

## **ERSP FORUM**

### **Pentecostals, Israel and the Middle East**

**Calvin L Smith, Tony Richie, Eric Newberg, Paul Alexander.**

The aim of the ERSP Forum is to provide an arena which permits Evangelical scholars to express their views without the constraints and cumbersome nature of debates normally carried out in academic journals. Contributors are therefore invited to comment briefly on a given topic and do not see the responses of their fellow contributors prior to publication. Sometimes we ask all participants the same question or, as in this case, we will ask each scholar a different but related question aimed at providing readers with a survey of a particular issue from several angles.

For many observers classical Pentecostalism's dispensationalist tendencies help explain the movement's traditional (and substantial) support for the State of Israel. However, some Pentecostal scholars argue that the movement's dispensational roots have been somewhat overplayed, while across classical Pentecostalism there is a range of (often competing) responses to Israel and Christian Zionism. In recent years the issue has grown in importance within the movement, coming at a time when Pentecostals are becoming more politically engaged and also as the wider Evangelical world is increasingly debating Christian responses to the Middle East. Therefore in this edition we asked several scholars of Pentecostal Studies to comment on different aspects of Pentecostalism, Israel and the Middle East conflict.

#### **Is Pentecostalism inherently dispensationalist and therefore inevitably Zionist?**

**Tony Richie**  
**Church of God**

The historic Pentecostal movement is complex and variegated. I write out of my own experience in the Classical Pentecostal tradition. Although surely an oversimplification, Classical Pentecostalism is perhaps best known as comprising denominations and organizations directly connected historically and theologically with the Azusa Street Revival beginning in 1906 and led by African American pastor, William J. Seymour, a student of Charles Fox

Parham, a Holiness evangelist from the southwestern United States. Classical Pentecostalism is related to but distinct from the Charismatic Renewal movement arising in the mid-twentieth century among mainline Protestant and Catholic groups and various international expressions of Pentecostal-type churches or groups. Even within Classical Pentecostalism significant diversity exists. However, the movement is doubtless best known for its emphasis on a distinctive experience of the Holy Spirit (Spirit baptism) subsequent to Christian conversion and accompanied by speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*) and possibly other spiritual gifts (*charismata*).

Classical Pentecostalism has a strong emphasis on a stirring eschatology. Often its eschatology has been heavily influenced by dispensationalist categories. Some (e.g., Peter Althouse, *Spirit of the Last Days*) argue that early Pentecostals were more likely to advocate a threefold form of “dispensationalism” rooted in the Trinity than the kind popularized in the nineteenth century by J.N. Darby (and later C.I. Schofield) that became common among many later Pentecostals and which now more often than not comes to mind in connection with the term. The Trinitarian form saw history as an unfolding of successive ages or dispensations of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with each calling forth the other and climaxing in Christ’s Second Coming. As such, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as Pentecostals experienced and understood it, had specific eschatological significance.

Pentecostals’ pneumatological eschatology was displayed in their “latter rain” theology, drawn from the precipitation cycles of ancient Israel referenced in the Bible (Joel 2:23 in the context of 2:28-29; cp. Acts 2:16-21). According to this teaching, the Spirit’s outpouring in New Testament times corresponded to an “early rain” associated with Christ’s first coming and the contemporary outpouring or “latter rain” signifies the prelude to Christ’s coming again. Latter rain theology also implicitly explains the “drought,” or comparatively minimal charismatic manifestations throughout much of Church history, occurring in the interim (cp. Isa 44:3). As such, it rigorously refutes the classic dispensationalism of the Darby and Schofield type. Nevertheless, both forms of dispensationalism are fervently premillennialist.

Unlike Darby’s brand of dispensationalism, the more historic form of dispensationalism, that is Trinitarian dispensationalism, does not require commitment to cessationism, or the discontinuation of spiritual gifts, such as speaking in tongues and divine healing. Accordingly, it’s obviously a much better fit for Pentecostal theology and spirituality. The cessationism of Darby’s and Schofield’s dispensationalism is largely due to its division of history into seven periods of distinctive methods of divine interaction with

humanity. Each of these periods is effectively sealed off from the others. Thus, dispensationalists in this vein could conveniently relegate charismatic manifestations to another age rather than the present. Pentecostals, however, emphasize experiential continuity with the biblical account of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4, 38-39). Therefore, Classical Pentecostal Christians are certainly not inherently dispensationalist—at least not in the sense of this system.

Nonetheless, many Pentecostals, already eschatologically fervent, have been attracted to the eschatological awareness and urgency in Darby's dispensationalism. Yet maintaining this kind of dispensationalism has required biblical and theological acrobatics, especially regarding pneumatology in general and cessation versus continuation of the charismata in particular. Not surprisingly, Gerald Sheppard has spoken of "Pentecostalism and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism" as the "Anatomy of an Uneasy Relationship" (*Pneuma* 2:2). Yet pneumatology and cessationism are not the only notable problems.

Darby and Schofield, and later, the Pentecostal prophecy teacher Finis Dake (*Dake's Annotated Reference Bible*) sharply distinguished between Israel and the Church. However, leading Pentecostal scholars (e.g., Stanley Horton, *The Promise of His Coming*, and Hollis Gause, *Revelation*) have challenged the rigid dispensationalist dichotomy regarding Israel and the Church. Pentecostals in general can hardly help noting that biblically-speaking there is an undeniable continuity and connectedness between biblical Israel and the Church (Acts 7:38; Gal 6:16; 1 Pet 2:9). The reluctance of Pentecostals to completely compartmentalize Israel and the Church is particularly important because the relationship of Israel and the Church is at the heart of Christian Zionism.

A few years ago at an international meeting in Europe, I experienced a spirited response to my use of the term "Christian Zionism." Christians from the Middle East insisted that Zionism is an exclusively Jewish concept and should never be coupled with "Christian" as a descriptive qualifier. Fortunately another American who happened to be present quickly explained that these terms are indeed often coupled in just this way in the United States. Nevertheless, many obviously found the notion disconcerting. I wasn't too surprised. I hadn't realized myself how prevalent Christian Zionism is in the U.S. until a few years before when I was invited to serve on a national theological task group regarding the topic.

Really, Christian Zionism is a broad designation for a diverse group (see Richie, "Dealing with the Dilemma of Christian Zionism"). Unfortunately, it is often applied almost indiscriminately to individuals and groups ranging from

those who generally support the right of the modern State of Israel to exist to those with extreme political agendas. The former are essentially benevolent and peaceful. The latter are cause for concern. Among radical Christian Zionists often an aggressive rhetoric is present. Could it lead to the use of force or outbreaks of violence? Could it influence government policies toward the use of force and violence in the Middle East? Does it not only *anticipate* but actually *incite* Armageddon? An uncritical acceptance of the policies and practices of the State of Israel and a disturbing lack of compassion for the plight of the Palestinian people, both likely due largely to an over identification of modern Israel with ancient biblical Israel, are not encouraging. Significantly, radical Christian Zionism builds on esoteric interpretations of apocalyptic biblical prophecy or classic dispensationalism. These features tend to make for an intense and unstable situation. In my opinion, Pentecostals need to distance themselves from radical Christian Zionism. As already suggested, Pentecostals can reject Darbyite dispensationalism on biblical, theological, historical, social, and political grounds.

True enough, as Dwight Wilson rightly notes, Pentecostals' perception of history has been heavily influenced by premillennialist belief that the restoration of Israel is a sign of Christ's imminent return ("Pentecostal Perspectives on Eschatology"). Most Pentecostals see the modern reestablishment of Israel as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy (Isa 6:13; Jer 31:7-8; Mi 2:12-13) and perhaps a precursor to restoration in Christ (Rom 11:25-29). Nevertheless, this perspective doesn't necessarily lead to Darby-like dispensationalism or radical Christian Zionism. *Is Pentecostalism inherently dispensationalist and therefore inevitably Zionist?* I think that there's enough firm reserve regarding dispensationalism among Pentecostals to suggest that they are not inherently dispensationalist or inevitably Zionist.

However, I'd like to qualify my comment. Pentecostals may indeed be inherently dispensationalist and inevitably Zionist in certain senses. That early Pentecostals were Trinitarian dispensationalists indicates an intrinsic element of dispensationalism apart from specific commitment to more rigid and speculative forms. Accordingly, a supportive position toward Israel and Palestine would also be more balanced or less biased.

Arguably, in a sense Christianity itself is intrinsically "dispensationalist." Christ's grace changes our relationship to the Mosaic Law (John 1:17; Rom 10:4). All times are summed up in Christ (Eph 1:10). Further, "dispensationalism" is found among Church Fathers as early as Ignatius and as important as Irenaeus. A better way of putting our question might

be: *In what sense is Pentecostalism inherently dispensationalist and therefore inevitably Zionist?*

Contemporary Pentecostals believe God's promise of an inclusive and universal outpouring of the Spirit *in the last days* (Acts 2:17-18) is being abundantly fulfilled in the present economy of the Spirit. Pentecost, therefore, inherently and inevitably points to Christ's coming and to salvation through the name of the Lord (Acts 2:19-21). Amen!

\* \* \*

### **Why do classical Pentecostals historically love the Jewish people and support the State of Israel, and how widespread is this viewpoint?**

**Calvin L. Smith**  
**King's Evangelical Divinity School**

The Israeli-Arab conflict has a thoroughly religious dimension. For Muslims the establishment of a Jewish state on "Islamic land" is repugnant and thus Islamist Hamas and Hezbollah seek Israel's obliteration. Meanwhile Palestinians increasingly view the conflict through religious spectacles, with one recent study documenting the shift of a traditionally secular Palestinian populace towards Islamism in recent years.<sup>1</sup> For their part, some Jewish settler activity is driven by a belief in a divine right to the land, explaining why some religious Jews choose to live in the heart of hostile Arab districts and towns such as Hebron in order re-conquer the land. Christianity, too, finds itself at the heart of the conflict whether through a long historical presence in the region, Arab and Jewish believers' presence in the land (together with their respective views concerning the current conflict), Western Christian Zionists who support Israel and their Christian anti-Zionist counterparts who critical of Israel and supportive of the Palestinian cause.

Classical Pentecostalism is also a religious stakeholder in the current conflict. Emerging shortly after the First Zionist Congress, Pentecostals have, by and large, strongly affirmed that God retains a plan and purpose for the Jewish people. This unbending nonsupersessionism has contributed to an inherent Pentecostal philosemitism, helping to explain strong classical

1. Loren D. Lybarger, *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle Between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

Pentecostal support for the Jewish state since 1948, and indeed explaining why some Pentecostal leaders have been courted by Israeli officials.

For many observers Pentecostal nonsupersessionism and philosemitism are products of its dispensationalist roots. Thus Pentecostal support for Israel (including Zionist tendencies among many Pentecostals), is perceived as a distinctly North American dispensational contribution to classical Pentecostal theology, not only in the US but also among Pentecostals strongly influenced by their North American counterparts. It is certainly true that US-influenced Pentecostals in different parts of the world often exhibit strong support for Israel. However, the ultimate litmus test for determining the viability of whether or not a pro-Israel bias is a specifically North American contribution to Pentecostal theology is to determine the extent to which *autochthonous* expressions of Pentecostalism (where their US cousins have had little or no influence) support Israel. In such cases one would expect philosemitic and Zionist tendencies to be far less pronounced, indeed absent.

Yet precisely the *opposite* is the case. In Latin America important expressions of autochthonous Pentecostalism in countries such as Chile, Brazil and Venezuela exhibit strong theological support for Israel.<sup>2</sup> In Africa, too, indigenous and autochthonous expressions of Pentecostalism in Nigeria and Kenya exhibit strong support for Israel, while in India figures were among some of the highest surveyed.<sup>3</sup> In short, love for Israel does not appear to be a specifically North American contribution to classical Pentecostal theology, while dispensationalism has been overlaid in this regard. Rather, the evidence suggests nonsupersessionism and philosemitism represent inherent aspects of Pentecostal theology, which help to explain traditional support for the Jewish state by many within the movement.

So what it is about Pentecostalism that makes it inherently philosemitic? A survey of early Pentecostal literature highlights the importance afforded to eschatology. Indeed historically “Christ as Coming King” represents an important early Pentecostal motif, and this emphasis is abundantly evident in early Pentecostal literature. Significantly, in his excellent study R. Kendall Soulen persuasively explains how second century responses to anti-Christian Judaism contributed to a distorted understanding of the canonical narrative (i.e. the Bible’s overarching metanarrative) so that some aspects of this narrative are given prominence at the expense of others (Soulen speaks of

2. Calvin L. Smith, ed. *Pentecostal Power: Expressions, Impact and Faith of Latin American Pentecostalism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 197-8.

3. Pew Forum, *Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals* (Washington DC: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2006).

how parts of the Bible's narrative were placed in the foreground, while others were relegated to the background).<sup>4</sup> Four pivotal aspects of that narrative are creation, the Fall, Christ's work at the cross, and the end (or consummation) of the age.

By focusing almost wholly on the Fall and God's response (Calvary), the other two events (creation and consummation) are downplayed. The effect of this standard canonical narrative, Soulen argues, is that Calvary becomes the climax of God's eternal plan. Thus eschatology is emasculated, becoming almost an afterthought in Christian theology. Another effect is that the Old Testament is relegated in importance. In both cases the consequence of the standard canonical narrative is to downplay or dismiss the biblical theology theme of Israel. In the Bible, however, Israel and apocalyptic/eschatological passages are often presented as inextricably intertwined, thus any relegation of eschatology to the margins also downplays the theme of Israel, while a shift away from the Old Testament relegates Israel as the people of God (and indeed God as the God of Israel). Soulen refers to this distorted canonical narrative and its effects as "structural supersessionism" (he also identifies two other forms of supersessionism, punitive and economic).

Crucially, Soulen's study demonstrates how churches and denominations that follow the standard canonical model and demote eschatology also relegate the Jewish people and Israel in their theology. However, Pentecostalism, with its strong eschatological focus, has done the complete opposite. References to eschatology in early Pentecostal literature were often linked with God's dealings with the Jewish people. Thus, eschatologically-driven and focusing on the often interrelated biblical theology themes of Israel and the end times, classical Pentecostalism embraced nonsupersessionism and philosemitism, which arguably represent inherent features, indeed doctrinal markers of classical Pentecostalism. This goes some way to explaining why global expressions of the movement, whether US-influenced, dispensational, autochthonous and indigenous, exhibit a strong love for the Jewish people and support for the Jewish state on theological grounds.

This raises an important question: to what extent will a growing focus on social justice across classical Pentecostalism (particularly within the academy) mark the beginning of the movement breaking away from these theological roots and ditching its nonsupersessionist and philosemitic markers? At this stage it is unclear, although division on this issue is already becoming evident

4. R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996).

across some parts of the movement. But perhaps a more positive way to look at this is to consider how Pentecostalism's twin emphases on philosemitism and social justice might, in fact, represent an important contribution towards peace in the Middle East. Arguably there can never be peace unless there is first peace between believing Jews and Arabs in the land (how can the unregenerate make peace with each other when even brothers in Christ on opposite sides of a conflict cannot do so?). Actually, there is plenty of evidence of some Arab and Messianic believers in the region coming together and having meaningful fellowship (indeed it has been going on for years). But Pentecostalism's love for the Jewish people, together with its traditional concern for all peoples and a growing emphasis upon social justice, might serve as an important bridge between those believers on either side of the conflict who have not yet been reconciled.

Thus it remains to be seen if responses to Israel and the Middle East will eventually rupture a Pentecostal movement increasingly divided on this issue, or more positively provide a valuable model for wider Evangelical responses to the Middle East conflict.

\* \* \*

**Because classical Pentecostals are historically sympathetic towards Israel, little is known of the Pentecostal mission to the Arabs. Therefore, please comment on the Pentecostal mission in the Holy Land, both before and since Israeli independence.**

**Eric Newberg  
Oral Roberts University**

The Pentecostal mission in Israel/Palestine, from its commencement in 1908 until today, has made most of its converts among the Arab population of the Holy Land. My comments will focus on the accomplishments of four Pentecostal missionaries: Lucy Leatherman, Anna Elizabeth Brown, Saul Benjamin, and Margaret Gaines.

The pioneer Pentecostal missionary in the Holy Land, Lucy Leatherman, was sent out from the Azusa Street Revival in 1906, sensing a call to call to the Arabs. In route from Los Angeles to Jerusalem, she writes, "Eight years ago, in A.B. Simpson's missionary school in Nyack, New York, I heard the

Macedonian cry to go to Jerusalem, but it is to the Arabs. I am told that there are more Arabs than Jews there, and God has been speaking to me and asks me if I would be willing to go with Him to the wild Arab of the desert.”<sup>5</sup> Given the success that Pentecostal missionaries in Palestine would enjoy with Arabs, this was perhaps a prescient insight on Leatherman’s part.

While Leatherman’s stay in Jerusalem was somewhat brief, she can be credited with important accomplishments. She published a local newspaper in Arabic, attracted the first converts to Pentecostalism, kept her support base in American and Britain abreast of her activities, and won over to the Pentecostal faith a gifted Christian and Missionary Alliance missionary, Anna Elizabeth Brown, who was proficient in the Arabic language. Brown established a mission station in Jerusalem, raised money for the construction of facilities, carried on a fruitful prison ministry, and launched satellite outposts in Greater Syria, Transjordan and Persia.

The primary target audience for these early mission endeavors was the Arab Christian community. That this continued to be the case is attested to by Ida Beck, a former missionary in the Holy Land, who states that “the greatest freedom for work is presented among these Christians.” That is to say, Arab Christians were the most receptive of the indigenous religious communities of Palestine. As Beck points out, “The majority of our converts are from this group. We have seen them thoroughly saved, filled with the Spirit, and living lives for God.”<sup>6</sup>

Saul Benjamin was ideally suited to the Pentecostal mission in Palestine. He was a native of Nineveh in modern Iraq. After a Muslim mob forced his family out of their home, he migrated to Los Angeles, where he eventually joined the Assemblies of God and trained for missionary service in an Arabic-speaking field. In the early 1920s Benjamin was sent to Palestine with the AG and assigned to a Pentecostal congregation in Es Salt, Transjordan, composed of Arabic converts from the Greek Orthodox Church. Along with his wife Pearl, also an AG missionary, the Benjamin’s greatly expanded the outreach of the church among the Arab community. Later they were transferred to Jerusalem and succeeded in building up the congregation housed in the Pentecostal mission station. In recounting the highlights of his missionary service in the Holy Land, Saul Benjamin states,

I have witnessed several revivals in Trans-Jordan, the first of which was so powerful that it attracted wide attention, not only from the civil

5. *Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 3 (November 1906), 4.

6. Ida Beck, “Problems and Opportunities in Palestine,” *Pentecostal Evangel* (July 3, 1943), 10.

population but also from the educational authorities of the government. Many students from the highest governmental school flocked to the meetings. They would come to the altar to pray and go away singing our revival songs. Government spies came to the services to see what was being done, and went away convinced that we were preaching a powerful gospel. Some confessed that they feared lest their continued attendance might make them Christians also.<sup>7</sup>

We can only admire missionaries like the Benjamin's who exposed themselves to danger in the interest of the gospel. This is a major liability of missionary work in the Holy Land.

The Pentecostal mission in the Holy Land received a major shock when the state of Israel was established in 1948 and the Arab *Diaspora* swept away most of the Arab Pentecostal congregation in Jerusalem. Many of them resettled in the Jordanian territory in what was to become the West Bank. Although the AG made no real attempt to follow up on their dispersed congregants, the Church of God (Cleveland) saw the need and established a mission in the West Bank. The key to the success of the COG can be largely attributed to Margaret Gaines, who served in Palestine from 1964 to 1999. Led by the indomitable Gaines, the Church of God succeeded in developing an indigenous leadership that continues to sustain a vital Pentecostal presence in the West Bank.<sup>8</sup>

Gaines is highly spoken of by leading Palestinian Pentecostals in the West Bank. When she retired in 1999, Gaines passed the torch to a gifted corps of leaders, two of whom are Nihad and Salwa (nee Subhi) Salman. In a conversation I had a conversation with Nihad and Salwa in 2002, in which they credited Margaret Gaines not only for her ministry in the village of Aboud, but also for introducing them to each other. After their marriage they became co-pastors of the COG church in Bethlehem. However, they eventually tired of what they perceived to be an anti-Arab bias of the COG leaders and pastors whom they guided on tours of the Holy Land. According to Nihad and Salwa, the COG was "...busy within Israel, supporting ministry to Jews. They had forgotten about us."<sup>9</sup> They were also bothered by American Pentecostal groups that would roll through Bethlehem to see the sights, and then go back to Israel to go to church and meet pastors. "It is as if we didn't exist."

7. Saul Benjamin, "Gold from Gilead," *Pentecostal Evangel* (November 9, 1946), 8-9.

8. Margaret Gaines, *Of Like Passions: Missionary to the Arabs*, (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2000), 213.

9. Interview with Nihad and Salwa Salman, 24 September, 2002.

Eventually Nihad and Salwa left the COG and in September 1999 established Immanuel Evangelical Church, an independent church plant in Bethlehem which has grown to more 60 families and 250 people. Immanuel Church has in turn planted two more churches in Ramleh and Haifa, and has opened two Christian book stores, one in Bethlehem and the other in Haifa. With the sponsorship of World Vision and the Church of the Brethren in Germany, Immanuel Evangelical Church has constructed an outreach center in Beit Jala with a vision for evangelization through compassion and caring for the community. The success of Immanuel Evangelical Church represents a gain for the Palestinian Christian presence in the Holy Land, especially in a time when many Christians in the Holy Land are moving abroad.

On balance, the legacy of the Pentecostal mission in Palestine in relation to its largely Arab clientele is mixed. On one hand, the missionaries have consistently demonstrated courage, fortitude, and spiritual fervor in ministering to their Arab clients. On the other hand, the strategy of proselytizing Arab Christians has not been exactly ecumenical, to say the least.

\* \* \*

**On the whole classical Pentecostals have historically (and to varying degrees) expressed Christian Zionist views. However, in more recent year some Pentecostals have eschewed this historical approach, and we asked one such Pentecostal scholar to provide us with his thoughts on the current conflict and some of the issues he believes need to be resolved.**

**Paul Alexander  
Palmer Theological Seminary**

The call for a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders with equal land swaps (i.e. on 22% of historical Palestine) is a pragmatic compromise solution, favoring both Israel and Palestine. It is not a pro-Palestinian position addressing only the interests of Palestinians, or acceding to their “maximum demands.” The fact that Palestinians are initiating this move and that the current Israeli government resists it should not distract us from that fact. The two-state solution has never been the ideal, or the greatest approximation of Kingdom of God values, but it has always been a pragmatic compromise of otherwise

serious and irreconcilable claims that tend to be mutually exclusive. The two-state solution helps defend Israel against criticisms of Zionism and only grants Palestinians relative justice.

Palestinians and Arabs must again commit themselves to accept Israel as a state within the 1967 borders, with full recognition of all the rights of a nation according to international law. This means there should be an Israeli embassy in Arab capitals, open and free access to people and business, open trade, and sports and cultural exchanges. Palestinians need the same benefits that would come with full sovereignty, not just the trappings of statehood. This includes the issues the US and EU is said to value—liberty, freedom of movement, and the right to own property without an occupying state confiscating it for settlement cities and buildings.

The issue becomes not whether there is a state but what kind of state it is and how it impacts the lives of Palestinians. The difficulties are in the details. Otherwise, the idea of a “Palestinian State” can even be an Israeli or a Zionist goal and can actually further injustice if such a state lacks true sovereignty. In fact, the idea of Bantustans in Apartheid South Africa was that they would be “states” with passports, flags, etc. and would apply for membership in the UN under the principle of self-determination. The world did not buy that ploy then and saw it as a way to disenfranchise blacks in South Africa by “giving them” a state which would then be responsible for them, while white South Africans continued to dominate and rule their destinies. Therefore, it is important that a Palestinian State have true sovereignty and not just be a “state” by name, which would shift responsibility to the Palestinians and save the State of Israel from its obligations under international law—this would be a worst case scenario, where the occupation would be considered “over” yet the State of Israel could maintain control of the water resources, mineral resources, land, air, transportation, trade, etc.

In considering whether Palestinian statehood is a desirable outcome we should consider the following:

1. What happens to the 500,000 Israeli settlers living in the Palestinian Territories? Will they be evacuated? Will they live with Palestinian leadership? Will they remain part of the State of Israel?
2. How will Israel’s legitimate security interests be addressed without undermining the sovereignty of the Palestinian state?
3. Who controls the borders of the Palestinian state?

4. Who controls the air, the airwaves, and the subterranean waters of a Palestinian state?
5. What happens to the refugees? Will they be allowed to return to the new state, or will the State of Israel have a say in the return policy of the State of Palestine?
6. Will Jerusalem be shared?
7. What will be the relationship between the new State of Palestine and State of Israel, and with the rest of the neighboring countries?
8. Will there be free movement of goods and people between Gaza and the West Bank and Jerusalem?
9. Will the new state be able to have its own currency, economic policy, imports, and exports, or must it remain within the Israeli economic system?

If Palestinian sovereignty cannot be achieved and its implementation is compromised too much, then there is a real danger that the exercise of statehood could become a camouflage for perpetuating the occupation. Then Christians may need to oppose it for the same reasons they opposed Bantustans in South Africa, even if the Palestinian Authority accepted the arrangement.

Every state and nation in the world perpetuates injustice—the US and Israel are no exceptions—and a Palestinian state will have its injustices as well. However, in the journey toward less injustice and more social righteousness, the time has certainly come for the Palestinians to have a sovereign state of their own, alongside Israel, and to work to ensure civil rights and healthy public policy for their citizens, while also enacting wise foreign policy, diplomacy, and trade with their neighbors. Other nations have come about through UN recognition—Israel, for instance—and when Palestine gains recognition as a state, even if through the UN, the Palestinians and the Israelis (and the world) will have journeyed a bit further along the arc of the moral universe, which, as Dr. King once proclaimed, bends toward justice.

