

The War in Israel: What You Need to Know about This Crisis of Global Significance with Dr. Jim Denison

Recorded Nov. 28, 2023 | Released Nov. 30, 2023

TRANSCRIPT

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

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[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Dr. Jim, welcome back to the Denison Forum podcast. How are you this morning?

[00:00:09] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I'm well, so glad to be with you today, Mark. Thanks for the privilege.

[00:00:12] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, we're going to talk about obviously what's top of mind for all of us right now, which is the war that continues between Israel and Hamas. I think it's important for us to always draw that distinction that this is a conflict between Israel and a terrorist group, not between Israel and the Palestinian people. Some people don't make those distinctions, but I think it's important to do so.

About two and a half weeks ago, you shared with me that God just stirred in your heart to write a book and to just try to pull a lot of different information together about this conflict. That book is now available as an ebook on our website.

The book is entitled *The War in Israel: what You Need to Know about This Crisis of Global Significance*. And as we're going to talk about today, you cover a lot of ground. There's a lot of stuff to think about related to this conflict.

But before we get into the details of the book, Jim, I just wanted to ask where did the passion that you have for Israel and for its people, its significance in the biblical story and in the world today,

where did that passion and love for Israel start for you? Because it doesn't necessarily find its place in every Christian's heart, but where did it come to you?

[00:01:29] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Well, thank you for that. 1995, I was pastoring a church in Atlanta. Our Minister of Music and Worship, John Conroe, one of my favorite people of all time, came to me. John had led a lot of tours over the years to various places and thought we should take a group to Israel. together. I'd always wanted to go to Israel, but it never had the opportunity or privilege to be able to do that.

So John put together this group of folks. In fact, just the other day found in a closet, a group picture of that group from 1995 that I'd kept over all of these years. And so I went along with John. John put the group together. I did the Bible studies and we had tour guides, of course, as you would expect.

I remember, I mean, gosh, that was how long ago, but I remember it as vividly, Mark, as if it happened last month. In that experience, I, you know, when you go to Israel, you assume you're going to see remarkable history. And you do, you know, that you're going to have a remarkable spiritual experience being in places where biblical events happen.

That obviously literally changed the world, but in that experience, it's as though the Lord was calling me specifically to this land. I sensed that God was uniquely moving in my life in this place. And in this time that I was there, this first pilgrimage, it was very clear to me, this would not be the last. That this was to be part of my life. This was to be part of my work. Part of my ministry was to be in this kind of ongoing engagement with Israel.

So when I got back, I began the process of trying to learn everything that I had not yet learned about Israel. I had three religion degrees by that point in time, a PhD in philosophy, but I'd never really focused specifically on Israel per se, more than you would just typically learn as part of a theological curriculum. So I really began pouring in to the history of the land, modern history of Israel, the Jewish people, the customs, the traditions by which they live.

And then about five years later, we had moved to a church in Dallas. Good friend of mine there wanted to go to Israel wanted me to take together the group. So they got me connected and I hate to say this in public mark and you'll understand this why I should be so reluctant to say this in public, but we developed a relationship with Dr. Mike Fanning Mike has been the he's been leading study tours to israel forever. That was his job for a very long time Mike had a phd in Old Testament in archaeology lived in israel for two years He's probably led 200 groups over there and so I knew Mike from seminary days way back in the day, but had not gone to Israel with him.

Well, this friend in our church in Dallas knew Mike from Baylor and suggested we would go with Mike. Should have never done it, but we did. So we went with Mike back in the year 2000. Mike is one of my dearest friends in the world. I've led 35 study tours since then. Every one of them with Mike. Mike's the best organizer.

As you know, you've been with him several times as well. He's crazy. He's certifiably insane. The guy's a lunatic. But he is a remarkable organizer of tours as nuts as he is as fun as he is to do these trips. And so, really working with Mike is what expedited this process.

And there were several years where I'd go four times a year when we would literally take four groups over. There were times where we do back to back groups and I'd stay over and another group would come. Several times we've done what we call 2. 0 groups with people that have been before so we can go to new sites. We can go to Petro. We can go down to a lot. Down in Be'er Sheva and the Negev and just over to Jordan and do things you don't usually do on a typical tour.

And so started in 1995 with what I thought at the initial time would be a single trip to Israel. Every pastor ought to go to Israel, I believed and still believe. And in that trip, to answer your question, God just spoke to my heart and said, I want Israel to be part of your life. And I want leading people to Israel to be part of your ministry.

When we started this ministry in 2009, people kept asking us to take them to Israel. And so we've continued doing that even way past being the pastor of a traditional church. And I have continued to this day love Israel, especially love the Jewish people. And this, as I learned in 1995 has become a major part of my heart, significant part of what I think God's called my ministry to be.

[00:05:27] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Wow. And just such a great background story. And as you said, and I've heard you say this having now traveled a couple of times to Israel with you, that every time it's different, every time it's fresh, every time it's new, every time the encounter with the presence of God in this very unique place is always there.

[00:05:45] **Dr. Jim Denison:** it's like the first time every time

[00:05:47] **Dr. Mark Turman:** yeah, and

[00:05:48] **Dr. Jim Denison:** ask me that do you get tired of this? Do you get tired of going in the answers categorically no. Never been a time when I was there that I didn't want to be there because it just such a unique place to be and God just always speaks in any unique way

[00:06:01] **Dr. Mark Turman:** And having been there four times, every time, it just feels like you grow closer to it and it becomes more a part of you every time you go. So obviously that's the background and the passion out of which this book is written. But Jim, tell us a little bit how a few weeks ago, how God just set stirred in you and said, okay, this needs to become a work. It needs to become something more than the very helpful articles that you've written and some of the podcasts that we've done. What stirred you, to take on this project of a book, which became a labor of love and became very significant in its scope and scale? What's your goal, what's your purpose, what's your hope for the book and where did God kind of put that on your heart?

[00:06:47] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I became very frustrated a few days after the October 7th invasion with how much what I think anyway is misleading information is continuing to be disseminated. In the early days, you always expect when a crisis of such significance happens, global significance happens that there's a lot you don't know and a lot that you think you know that you later find out you don't know, but after a few days of what I believe to be absolutely wrong narratives inside all of this, not being corrected, but being in many ways continuing to be promoted and advanced and even to the time we're having this conversation continuing to be the case. I just felt like there were some narratives that really needed to be set straight here. Some things that needed to be put in context, historical context, biblical context, cultural context, so that we could understand this conflict as it actually is.

But not just for an academic or educational purpose. I felt like we can't pray as effectively if we don't understand the context in a level that can help us to pray with passion and with precision. It's hard to know how to use our influence effectively. However, we might use that influence in this context if we don't have a better understanding of the context itself.

So the goal really is to equip Christians to pray powerfully and use their influence effectively for the cause of peace in the Middle East and peace in their own relationships and in their own hearts with the Prince of Peace to be catalysts for spiritual awakening, which is the ultimate answer to this conflict and to all conflict and to do so by setting this conflict itself in a better setting, I think, historically and culturally, at least that's the goal.

So I'm wanting you to equip and encourage people redemptively in light of the conflict that we find ourselves continuing to hear about on a daily basis.

[00:08:27] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, that's what the book does so well, especially in the beginning, setting a context for understanding. I think many of us have the perspective of this part of the world is just always in turmoil. And this is just the latest expression of that turmoil. And that may be in some way true, but we'll talk about how it's likely going to be more than that, at least in this instance.

But when we think about the nation of Israel and the Jewish people, Jim, would you say that we should make significant distinctions between this? When we use the term Israel how would you want people to most think about that? Would you want them to think about it as a people group, as a race of people? Would you want them to think about it as a geopolitical nation, a reality as a country? How do you usually think of it when, or is it just all one in the same for you when you think of the term Israel?

[00:09:25] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, the answer to all of that is yes. Is that helpful? Does that clarify what you were, you know, as we say so often, Mark, when we go over there and try to explain this and your question is, it gets really to the heart of the complexity of it all. There's race, region, and religion.

So in that part of the world, by virtue of race, you think of the Jews as a race, you think of the Arabs as a race. Those are the two predominant races that you encounter when you're in what we think of as the Holy Land.

In terms of the region that you're thinking about, you're thinking of the modern geopolitical state of Israel found in 1948. And then on both sides, on the West side is Gaza, on the East side is what's known as the West Bank, even though it's on the Eastern side of Israel, because it's on the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, as you know. And so that's the region of it, and people that live in the West Bank and Gaza are by region known as Palestinians.

People who live in the middle are by region known as Israelis, even though they might be Jews by race or they might be Arabs by race. About 20 percent of Israel's population is Arab. About 80 percent is Jew by race. So you've got races being Jews and Arabs, both living in the region called Israel. You have races in the West Bank and Gaza, predominantly Arab, primarily Arab I would say, in that area that are known as Palestinians by region, and then by religion.

You have Judaism, you have Islam, and to a small degree you have Christianity. So, it becomes very complex. You can have an Israeli Arab... Muslim. About 20 percent of Israel is that. You can be an Israeli Arab Christian. Some of my best friends in the Middle East are Arab Israeli Christians. You can be a Palestinian Arab Muslim.

Most in Palestine are. I have some very good friends there who are Palestinian. Arab Christians. You could be an Israeli Jewish Jew. You could be an Israeli Jewish Christian. I don't know any Israeli Jewish Muslims who are Jewish by race and Muslim by religion, although I guess that's possible. And so, it's race, region, and religion.

All those things get kind of mixed up together and that's part of why the area is so complex. As you spend time there, it begins to make sense, but when you hear it, it can be really, really rather confusing, I'm afraid.

[00:11:41] **Dr. Mark Turman:** yeAh, so I'm already confused by putting all those terms together. But have you ever met or do you know any Arab Palestinian Jews? Okay.

[00:11:53] **Dr. Jim Denison:** met anyone, but I guess it's logically possible that somebody could have converted to Judaism who lives in Palestine and is Arab by race. But I do know a number of Arab Palestinian Christians, as I say. Bethlehem, for instance must have, as its mayor, a Christian, by law.

[00:12:08] **Dr. Mark Turman:** By law.

[00:12:09] **Dr. Jim Denison:** is in the West Bank, and is therefore in Palestine. And the vast majority of people who live there are Arabs, and yet some of them probably 15 or 20 percent, I think, of Bethlehem these days are Christian. Used to be a majority Bethlehem was Christian. Now it's a minority. Some of our friends that, you know, in Bethlehem as well, that we work with when we go there are Palestinian Arab Christians, but have not met any Palestinian Arab Jews, but I suppose that's possible.

[00:12:33] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So, Jim, tell us why this piece of, small piece of land the size of New Jersey it, historically, you've said and explained so well that this is a land bridge and that over the centuries for hundreds, thousands of years, this was the place where larger nations would go to have battle. So they didn't have to do battle on their own primary territory you might say. Right. That's not really the case of why there's conflict now. Or is it, is that historical reality still at play in terms of geographic location?

[00:13:09] **Dr. Jim Denison:** No, historically, you're exactly right. There was always Egypt to the south. There were always the great kind of superpower to the south, and then to the north it could be the Babylonians, or the, well, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians, and the Persians, and the Greeks, and the Romans, and there were always a war with Egypt, and so they'd fight each other, and they always met in the middle, and that's that thin little land bridge there that we think of as Israel. You've got the Mediterranean to the West and you've got deserts essentially to the East and mountains. And so it's just this little kind of fertile tiny little area there, which is where they would meet. And that's why historically it was such a place of conflict.

That's not really the case now in terms of the existing conflict that we're thinking about here. And so just to put it in some historic context, very briefly in 640 AD, a Muslim conquest came into the area. Arab invaders coming from the area of Saudi Arabia and to the south came into

that area that was populated primarily by Jews and Christians at this point in time and settle in this area that's been known as Palestine. The Romans renamed a Palestine back in the 2nd century not for the current day Palestinians but for the Philistines to sea people that lived there at the time a Latin version of Philistine is Palestine. So they renamed the area of Palestine, but it was lived in primarily by Jews and Christians.

640 AD the Arabs come in Arab Muslim conquest and drive out a lot, although not all of the Jews and the Christians that live there. And then you fast forward all the way to 1948 the declaration of the modern state of Israel. By this time, there's been a great number of Jews that have come back into the land. Always Jewish presence there. There was always a Jewish population, but a great number more that have come in.

Now, by this point in time, it's about 1.2 million, about two thirds are Arab, about one third are Jews. Israel declares itself a state, May 14, 1948. The surrounding Arab nations tell the Arabs there to leave the land while they come in and destroy Israel. Then they can come back to the land. Well, most of them do. About 80 percent of them do. They go to Gaza because that's Egypt. They go to the West Bank because that's Jordan. About 20 percent stayed.

Well, Israel won the war for independence. And those that fled became the population primarily in Gaza and West Bank today. Those that stayed and their descendants became the 20 percent of Israel that are the Arabs living there now.

And so the conflict now is between two nations that are both battling for the same land, and especially Hamas, which wants her not to be in Israel, wants to destroy Israel, wants to annihilate the Jews. They see it as a zero sum. They don't want a two state solution. They want there to be no Israel. But it's not because of the ancient land bridge between the Egyptians to the south and the Assyrians to the north. It's more because of the geopolitics from the seventh century forward and the Arabs and the Jews and both of them wanting the same territory.

[00:15:51] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So early on in the book, Jim you make the statement that with so much opposition toward the Jewish people throughout history, and now what we're seeing in this present conflict, one of the statements that you made was, is that Israel is the home of hope. And you made that statement keying off of their national anthem. Why do you use that phrase? Why do you call them the home of hope?

[00:16:18] **Dr. Jim Denison:** It's a great question. The Jewish population worldwide is around 17 million or so, less than half of which live in Israel. But because there is an Israel, the Jews across the world know they have a homeland. And they know that therefore, even though they're a tiny percentage of the global population, they can believe that there is a future for them as a race.

They have been the victims of anti Semitic hate going all the way back to the Egyptians and the four centuries that they were enslaved in Egypt before they were let out of the Exodus by Moses. And from that time to this, for lots of reasons we can talk about, there have been enormous efforts over the centuries, the millennia, to exterminate the Jewish people.

people to exterminate them as a race. Well, now, because of 1948, because of the creation of the modern state of Israel, the Jewish people know they have, as a people, a hope. They live in the threat of extermination on a level the rest of us can't understand. I never get up on a single day and wonder if somebody's going to destroy America.

Or Americans or if I as an American am going to be wiped out simply because I am an American. But Jews living in France right now, Jews living in Germany, Jews living in Canada, Jews living in the United States are right now the victims of anti-Semitic hate on a level that really would have them as a race be ended.

And so for there to be a powerful, military, nuclear armed force in the Middle East that can be almost a guarantee of sorts that the Jewish race will not be exterminated, there will never again be a Holocaust, there will never again be a Shoah, there will never again be an extermination of the Jewish race, that's a step of hope that is more essential to the Jewish people than we Gentiles can possibly understand. And that's part of why there's such solidarity with Israel by Jews around the world even if they have never lived there and don't intend ever to live there. They're just this kind of solidarity around a sense of national hope and future together

[00:18:22] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Jim, do you think that that solidarity is mostly built now around race or around religion, or is it so wrapped up that you really can't distinguish the two?

[00:18:34] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Now, I think you can distinguish them. It's a great question. In Israel, about 40 percent of the Jews that live there are practicing atheists. They wouldn't call themselves atheists, but they never observe Shabbat, they don't go to synagogue, they don't keep the traditions, they have their own versions of traditions, but they're very secular, very much secularist Jews. They, if they had a religion, it would be Zionism, which is the belief that Israel should have a nation, should have a homeland. And so, but they're not practicing Jews on some level.

Outside Israel, you have what's known as the Orthodox and the Conservative and the Reform. And the more you move down that spectrum, the more you move away from historic Judaism and the very liberal expressions of Judaism. I know a number of Reform Jews who don't believe God exists. Know a number of Reform Jews who practice the traditions of Judaism, but they do so in cultural ways more than in religious ways. And so you wouldn't, I think, say fairly that Judaism is united around religion as it would have been in the biblical era.

But it is united around the sense of race, solidarity of race, and the need for the race to be perpetuated, which is the hope that Israel offers and presents. So I think it's more about nationalism and around race than it would be united around religion and Judaism today.

[00:19:43] **Dr. Mark Turman:** No. So, kind of a related question off of that, which is, would you go so far as to say that you believe that the Jewish people have been the most oppressed, the most persecuted group across history. And would you say that that has been because of simply their identity as a race, or because of their religion? Or is it some of both?

[00:20:08] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's a great question. I think you can make the argument that they have been. I really do. And part of that is because of the longevity. I mean, they've existed for essentially 40 centuries, if you go back to Abraham. It's hard to find a contiguous racial group that has anything like that longevity by which to be persecuted.

That might be part of it, but the other part of it, I really do. think has to do with some of the uniquenesses to their religion and to the culture that's grown out of that. The Jews, wherever they have lived, have been Jews first. Before they've been Egyptians, before they've been Assyrians or Babylonians or anything else or Europeans, they are first and foremost Jews.

Jews, they keep their traditions, they keep their their cultural identity intact. They observe their three great feasts of the year. They have the Shabbat of ever, the Sabbath of every week. They their home is the first synagogue highly literate so that they can teach the word of God, the Torah to their children.

The father is the first priest. And so there's this very intact, very intentional kind of counter culturalism about the Jews. Well, that's put them at great odds over the centuries, depending on where they live. In the story of Daniel's unwilling to worship the Babylonian emperor as God because he worships the one true God.

And as you have Daniel in the lion's den, you have Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and the fiery furnace as a result of that all the way up into the Jewish counter culturalism that led on some ways to the rise of Hitler and the claim that the Jews, because they were different from the Germans, were the cause of Germany losing World War I and the cause of a lot of the oppression of the German people. They blamed the Jews for all of that.

Their otherness, their distinctiveness, their being different from, their being unwilling to subsume their religion to the culture in which they lived. I think has a good deal to do with this.

And then Mark, I'll add very quickly. I genuinely think there's been a great deal of jealousy of the Jews over the centuries because they are so highly literate because they are so connected and committed to family and the thriving of family.

They just culturally have embodied embrace those things that make for human flourishing. Those things that sociologists know can prove are the essentials to flourishing as any individual in any race. As a result, wherever they've been, they have really tended to flourish.

I've often used the statement that they've never been more than 2.5 percent of America's population, but they have 37 percent of our Nobel laureates. Well, that's true kind of wherever the Jews have lived. And so conspiracy theories have come out of that. Well, the reason they flourish and we don't is because they're part of some global conspiracy or they've stolen our power from us in some way or whatever.

There were farmers, for instance, until when they were brought back when, as they started coming back into what's known as British Zionism they were not allowed in some places to have access to land so they had to become bankers instead. Well, then they thrived as bankers. Then the farmers blamed the bankers for being more successful than the farmers that sort of thing. And so I do think there'd been jealousy directed toward the Jews over the centuries that has been part of that as well.

[00:23:14] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Right. And that's, yeah, that's so helpful. This incredibly unique group of people that, as you said strive very diligently to retain their identity as a group, as a race and is to be really admired in so many ways. .

Well, let's talk a little bit, Jim, about that phrase, God's chosen people. Several people asked me that even over the last few days. And we know from biblical teaching in the Old Testament that there is this distinction of Israel being chosen for the purposes of God in a unique way.

And some people try to understand how that might apply to the nation of Israel today and to the Jewish people today. Anyway, we could write volumes just around that phrase of what we might understand about Israel as God's chosen people. So my challenge to you is, can you give us a couple of minutes of just In what sense can we use that phrase, Israel is God's chosen people today? Can we use it at all? Should we use it at all?

[00:24:22] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's a great question. I think the largest chapter in the whole book is on that very question and we get into great detail looking at a number of different texts that have been interpreted in various ways in the history of tradition and all of that, because it is a very complex subject. So really, as you know, Mark, there are three answers to your question.

The one comes out of a theology known as dispensationalism. It believes that any promise made to the literal state of Israel has to be fulfilled by a literal state of Israel. So they see the creation in 1948 as a fulfillment of prophecy. They think that the state of Israel today continues God's original intention of using the Jews as his chosen people.

So their answer to your question would be yes, they are still the chosen people just as they were the chosen people back to the time of Abraham. As Jerry Falwell said, God judges nations as they judge Israel. And so they would say we should be supporting Israel because they are still, in a geopolitical sense, the chosen people of God.

And there are variations on that that would say even if the state of Israel isn't the chosen people, the Jewish race is still as much the chosen people as they ever were. And so that's one answer.

A second answer would be to say, well, the purpose for which they were chosen was to bring the Messiah. And now that Messiah has come, the Jews are no different in God's economy than any other race. That's Galatians 3, 28. There's neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, or all Abraham's seed, heirs according to the covenant. Paul speaks of the church as the new Israel. So a second answer would be to say they are not the chosen people today as they were prior to the coming of Messiah. They fulfilled that purpose when Messiah came.

A third answer, and the one that I would embrace myself, would be to say that while I do believe that the purpose of the choosing of the Jewish race was specifically to bring Messiah. And I do understand the church to be the new Israel today. I don't believe the church has replaced the Jews in the sense of their uniqueness.

I do believe that God continues to use the Jews in a unique way. Some of which we've been describing already in this conversation. They're incredible cultural contributions over the centuries. They're incredible social impact, all the good that God continues to bring to the world through the Jewish people.

And even through the nation of Israel in 1948, the only functioning democracy in the Middle East by far America's best friend in the Middle East, lots of geopolitical reasons. We should be grateful for Israel. So you can answer the question third way to say they're still being used in a unique way by God, even if they're not the chosen people as they were prior to the coming of Messiah. So very complex conversation, but that's a short version of the very involved issue that really is at hand there.

[00:26:57] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, thank you for that. And a couple of points of clarity, just to make sure I'm thinking along with you, which is to say that if you go all the way back to Abraham and when God chooses Abraham and says that he will bless the world through

Abraham and through the people of Abraham, We would say as Christians that the largest expression of that, the most ultimate expression of that was bringing Christ, bringing Jesus through them to be the Messiah for the world.

That would be the greatest expression of how God blesses the world through the Jewish people. But that he continues to do that by their unique contributions as a group. And so he's continuing that promise in some sense of blessing the world in many different ways through their unique abilities and contributions.

Jim, I'd also want you to clarify that I often get into this line of thinking that, okay, well, there's the way of salvation through Jesus for all the rest of us, but then the Jews. Well, the Jews are on their own track of salvation that is different for the rest of us. That's not what the Bible teaches in the book of Romans and in other places, correct?

[00:28:11] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's correct. And it's important to say that because to the degree that we think of the Jews as God's chosen people, it almost feels anti Semitic to say that they therefore need to trust in Christ. It feels as though we're on some level disparaging them by saying that they need to trust in Jesus, just like everybody else does.

But that's exactly what the Scripture says. I mean, Paul himself, a Pharisee and with the highest credentials you could have, really, in first century Judaism, says that he could wish himself accursed for the sake of his fellow Jewish people. And he makes it clear in the book of Romans that he prays for their salvation.

If the Jews could be saved apart from Christ, then there'd be no need , for the Christians to reach out to the Jews. And yet, that's what you see all through the book of Acts in which you see all through Christian history. And you see Jesus as a Jew dying for his fellow Jews on the cross and praying for God's forgiveness for the very Jewish authorities who arranged his execution.

And so very much it's the case that the only way to salvation is through Christ. Jesus says, I'm the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me. Paul, Peter said to his fellow Jews in the Sanhedrin in Acts four 12, there is no other way of salvation given under heaven among men, no other name by which we must be saved.

And so Peter believed that the Sanhedrin needed to trust in Jesus and the Sanhedrin was the ruling council of the Jews. So if there was a way to be saved apart from Christ, you'd think the Sanhedrin would have found it. Yet Peter insists that they need to trust in Christ as their Messiah as well.

So it's not anti Semitic to say the Jews need Jesus any more than we're being hateful to Gentiles to say the Gentiles need Jesus. We're offering both the incredible good news. That God loves us so much, He gave us a way of salvation that we could never earn, but we could all receive just by grace through faith, and that's the offer to Jews as well as to Gentiles.

[00:29:56] **Dr. Mark Turman:** No, such a clear word that often gets missed in this conversation in some ways, especially when we get into these geopolitical realities that we're seeing played out so much right now. So let's kind of move the conversation into this present conflict in some way, and let me set that up in this way, Jim, that it just seems like from what you have described in various places, including this book, the two World War, World Wars and especially the Second World War really kind of just pivoted history around this region in a huge way as it did for the whole world in so many ways that we continue to experience the ramifications of that. But the Second World War brings in what was called the British Partition Plan that ultimately leads to the independence of Israel in 1948.

kind of give us the short story of the last 70 years or so, including like, where does Yasser Arafat come into this story? He's obviously a significant part of the Palestinian movement. And some of his legacy still certainly is found there in the West Bank particularly, but kind of take us shortly from 48 to now and how we got to this place where we have this, we have these competing groups, particularly this group, Hamas, that has come so much into the forefront. Bring us up to speed over that last 80 years or so.

[00:31:26] **Dr. Jim Denison:** You bet. Yeah, great question. So, as the Jews start moving into Israel toward the end of the 19th century, what's known as British Zionism, and repopulating the land, by 1947, after the Holocaust, the horrors of the Holocaust are becoming known to the world, it becomes more obvious to the world that the Jews need a homeland, that they deserve their ancient homeland again.

And so, the British had taken over this area of Palestine after World War I . The Ottoman Empire controlled it for 400 years, but they were on the wrong side , and after they lost World War I, the British were given control of the area from , 1917 forward, under the British mandate period.

1947, the British bring forward what's known as the Partition Plan that the United Nations adopted. In that plan, this little sliver in the middle would be Israel, West Bank and Gaza would be the nation of Palestine. The Jewish authorities accepted the plan. The Arabs... rejected it. And so then the next year the Jews declare independence, May 14, 1948.

And we know at point the nation of Israel is recreated for the first time in 2, 000 years, in 1948. Well, now you've got West Bank, which is Jordan, and you've got Gaza, which is Egypt, primarily down here.

1967, the Six Days War, there's an attempt to eradicate the Jews from the land by the Arabs around them. The Jews win that war and they gain control of the West Bank and Gaza. 1973, Yom Kippur, another attempt to eradicate them. They win that war again. Along the way, they've gained control of the Golan Heights up on the northern edge with Syria as well, and the Sinai Peninsula, which is on the border with Egypt.

They trade the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in exchange for peace, the Camp David Accords in 1979. And from that time forward, there's never been a shot fired by Egypt against Israel. Or in return, in the early eighties, they signed a peace treaty with Jordan in exchange for peace and they have a peaceful relation with Jordan and on that border has been peaceful as well.

Well, in 1959, a man named Yasser Arafat comes to the leadership of the Palestinian people, organizes a thing called the PLO, Palestine Liberation Organization, to seek to overthrow the Jews, to drive them out of the land, create the whole area as Palestine. Recreate all areas, Palestine. He eventually becomes the leader of a party known as Fatah.

He, when he dies, his successor Mahmoud Abbas becomes the leader of Fatah. In 1987, an outgrowth of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt known as Hamas is founded. They over time become they win elections in 2005 and they drive Fatah out of Gaza. And so now this party called Hamas is in control of Gaza.

The party called Fatah that had been started by Yasser Arafat is in control of the West Bank. Well, in the Oslo Accords, Yasser Arafat recognized Israel's right to exist in exchange for limited Palestinian autonomy of the West Bank. So Fatah, that party, under Mahmoud Abbas, recognizes Israel's right to exist.

They're not trying to exterminate Israel. Hamas was founded to destroy Israel. Its founding creed says it exists to destroy Israel. That's why it exists. It's to drive the Jews completely out of the land, to kill the Jews, and to take the whole area over. So this party, Hamas, has been ruling since 2005 in Gaza, Fatah in the West Bank.

Fatah is willing to work with Israel, Hamas wants to destroy Israel. Hamas and Fatah are very much at odds with each other, as you might imagine, and that's where we are today. We have the Palestinian Authority, as it's known, or Fatah. In the West Bank, we have Hamas in Gaza. It's been labeled a terrorist organization, and as we saw on October 7, that label is tragically well deserved.

So that's where Hamas comes from, that's why they exist, to destroy Israel. Israel's being accused of committing a genocide against the Palestinians. It's actually Hamas that is pledged to genocide and has made that extremely clear from their founding to the present day.

[00:35:28] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So Jim, if I'm understanding you correctly, this plan is rolled out, endorsed by the United Nations to create essentially a two state solution for Israel and for the Palestinians. When the Arabs reject it, Israel just finally says, well, we're going to accept our side of it.

And we're going to declare ourselves. in keeping with the spirit with that recommendation, even though the Arabs rejected it. So, they declare that they're going to be a nation and they start moving in that direction to make that a reality. And it becomes a reality in 1948 and they've operated that way since then.

But the Arab side of that question has never been able to get very organized. Somewhat organized under Arafat, but never organized into a nation in the way that Israel organized itself into a nation. That's all the way back to 1948.

[00:36:21] **Dr. Jim Denison:** And part of that again is because some of the Palestinians left the land, others stayed in the land. The Israeli Arabs, so you've got Arabs here, Arabs there. These Arabs are more aligned under Jordan. These Arabs are more aligned under Egypt. Lots of complexity inside the whole question of how to create a united Palestinian leadership.

[00:36:38] **Dr. Mark Turman:** right, and still a lot of factions and disunity among the Palestinian groups and the surrounding Arab nations. One of the questions I had for you, have you seen, like, even among some of these Arab nations that have acknowledged Israel's right to exist, have you seen any Arab nations disavow Hamas as a terrorist group?

[00:37:03] **Dr. Jim Denison:** We've seen leaders within those groups do that. Recently, for instance, an Egyptian minister in their cabinet asked why with all the money given to Hamas, they've never built a bomb shelter. They had to know Israel was going to respond this way and they've never done anything to protect their people. So we've seen limited statements from within these various groups that have responded in a way that would be derogatory toward Hamas, but not the way you would wish they would, the way you wish that those in Abraham Accord or Jordan or Egypt would come out in mass against Hamas as this terrorist group that is victimizing its own people, its own Palestinian citizens.

And I think that's for two reasons real quickly, Mark. The first is that we're Muslims against Muslims here. There's a thing called the ummah, which is the global Muslim community. In that thinking, you're a Muslim before you're a Jordanian, or you're a Palestinian, or you're an Egyptian, or a Turkish person, or anything else.

And to criticize your fellow Muslim can be seen as attacking Islam. Especially if you're criticizing a fellow Muslim versus the Jews. The Qur'an calls the Jews apes and swine. There's

been an historic enmity against the Jews, so for a Muslim nation to come out against a fellow Muslim nation, even a terrorist organization, could be seen as an attack on Islam.

And that leads to a second point. These nations have significant groups within them that are jihadist as well. There are people in Egypt that are very unhappy with Egypt's peace accord with Israel. People in Jordan, very unhappy with the Jordanian Hashemite kingdom's relationship with Israel and if these two kingdoms if a CC and Egypt or King Abdullah in Jordan comes out in favor of Israel against Hamas, he could be dealing with uprisings unrest in his own nation in ways that aren't as obvious to us. We think of them as being much more monolithic than they are.

And so, there's political realities here. If they make public a statement of support for Israel versus Hamas, that isn't as clear for us in this country. I guess we're seeing a little of that with the divisions we're seeing in America. Around the way President Biden has responded to Israel and it maintains that solidarity and people in his own party that are very unhappy with him for doing that to the degree that he has. Well, in Egypt and Jordan and Turkey and Lebanon, you'd see that on a much greater level if they were as strongly supportive of Israel as we would wish they would. So their political realities as well as religious realities in play here.

[00:39:25] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So yeah, lots of extreme elements in all of these countries is what it sounds like, lots of competing and sometimes very extreme elements. We just a few minutes left, Jim, maybe a couple more questions for you and just really encourage people to pick up this book. It's such a comprehensive overview of so many of the dynamics, but wanted to ask: we've talked a lot. We've done even a podcast on some of the reactions that we've seen on college campuses here in America opposing Israel's response to this terrorist attack. One of the statements you made in the book was: you do not believe that the claims of Hamas and the claims of Israel in this conflict are morally equivalent. Talk about that statement when you say that they are not morally equivalent because many, including people in America, people on college campuses, are claiming that they are morally equivalent. Explain what you're saying.

[00:40:25] **Dr. Jim Denison:** They are. And even some are going further than that and making Hamas the victims and making Israel the perpetrator of genocide on a level that they would never accuse Hamas of being, even though Hamas is that perpetrator of genocide.

So really, I think one thing you can do is go back to the founding creeds of these two nations. From Israel forward, 1948 forward, Israel has existed to be a homeland for the Jewish people to which anyone is welcome. That's why 20 percent of the Israeli population is Arab. That's why Israel is at the forefront of advancing human rights. On levels that are actually kind of frustrating for conservative Christians like us on occasion.

Tel Aviv was named the most gay friendly city in the world by American Airlines a few years ago. There's a very large gay pride parade every year in Tel Aviv. Well, try doing that in Gaza. Try doing that in the West Bank. Try doing that in Egypt or doing that in Turkey. But Israel has always been on the forefront of civil rights and human rights.

Golda Meir, one of the most significant prime ministers, a female, women that are in the governance of Israel and a level that you would never see in a Muslim nation. And so on the one side, you just look at the sociological realities of Israel and compare that with Hamas, which, as I said, is pledged to the absolute genocidal destruction.

Of Israel part of the reason this video is making the rounds right now and being shown in movie theaters and online taken from footage shot by the terrorists of Hamas when they came in on October 7th is to disprove this notion out there that they really didn't kill babies that they really didn't rape women that they really didn't execute parents in front of their children. There's this kind of narrative that's growing out there as an apologetic for Hamas.

This video gives the lie to that. These hostages now being released are giving the lie to that. So there can be absolutely no moral equivalence between the way the parties treat the other, the way that Israel warns the Palestinians in Gaza before they come in, the way that they have historically dropped leaflets to warn them before they have to come in.

The only reason they're having to come into Gaza and do what they're doing is because Hamas uses them as human shields. When they took al Shifa hospital, there was this huge outcry claiming that this was an absolute genocidal destruction of the Palestinian people and then they found the tunnels underneath the hospital. They found everything Israel said they would find proving that Hamas was using that hospital as its base of operations.

The very thing Hamas was lying about, the very thing that the people angry at Israel, the pro Palestinian demonstrators, have been so upset about, was proven when they came in and found everything Israel said was there. So, on a sociological level, there can be no moral equivalence between the two.

But then very quickly, if you look at their ultimate outcomes, Dennis Prager makes the point that if the Palestinian terrorists would lay down their arms that would be peace today. If the Jewish forces laid down their arms, there'd be annihilation today. What the two want is so opposite of each other there can be no claim to moral equivalence between these two groups when you look at what their wished for outcome is, and compare the one to the other.

[00:43:32] **Dr. Mark Turman:** No, it's , so important to really think through that deeply. And yeah, your explanation is so helpful and the book goes even further into that whole conversation,

because that's really foundational I think at a very deep level of understanding this conflict and distinguishing this conflict in a very important way relative to that moral argument. So very, very helpful there.

I've got one last question, which could be 25 or more minutes all on its own. But one of the major claims putting this book together that you've explained is that this is different. It's different from a geopolitical standpoint and it leads us to an urgent spiritual call. Can you kind of sum up those two ideas as a landing place for us?

[00:44:25] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, I'll be glad to try to do that. What's different about this on the first level is the degree of the atrocities committed by Hamas is obligating Israel now to destroy Hamas. That's not been the case in the past. When Hamas has attacked Israel, it's been primarily through rocket fire that's been exchanged by rocket fire to degrade Hamas's ability to do that.

And then there's a reset for a period of years while Hamas restocks their stores, and then they do it again. They've taken a few hostages here and there, but nothing like what they did on October 7th. And so Israel was able to allow Hamas to exist in Gaza and wanted not to have to go in. They knew the kind of urban warfare that would be ahead of them.

They knew that there'd be a great number of Palestinian civilians that would be caught in this crossfire through no wish of Israel, through no desire of Israel. I keep saying if Israel had ever wanted to destroy the Palestinians, they've had the military ability to do that for decades. If they wanted to take hostages, they could be doing it right now.

And they don't, if they wanted to do to Palestinians what Hamas wants to do to Israel, they could do it tomorrow. They could absolutely annihilate the Gaza Strip tomorrow if they wanted to do that. They don't want to do that. But now, they're being required to remove Hamas ability ever to do to Israel again what they did on October 7th.

And I say that to say, that's going to require, already does, and will even more as they move south in Gaza. It's going to require that the Israeli defense forces do street warfare, urban warfare, in a way that will inevitably, tragically, unintentionally lead to an escalation of Palestinian casualties.

What I'm afraid will happen, as this happens, is there will be a mounting global outrage against Israel that could isolate Israel which is exactly what Hamas and the enemies of Israel want. They want Israel to be isolated politically, economically. They want nations to stop exporting to Israel, which depends on exports for its food.

They want nations to stop exporting to Israel in terms of energy resources, in terms of economic trading. They want to isolate Israel to a degree that the Jews will give up on Israel and leave for a better place to live. They know they can't destroy Israel militarily, but they can make conditions so difficult in Israel that the Jews leave the nation and that would be a way of eradicating the Jews, which is what Hamas is after.

They would do it geopolitically and socially if they can't do it militarily. I'm afraid we're going to see a mounting opposition to Israel. As this war commences again, as they move into the South, as we see more civilian casualties as a result, that's going to bring a kind of a force against Israel they haven't faced since 1948.

Never been a time when the world's opinion has been as united against Israel, as I'm afraid it might be in coming weeks and months. I hope I'm wrong, but I'm afraid that may happen.

The other reason I think this could be different is, as we see a rising number of civilian casualties, these are Muslims being killed, it's going to be said, by Jews. Well, back to the ummah, the global Muslim community. Surah 2, verse 190 in the Qur'an requires Muslims to defend Islam. I'm afraid we're going to see a rising ideology that says that the Muslims worldwide have to attack Israel because Israel is attacking Islam by what it's doing to Muslims.

In Gaza, not just against Hamas, but against Palestinian Muslims. I'm afraid we're going to see that ideology rising with Hezbollah to the north with Palestinian Islamic Jihad in West Bank. You could see Iran fueling that narrative. Certainly I'm afraid we could see a larger kind of military sort of aggression against Israel here a multi sided multi front kind of a escalating conflict as that ideology moves forward and this idea that they have to defend Islam against Israel. I'd love to be wrong about that. So far, that hasn't happened to a significant degree. Hezbollah recognizes that if they attack Israel and Israel responds, Lebanon will be devastated. And Hezbollah's responsible for Lebanon in a way they haven't been.

So far, Abbas and the Palestinian authorities have been able to keep Palestinian Islami Jihad in the West Bank from mounting an intifada, an uprising, as they would very much like to do. But as casualties mount, I think that's going to be harder for them to do, and I am afraid. One of the things I pray for, as I pray for the peace of Jerusalem, is that Israel won't be fighting a multi front war against other Muslim communities, populations, because they think they have to defend Islam against the Jews. Well, all of that's new, because again, Israel has not had to do a ground war in Gaza to defeat Hamas prior to October 7, but now they must. They have to do whatever it takes for there to be no Hamas, or there could be no Israel.

I've quoted several times that Israeli defense commander who said, if we cannot destroy Hamas, the future of Israel is in jeopardy. Not because Hamas will destroy Israel militarily, but because it

will make it so difficult there that the Jews will leave and the whole project will be abandoned. And that would accomplish what Hamas wants to accomplish.

[00:49:29] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Hmm. Even with, without being able to actually take the life of every single Jew,

[00:49:36] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's right.

[00:49:37] **Dr. Mark Turman:** it would at least eliminate them as a nation state. And would be a long way down their agenda toward what they were after. And all of this, as you point out in your book just points to the spiritual urgency of us as Christians, as people of the gospel of not only praying for Israel and praying for peace, but for praying for God to use this as a catalyst for not just regional, but for even global spiritual awakening. Can you kind of, bring us together around that idea?

[00:50:09] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, and we'll close with that. There's been a wonderful spiritual awakening happening in the Muslim world as Muslims have seen visions and dreams of Jesus and turning to him in unprecedented numbers. In fact, a dear friend of mine, Tom Doyle, who's been a missionary in the Middle East for most of his career, points out that this remarkable spiritual awakening in the Muslim world coincides with the growth of radical Islam.

And Osama Bin Laden and Al 11 and all of that because Satan wants us to hate the Muslims and fear the Muslims when God wants us to pray for them and be a catalyst towards spiritual awakening in the Muslim world So let's not allow them to get away with that Don't let Satan get away with that. Use this as an opportunity to pray for spiritual awakening to continue among the Muslim people as they recognize that conflict is not the solution, that the, their path to flourishing is not through annihilating Israel, or following leaders who seek to do that.

And a kind of a ultra nationalist sort of a vision that will not accomplish what they ultimately in their hearts need. So pray for God to use this to draw the Muslims to faith in Christ. Pray for the Jews. My dear friend, Tom Doyle, thinks that more Jews have come to Christ as Messiah in the last 20 years than the previous 20 centuries.

Many of them are not joining Baptist churches, so to speak they're Messianic Jews, but Jesus is the, some of my good friends in the Middle East are Messianic Jews. They are observant Jews, but Jesus is their Lord. They would say, Jesus is my Lord. They've made Jesus their Messiah. Well pray for that to happen.

As I've said before, 40 percent of the Jews in Israel are secular Jews. Israel itself is a secular country. state. Pray for the Jews in Israel to realize that their ultimate solution is not even the state of Israel, that their ultimate security is not found in the IDF, that their ultimate security is making Christ their Messiah.

So let's pray for God to use this to continue a spiritual awakening in the Middle East. And wouldn't it be wonderful If just like the greatest spiritual movement in human history started in the Middle East, and now 2. 2 billion people around the world follow Christ? What if a fifth great awakening that's already been happening in many places could be greatly catalyzed again in the Middle East?

What if God could use that tiny region again, that hinge of history again, to advance the powerful spiritual awakening that we in the States and we around the world so desperately need. Let's pray to that end and ask God to redeem this conflict in a way that could glorify his Son most fully.

[00:52:36] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Absolutely. What a great word and a great idea that God could start something new again from this very, very special place. And we'll want to pray to that end and use all of our influence as we can to share accurate information as you've done in this book and to call people to that place of spiritual renewal personally, as well as praying for God to just do a global movement in our generation, to bring that awakening that our world so desperately needs.

Jim, thank you for the conversation today. Thank you for the book and just want to encourage our listeners again to go and to find it on our website. Denisonforum.org. You'll find the book. It's The War in Israel by Dr. Jim Denison. What you need to know about this crisis of global significance. It's a lot to take in a lot to think about and very, very helpful.

And Jim, we just want to thank you for putting your time, energy, effort, and passion into this. I want to thank our audience for listening to us today and encourage you to rate, review us and share this podcast with others as we always do. Thank you , again, for being a part of The Denison Forum Podcast.