

Voices: Justice through the eyes of an Arab Israeli Christian

September 14, 2020

EDITOR'S NOTE: "Justice looks like ..." is a special series in the Voices column. Readers will have the opportunity to consider justice from numerous viewpoints. The series is based on each writer's understanding of Scripture and relationship with Jesus Christ. Writers present their own views independent of any institution, unless otherwise noted in their bios.

You are encouraged to listen to each writer without prejudice. Then, engage in conversation with others around you about what justice looks like to you.

[Click here](#) for more information about the series. [Click here](#) to read the full "Justice looks like..." series.

I am an Arab evangelical Christian. I also am an Israeli citizen by birth. I speak Arabic, Hebrew and English fluently and was raised in a dual traditional Catholic/Greek Orthodox household.

When I came to Christ in my early 20s, I chose to worship with an evangelical Christian church, further distorting my complicated identity. My passport says, "citizen of Israel"—by definition a Jewish state—but my ancestry is fully Palestinian.

My physical features are undoubtedly Arab. My beard and darker skin are hallmarks of my heritage. Intense airport screenings, public searches and hours-long questioning are the norm whenever I travel.

I grew up simultaneously accepted and rejected across multiple

aspects—accepted as a citizen of Israel, but rejected as equal to a Jewish citizen; accepted as Arab, but rejected as a true Palestinian, because I am not Muslim; accepted as Christian by the tiny core of evangelical believers of the Holy Land, but rejected by the Catholic and Orthodox churches, because evangelicalism is considered a cult. The list goes on and on.

Justice in the Bible and Jesus

What exactly is justice? The word “justice” is ascribed to the idea of fairness and moral righteousness. It demands both equality and equity and often is associated with the biblical ordinance of an “eye for an eye.” In simple terms, it levels the playing field.

The Bible is abounding in instruction on the seeking and implementing of justice for all, with special emphasis on the marginalized and oppressed. We are told to “give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute” (Psalm 82:3) and “learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression” (Isaiah 1:17), among others.

For believers, Jesus represents the ultimate expression of justice, with his sacrifice allowing all people access to God the Father.

Segregation in Israel and Palestine

Growing up in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, my earliest memories center around an unspoken understanding of segregation.

Arab children were not allowed to learn in the same school as Jewish children, but nevertheless were required by law to learn to speak Hebrew.

Outrage, frustration and hopelessness were common emotions as we learned of family members and friends who were forced from their ancestral homes, stripped of jobs, denied exit and entry rights from their

own towns and indiscriminately terrorized and imprisoned.

We practiced “bomb drills” and experienced a war every several years.

Everything about our lives as Arabs was separate, but certainly not equal. We had our own hospitals, markets and civic organizations separate from our Jewish neighbors, but nevertheless overseen by them and completely at their mercy.

We existed as a sort of second-class citizen. On paper, we belonged; in reality, we were shunned at worst and uncomfortably tolerated at best. The divisions flowed down into our towns and villages, with Muslims and traditional Christians living in a tenuous relationship strengthened in its collaboration against Jewish persecution and weakened by internal mistrust and suspicion.

Growing up, I had limited interactions with non-Arab children and formed no real relationships with non-Arabs until I reached high school. An astounding feat when you consider how densely populated the nation of Israel is, with Arabs and Jews living practically shoulder to shoulder.

Western church blind to Arab Christians

When I became a follower of Christ, I joined a tiny group of believers representing less than 1 percent of the population of Israel. It was then that I began to experience an altogether unfamiliar and deeply unsettling type of injustice.

I could accept the fact Jews, Muslims and Orthodox Christians would not welcome me. What I was unprepared for was the rejection by a significant portion of the Western church and its alarming silence about the ongoing human crisis playing out daily in the decidedly *un*-Holy Land.

Many American evangelical Christians cheered and applauded as nonbelieving Jewish authorities razed the homes of Palestinians, some of whom were their spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ. Millions of dollars from evangelical churches have been raised and distributed to build settlements on Palestinian land and arm its Jewish residents against their Arab neighbors.

When asked to help support Christian Arab churches, an overwhelming majority chose instead to continue to pour support into the secular nation of Israel. Eschatological interpretations—such as end times theology—took precedence over every other biblical tenet, including the spread of the gospel.

Atrocity was constantly overlooked by many of my Western brothers and sisters in the pursuit of advancing the second coming of Christ. Arab believers largely were ignored and lumped in as “enemies of God’s chosen people” because of their race.

Churches that regularly supported missions to nations around the globe bizarrely abandoned their support of mission to the Holy Land and concentrated instead on funding the very entities actively seeking to destroy the Christian presence in the land. How did this represent biblical justice? Or any type of justice?

Justice and unity in Jesus

I am a walking representation of the absurdity of the Holy Land. I am both Israeli and Palestinian. As a resident of the Holy Land, I am a physical recipient of the extraordinary legacy of the life of Jesus. But even more, as a follower of Christ, I am a spiritual recipient of the justice for which Jesus died and rose again.

Ironically, the very name under which we are called to unify has been used

to endorse the worst discord. The land Jesus walked is a boiling cauldron of strife and injustice.

How can I truly seek justice? How can I encourage other believers to seek justice on behalf of my fellow Arabs?

The world is poised to unravel, and as the old falls away, I pray the new with which we replace it will be a better, stronger reflection of the truth we are called to represent. Only in unity with one another will we be able truly to seek justice.

R.E. works with Baptists in Texas as a cross-cultural mobilizer to equip churches for effective cross-cultural ministry to people of Middle Eastern background and heritage. His full name is withheld due to security issues. The views expressed are those solely of the author.

R.E. was recently featured in our 'On the Way' podcast. [Click here](#) to listen to the episode featuring him.

[Click here](#) to read the full "Justice looks like..." series.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The author's bio was updated to clarify the scope of ministry.