

Sermon Summary
19th after Pentecost
23rd October 2011

- With recent events in Israel and Palestine in mind, we do well to remember that the long-running tension there is not simply political.
- Certainly the fact that the European leaders gifted the same land to two long-standing rivals after different 20th century conflicts has not helped, but the conflict goes back way beyond this.
- Passages like this (Deut 34) have fuelled it by suggesting a divine mandate still in force which guarantees ownership to one group, and excludes another.
- Imagine the difficulties that Palestinian or Arab Christians (often forgotten as the media presents a simplified Israeli/Jew vs Arab/Muslim picture) must have in reading such passages which seem to validate their own exclusion from their ancestral lands.
- The politics of the present day are a theological as much as a political issue.
- We may pat ourselves on the back that we are far removed from such thinking. We are not.
- One important influence on Middle Eastern politics is a Christian lobby in the USA which holds that without God's original gift of an Israel as per the OT promises, the Messiah cannot return. Their influence in American foreign policy is considerable.
- Thus we see that understandings of the bible in one place may effect what goes on elsewhere.
- So what, you may ask?
- Well, it has implications for us. It is a reminder that we need to understand our bibles well enough to engage with those who would use Scripture to support political and social policy which may not really be scriptural (but gains credibility through such associations being made), or are moot (Scripture really supports one or more possible views, or gives no definite position)
- We need these skills for our own time and place. We know that there are people who try to drive particular social agendas on the basis that they are Christian, when sometimes the values promoted seem quite alien to those of Jesus.
- We need to be able to reply to these views.
- After all, anyone can quote Scripture to justify almost anything. The Devil is portrayed doing just that in the Temptation of Jesus at the beginning of the gospels.
- We need to ensure that the Lord's name (authority) is not used in vain.

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