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Welcome

A hectic month in the Middle East, especially with the results of the Palestinian election. Some background can be found on p3. On this page I begin a series of articles that are long-delayed, on the variety of Christian attitudes towards Israel. I'd appreciate your comments, as always.

Also, on p2, the second half of an article on Tunisia – also delayed.

One Israeli journalist's view of the Hamas election victory is to be found at <http://www.metimes.com/articles/normal.php?StoryID=20060127-061401-5676r>

Email your responses to pkclark@pmbx.net & check the web for back issues.

Christian Zionism – a discussion

I received an email recently in which the correspondent asked if we could address, in e-News, the issue of “America's unwavering support for Israel” as he puts it.

He goes on to unnecessarily accuse me of being an academic(!) as he continues, “Since you're up on these intellectual exercises, perhaps you can shed your ideas on why you believe that the US supports Israel, and do you really believe that is the source of the Arab world's agitation at the U.S.?”

Well, perhaps we can develop some background to these questions, but we'll have to move forward slowly, since e-NEWS is dedicated to providing information with which people can make up their own minds.

Also, I have had comments about the role of Christians in the position of the U.S. towards Israel. *Christian Zionism* is a subject that has received much debate. Even being prepared to discuss it in a journal such as this can result in serious criticism, so I therefore do so with trepidation. This being so, I here propose a series of questions which may allow those of us who have not seriously considered our position to ‘get on board’ the discussion, as it were.

OK, not so much questions, as *themes*, through which we can approach the topic:

- ◆ *What we believe the Bible says about the future of Israel in the land promised to the Patriarchs.*
- ◆ *What does Biblical prophecy say about any conditions laid upon the Jews for their return to the Land?*
- ◆ *Since 1948 Israel has existed as a nation, but is this political entity necessarily the fulfillment of scripture?*
- ◆ *Prophecies include a wide area of the Middle East – but Israel today is only a small part of that.*
- ◆ *What freedom of action does Israel's position in prophecy allow it, and how should believers (and the nations whose behavior they influence) respond?*
- ◆ *How much should believers in other nations feel that they are responsible for the success of the return to the land?*
- ◆ *The question of how willing Israel should be to trade ‘land for peace’ is controversial, both within Israel and amongst those who have an interest in it.*
- ◆ *Does Israel's distinct position in Scripture give it a privileged position in the world today?*
- ◆ *Being a unique people throughout Scripture, should Jews be concerned that their moral conduct might influence the way God smiles upon their nationhood?*
- ◆ *Since the Jews are God's chosen people is it necessary to continue in Jewish evangelism?*
- ◆ *Should Christians always approve of the political decisions made by Jewish leaders?*
- ◆ *How significant is the presence of a Jewish state in end times prophecy?*

There is insufficient space to expand on this here, but perhaps these themes can provide an outline for a series of articles on the topic.

Positions on these themes depend upon our understanding of Biblical prophecy, but also on our perception of how much of Old Testament practice is still relevant today. Amongst believers there are numerous positions that are held concerning Israel's position in prophecy. Little thought is given to whether it is necessary to distinguish between Israel of the Bible and the modern state of Israel. Perhaps this series of articles will go some way towards allowing us to recognize where we stand in regards to these themes. As always, **your response is invited.**

Tunisia (cont. from e-NEWS 55)

France took control of Algeria in 1834 and Tunisia in 1881, after the collapse in the piracy trade left Tunisia heavily in debt. Tunisia, therefore, went through the turmoil of **World War I** under French rule, though an independence movement, *Destour*, had been in existence prior to the war. In 1934 the Neo-Destour Party (*New Constitution*) was formed by **Habib**

Bourguiba (b. Munastir, 1902), and this finally obtained independence in 1956, though Bourguiba was imprisoned by the French for 10 years.

During **World War II** Vichy France allowed Germany to occupy Tunisia and resist the Allied advance of 1942. The defeat of the Germany Army (it surrendered on May 12, 1943) allowed the Free French to take control, arrest collaborators, and depose the Bey. This last action increased local nationalist sympathies, and in 1947 the French allowed Tunis increased autonomy. Riots in 1954 persuaded France to offer full autonomy, and in 1956 this led to total independence, under the Bey of Tunis. The Bey was deposed by Bourguiba's government in 1957 and the republican constitution was established.

Disputes with France continued, with French warplanes from Algeria killing 68 in the bombing of a Tunisian village in 1958. In 1961, when France refused to evacuate a naval base at **Bizerte**, the Tunisian military surrounded the base. In the breaking

of this blockade, and the French siege of the city of Tunis, more than 1,000 Tunisians were killed. The United Nations called for a cease-fire, and then demanded that France leave Tunisia completely, which was done in October 1963.

After his initial victory Bourguiba was elected president and then re-elected each 5-year term until being named president for life in 1975. Since 1963

Bourguiba's party, the Democratic Constitution Rally, had been the only legal political party. During this period the government extended the right to vote to women and has been in the forefront of education reform in the Arab world.

When the PLO was expelled from Beirut in 1982 Tunisia gave refuge to Arafat and several hundred PLO leaders. An Israeli air raid in 1985 destroyed the PLO headquarters there.

In 1987 Bourguiba was removed from office by his Prime Minister, **Zine al Abidine Ben Ali**, a member of his own party. At this point political opposition parties were legalized. 'Free' elections followed in 1989, though Ben Ali's party gained all 141 of the seats available. Since then Ben Ali has himself been president.



The *Corsairs* were pirates based in North Africa, operating from ports such as Tripoli (Libya), Tunis, and Algiers. After the expulsion from Spain in 1492 these *Barbary Coast* raiders (the native tribes of this area of North Africa are the Berbers) set up autonomous states from which they raided shipping in the Mediterranean, Atlantic and even as far as Britain.

For a quarter of a century the US had paid tribute to the corsairs, until the *Pasha* of Tripoli attempted to increase the tribute in 1801. At that point the US attempted to suppress the corsairs, attacking them in Tripoli (1801-05) and Algiers (1815).

The 1803 expedition was ill-fated, and resulted in the capture in 1804 of the frigate *Philadelphia*. A overland raid led by Stephen Decatur enabled them to burn the ship to prevent the corsairs from profiting from the capture, and in 1805 the town of Darnah was captured.

The *Pasha* then agreed to stop exacting tribute, but demanded \$60,000 for the release of American captives.

The US bombardment of Algiers in 1815, and the British attack in 1815 were the final blows that put paid to the reign of the corsairs, sealed by the French invasion of Algiers in 1830.

Palestinian Election Results

The first Palestinian parliamentary elections were held on Wednesday, January 25th. Participants included Palestinians residing in Gaza, the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. In East Jerusalem security restrictions meant that only 5% of them were allowed to vote, selected at random and their vote used to represent the rest of the Arab East Jerusalem population. Candidates standing are represented by 11 different lists, including *Fateh* (45 on the list, led by jailed Marwan Barghouti), Hamas (standing as *Change and Reform*), *Independent Palestine List* (41, advocating non-violent resistance), *Third Way* (25, includes Hanan Ashrawi, well known political leader from the Christian community), PFLP (50, with members in a list named after an assassinated leader, *Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa*), and *Badil* (40, Arabic for 'alternative', a left-wing group).

🕒 **7pm** With a 78% voter turnout, the exit polls on Jan. 25th initially indicated a strong showing for Hamas, with 30% of the vote. At that point the US expressed its unwillingness that Fateh, under the current PM, Mahmoud Abbas, allow Hamas a presence in a modified cabinet. President Bush repeated the US policy, that they would not deal with a government that involved Hamas, unless the group renounced its stance towards Israel. The Hamas charter still calls for the destruction of the Israeli state.

🕒 **By 10:15pm** on Wednesday (Jerusalem time) other exit polls showed that Hamas may have gained as much as 42% of the vote, just behind Fateh, with as many as 53 of the 132 available seats. Hamas leaders were considering how much they would be willing to participate in a Fateh-led government, possibly with places in the Cabinet.

🕒 **2am** The 'strong showing' by Hamas led the US to reiterate, accepting the election results, but hoping that Abbas would keep Hamas in opposition.

🕒 **At 6am** Hamas members were celebrating their results, realizing that they would now have a role in any post-election government. A coalition deal – opposed by the US – would give them a significant cabinet role.

🕒 **8:30am** Within a short time, however, suspicions began to emerge that their best hopes were to be exceeded. News from Gaza and the West Bank suggested that Hamas may have gained as many as 70 of the seats, giving it an overall majority.

🕒 **Statements at 10am** reminded observers that Hamas' agenda still called for Israel's destruction, though the organization has largely observed a truce during the last 12 months, and earlier in the week accepted the possibility of negotiations with Israel.

🕒 **By 11am** Palestinian PM Ahmed Qurei and his cabinet handed in their resignations to Abbas, the PA President.

🕒 **1pm** By early afternoon the situations were reversed. Instead of questions as to whether Hamas would be allowed to participate in a Fateh government, the political maneuvering was leading Fateh to state that it would refuse to join a Hamas-led government. Abbas' opinion was that Hamas be left to govern alone, with Fateh in opposition.

🕒 **5pm** Fateh/Hamas supporters clash after the victory is celebrated by placing the Islamic green Hamas flag on the roof of the Ramallah parliament building.

🕒 **5:30pm** President Bush says the election was "a wake up call to the leadership, obviously people were not happy with the status quo."

🕒 **7pm** The Electoral commission confirms Hamas' win with 76 seats. International election observers included former President Jimmy Carter.

Why Hamas?

Since the formation of the Palestinian authority in 1994, led by Yasser Arafat, the leading party has been Arafat's Fateh. Throughout Arafat's leadership the party was seen as **corrupt and self-serving**, diverting much of its money – from tax receipts, foreign donations – to personal accounts.

In the period since 1994 Palestinians have seen **fruitless peace negotiations**, and have been disappointed by their leaders. Also, when Arafat was seen to be supporting terrorist activities whilst making promises of peace, this increased Israeli/US distrust of his intentions.

Even before his death (11/11/04) Arafat had pledged to rein in Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants, responsible for frequent attacks on Israeli targets. These attacks caused Israel to roll back steps it had taken to allow the Palestinian authority more control over the West Bank. Arafat never made good on his pledge – the militants were stronger than Arafat's police, had he been willing to confront them. Abbas wanted to approach Hamas more slowly, convincing them to lay down their weapons, rather than attempting to do this by force.

Even throughout the negotiations, Palestinians had observed **the West Bank settlements** increasing in number and size, and the security arrangements for them – roads, fences, checkpoints – preventing Palestinians from moving around the West Bank.

Since the Gaza pullout, Hamas has been firing rockets at nearby Israeli targets. Part of the Israeli response has been the use of aircraft **breaking the sound barrier overnight**, to create a climate of fear and exhaustion among the people. More recently this included nighttime bombing, dropping 'sound bombs' over populated areas, causing hearing injuries.

Disillusion with Fateh led many to look to Hamas, even though they may not identify with its Islamic radicalism. Others see Hamas as challenging the Israeli occupation, and playing a part in the withdrawal from Gaza itself. In the Arab world there is growing frustration with the West. Arab perceptions are that the US as the main supporter of Israel is not being even-handed in its condemnation of violence and broken treaties. Then, **when the US expresses its support for Abbas and Fateh**, this alone increases support for Hamas, as the main opposition party.

