

God's Answer

Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary is a remarkable place. Nazareth is Jesus' home town. Evangelicalism represents his authentic message. Theology is the deep study of those truths, and a seminary is a place where future leaders may learn. That is 'NETS'. The seminary opened its doors two years ago. Now we have around thirty students as we begin our third 'session'. This is a remarkable achievement in so short a time. How did it happen?

First, the evangelical churches of Israel recognized the need to train their elders and pastors without their having to leave the country for theological training. Second, we recognized the need to provide this training cheaply and conveniently, using evening classes so that the students could stay in their jobs and in their church roles. Third, we devised training that is spiritually alive, biblical faithful, and culturally relevant. Our aim is to train people for serious theological understanding, biblical preaching and spiritual empowerment by the Holy Spirit to expound and proclaim the gospel.

Every country faces its own peculiar challenges, shaped by its spiritual history. Britain, for example, has lived on the borrowed capital of Victorian evangelical life for a long time and is only now facing complete bankruptcy, spiritually and morally. Imagine then what it means to have the whole Bible as your country's spiritual heritage, not to mention the third most sacred place in Islam, a hundred years of Crusades, five hundred years of being a vassal state to the Ottoman Empire, then the centre of attention concerning a Jewish homeland, and finally being the place where Jesus will return. Some heritage indeed!

This is still 'The Holy Land' – holy by virtue of God's gift to Abraham, by virtue of being the one place on earth where God has physically dwelt in the Temple's Holy of Holies, by virtue of being the place where God was incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth, where Jesus was crucified and resurrected, and where he will return in glory.

But wait – here is a spiritual principle of epic proportions! What God makes holy, Satan seeks to make unholy. So it is that the three great monotheistic religions inspire the vast majority of its population yet the result is more, rather than less bitterness, strife and war-mongering. Both in Jewish and Arab politics there is a blatant degree of dishonesty and corruption, as news reports frequently remind the world.

God's answer to Satan is sometimes revival, but always the Church. This is the community God has created to defy the world, defeat Satan, proclaim the gospel, and to anticipate heaven. That church in Israel is small, disorganized, and all too divided. None of that can change it from being the Bride and Body of Christ, the People of God, the elect from every nation called to be his witnesses in the world.

In Israel, that requires equipping the church for ministry and mission. NETS has a vision to raise up a whole generation of faithful and anointed leaders embracing all the believing communities and creating personal bonds across them. Mission here requires understanding the world of the Bible and the modern world of Israel. Mission here requires building bridges 'full of grace AND truth' between the tiny evangelical community and the traditional churches, the various Jewish communities, and the ever-growing Arab Muslim populace. It means proclamation and it means 'works of mercy' that will make the Church not only a beacon of gospel truth but spiritual life and moral hope for Israel. Satan hates it, people ignore it, but God loves it. That makes Israeli believers, whether Jew or Gentile, profound realists and glorious optimists!

Philip Hill



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