

Should Christians Support Israel?"

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The question asked in the title of John Hagee's book Should Christians Support Israel? is not a rhetorical one. In fact, not only is an answer expected, if the reader were to come up with any answer other than a resounding YES!, he is shown to be in error.

The opening sentence of chapter one is, "If you do not believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God ... put this book down!"

Indeed, how can anyone claiming to love God and the Bible come to any other conclusion than yes, we must support Israel and the Jewish people.

It is essential that Christian evangelicals address the issues Mr. Hagee confronts. And it is refreshing when someone in his position takes a stand in support of Israel and the Jewish people.

The author, a graduate of Southwestern Assemblies of God College, is the senior pastor of Cornerstone Church located in San Antonio. The church has a staff of forty-five and a membership exceeding 2,800 families. He is the president and chairman of the board of Global Evangelism television and is seen on cable TV over the TBN network. The Jewish community of Texas has bestowed upon him numerous awards including "Humanitarian of the Year" by the San Antonio B'nai B'rith Council and the Zionist organization of America's Israel Service Award in both, Dallas and Houston.

The book consists of three major parts: (1) The Roots of Christian Anti-Semitism, (2) Christian Myths Concerning the Jews and (3) Our Debt of Gratitude to the Jewish People. The first part summarizes the history of anti-Semitism from the first century until today. The second portion of the book takes a detailed look at the Church, the Messiah and the Jewish right to the land of Israel from a Biblical and historical point of view. The final part of the book reminds Christians of the importance of the Jewish people to their own faith.

The book, although apparently written to all who call themselves Christians (the preface is written by Dr. W. A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas) focuses most directly on the Roman Catholic Church.

Indeed, after stating that anti-Semitism has its origin and its complete root structure in Christianity, Hagee explains that this doctrine of hate toward the Jewish people did not begin with the "Holocaust and Adolf Hitler who said, 'I am only continuing the work of the Catholic Church'." Nor did it begin with Martin Luther who died "a vicious and bitter anti-Semite because the Jews would not accept his new brand of Christianity."

According to the author all of this anti-Semitism and more had its origin in the Roman Catholic Church. He writes of the anti-Semitism of the early church fathers ... Chrysostom, Origen, Justin, and Jerome, and of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 which decided that all Jews must wear the 'Badge of Shame' and tithe to the Roman Church. In the account discussing the Crusades and Spanish Inquisition Hagee writes:

"Where are the Jews of Spain? They were murdered in cold blood by the Roman Church! Where are the Jews of Portugal? They were murdered in cold blood by the Roman Church! Where are the Jews of Italy and France? They were murdered in cold blood by the Roman Church. Where are the Jews of Austria and Hungary? A Godless theology of hate that no one dared try to stop for a thousand years, produced a harvest of horror. When the Pale Rider of Death thrust in the sickle, the rivers of Europe turned red with the blood of the Jews."

Hagee also includes a three page, side by side comparison between Nazi policy and Roman Church policy from fifteen hundred years earlier attempting to demonstrate how Roman Church policy shaped the policy of the Third Reich.

Regarding the roots of anti-Semitism, I wonder if any thought was given by the author to ancient Egypt or even Satan himself?

Having established the existence of anti-Semitism within the framework of Christianity John Hagee now arrives at what I believe is the reason this book was written. Indeed, the reason Mr. Hagee is so well received and honored by the Texas Jewish community.

He holds that because of the deplorable way Christianity has carried on for two thousand years there is no way Jewish people would want to accept its message. Failing to consider the Biblical difference between true born-again believers - Christians - and the Roman Church, Hagee argues that Biblically or otherwise there is no reason for Jewish people to accept Jesus as Messiah.

He makes this clear in the chapter titled: "Myth: The Jews Rejected Jesus as Messiah." With the reasoning being how can one reject something when it has never been offered to him?

This point is made with a number of questionable comments:

"There is not one verse of Scripture in the New Testament that says Jesus came to be the Messiah." (In Mark 14:61-2, in response to the question, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?", Jesus answered, "I am.")

"If God intended for Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel, why didn't He authorize Jesus to use supernatural signs to prove He was God's Messiah, just as Moses had done?"

"The Jews for Jesus (the five thousand fed on two loaves and five fish) wanted Him to be their Messiah, but He flatly refused."

"The Jews did not reject Jesus as Messiah, it was Jesus who rejected the Jewish desire for Him to be their Messiah."

If Jesus was not the Jewish Messiah then whose Messiah was He? Hagee argues that He came exclusively for the gentiles. In fact, he says that if the Jewish people had accepted the suffering Messiah, every gentile would have been forever lost.

In Hagee's chapter "Myth: The Old Covenant is Dead", he stands in defense of his statements that the Jewish people (or at least many of them) do not need the Messiah, Jesus for salvation. He argues that the Redeemed Remnant of Romans nine through eleven is Jewish people who have some type of powerful and special relationship with God. This is completely separate from believing in Jesus. In fact, he exhorts his readers to "put an end to this Christian chatter ... that the Jewish people ... can't be in the will of God until they convert to a 'Gentile-ized' Christianity."

In the section regarding the Jewishness of Jesus, the author goes to great lengths reminding his readers that Jesus was just as Jewish as those around Him. However, his textual criticism, at times, appears insufficient. For example, he states the "face cloth" in the empty tomb of Jesus was His prayer shawl or tallit. Jesus, knowing Peter would burst into the empty tomb, took the time, as any good Jew would, to precisely fold the prayer shawl. "You have to be alive to fold the shawl and you have to be Jewish to know how."

The final part of the book tells of the great debt the nations have to the Jewish people. The late Sam Levenson wrote,

"It's a free world. You don't have to like Jews, but if you don't, I suggest that you boycott certain Jewish products like insulin, discovered by Dr. Minkowski; the vaccine for hepatitis discovered by Baruch Blumberg; chlorhydrate for convulsions discovered by Dr. J. Von Lieberg; the Wassermann test for syphilis; the polio pill by Dr. Albert Sabin; and the polio vaccine by Dr. Jonas Salk.

"Good! Boycott! But humanitarianism requires that my people offer all these gifts to all the people of the world. Fanaticism requires that all the bigots accept diabetes, hepatitis, convulsions, syphilis, infectious diseases and infantile paralysis.

"You want to be mad? Be mad! But I'm telling you, you ain't going to feel so good."

In my opinion, Hagee's use of speculation and lack of proper documentation makes it very difficult to take his book as authoritative. From the title of the book through the last page he expects the reader to trust his opinions and sources.

He doesn't address the differences between so called "Christians" and real born again believers.

He doesn't confront the issue of Biblical Judaism vs. Rabbinical Judaism.

Finally, he uses whatever persuasiveness he possesses to discourage a witness to our Jewish brethren.

Should Christians support and love Israel and the Jewish people? Yes! And may it be evident by a sensitive yet bold witness proclaiming Messiah, Jesus as the One and Only hope for salvation and eternal life and shalom.