



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday December 29, 2023 ~ Parsha: Vayechi

Jesus Was Not A Palestinian

Dear JCCP/CBT Family,

Among the most pernicious aspects of Israel's current war against Hamas has been the assault on truth, facts, and memory. As we have painfully learned, this brutal war is waged not only with military weapons, but also through an extensive disinformation campaign waged by Israel's enemies, and their willing accomplices throughout the western world. We see this daily in irresponsible reporting in the media, the tolerance and even acceptance of antisemitic rhetoric and behavior on college campuses, and mouthed by politicians.

We are told that Israel is a colonial enterprise, denying the 4000 year history of the Jewish people in the land of Israel.

We were told that Arab and Muslim narratives regarding Israel must be accepted uncritically, lest we be accused of racism and Islamophobia, while Jewish and Israeli narratives are subject to a level of scrutiny unparalleled in modern history.

We are told regularly that Gaza is under Israeli occupation, when the truth is that Israel retreated from Gaza in 2005 and placed under the control of the Palestinian Authority. After a bloody series of battles against the Palestinian Authority, Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007 and has remained in power since that time. Hamas, not Israel, built the tunnels, bought the weapons, and stole billions of dollars of international aid directed to Gaza which has been used to wage war against Israel for the past 16 years.

Since the day after the war began with Hamas' brutal attack on Israel and the massacre of 1200 Israelis, we've heard calls for an immediate cease-fire from both friends and foes alike, neglecting to mention that Hamas has broken every single cease-fire since its first military conflict with Israel in 2009. Yes, every single one of them, including the recent cease-fire in November that led to the release of 105 hostages. Yes – Hamas broke that one too.

I could go on and on. And I am tempted to do so, but there was one particular assault on history and memory that is a particular concern during this holy season for our Christian neighbors and friends.

So let me say it plainly. Jesus was not a Palestinian.

We have been seeing this claim for a long time now, but especially this year, we are seeing the spread of this ridiculous and dangerous idea that Jesus was a Palestinian. While once relegated to the fringe and margins of the anti-Israel movement, promoted primarily though not exclusively in Palestinian media, the European left, and the far-left end of American Protestant Christianity, this idea has entered the mainstream in recent years. And it is not shared to add new information or to understanding the life and ministry of Jesus. Its sole purpose is to denigrate Jews, and once again, to sever the link between the Jewish people and the land of Israel.

It's hard to ignore this budding movement. On Christmas Day, Father Edward Beck claimed on CNN, that Jesus was a "Palestinian Jew," trying his best to make comparisons between the situation in ancient Israel under Roman occupation to that of Gaza today.

US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez posted a story which claimed that Jesus "was born in modern-day Palestine," compared Israel to the Romans, and absurdly asserted that "this high Christian holiday is about honoring the precious sanctity of a family that, if the story were to unfold today, would be Jewish Palestinians."

Most other proponents of this idea routinely refer to Jesus as a Palestinian without any mention of the essential truth that he was born a Jew, lived as a Jew, and died as a Jew.

So allow me to share some simple facts, which, even in an age when traditional orthodoxies are so regularly challenged, will remain true, despite the desire to use every single avenue, no matter how historically inaccurate, false, or antisemitic, to wage war on Israel and the Jewish people.

Jesus was born in Judea. He identified as a Jew. Jews living in Judea at the time would have described themselves as living in the land of Israel, despite the Roman occupation. It's that simple.

The Jewish people revolted against Rome in the years 66 through 70 CE. Sadly, that revolt ended with spectacular failure. The Second Temple was destroyed. One million Jews were killed during the revolt, and another million or so were exiled from the land, beginning the long period of wandering and exile which ended with the reestablishment of the state of Israel in 1948. In the century that followed the destruction of the Second Temple, the remaining Jews in the land of Israel were persecuted mercilessly. Indeed, the martyrology service on Yom Kippur, which tells the story of the suffering and murder of the 10 great sages of the Mishnah, is a liturgical rendering of the actual suffering that took place during this period. There were several revolts against Roman rule, the most famous of which was the [Bar Kochba](#) revolt. This rebellion, which lasted from 132 through 135 CE was a turning point in Jewish history. Though initially successful, (indeed, the initial military successes against the Roman army were almost unimaginable at the time) the Romans soon gained the upper hand, and the rebellion ended in bitter defeat. In addition to even greater suffering and persecution in the aftermath of this failed revolt, including the forced exile of most of Israel's remaining Jews, the Roman emperor Hadrian renamed the entire region *Syria Palestina*. His purpose was to demonstrate that the Jews were no longer owners of the land.

Jesus, living over a century before the revolt against Rome, would never have called himself a Palestinian. Furthermore, while the New Testament regularly mentions Israel and Jews, often quite negatively, Palestine is not mentioned even once, which, of course makes sense, because it did not exist at the time.

Calling (or recasting) Jesus a Palestinian serves no Christian moral, theological, or religious duty. In fact, if any of your friends growing up made such a claim at CCD or

Sunday school, they would've likely been rebuked for their foolishness and disrespect. Making such a claim only serves a larger political goal. That's why this once fringe idea is gaining traction in the mainstream. It is another weapon to denigrate Jews and sever the connection between Jews and the Land of Israel. And that's why I'm taking time this week to talk with you about it. Because even in this season of the year that is so special and sacred for Christian neighbors and friends, it is Jesus's identity, not his ministry, that is receiving so much attention. Your Christian neighbors and friends might not be aware of this, or the danger it represents. Sadly, the Jewish people don't have that luxury.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner