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Will Israel obey God or man?

By EARL COX
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For many, the settlement issue essentially boils down to: Should we obey God, or should we obey man? Who is our higher authority?

Again, a difficult conflict has arisen in Israel - this time, with regard to the government's order to freeze construction of new housing units in the so-called Jewish "settlements" in Judea and Samaria.

For many, the issue essentially boils down to: Should we obey God, or should we obey man? Who is our higher authority?

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu recently reversed his position on construction of new homes in the settlements. He had stood strongly against US and international pressure on the issue since taking office; but suddenly and surprisingly ordered a construction freeze.

However, it should not be overlooked that the ordered freeze is both temporary and incomplete. It is to be in effect for only 10 months, and does not include 3,000 housing units already under construction in Judea and Samaria. Nor does it include east Jerusalem.

Israeli soldiers have been instructed by their government to enforce the freeze. However, many soldiers are defying those orders. Numerous settler leaders are angrily refusing to cooperate. Also, many rabbis are publicly proclaiming strong opposition to the government's policy reversal - after all, Netanyahu's original stance on the settlements was part of the platform that helped him get elected.

The rabbis have stressed the biblical, God-given right of the Jewish people to possession of the land in question. The biblical mandate clearly designates all the land west of the Jordan River to be the homeland of the Jewish people forever.

Bible prophets called it "an everlasting covenant" with God. The rabbis claim that the covenant is still in effect today, following God's miraculous re-gathering of the Jewish people back to their homeland and restoration of their ancient nation.

Some of the defiant soldiers have already been arrested and punished for disobeying orders, amid strong protests from the settlers and the rabbis. But as one settler, who is also a reserve soldier, put it, "We believe God's authority supercedes that of the army or that of the government."

"We have two alternatives," he added. "Do we obey God or do we obey man?"

We Christians certainly support the position and actions of those who regard the authority of God to be higher than the authority of men, even the authority of any government. Our Bible instructs us to obey our government authorities - except when those orders are in opposition to the principles and values of God. The defiant rabbis, settlers and soldiers all claim that this is the case with the government's construction freeze order.

The settlers showed that they are extremely serious about their opposition. Israeli media reported that more than 10,000 of them gathered outside the residence of the prime minister in Jerusalem to let him know about their strong and unmistakable opposition to the freeze.

Some settlers expressed fear that the freeze would be extended because international pressure will not abate. They fear Netanyahu will have to continue to mollify the Obama administration to maintain US support and aid.

Supposedly, the US is applying pressure to draw the Palestinians into resuming peace talks. However, the Palestinians have declared they will not resume talks until all settlement construction is halted.

Somehow, one believes Prime Minister Netanyahu may well know exactly what he's doing with his construction freeze order. He should know the Palestinians will never end their belligerence toward the Jewish people and nation, that they will never negotiate in good faith with Israel (although the beginning of Isaiah 14 indicates otherwise; Ezekiel 27 may also refer to the unification of the Jewish Palestinians and Israelis), and that they will never meet the necessary conditions to merit independent statehood.

The temporary construction freeze is thus probably just a strategic waiting period. Netanyahu obviously wants the US and the world to see that Israel is taking yet another step toward peace, which the Palestinians are again refusing to reciprocate.

It may turn out that Netanyahu's temporary construction freeze is not so much in opposition to God's covenant as it now appears to some. It may turn out that Israel will, after all is said and done, obey God rather than man.

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