

## A Problem with John Hagee - One

John Hagee pastors a large church in San Antonio, Texas and is founder of 'Christians United for Israel' (CUFI) and a major US financial and political supporter of Israel. So, what's my problem with Mr. Hagee; after all, he has thousands attending his church, many more watching on-line and millions of US evangelicals support him in supporting Israel? There are I believe good reasons to question Mr. Hagee – on his understanding of history and especially on his approach to theology.

Challenging a Christian brother is something not to be done lightly. My own stance has been heavily criticized by Israel supporters in very dismissive terms as 'going against God's will'. But the questions won't go away because, in struggling to know the truth revealed in scripture, I and many others find answers that don't correspond to those of Mr. Hagee. Indeed sometimes in his writing Mr. Hagee leaves himself open to the charge that he is misleading God's people.

Beginning at the beginning, in the foreword to John Hagee's book<sup>1</sup>, Rabbi Aryeh Scheinberg writes:

*"The prophet Isaiah, in chapter 49 verse 22, says "for thus saith my Lord, behold I will raise my hand towards the nations, and to the peoples will I hoist my banner, and they shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. Kings will be your nurturers and their princesses your wet nurses... For the Lord shall comfort Zion, He shall comfort all of the rooms; He shall make her wilderness like Eden and her wastelands like a garden of the Lord, joy and gladness shall be found there".*

The Lord has hoisted His banner to rally His troops.'

Scheinberg compliments Hagee on having a '*clear and wise voice that has alerted the world to the duplicity and hypocrisy of Europe, the United Nations, and the Arab and Muslim countries of the world.*' With this compliment Scheinberg has accused half the world, and the major peace organisation, of lying and deceit: and lauded Hagee for wisdom and clarity. Well, it wouldn't be the first time that a lone voice has spoken out across the crowd. Whether or not Mr. Hagee is entitled to this accolade we will see. But first let's notice duplicity right here in rabbi Scheinberg's quote.

Scheinberg claims that the modern state of Israel and the Jews are the specific subjects of this verse. Is this claim justified? The ellipsis ( ... ) in Scheinberg's quotation, after 'nurses', loops from Isaiah chapter 49:22 to chapter 51:3, so not exactly a quote from Isaiah 49 verse 22. It looks suspicious but might he be justified? Misuse of the ellipsis is one thing, but to use chapter 51 verse 3 whilst ignoring verse 1 is wholly unacceptable. At the very least that verse reveals a subset under consideration;

*Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father ...*

My answer is 'no', but For a fuller treatment read the text and commentaries, but here at the beginning of Mr. Hagee's book we are being misled by the rabbi, whether intentionally or not.

Rabbi Scheinberg believes that Israel needs evangelical Christians for its support and defence? Why; and why more so than other nations? Could it perhaps be because Israel has failed to honour God's Messiah, has failed to pursue righteousness? The Mission of the church is to witness to the kingdom of God, not to defend nationalism.<sup>2</sup> In the passage Scheinberg uses there is no 'rallying of troops', none is needed because God himself acts, it is His own righteous action.

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1 John Hagee, *In Defense of Israel*. Front Line, 2007

2 Matthew 28.

Throughout chapter 49 verses 23 to 26 it is God himself who acts. It is *those who wait for me* who shall *not be put to shame*. Put simply, Scheinberg has ignored Isaiah's context. For Christians, this passage is clearly messianic, including as it does a clear summary of God's intention,

he says, "*It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth*". (Isaiah 49:6).

Early in his book John Hagee describes himself as an avid student of history. At the date of publication (2007) he was convinced that

*'Iran is the new Germany; Mohammed Ahmadinejad, is the new Hitler; Iran poses a threat to the state of Israel that promises nothing less than a nuclear holocaust. The only way to win a nuclear war is to make certain it never starts. We must stop Iran's nuclear threat and stand boldly with Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East'*.<sup>3</sup>

He was wrong on every count bar one, that the only way to win a nuclear war is to make sure it never starts. And, if he truly is an avid history student then he too must be charged with dissimulation, for on page 5 of his book he includes a sentence that reads *'The Final Solution of Adolph Hitler... was carried out by baptised Christians in good standing with their church*, giving the reference as below.<sup>4</sup> Following the link redirects to an article by Elesha Coffman titled 'Final Solution, part II'; but reading it, you'd be forgiven for wondering what Mr. Hagee is up to.

The quote actually comes from a different article, by Egal Feldman, entitled, 'Catholics and Jews in 20th-century America'. I haven't read Feldman's article so I cannot vouch for the accuracy or otherwise of the quotation, but a literature and web search suggests that the article is about Catholics and Jews in America. The 'historical application' by Mr. Hagee is dubious in the extreme: It is illogical to use assumptions regarding one group in one part of the world, (Catholics in America), as a control for similar but distinct groups in other parts of the world, (Catholics and Lutherans in Germany) and at different periods.

Coffman actually uses the quotation in order to refute it. Mr. Hagee uses it in quite the opposite manner, forcing a conclusion contrary to that intended by the author and doing him an injustice. Failure to point this out is either deceitful or very sloppy research and lazy history, (the moral, always check your references; including mine).

And since when has being baptised meant 'in good standing', and what does 'in good standing' mean? To support his claim that Hitler was 'in good standing' with the church and that therefore the church was complicit in the crime of the Holocaust, Hagee quotes Hitler's *Mein Kampf*,

*'Hence today I believe I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord'* (italics original).<sup>5</sup>

Hagee wants us to assume that it is the Christian God for whom Hitler was working. But Hitler held Christianity in contempt. There are frequent references in *Mein Kampf* to gods or goddesses, of e.g. fate (p.29), distress (93), vengeance (289), clues which suggest that his religion, if any, was Norse 'pagan' rather than Middle East monotheism.

Hagee believes we Christians should ask forgiveness of Jews for the history of anti-Semitism, and be grateful to them for what their history brings us. These are nice thoughts but they present certain difficulties. I don't see how we can usefully apologise for actions of past generations including in places far away. That is not to say we shouldn't learn from those events, we can and must avoid repeating those mistakes. Let's also pay attention to things we need to ask forgiveness for today. The

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3 Op cit P.2.

4 [www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2002/jan25.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2002/jan25.html) accessed by me July 2014

5 2 Volumes published in 1925 & 1926, that is 15 years before the 'Final Solution', and 7 years before his election to the Reichstag

economic enslavement of many in the developing world, the treatment of black Africans, Islamophobia, our treatment of women . . . .

As for gratitude, this idea is based at least in part on his letter to Roman Christians where Paul is writing of Israel's historical birthright. But he is writing in *great sorrow and unceasing anguish*. Why? Because many of his kindred are cut off, they are not Israelites (Romans chapter 9). I don't understand why I should be particularly grateful to unbelieving 21<sup>st</sup> century Jews. They contribute nothing to my faith even though they must be subjects of my prayers. Does not Paul indicate that by making them jealous some may be saved (Romans 11)?

Hagee is also correct that sins of omission are as serious as sins of commission, but when he cites the failure to bomb Auschwitz in 1944 as a 'sin of omission' he is straying into fantasy. In his book 'Hitler's Holocaust'<sup>6</sup> Guido Knopp reports that Nathan Goldman of the World Jewish Congress approached the military with precisely this request. He spoke to *'British Air Marshal Dill, who stated bluntly that "the British had to conserve their bombs for military targets, and the only salvation for the Jews lay in the allies winning the war"'*. I have no evidence to disagree with the Air Marshal's military assessment. Given its sacrifices on behalf of freedom, Britain may find it irritating to be lectured on this by an American, whose nation profited from the war at Britain's expense.

Although Hitler's attitude towards Jews was well-known it was not until 1941 that the 'Final Solution', the Holocaust, became the final solution. Until the failure of 'Operation Barbarossa', Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Hitler's solution to the 'Jewish problem' had various elements. One was the 'Mischling Laws' intended to determine a person's Jewishness, with the aim of 'recovering' the Aryan blood.

Prior to Germany's invasion of Poland Hitler's principal targets were not Jews but liberals, socialists, communists, intellectuals, homosexuals gypsies and people with disabilities. Following the outbreak of war these, together with millions of Jews, would be used as forced labour and starved to death. Jews would also be 'exported' eastward into Russia as happened with many Jews from eastern Poland. But, with the Eastern front at stalemate following the battle of Moscow, the only way to get rid of Jews was genocide.

Mr. Hagee's assessment is just too simplistic. Britain had received Jewish child refugees up to the declaration of war on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939. Were it not for Britain's lonely stand against Nazism from 1939 to 1942, unsupported by USA, the destruction of Europe's Jews might have been total. Isn't turning a blind eye to more than 65 years of persecution of Palestinian Arabs as bad as ignoring the plight of Jews in Hitler's Germany? We may not minimize the wrong, but we must place it in context.

## Summary

John Hagee's approach to history is sadly typical of many supporters of Israel. They are so committed to God's 'miraculous intervention' that they make two major mistakes. First, they ignore actual historical details that counter their argument; that is to do history badly. The second error is worse; they fail to fully comprehend the incredible truths presented through God's intervention 2000 years ago. Unintentionally they undermine and compromise the message of Jesus and the challenge of the Cross. (More, on the theology ....)

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6 Guido Knopp, *Hitler's Holocaust*. The History Press, 2004