HOODWINKED!

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My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm. **(John 18:36)**

Jesus Christ made this statement to Pontius Pilate, the politician who ruled Judea in Palestine some 2,000 years ago. In light of that statement, we may wonder nowadays why so many Christians have rallied behind modern Israel and her dream of "Greater Israel" – especially when that "dream" means occupying and seizing Palestinian territory, browbeating and driving out its inhabitants to become refugees in surrounding countries, and even applauding America's warfare against Israel's neighbors – Syria, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon.

Christ taught that *the kingdom of God is within you* and *isn't ushered in with visible signs*. (Luke 17:20-21) In this present Age, God's Kingdom is not a political one that can be seen physically, but one that rules and reigns in our hearts – a Kingdom of peace, love, faith, and righteousness. Only with the Return of Christ will that Kingdom's spiritual power and authority be established, physically, in our earthly realm. In the meantime, Christ's followers are enjoined to prepare the way by working to further God's Kingdom of love, peace, and righteousness in this present broken and corrupted world.

We would do well to ask ourselves then, how can we – as followers of Christ who are supposed to be peacemakers – be rooting for the establishment of a political kingdom, Israel, and all the blood-letting, suffering, and wars that go along with it? How can we not raise our voices against such violations of God's (and the U.N.'s) standards for all peace-loving nations? Are we taking seriously the teachings of the Founder of Christianity – to *love your enemies* and *love your neighbor as yourself* ? (Matthew 5:44, 22:39)

***Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God*, Jesus taught. From His own example, we know that Jesus trusted fully in the power of the Almighty to bring about change. His teachings**

were revolutionary in His day, and still are. His peaceful methods have revolutionized and brought much positive change to human society over the last 2,000 years… and will continue on into the upcoming Age of Peace known as the Millennium.

Sadly, it is also true that, throughout history, political and even religious leaders have fomented all sorts of war and trouble in the name of religion, falsely claiming to have God on their side. Jesus knew this was going to happen and warned His followers, *Indeed the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing God a service.* (John 16:2)

Is it possible that a sizeable portion of Christianity thinks "they are doing God a service" when all they're doing is giving support to an unjust and cruel political agenda?

What kind of misguided logic is at work here, we may wonder? Much of it has to do with a common misunderstanding about certain prophetic promises in the Old Testament regarding a "greater Israel". Some of these were fulfilled long ago in the days of king David and king Solomon. Others speak of a "greater Israel" to come in the future Age of the Millennium. Sadly, these passages have been misinterpreted and hijacked into serving as justification for modern Israel's territorial ambitions.

True, Israel did enjoy special favor from God in the days of the Old Testament. But even then, when Israel sometimes departed from the ways of God, she lost that blessing and protection; and ancient Israel plunged into periods of difficulty and subjugation to her enemies.

This idea that Israel has a special corner on God's favor and blessings has hoodwinked much of mainstream Christianity into ignoring and excusing Israel's present day misconduct – especially towards her Palestinian neighbors. And this comes in a bigger package of tacit support for American wars in the Middle East, wars which Israel hopes will work to her advantage.

For the record, a brief history: After World War 1, the Palestinians allowed Jewish immigrants to settle in their land. And after World War 2 and Jewish suffering in the Holocaust, an agreement was made in 1948, in

conjunction with the United Nations, to partition the land so that each community could dwell peaceably side by side.

In the aftermath of the war that followed, and in the decades following, the Israelis have driven the Palestinians out of their lands into refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan and have turned the West Bank and Gaza Strip into occupied territories, little better than giant-sized prison camps.

To give a veneer of respectability to all these injustices, certain Biblical passages were pulled out of their historical context and used to promote the belief that God had given the land to the Israelis, as if they were still living in the days of the Old Testament. This may suit the agenda of politicians and profiteers, but to stuff that agenda into the sacred writings is a risky business; landing on the wrong side of Divine displeasure is never advisable.

Those who want to invoke the passage about a "Greater Israel" should take note of this important guideline: 'Y*ou will divide it* [the land] *by lot as an inheritance for yourselves, and for the strangers who sojourn among you and who bear children among you. They shall be to you as native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall be that in whatever tribe the stranger sojourns, there you shall give him his inheritance,' says the Lord GOD*. (Ezekiel 47:22-23)

What "inheritance" has modern Israel given to the "strangers who sojourn among" them? Modern Israel has ignored this provision, outlined in their own Scriptures and in U.N. resolutions. It is bad enough that the Palestinians have been turned into "strangers" in their own land, but now on top of that, the Israelis are actively disinheriting them, in complete violation of God's own instructions.

Interestingly, that same prophetic passage is preceded by a description (Ezekiel 47:6-12) of the land being in a paradise-like state… meaning that the promise there of "greater Israel" is not even supposed to be applied to the present Age. The historical context is a future era, coming after the Return of the Messiah and the establishment of God's Kingdom on Earth – the Age known as the Millennium.

There is nothing in Scripture to say that Israel is destined to possess a "greater Israel" in this present Age, much less have the right to grab territory by force or subterfuge, nor to fight brutal wars against her weaker neighbors.

In recent times Operation Cast Lead killed 1,398 Palestinians to 4 Israelis (winter of 2008-9); Operation Protective Edge killed 2,204 Palestinians to 12 Israelis (summer of 2014). And that is but the tragic tip of an iceberg of decades of oppression. And now in 2024, the world is witnessing yet another "operation" – the tragic and bloody "cleansing" of the Gaza Strip.

Lopsided, shocking statistics like these make it clear that something's wrong somewhere. Modern Israel has simply lost her way. She is no "promised land", that's for sure – and no better than any other nation in today's world.

Israel will get her promised land in due time, but it will come from God's hand, not her own. And it will not come until the Age of the Millennium, and until she has been duly humbled before God and the rest of the world. It will be a painful process but will result in Israel finally becoming the God-fearing, charitable, and concerned nation and wise ruler that God has always intended for her to be.

What further complicates the Mideast tragedy are America's geopolitical interests. Her extravagant war economy depends on controlling the flow of oil and payments made in dollars. Furthermore, the region is a vital link in Russian-Chinese economic expansion, against which America wants to put a stop. So, never mind the lofty-principles and rhetoric; greedy preservation of the American economy is the real reason behind Middle East suffering and catastrophic devastation.

Conclusion: For too long, Christians have been hoodwinked into giving unconditional support to Israel, and by extension, fooled also into supporting, or keeping silent about, American wars in the Middle East. In addition, American politicians are happy to appease Israel because that is profitable for them and garners favor with the powerful voting bloc of the mainstream Christian community.

How sad that the Church has been infiltrated like this, unable to speak out against America's gruesome, never-ending wars – wars that benefit no one except the U.S. dollar and arms manufacturers. Many believers, of course, are simply misinformed and innocent followers of what they have been taught. But be enlightened! Remember Christ's words to His followers: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God*.

True followers of Christ have left behind the dream of a literal Promised Land – a "greater Israel" – aiming instead for the far greater reality of the kingdom of God in the hearts of humankind. They have been liberated from the narrow confines of earthly human limitations into the glorious truth and freedom of the realm of God's Spirit. Their vision has expanded beyond national boundaries of human origin to that of the worldwide universal fellowship of those who long for peace, truth, justice, love, and righteousness. They have catapulted from insignificant earthly goals to the glorious reality of God's heavenly Kingdom!

Are you a peacemaker? Invite the Prince of Peace to enter your life today! Embark now on a thrilling, love-filled journey into the Kingdom of Heaven… in this life and in the life to come!

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