

# Understanding the crisis in Israel from a biblical perspective

## TRANSCRIPT



**NOTE: This transcript was AI-generated and has not been fully edited.**

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[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Welcome to a special edition of the Denison Forum podcast. I'm Dr. Mark Turman, host for today's conversation and executive director of Denison Forum, sitting down again with our CEO and co founder, our cultural apologist Jim Denison. We're offering to you our audience some special. Episodes of the Denison Forum podcast because of things that are so seriously happening over in Israel between Israel and the terrorist group Hamas that may have even larger global implications.

Our goal is to encourage, to edify, and build you up, to equip you to not only think biblically, but to act redemptively in your area of influence. We live now in a global community connected in every significant way, not only by technology, but also by commerce and by experiences of faith and many other things as well.

We know that all of you are concerned about our world and particularly about this new conflict that has erupted in the Middle East that has implications likely for all of us. Many of us have

friends around the world, including Israel. And that's certainly true of Dr. Denison of me and of the Denison ministry family.

And so we know that you're concerned. So for the coming days, we're going to try to update you. In addition to Dr. Denison's work in the daily article, we're going to have some extended conversations for 20 or 30 minutes, perhaps as events warrant. And we want to do that today. We are now on day five of this new conflict between Israel and Hamas.

And Jim, thank you for taking time. And we know that this will be helpful for clarifying our thoughts, for equipping us to pray and hopefully to engage in other ways as the Holy spirit leads us. So first of all, how are you this morning and what's your sense of where we are here on day five?

It's day five for us in the morning while we're having this conversation, which means it's midday in Israel and in Gaza. What is your sense of where things are this morning?

[00:02:10] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah. Thank you, Mark. And I'm glad to be in this conversation with you. Although so grieved that we have to do this in the context of what we're here to discuss.

I was on there early this morning with one of my favorite radio hosts and she was asking me, how was I feeling? So I asked her and she talked about how grieved she felt at this point in time, given what's happening there. She has friends in Israel as well as we're watching these atrocities unfold. All of us feel that and should feel that.

And how do we process that was a lot of her question. And I think some of the things. We'll talk about today as well, but by way of an update, where we are right now, it appears. And I would love to be wrong about this, and we hope that upcoming events will prove me wrong. But it appears that some of the fears we had that this was part of a larger strategy are starting to unfold.

There's a thing called the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. It was actually the earliest of these terrorist groups. It was founded in 1981, primarily in the West Bank, which, as we discussed yesterday, is on the eastern side of the state of Israel. They have been for some time now about an uprising in the West Bank that some are even thinking of as a third Intifada.

That's part of what attracted the Israel Defense Forces attention over there and allowed Gaza's invasion on the West to proceed with less Israeli resistance than could have happened. Now we're hearing that they're really stoking resistance here in the West Bank, that there are riots happening there, that there's increased violence happening in the West Bank.

Which is part of a multi pronged strategy that apparently could be at play here. Up on the north, we're hearing about a Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorists that have been killed by Israeli forces for trying to get from Lebanon into Israel on the north. Lebanon, Hezbollah, which controls southern Lebanon, has been launching more missiles, and Israel's been responding to that in kind.

And then we're hearing that even today there is Israeli defense force soldiers that are massing on the border with Gaza, apparently preparing to go in on a ground invasion of Gaza, perhaps. There's already been missile strikes that perhaps are preparing the way for that. Egypt has closed the border with Gaza, which makes it almost impossible for Palestinian civilians to escape, as perhaps this ground force comes in.

And all of this, Mark, could exacerbate itself. As you see more casualties on the Palestinian side, that probably will inflame things in the West Bank and further cause Hezbollah to the north to be more engaged, and it could be that this multi pronged... attack against Israel that we all been, have been afraid of, perhaps being mobilized by Iran, ultimately, might be happening even as we speak.

I would love for all that not to be true, but we're hoping that is, we're afraid that may be what's happening right now.

[00:04:36] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Which is a significantly dire picture. And it may not feel like this to many in our audience right now, but in relative terms across the history of even the last 30 to 50 years in all of these relationships, it's been a relatively peaceful season for a while until last Saturday.

And that may not feel like it to us based on our amount of awareness, how much we pay attention to the news, that type of thing. We typically only hear about bad things happening in this part of the world. But people who live there, people who travel there relatively often as you do and others that we know.

Would tell us and have told us that this has been a relatively peaceful, quiet time between Hamas and Israel. Want to ask you to clarify a couple of things out of what you just said so that people track with us. One is the clarification that Hamas is not a nation. It is not a nation state. It is a terrorist group, even though and some of the things that you've reported on and written on in the daily article.

And some things that you've shared with me, there could be as many as 30 to 40, 000 Hamas soldiers which is a significant fighting force, but this is not a country, this is not a nation state that has attacked Israel. Can you. Just elaborate on that a little bit.

[00:05:57] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Absolutely. So Hamas itself is a political party.

It was formed in 1987, although it has precursors going back decades, even earlier than that. It's pledged in its charter that was brought to bear in 1988. It was pledged to the destruction of Israel. And so it exists, it would say, to liberate Palestine, as they would say. Very similar to Fatah, which is on the West Bank, which was started by Yasser Arafat in 1959 again, to liberate Palestine, as they would say, and then Hezbollah to the north.

These are all political parties, all three of them. The Palestinian people live primarily in Gaza to the west and West Bank to the east. They've been holding elections. Back in 2005, there was an election at which Hamas won the majority of the votes in Gaza. Fatah won the majority of the votes in the West Bank.

Those two parties hate each other. Hamas accusing Fatah of corruption, Fatah accusing Hamas of the same. Fatah, when it was the Palestine Authority back in 1993, pledged a peace arrangement with Israel whereby they recognized Israel's right to exist if Israel would give them limited autonomy in the West Bank.

Hamas thinks Fatah is therefore complicit in Israeli domination of Palestinian people. So they're parties. What makes it look like a nation is that Hamas rules Gaza, just as Fatah, or the Palestinian Authority, rules the West Bank. So they're in control of Gaza, but they're not a country. They're a political party that controls that part of the country.

Okay,

[00:07:22] **Dr. Mark Turman:** so is that to say even though these are parties... One thing I sense in what you're telling me is that even though we live and experience a high, unprecedented rate of partisanship in our country between Republicans and Democrats, that type of thing yeah their hatred of each other as competing parties is on a level well beyond even what we experience in the partisanship within our own country.

It's. Longer, deeper, stronger, and more intense, even than what we've experienced. And so confirm that if I'm on the right track and then secondly, even as parties. In people in my generation will remember something called the PLO, the Palestine Liberation Organization or yes. And so there is no Palestinian nation by which and through which these parties are competing.

Not at least in the sense that we understand it. There's not a nation in which there is a, these parties are all attached to. In the typical sense that we think about it as Americans, am I on the right track there?

[00:08:27] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's right. And that's part of what makes it so confusing. There's never been an autonomous Palestinian nation in history, in human history.

It was Israel before the second uprising, 132 to 135, the Bar Haq Revolt at the end of which Rome said, okay, we're tired of dealing with this Jewish nation. We're going to disperse the Jewish people and rename the area Palestine. But that area, even though on a map it would call itself Palestine, was under Roman domination.

Then it came under the Byzantines, and then the Arabs, and then the Crusaders, the Mamluks involved as well, then the Ottoman Empire, then the British Empire, and then Israel in 1948. So there's never been an autonomous nation called Palestine, even though that's what the Palestinians so much would wish for.

The so called two state solution people hear about would be that. It would be for the first time a, an autonomous Palestinian nation as well as an Israeli nation. That was suggested in 1947, the two state solution, the UN partition plan. The Jews supported it. The Arabs rejected it. And so they're Palestinian people.

They live primarily in Gaza and the West Bank. They have some limited autonomy. That was granted in 1993 in the Oslo Accords. And Fatah governs the West Bank and Hamas, the Gaza Strip, but not as a nation itself, but really more as... Areas under Israeli control that are given some level of autonomy. So it's very confusing from our point of view, because we don't have anything quite like it in our own experience here in America, we have parties, but they're within a nation.

In this sense, these parties want to become nations unto themselves, have aspire to do that act as though that were the case, but it's not really the case as much as would be true for

[00:10:02] **Dr. Mark Turman:** us. Wow. Okay. That helps, but that. Very confused. That tells us, we try to think, we try to think that well, everybody operates their country or something like that in a way similar to us.

And it's just simply not the case. One term that I want you to explain to us before we move on to, Some of the thinking that we can try to wrap our minds around relative to these terror risk groups and what their pa, their plans and agendas are. What is

[00:10:29] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Anata? Anata is actually, it's an Arabic word for uprising.

Okay. It's, there've been several of these intifadas. There's a thought there's a third intifada happening right now. There's been an attempt for years and years on the part of Hamas and to some degree Fatah and certainly the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other groups to do that. But what happens when an intifada occurs is that what was being done by militants or by jihadists gets caught by the larger public.

It becomes a public wide sort of an uprising against Israel. One example is when Ariel Sharon visited Western wall back a number of years ago, and the word got out that the Jews were planning to blow up the wall and rebuild the temple and use these tunnels that you and I have been through there as a means to doing that.

And so this intifada broke out, this uprising against the Jews. When that happens, it's violence on a very large scale. It's just what you would think of as Palestinian civilians involved in this throwing rocks And Israeli defense forces and cars and buses terrorist attacks, suicide attacks. A lot of the security wall that's now around the West Bank and Gaza was because of that second intifada.

And so an intifada is an uprising on a much larger level than is the case with individual isolated terrorist attacks on the part of individual insurgents and jihadists. And that's what Israel is so concerned about is an intifada. Because that really stops everything when the second intifada started, we couldn't go to Israel.

We went a couple of years for more than a couple of years where no one went. Tourism stopped in Israel, outside investment to a large degree stopped. The nation grinds to a halt in some ways, which is what the jihadists want. That's what the terrorists want. They want to destroy Israel economically, politically, as well as militarily and through terrorist in certain terms.

And so that's what we're worried about is an intifada that could bring at this point, it could be the West Bank, could be Gaza and could be Hezbollah, could be all of that. What makes this unprecedented, even relative to Yom Kippur and other wars, is that those wars were rather conventional. This is being likened to Yom Kippur because it was 50 years almost to the day that the 1973 invasion happened from Syria and other nations to the north over the Golan Heights.

But those were armies fighting armies. Those were not terrorist attacks against civilians, even though some civilians, as always is the case in warfare, are affected. It wasn't intentionally an attack against civilians. Those that came against Israel in 1973 did not behead children and infants. It wasn't an ISIS style terrorist sort of attack.

Whereas that's what's happening now. Now civilians are being deliberately targeted. while what's going on in Hamas. Israel has not ever seen this. By some estimates, there have been more Israelis killed last Saturday than ever before in one day in Israeli history, 1948 to the current. And so this is unprecedented in the level of ferocity that we're seeing in the light of what could be an Intifada to come.

[00:13:24] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Which is why you're hearing some compare this from Israeli sources. That this is on par for them to 9 11 for us. Israel doesn't have as many citizens as we do, and it's really not all that helpful to talk about percentages of population being killed or injured in this.

But on a scale of ferocity and of brutality. That is what they're speaking to in this as they get further into this, as they discover the carnage and the brutality of what's been done here. And like I said, if the goal, so the goal seems to be this intifada of attacking civilians so that civilians then attack back and that it becomes an entire uprising on both sides.

The terrorist groups hoping that, like I said injures or damages Israel in such a way as to possibly create an even larger collapse of the country. We're now we're not just talking about pockets of resistance fighting against a nation state in an army. Now we have movements of civilians in uprising and an uproar against each other.

It's such a large scale uprising that it becomes a a massive kind of war in the streets and among civilians, right?

[00:14:38] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's right. And then there's one other element to this I'm not seeing in the news as much now as I'm afraid we will in days to come.

Is this for a response to this? As their troops and their soldiers respond to this, as civilians, Palestinian civilians, are inevitably harmed and killed as a result of this, one of the hoped for outcomes would be a turning of the global community against Israel. Right now, we're seeing in the West, anyway, a very strong support for Israel, and Israeli leaders are already and saying publicly, we'll support us when we do what we have to do next, support us a week from now, support us when we have to go into Gaza.

That's when we'll find out if you're really supporting us. The other side doesn't want that. They want there to be this kind of what's already happening in a lot of the elitist sort of critical theory parts of the world, which you saw at Harvard and Columbia, this idea that these are oppressors that must be oppressed.

This idea that it's an apartheid state and that these are That this is an occupied state, that sort of thing that's already been happening and the leftist fringe the idea of sanctions and divestment sell from Israel, those sorts of things, boycotts, all of that you see on a lot of college campuses, they're hoping that as Israel responds to all of this in military terms, that will be a stronger movement against Israel.

They want to isolate Israel economically. They want to isolate Israel politically. They want America to turn its back on Israel as well. Iran wants to destroy Israel so that its Mahdi can come, but it knows it can't destroy America if it can get America to leave Israel. Then perhaps it can leave Israel to itself, and then it can push Israel into the sea, as it says.

That's what Osama bin Laden wanted to do at 9 11. He was hoping that at the very least, he would cause Americans to withdraw from the Middle East, lest they face further terrorist attacks in the homeland. So that then they could deal with Israel on its own. They know they have to decouple Israel from Europe and from America, and they're hoping.

That will happen as Israel responds to these atrocities. So that's another element of what we're seeing here in this larger strategy that's starting to unfold.

[00:16:39] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Let's see if we can, in your conversation with our friend Carmen LaBerge today, and part of that framework is just how Christians try to think their way through this biblically from the standpoint of terror and brutality and cruelty.

I think many Christians today when they read the Bible, they come across the fall and then they read about the first murder of Cain killing his brother. And they almost shrug it off as if it's not significant. You have to wonder, there had never been a murderer until Cain kills his brother.

You have to imagine that the trauma that. creates within creation and how it must have grieved the heart of God. And now when we see what's going on in Israel, some of the reports coming out what we saw in the brutality of nine 11, what we see in other expressions, particularly at scale, when it comes to the mindset of a terrorist.

Who is going to attempt to achieve an agenda through such incredible, brutal means. How do we think about that biblically and, , my thoughts sometimes run to the idea, if you want to know how bad the human heart is, look at the cross of Jesus that we would, that any person for any reason with any kind of motivation could do that to another human being is.



When you really ponder it is just astounding that the human heart can be that dark. Jeremiah wrote about this, that the human heart is so dark, no one can understand it. Help us frame this from the standpoint of what is sometimes called the doctrine of depravity.

[00:18:22] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, thank you. And we can close with that, absolutely, on a theological level because it has such practical outcomes for us.

So the idea of total depravity doesn't mean that humans can never do anything good. It means that every dimension of the human experience is affected by the fall. That I'm affected by the fall in my thinking, as well as in my feeling, as well as in my actions. That all of sin, it comes short of the glory of God.

That all of us are affected by sin, tainted by sin in every dimension of our lives. That idea. Is a biblical idea that comes from Cain and Abel to the present. That's the Canaanites worshipping their pagan god Molech by casting their children into the fire. That's Saul of Tarsus dragging early Christians out of their homes to be executed, at least in his hopes.

That's the kind of persecution of Jews that we've seen from Egypt and the genocide all the way to the Holocaust and so forth. What Hamas is doing right now is tragically an expression of fallen human nature. And the gospel takes that seriously. The reason that's an important point is that you and I live in a day of postmodern relativism that wants to say there's no such thing as truth, it's just your truth and mine.

No such thing as absolute morality, just your morals and my morals. This gives the lie to that. This says some evil is evil. As the president said in his remarks, unadulterated evil. When you're beheading children and infants, that is Evil. And the Bible recognizes that fact. We have to recognize that, have to start there with the fact that evil is evil.

And it's part of the fallen human condition. Second thing we have to recognize biblically is that humans can't solve human problems at the deepest level of human depravity. That we can't fix this ourselves. It's often been said that whatever's wrong with America can be made right by what's good with America.

That's only true to a degree. If I get cancer, I can't solve my cancer myself. This is a spiritual cancer. The gospel is the only hope at that point, because it recognizes both our evil and the goodness that God offers us in the gospel. I think of Tim Keller's famous quote, when he made it clear, the gospel is this, we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ.

I'll add one other piece if I could. On a third point, this is crucial for us in America as we understand ourselves in the context of our governance. America is built on this idea that all men are created equal, that they're endowed by the creator with inalienable right, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Ronald Reagan said faith in the dignity of the individual under God is the foundation for the whole American political experiment. It's John Adams who added, I think, to that sentiment, I think, that our constitution was made for a moral and religious people and is wholly unsuited to the governance of any other.

So if we are not moral and good, despite our fallen human flesh, we can't be governed effectively as a democracy. C. S. Lewis said he believed in democracy not because we're good, but because we're evil. And it's because we're evil that no person should be allowed unaccountable power over another. That's why we have checks and balances.

That's why we have elections. That's why we hold our leaders accountable to the people. That's why the gospel is so crucial for America's future. Because only when there's spiritual renewal and awakening and biblical morality can we be the good people that we must be for democracy to thrive. In a day that doesn't believe in morality, this is showing us, no, there is such a thing as morality and evil is evil.

It's also showing us we need the help only God can bring. And that help is crucial for our democratic experiment as well as for the flourishing of the human heart.

[00:22:05] **Dr. Mark Turman:** It just makes me think of how much it's true, not only for America, but for all the rest of the world. Part of what you were saying particularly about the depravity of all human beings.

Number one it illustrates how relevant biblical truth is. As I've heard you say before, because God doesn't change and because human nature doesn't change without the gospel, therefore the Bible and the message of Jesus is relevant in every age. You would have thought if we were capable of solving our problems that over thousands of years, we would have gotten past these kinds of incredibly depraved and cruel and brutal and just unspeakable kind of evil toward each other if we were going to be so capable of solving our own problems.

It also illustrates for me something that that we've preached and taught in churches for a long time when preaching the gospel is that any of us is capable of any sin, given the right context and given the right opportunities. I, what I've often told people and thought of my own in my own heart, if I had been one of those people alive when Jesus was put on trial, what would I have been doing?

What part of the crowd would I have been in? The likelihood is I would have been in the part of the crowd calling for his crucifixion. That's why Mel Gibson in his movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, put his own hand in the scene where Jesus's hand is being nailed to the cross is because he was recognizing.

And in some ways, acknowledging, admitting that he would have been a part of the crowd as well, calling for the elimination of this strange Jewish rabbi that they couldn't couldn't comprehend and couldn't control the way they wanted to. And then the whole picture of the Bible in the story of the New Testament, so many stories, the Apostle Paul and others.

Is the story that the human heart cannot change on its own, cannot change with human effort, but can actually change by the grace of God. And if we give up that hope if we give up the hope that human beings can be transformed by the gospel, then there really is no hope. It just strikes me as reminders of at least those kinds of truths for us as a way to.

To process what's going on in our world, and particularly what's going on in Israel right

[00:24:28] **Dr. Jim Denison:** now. I think that's exactly right. Your pastor, Paul Powell, whose legacy library has a daily devotional that I read each day made a statement the other day I thought was really profound that adds, I think illustrations into what you're saying.

He says, you can chart human progress in a variety of ways. You can chart technological progress. You can chart medical progress. You can chart scientific progress. Why have you never seen a chart of moral progress? Yes. And it's because it doesn't exist. What Hamas is doing demonstrates exactly what you just said.

We are just as depraved as we've ever been, just as fallen as we've ever been, and need the gospel therefore just as much as we ever have. Postmodern relativism says you don't need anything but yourself. It says you can solve it yourself. It's all about you. Look out for number one, pull your own strings.

You're a universe unto yourself. That's what we've been taught. That's what our culture has believed now for decades. This invasion and these atrocities give the light of that. And they say to all of us who are followers of Jesus, share the gospel. Live the gospel. Demonstrate the good news of God's love.

You have the only antidote to the disease of the human heart. You have the only chemotherapy for the cancer of the soul. It's never been more urgent that we pray for awakening, speak the

word in love, and live and demonstrate the grace of Christ in such a time as this. Because what's happening in Israel could happen here.

Human nature is that depraved and that much in need of the good news that we have in Christ.

[00:25:58] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, such a great reminder, Jim. Thank you for bringing us up to date. We will come back as events warrant with additional podcasts to try to help our friends to get again, just their mind and their heart around this in a biblical way.

Obviously, no matter where we are in the world, we can be praying for God's goodwill to be done, for peace to come, for innocent people, especially children, to be protected. We can pray that leaders would come to a greater place of wisdom and that this conflict would not expand. And would not become greater, but in fact would become smaller.

God loves everybody, not just Americans, not just Christians. He loves Jews. He loves Palestinians. He loves Muslims. He desires, as the Bible tells us, that all would come to a knowledge of the truth and to experience salvation by grace. And we are praying for that as well. And we will come back with additional updates in coming days as events warrant that.

And we ask you to continue to pray with us that God would bring peace in this conflict and in others around the world as well. Thank you for being a part of the Denison Forum podcast today. God bless you. We'll see you soon.