

Views from the Pews – A Suggested Toolbox for Christians During the Latest Middle East War

Shortly after the attack on Israel, we stopped watching the TV news. By accident or design, television was proving too much, inviting a purely emotional response rather than a reasoned one. Here are some alternatives to try as coping strategies:

- Read some history. Especially history involving western Europe and America. The Holocaust casts the longest shadow but other events/decisions cast shadows too. History between the two World Wars may help to explain current behaviour and attitudes.
- Realise that New Zealand and Australia have invested in this region in the not-too-distant past, particularly in the liberation of Palestine from the Ottoman Empire in 1917-18. Beneath all the other blood in Gazan soil lies Anzac blood as well. And the New Zealand Division went north into Syria in 1942 to forestall a possible German push from the Caucasus.
- Accept that explanations are not the same as justifications. Understanding why something is happening is not to excuse the inexcusable.
- Look after our local communities who feel vulnerable. It is unacceptable that both synagogues and mosques in New Zealand are fearful. Your local church may have a role as a neutral caregiver in this time of crisis.
- Explore the history of Christianity in Palestine.
- Do not be afraid of neutrality; be wary of rushing to take sides in a finely nuanced conflict.
- Although the Bible is full of conflicts and tensions – even ethnic cleansing – it is not the status quo for that region. There are long-standing plans for peace if only the combatants would grasp the opportunity.
- Give generously to relief organisations – there are many of these, they have longstanding knowledge of what is wrong and how to put it right.
- Re-read the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Who are our neighbours? The numbers would surprise us. They include those who in the words of a familiar prayer ‘we struggle to love’.
- Talk to those you know and trust. These are challenging times.

This is a long list, but as Bible-readers we have an investment in the region. Turning off the TV gives us an opportunity to read, think, talk and pray.

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