

Voices: Is the US embassy's move to Jerusalem a prophetic sign?

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Can we discuss the end times for a moment?

President Donald J. Trump's decision to move the United States embassy to Jerusalem, thereby recognizing Jerusalem as the capital, set off another firestorm of debate this past week. Some supported this decision based on political reasons only. Others supported this political decision on theological grounds.

My concern in this article is not for the political reasons surrounding the decision, of which there are many complex factors, but the theological presuppositions of those Christians who have been pushing for this decision.

Many Christians rejoiced over this decision because they believe that the United States recognizing Jerusalem as the capital (which legally happened in the mid-1990s) is a sign of prophecy which will lead to the end times. There are definitely other interpretations.

You may be like me and find yourself troubled that decisions seemingly endorsed by the Bible and other Christians could lead to more violence and bloodshed.

Dispensing with Dispensationalism

Please understand — there are many different ways in which good Christians understand the end times. If you were to put the three leading

twentieth-century Christian leaders in a room (Billy Graham, Herschel Hobbs and George W. Truett), they would all see the end times differently. They would all agree Jesus will return — but they held a different perspective on exactly how that will happen.

Good Christians can interpret the end of times in different ways. Disagreeing with one another concerning the end times does not make one outside of Christian orthodoxy. Jesus said we will not know the day or hour of the end (Matthew 24:36), so I am immediately suspect of the biblical knowledge and motives of those who claim to be certain on matters Jesus says no one (not even the angels) are aware of.

The belief that somehow Jerusalem must be recognized as a part of the end times prophetic fulfillment is actually a rather new development. In the 1800s, J. M. Darby and C. I. Scofield were proponents of a new way of understanding the Bible known as dispensationalism. It's called dispensationalism because it assumes that God acts in different ways and has different rules during different eras (dispensations).

According to Dispensationalists, we live in the sixth dispensation, and the rapture/anti-Christ talk is from the seventh dispensation. They believe that the Temple will be rebuilt and animal sacrifices will be resumed.

Dispensationalism places a human-made system onto the biblical text, which is always dangerous. Some dispensationalists act smarter than the original authors, as the Bible is treated like a secret timeline.

Keep in mind, many Christians for over 1,800 years did not believe dispensationalism or the necessity of a literal nation-state of Israel for Christ to return. Dispensationalism and its political implications are a very new development, driven more by current politics than by biblical theology and certainly has not been upheld by theologians throughout the history of the church.

‘Contrary to the teachings of Jesus’

My concern with dispensationalism is that it requires supporting policies and practices that are contrary to the teachings of Jesus — which include more fighting, more injustice and pitting sides against one another.

In fact, dispensational theology can feed on divisiveness. If we want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. Instead of being a fulfillment of biblical prophecy, where Jesus brings peace to the earth (Revelation 21:4), dispensationalism can become a self-fulfilling prophecy to massive conflict based on suspect theological assumptions.

Keep in mind John 3:16: God loves the whole world, and wants to bless America and France, Israel and Palestine (Don't forget that there are Palestinian Christians, too!) Also, remember that Jesus said his kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36).

We can trust Jesus. He is coming back, and his kingdom, thankfully, is not a kingdom of this world.

Until then, may we share the Good News of God's love that has been revealed in Christ Jesus and work toward peace for all.

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