Matthew 25:13 *Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*

It is totally fine for us to differ on some of these points; many faithful Christians see some of this differently. In the end they may be right, and I may be wrong. There is no reason to get mad; you may disagree, but we can live in fellowship with one another and sharpen and help one another. The writer of Hebrews gives us a wonderful charge: *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* Every day that passes brings us one day closer to that Great Day.

I also stand with Israel in another sense – that the church of Jesus Christ is the true Israel of God. The church is God’s chosen people and nation, made up of multitudes of peoples and spread throughout the nations of the world. This was always God’s plan. Christ, the Messiah, died for the sins of Israel and the peoples of the world. The gospel is for the Jew first, then for the Greek, and for all — for Romans, barbarians,

slaves and free peoples. It is for Africans, Asians, Europeans, Americans (South, Central and North), Pacific Islanders, etc. As Scott Clark said, *“salvation is by grace, not by race”* and this is incredibly good news for those of us who are not ethnic Jews. The apostle Paul, a man who lived the majority of his life as an observant Jew, spoke about the power of the gospel and how it unites all those who trust Christ by faith alone. Galatians 3:26–29 *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.* So, we all can sing the old Sunday School song and all believe its promise as those united to Christ by faith: *“Father Abraham, had many sons...and many sons had father Abraham...I am one of them, and so are you. So let’s just praise the Lord.”*

Israel of old was the church of God as it was called out, cut out from the world, and was being prepared to become a beautiful edifice to house the glory of God in Christ and to welcome in the whole world. Israel of old was like a building with scaffolding still on it. Now the scaffolding is off and we look to Christ alone as the visible sign of God’s presence has moved from a physical temple into the hearts of His people. Before His ascension, Jesus gave His disciples a few parting words that still apply to His church today. In Acts 1:7–8 *He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* This is our call as the church: to be witnesses of Jesus Christ and to proclaim the good news of the gospel to the ends of the earth until Christ returns. I found these words from Tabletalk magazine helpful: *The true temple is not in the stones and beauty of Jerusalem’s worship center but in the resurrected body of Jesus. He will build the temple in the three days in which He will enter into death and emerge as its conqueror. Even the glory of the incarnation, when the disciples saw the glory of God in the flesh of Jesus, will be eclipsed by the glory of the resurrection. Here is the essence of the temple imagery: the majesty, awesomeness, weightiness, purity, brilliance of God will be seen in the body of Jesus which will have triumphed over the curse, brought to the dust of death but seeing no corruption. At last, Jesus is the true temple.* Again, the writer of Hebrews gives us wonderfully comforting words in Hebrews 9:11–12 *But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.*

We see continuity between the Old and New Testaments- united by one covenant of grace and one great arc of redemption. Paul wrote about how Christ has torn down the dividing wall and reminds us of the covenant promises of God to His chosen people from all nations, tribes, and tongues. He wrote in Ephesians 2:11–14 *Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.* So, all of the promises of God (even those given to Old Testament Israel) find their “yes and amen in Christ” as 2nd Corinthians 1:20 reminds us.

Israel, as God's covenant people of old, were his olive tree. God made room for more branches to be put into that tree, Gentiles like most of us are, who have found life in his Son. We do not believe in "replacement theology", we believe in "the ingrafting of the nations" into one tree across the entirety of God's plan of redemption for humanity. The first few chapters (and the last few chapters) of the Bible reference a tree. Many old branches were pulled out, as Jesus was rejected as the promised Messiah, to make room for us Gentiles. There will come a time where many Jews will be grafted back into that tree, as it has now become large enough for the whole world to find rest and shade in its branches. I pray, as Paul did even as he shared with his kinsmen- the Jewish people, for the conversion of massive numbers of Jews to the gospel of Jesus Christ. I pray that many, even in this time of great suffering, will turn to Christ and trust Him by faith alone. There is salvation in no one else; there is no other name under heaven by which people might be saved, for Jews as well as Gentiles. I stand with them, and pray for them, that they would see Jesus, and rejoice in their Messiah, and be grafted back into the True Vine, Jesus crucified and risen, to bring life to the world.

Christ Himself wept over Jerusalem in Luke 19:41-42 as He thought about the rejection by the Jews of the prophets and of Himself as the Messiah. Yet, even this rejection was promised in Isaiah 6:10 and 53:1. So, we echo the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 11:1-2a: *I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.* So, our current prayer echoes Paul's own prayer for the Jews in Romans 10:1 *Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.* May the words of Micah 4:3 comfort us: *He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.*

Come Lord Jesus. We wait for your return when war will be no more. Give us the faith to trust you. Amen.