

A BIBLICAL VIEW ON **ANTISEMITISM**



KERBY ANDERSON

ANTISEMITISM



Antisemitism has been in the news lately because of various comments made about Jews and Israel, and because of the many violent acts directed at Jewish people and synagogues. Especially troubling have been comments made by members of Congress that led to a watered-down House resolution condemning not just those comments but all hatred.

Representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN) tweeted, "Israel has hypnotized the world, may Allah awaken the people and help them see the evil doings of Israel." She has criticized the influence of Israel on American lawmakers who have an "allegiance to a foreign country."

While it may be tempting to say that these are merely words, Jewish people understand the power of words and how they can lead to actions against them. Columnist Cal Thomas quotes Sarah Stern (Endowment for Middle East Truth) who had this observation: "We Jews have learned from our long and painful history that words matter. Violence against Jews does not erupt in a vacuum; and the increasing ease with which antisemitic comments are uttered within certain segments of our society is deeply painful and disturbing."

Sadly, words and bigotry against Jews sometimes do erupt into violence. Robert Bowers entered a Pittsburgh synagogue and killed eleven people and injured another six people. Nearly every FBI report of hate crimes over the last decade shows that a majority of acts have been against Jewish people and Jewish targets.

What is Antisemitism?

Antisemitism has been defined as hostility toward or prejudice against Jews as a religious or racial group. A German journalist Wilhelm Marr first coined the term in the 19th century. But hatred and prejudice against Jews has existed for millennia.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance uses a definition that includes eleven key areas. This would include “calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of

Jews in the name of radical ideology.” It also includes “making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews.” And it includes those who deny the fact and scope of the genocide of the Jewish people during World War II.

That doesn’t mean that it is anti-semitic to criticize the actions of the Israeli government. Israeli citizens do that from time to time. But comparing Israeli policy to the Nazis or holding all Jews collectively responsible for actions by the Israeli government is of concern.

While it is grammatically correct to spell antisemitism with or without a hyphen, a group of scholars expressed their desire to have the term written without a hyphen. They believe that the hyphenated form legitimizes the term “Semitism” which is a pseudo-scientific racial classification that has been associated with Nazi ideology.

The Growing Problem of Antisemitism

Nearly every survey taken in the last few years points to a growing problem with antisemitism. FBI reports show an increase in antisemitic assaults, accounting for more than half of all reports. Antisemitic incidents on college campuses jumped significantly a few years ago. And while we are looking at this growing problem, it is worth mentioning that Jews only make up about 1.8 percent of the US population.

Surveys in Europe show an even greater problem. Attacks on Jews and Jewish schools and synagogues have been in the news for years. A survey of almost 6,000 Jewish people across eight nations of the European Union were asked if they considered emigrating from their home country because they didn't feel safe. Nearly half of those in France (46%) and

Hungary (48%) said they considered emigrating because of their antisemitic experiences.

Antisemitism is not merely a modern problem. In the book of Esther (3:6), we read the story of how Haman "sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus." Other pagan groups and false religions persecuted the Jews because of their belief in monotheism and their allegiance to God.

After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of Jews in AD 70, some Christians interpreted the event as a punishment for Jews for the death of Jesus. Sadly, this idea provided a foundation and justification for a Christian form of antisemitism. All sorts of myths have been spread about Jews and their practices.

One of the myths is often referred

to as “blood libel.” According to this false allegation, Jews murder Christian children in order to use their blood in the baking of unleavened bread during Passover. Proponents even taught that Jews drink blood mixed with the wine during the Passover Seder celebrations.

Another myth is the false belief that Jews are the center of a world-wide conspiracy against the West. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was a fabricated text supposedly describing a Jewish plan for global domination. This antisemitic tract was first published in Russia and then translated into various languages. It supposedly was the minutes of a meeting where Jewish leaders were discussing their goal of controlling the press and world economies.

How Should We Respond?

Most Christians accept the biblical

principle that the Jews are God's chosen people. Deuteronomy 14:2 says, "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."

This may also partially explain why antisemitism exists. God chose the Jews, and thus Satan opposes what God has chosen. If you think about it, antisemitism is irrational. Jews make up a very small percentage of the world's population. It isn't very rational to think that such a small number of people control the world's politics and economics. And hatred of Israel by Arab nations isn't very rational. Israel is about the size of New Jersey and is surrounded by Arab countries with more than 500 times the land area. Yet, Israel is the epicenter of so much of the conflict in the Middle East.

Even if someone doesn't believe the Jews are a chosen people, they should still treat the Jews with the same dignity as any other religious or ethnic group. All of us are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and worthy of respect and dignity. Antisemitism is contrary to any human rights standard that exists even in the secular world.

We should also realize that once one ethnic or religious group is singled out for persecution, it may only be a matter of time before other groups will be marked for similar acts of disrespect, intolerance, and persecution.

We should also insist through our foreign policy that other countries treat Jewish people with respect. Unfortunately, in most Muslim countries antisemitism is practiced without any sanctions from the US government.

In these countries, persecution of Jews (and Christians) is not only allowed but is often encouraged.

In America, we should also ask our elected officials to take a stronger stand against antisemitism. Some commentators talk about the Democrats' antisemitic problem and anti-Israel stance. This was not always the case for the party.

President Harry Truman was threatened by some of his cabinet not to recognize the new state of Israel, but he called their bluff. He recognized Israel within 11 minutes of David Ben-Gurion's declaration of Israel's independence on May 14, 1948. Presidential candidate Robert Kennedy was so supportive of Israel that Palestinian extremist Sirhan Sirhan assassinated him. And we should not forget the courageous stands by Senator Joe Lieberman, who was also the first Orthodox Jew put on a presidential ticket.

It is time for members of Congress and for all of us to speak out against antisemitism here in America and across the globe. The Jewish people deserve our respect and our protection.

Additional Resources

Joe Carter, "The FAQs: What Christians Should Know About Antisemitism," *The Gospel Coalition*, October 30, 2018.

Matthew Hawkins, "Six Reasons Why Christians Should Reject Antisemitism," Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, September 26, 2016.

International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, "Working Definition," <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>.

Cal Thomas, "The Democrats' Jewish Problem," *Washington Times*, March 11, 2019.

"Voters Think Democrats Have A Growing Antisemitism Problem," Rasmussen Reports, March 11, 2019.

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A Biblical View on Antisemitism
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