

## FACING THE CHALLENGE OF BDS

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GALEN PETERSON, D.Miss.\*

On the last day of August in 2001, the United Nations convened the World Conference Against Racism in Durban South Africa. Over the next nine days, the focus took a dramatic shift away from worldwide racial discrimination when speakers overwhelmingly singled out Israel for condemnation, calling Zionism the world's most extreme form of racism, while hypocritically ignoring other nations who clearly engage in racist practices.

As the conference was taking place, 1500 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) also assembled in Durban and went even further in demonizing Israel. Many reports describe it as a frenzy of hatred:

Thousands of large, glossy posters portrayed alleged Israeli crimes and called Israel an apartheid state. Hundreds of Palestinian scarves fringed with ANC colors and T-shirts of many kinds again equating Israel with racism and apartheid were distributed freely. Booths with posters equating Zionists with Nazis were set up. Books freely distributed by the Arab Lawyer's Union contained cartoons again equating Israelis with Nazis, and picturing Jews with hooked noses, blood dripping from their hands, and fangs. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an infamous antisemitic tract, was on sale. Hundreds of flyers were distributed with a picture of Hitler and the words "What if I had won? The good thing—there would be no Israel."<sup>1</sup>

A group of European Jewish students who attended the conference reported being surrounded and threatened, with mobs screaming at them:

"You don't belong to the human race! Chosen people? You are a cursed people!... Why haven't the Jews taken responsibility for killing Jesus? They've sucked our blood all these years. We don't want you here."<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the conference those NGOs produced a declaration calling for:

...a policy of complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state...the imposition of mandatory and comprehensive sanctions and embargoes, the full cessation of all links (diplomatic, economic, social, aid, military cooperation and training) between all states and Israel...and condemnation of those states who are supporting, aiding and abetting the Israeli Apartheid state and its perpetration of racist crimes against humanity including ethnic cleansing and acts of genocide.<sup>3</sup>

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\* Galen Peterson is Executive Director of the American Remnant Mission and Messianic Pastor of Brit Hadasha Fellowship in Concord, California.

<sup>1</sup> Anne Bayefsky, "The UN World Conference Against Racism: A Racist Anti-Racism Conference," *Proceedings of the ASIL Annual Meeting* 96 (2002): 67, doi:10.1017/S027250370006300X.

<sup>2</sup> Joëlle Fiss, *The Durban Diaries: What Really Happened at the UN Conference Against Racism in Durban (2001)*, American Jewish Committee (AJC) and European Union of Jewish Students (2008), 19.

<sup>3</sup> World Conference against Racism NGO Forum, "WCAR NGO Forum Declaration" (Durban, South Africa, 2001), para. 424-425, <https://www.adalah.org/uploads/oldfiles/eng/intladvocacy/ngoforumdecl.htm>.

The conference ended on September 8, 2001. What happened three days later on September 11 is tragically familiar, for that is when those final words of condemnation against states that support Israel were literally acted out in the deadliest terror attack in the history of the United States. Then, while our nation began formulating a strategy for hunting Osama Ben Laden and his cohorts, and implementing numerous methods for making air travel and our lives safer, the opponents of Israel began putting together *their* strategy for implementing the mandate for punitive economic measures against Israel that were established days earlier. Plans for an economic boycott galvanized in July of 2005, when 171 Palestinian NGOs met and issued a formal call for the nations of the world to impose boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel.<sup>4</sup>

This call employed language taken directly from the anti-Israel NGO Forum in Durban. Boycotts mean not doing business with Israeli companies and international companies that do business in Israel. Divestment means selling all stocks of companies that do business in Israel. Sanctions means international legal restrictions on doing business with Israel. By employing these means, the BDS call established the following objectives:<sup>5</sup>

1. Ending Israel's occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall.
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality.
3. Granting the right of Palestinians who fled in 1948 to return to their homes, as well as extending that right to all of their descendants.

From that point onward, the BDS movement, as it became known, began spreading around the world, fueled by pro-Palestinian groups and people who are sympathetic to them. It quickly became very popular on college campuses where groups like Students for Justice in Palestine are easily able to exploit other naïve and idealistic students.

The BDS movement has especially focused on the implementation of divestment policies both on a national level and in local communities. An example of the former is the 2025 law passed in Spain that makes it illegal to import goods produced by Israel in the region commonly called the West Bank (known biblically as Judea and Samaria) and requires Israel to certify that every imported item is not produced there.<sup>6</sup>

Currently, in the U.S., there is substantial official resistance to BDS. Thirty-eight states have enacted laws or executive orders requiring businesses or individuals contracting with the state to pledge not to boycott Israel, which can lead to penalties if violated. Universities and local governments can be penalized by the federal government for enacting formal divestment measures based on punitive purposes against Israel.

For that reason, the BDS movement has pivoted to a strategy of achieving their objectives through backdoor measures. By aligning with groups like the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO), and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), they have found willing volunteers to promote divestment of companies that do business with Israel.

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<sup>4</sup> Mazen Masri, "Israel's Wall, Displacement, and Palestinian Resistance in the West Bank," in Coleman, Daniel; Glanville, Erin Goheen; Hasan, Wafaa; Kramer-Hamstra, Agnes (eds.), *Countering Displacements: The Creativity and Resilience of Indigenous and Refugee-ed Peoples*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2012), 81. See also Omar Barghouti, *BDS: Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: the Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 5.

<sup>5</sup> "The BDS Call," The BDS Movement, (9 July 2005), <https://bdsmovement.net/bds-call>.

<sup>6</sup> "Royal Decree-Law 10/2025, of September 23, adopting urgent measures against genocide in Gaza and in support of the Palestinian population," <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rdl/2025/09/23/10>.

Their methods typically involve creating smokescreens by couching their opposition using environmental and anti-militarization terms without ever mentioning BDS, Zionism, or Israel. The organization maintains a list of companies that proponents of BDS can target if they are part of an investment portfolio for any city.<sup>7</sup>

Rather than attempting to harm all such companies at once, according to the BDS movement: “We must strategically focus on a relatively smaller number of carefully selected companies and products for maximum impact.”<sup>8</sup> They also provide an “Ethical Investment Policy” to municipal entities and advocate for adoption with full inclusion of BDS measures without directly naming Israel or BDS in the policy.<sup>9</sup> Altogether, this approach has been proven to be a very effective strategy in accomplishing their agenda because it does so under the radar of public scrutiny and publicity in the press.

### The Academic Boycott

In 2004, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) was founded with the goal of preventing Israeli universities and other institutions from participating in international conferences, exchange programs and other forms of academic cooperation.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of claiming to exempt Israeli individuals from this boycott, in actuality, the movement frequently violates its own stated policy. International journals have succumbed to pressure to remove Israeli academics from their editorial boards. Individual Israeli scholars have been disinvited or blocked from serving as guest lecturers or speakers and from presenting at international conferences even when attending in a private capacity. As just one example, an Israeli sociologist and dance researcher who had previously taught at UC Berkeley was denied a return to her visiting post when the department chair informed her via WhatsApp that hiring her would put the department in a “terrible position” because “grad students are angry.”<sup>11</sup>

PACBI has initiated a series of demands upon academic institutions, including a litmus test for individual Israel academics, in which they will only be allowed to speak if they “publicly and unequivocally recognize Palestinian rights as defined by the movement” and describe their own university’s “complicity” in oppressing Palestinians.<sup>12</sup> All the while, this Kafkaesque campaign is being carried out in the name of “academic freedom.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “How to Divest,” Investigate: A Project of the American Friends Service Committee, <https://investigate.info/divest>.

<sup>8</sup> “Guide to BDS Boycott and Pressure Corporate Priority Targeting,” BDS Movement, <https://bdsmovement.net/Guide-to-BDS-Boycott>.

<sup>9</sup> “Ethical Investment Policy,” BDS Movement, <https://bdsmovement.net/resources/ethical-investment-policy>.

<sup>10</sup> “Academic Boycott Overview,” BDS Movement, <https://bdsmovement.net/academic-boycott>. See also Sarah K. Cardaun, *Countering Contemporary Antisemitism in Britain*, (Brill: Leiden, The Netherlands, 2015), 70; Suzanne Goldenberg, “Israeli boycott divides academics,” *The Guardian* (8 July 2002); Lisa Taraki, “Boycotting the Israeli Academy.” *Z Network* (19 August 2004), <https://znetwork.org/znetarticle/boycotting-the-israeli-academy-by-lisa-taraki>.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Burke, “UC Berkeley and Pomona College settle antisemitism complaints, Edsource (11 December 2025), <https://edsource.org/updates/two-california-colleges-settle-antisemitism-complaints>. In December 2025, UC Berkeley settled a lawsuit by paying her \$60,000, issuing a formal apology, and rehiring her.

<sup>12</sup> “PACBI: ISA Must Exclude Israel and Its Complicit Institutions From Its 5th Forum or Face a Boycott,” BDS Movement, <https://www.bdsmovement.net/news/pacbi-isa-exclude-israel>.

<sup>13</sup> “Academic Freedom,” BDS Movement, <https://bdsmovement.net/academic-boycott#5>.

## The Ultimate Objective of the BDS Movement

For the segment of the American population that supports BDS, the common reason for that support can be summed up this way:

“BDS is a legitimate, peaceful way of opposing Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement, BDS urges action to pressure Israel to comply with international law.”<sup>14</sup>

This perspective is significant because it creates a linkage between Israel and the way that the international campaign for boycotts, divestment, and sanctions played a major role in dismantling apartheid in South Africa. The BDS movement capitalizes on that populist theme in all of its publications and events. But, upon closer evaluation, in light of its threefold objectives, stated earlier, the movement is not merely seeking to end the so-called occupation of Palestinian territories or to end apartheid (and thus establish the second objective of equality). Instead, as BDS activist, As’ad AbuKhalil, has admitted: “the real aim of BDS is to bring down the state of Israel. . . Justice and freedom for Palestinians are incompatible with the existence of the state of Israel.”<sup>15</sup>

Omar Barghouti, head of the BDS National Committee, which is the primary driving force behind the movement, has openly stated in an interview and has repeated in writing and on videos that even if Israel ended the occupation of the West Bank, BDS would not end.<sup>16</sup> Barghouti says that a Jewish state in historical Palestine threatens the rights of Palestinians: “A Jewish state in Palestine in any shape or form cannot but contravene the basic rights of the indigenous Palestinian population.”<sup>17</sup> That conclusion provides depth to the intent of the initial objective of BDS being “ending Israel’s occupation and colonization of all Arab lands,” for it coincides with the Islamic contention that the territory of the entire modern state of Israel is subject to the legal principle of Islamic Waqf, and thus perpetually belongs to the domain of Allah and is subject to administration by Arab Muslims.<sup>18</sup> In the end, BDS is not about apartheid or occupation or even claims of genocide in Gaza, it is about the elimination of state of Israel as a homeland for Jews.

## Standing Against BDS in the Public Domain

Some organized opposition to BDS exists, such as groups like StandWithUs, and campus response teams from Hillel and the Anti-Defamation League, but to a much smaller degree than

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<sup>14</sup> University of Maryland, “Critical Issues Poll: American Attitudes toward the Middle East (October 2019), 14, <https://criticalissues.umd.edu/sites/criticalissues.umd.edu/files/UMCIP%20Middle%20East%20Questionnaire.pdf>. 36 percent of the respondents agreed with this statement, while 43 percent disagreed.

<sup>15</sup> As’ad AbuKhalil, “A Critique of Norman Finkelstein on BDS,” *Al-Akhbar English* (February 17, 2012), <http://english.al-akhbar.com/blogs/angry-corner/critique-norman-finkelstein-bds>.

<sup>16</sup> Marc Tracy, “With All the Boycott Israel Talk, What Is BDS?” *The New Republic* (2 February, 2014), <https://newrepublic.com/article/116449/scarlett-johansson-john-kerry-scare-bds-israel-controversy>. Barghouti has also stated on the “Gazan Voice Podcast” (21 May, 2020) that if BDS is successful, it will mean the end of the Jewish state of Israel.

<sup>17</sup> Omar Barghouti, “Letters from the August 26-September 2, 2019 Issue.” *The Nation* (13 August 2019), <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/letters-from-the-august-26-september-2-2019-issue>.

<sup>18</sup> See Yitzhak Reiter, “All of Palestine is Holy Muslim Waqf Land: A Myth and its Roots,” in *Law, Custom, and Statute in the Muslim World*, ed. Ron Shaham (Brill E-Book, 2006), 173-197. See also Articles 11 and 13 of the Hamas Charter of 1988. Ironically, there is no justification for this concept in the Quran, which actually affirms in numerous places that the land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people (5:21; 7:37; 17:104; 26:59).

pro-BDS groups. However, when local groups become aware of BDS intrusions in their communities, they can provide a very effective counter-measure.

A personal experience is illustrative. For two years, people from the Brit Hadasha Messianic Congregation in Concord, California built a strong bridge to the local Jewish community by literally standing with them at a weekly vigil on a freeway overpass in support of the Israeli hostages in Gaza. That good will became a significant factor when a DSA-led group attempted to incorporate anti-Israel principles in a stealthy manner into the official investment policy of the city of Concord. Israeli expatriates and other Jews joined together with the people from the Messianic congregation to state their opposition to changing the existing policy.

When it was my turn to speak to the city council, I pointed out that the large group of people in attendance that day were citizens and members of our congregation that is located in the city, while the proponents of divestment were overwhelmingly from out of town, including one person who lived 400 miles away. I also addressed the way that they had intentionally omitted any reference to BDS, while at the same time, advocating for divestment from specific corporations that are at the top of the BDS movement hit list, including Caterpillar and Microsoft.<sup>19</sup> It was also important to point out to the city council that, according to their investment policy, their fiduciary responsibility was “to achieve a return on the funds under their control” and that divestment from these specific corporations would be a failure in that regard, especially since Caterpillar was the number one performing stock on the Dow Jones Industrial Average index at the time.<sup>20</sup>

In the end, the city council voted down the divestment policy, citing the significance of local involvement and the importance of maximizing the return on their investments. It should also be noted that many people from our congregation were interceding in prayer throughout this time. It is my personal conviction that this story illustrates the approach that is necessary for BDS to be defeated in our communities.

## BDS in the Church

Several Christian denominations have formally adopted BDS as official policy:<sup>21</sup>

- United Church of Christ
- United Brethren in Christ
- Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
- Mennonite Church
- Alliance of Baptists
- United Methodist Church
- Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Episcopal Church
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Caterpillar is targeted because Israel purchases their heavy equipment and Microsoft is targeted for its technological role in supporting Israeli military operations.

<sup>20</sup> Caterpillar finished 59.5% higher in 2025.

<sup>21</sup> In addition, a number of churches, individuals and NGOs with a liberation theology orientation have signed on to the Kairos Document, which calls for engagement “in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation. See “Kairos Document: A moment of truth—A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering,” 4.2.6, <https://www.kairos-palestine.ps/index.php/about-kairos/kairos-palestine-document>. For a list of endorsers, see “Cry for Hope: A Call to Decisive Action Endorsers,” <https://www.cryforhope.org/images/endorsers.pdf>

What are the reasons that these denominations have endorsed BDS? A comprehensive analysis is beyond the scope of this paper. But a snapshot of the motivations held by the Presbyterian Church (USA) is representative. In 2003, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) adopted a policy that called upon “the Israeli government to end the occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem” and the “right of return of Palestinian refugees.”<sup>23</sup> In addition, they have repeatedly drawn parallels between Israel and Apartheid South Africa.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the denomination has entirely adopted the objectives established by the BDS movement while presenting their reasons with minimal justification from Scripture.<sup>25</sup>

With the exception of the Alliance of Baptists, these denominations have two things in common. One is an adherence to supersessionism (also known as replacement theology) that denies any eschatological significance to the existence of modern Israel. The other point in common is that they all sent representatives to the NGO Forum for the World Conference Against Racism in 2001 where BDS was spawned.

It is reasonable to ask whether these representatives were exposed to a spirit of hatred with all the trademarks of a demonic presence in which reason was lost and some people were inspired to commit murderous acts right afterward, while others began heading down the path of economic violence. The influence of the spiritual realm cannot be discounted in regard to BDS. For, as God’s Word declares:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).

Nevertheless, it is shocking when pro-BDS Christian denominations deny that biblical reality and adopt practices that contradicts numerous principles established in Scripture. That includes the denial of the land inheritance component of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:7; 13:14-15), holding Israel to a standard that is not applied to other nations (Lev. 19:15), relying on false witnesses (Ex. 20:16), and breaking Paul’s instruction against retaliation (Rom. 12:17; cf. Mat. 5:39-41).

### **Warnings to the Church about BDS in the Book of Obadiah**

The book of Obadiah is particularly relevant in regard to issues raised by BDS. It is unique among the biblical prophets, because it is not a warning to the northern kingdom of Israel or the southern kingdom of Judah. There were numerous prophets who warned those Jewish people about idolatry and abandonment of biblical principles.

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<sup>22</sup> While the ELCA voted to “exclude the option of divestiture” in 2007, it incongruously “discouraged the purchase of products produced within Israeli settlements.” The 2016 Churchwide Assembly voted to develop a human rights social criteria investment screen that aligns with the BDS movement’s core economic goals without identifying it as divestment.

<sup>23</sup> Presbyterian Church (USA), “Resolution on Israel and Palestine: End the Occupation Now,” <https://www.pcusa.org/sites/default/files/endoccupation03.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, “A Prayerful Study of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions,” Presbyterian Distribution Service (24358-22-003), 4-5, <https://pcusa.org/sites/default/files/A-Prayerful-Study-of-Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. In this 19-page document, not a single reference from the Bible is cited as the basis for their conclusions. The same is true in other documentation, such as “The 221st General Assembly (2014) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Frequently Asked Questions: Divestment” <https://www.pcusa.org/sites/default/files/ga221-middle-east-faq.pdf>; and “Resolution on Sanctions: An action of the 225th General Assembly (2022),” <https://pcusa.org/sites/default/files/0019-CPJ-ACSWP-Resolution-on-Sanctions.pdf>.

Obadiah, on the other hand, was raised up by God to warn the nation of Edom immediately to the southeast of Judah about their response to the imminent invasion and plundering of Jerusalem. As the descendants of Esau, the Edomites were continually engaged in a struggle with the descendants of Esau's twin brother Jacob. According to the principle of primogeniture, as the first one to be born, Esau was entitled to the birthright of their father Isaac. But Esau sold that right to Jacob, which made it a legal transaction (Gen. 25:31-34). And once that was done, it could not be undone. So, Jacob and his descendants received the right to the land of Canaan, which later became the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Meanwhile, Esau claimed the hill country south of the Dead Sea, which became known as the land of Edom.

That began a thousand years of rivalry and hostility that came to a head in the book of Obadiah. In verse 11 of Obadiah's only chapter, he establishes the context by saying to the people of Edom regarding Judah: "On the day that you stood on the other side, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem. . ." Most scholars believe that this description refers to the sacking of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians.<sup>26</sup>

The focus here is not on the primary invaders, but on the way that the people of Edom initially stayed out of the situation, yet became tempted to get involved. God then issued a series of warnings to Edom through Obadiah that still have relevance for today. The first of which is:

### **Do not identify with those who seek to harm the people of Israel.**

As verse 11 continues, under God's inspiration, Obadiah exposes their scheme by saying: "you too were as one of them." These words show that the Edomites thought of themselves as being united with the attackers against Judah. By exposing that intention, it serves as a warning that is grounded in God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants in Genesis 12:3, when He declared that "the one who curses you I will curse." Elsewhere in the writings of Isaiah and Jeremiah, we are told that God would curse Babylon with punishments for taking Judah captive and sacking Jerusalem (Isa. 47:5-11; Jer. 50:17-18). And indeed, history confirms that is the case. But this warning in Obadiah was specifically given to the Edomites who aligned themselves with those captors. And by doing so, they were inviting comparable divine punishment because of the protection clause of the Abrahamic covenant.

This scriptural and historical reality relates directly to churches identifying with those who are actively seeking to harm Israel. It is reasonable to conclude that few Christians who support BDS know that Omar Barghouti, the leader of the movement, intends to maintain the practice even if the occupation of the West Bank ends. There could never be a clearer disclosure of the real intentions behind BDS than that. And Obadiah is warning all ignorant people not to take the side of Israel's enemies.

### **Do not be pleased when your Jewish brother suffers.**

The second warning literally reads: "Do not look down on your brother in the day of his

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<sup>26</sup> See Daniel I. Block, *Obadiah: A Discourse Analysis of the Hebrew Bible*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. Daniel I. Block (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 24; and Paul R. Raabe, *Obadiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 24D (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 51. An alternative view dates the invasion to raids by Philistines and Arabians in the mid-ninth century BCE (c. 848–841 BCE) during the reign of King Jehoram, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 21:16–17. Proponents of this view include Walter L. Baker, "Obadiah," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1453–1454; and Leon James Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 262.

disaster and do not rejoice over the sons of Judah in the day of their destruction” (v. 12). The brothers in view here are Esau, the progenitor of Edom, and Jacob, the patriarch of the Jewish people.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the Edomites should have been coming to help their brothers in Judah instead of rejoicing when they faced the attack from Babylon. And the same should be true today.

But when denominations like the United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA) disregarded this warning by passing divestment resolutions, the atmosphere has been described as celebratory. A number of pro-BDS Christian groups also expressed a sense of pleasure over the October 7 attacks by issuing statements celebrating the breach of the Gaza border as a “moment of liberation.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Do not speak like you are morally superior.**

Once more in verse 12, the prophet warns: “do not boast in the day of their distress.” This phrase literally means, “Do not make your mouth great in a day of distress.” Or, by implication, “Do not speak like you are morally superior.” Yet, a review of denominational commentary in support of BDS often reflect a sense of personal moral uprightness while ascribing evil exclusively to Israel.<sup>29</sup>

### **Do not do what the enemies of Israel do.**

The Edomites were also warned “Do not enter the gate of My people in the day of their calamity” (v. 13). This was about going into Jerusalem and joining with the Babylonians in looting the city. But in a general sense, it is a clear warning not to do what the enemies of Israel do by using their methods for accomplishing their purposes. Those methods are not limited to physical acts of violence, but clearly include the economic hostility of BDS. The great tragedy here is that churches are putting into effect practices designed by groups like Hamas that are obsessed with the destruction of Israel and replacing it with an Islamic state.

### **Do not exploit a problem financially.**

Obadiah then adds this warning in the same verse: “Do not loot their wealth in the day of their disaster.” He is saying, because there will be economic consequences related to this dispute, do not exploit them. Yet, for these denominations, enforcing financial punishments has become their primary means for advancing their so-called approach to peace, which will never lead to actual peace.

### **Do not impose your will on a situation that is not your own.**

Lastly, in verse 14, they were warned: “Do not stand at the fork of the road to cut down their fugitives; and do not imprison their survivors in the day of their distress.” This is all about participating in power plays, in the form of ambushes and inflicting punishments that are not yours to enforce.

In many respects, forcing Israel to submit to the will of the Palestinian people through economic pressure is no different than the Crusades, the Inquisition, and countless other

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<sup>27</sup> The Jewish people as a whole are in view here, in light of the word “Jew” being derived from the Hebrew name יְהוּדָה (Yehudah or Judah), which comes from a root meaning “praise.”

<sup>28</sup> “Compilation of NGO Statements on October 7 Massacre and Aftermath,” NGO Monitor (17 October, 2023), <https://ngo-monitor.org/reports/compilation-of-ngo-statements-on-october-7-massacre-and-aftermath/>.

<sup>29</sup> See General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), “On Recognition That Israel’s Laws, Policies, and Practices Constitute Apartheid Against the Palestinian People,” Overture INT-02 (2022), <https://www.pc-biz.org/search/3000773>. See also General Synod of the United Church of Christ, “Declaration for a Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel” (2021), 1.

impositions forced on the Jewish people, with the objective of compelling them to submit to the will of man-made authorities. Compulsion always flies in the face of God's calling upon believers to act with grace.

Altogether, those are some very unambiguous warnings given to Edom that have not abated. In fact, as Zechariah 2:8 shows, touching Israel in a financial manner was the same as touching the apple of God's eye. So, the consequence for violating God's boundaries were understandably severe. By not heeding these warnings, the Edomites would be "covered with shame, and you will be cut off forever" (v. 10). And that is exactly what happened, because the Edomites became controlled by Assyria and Babylon, and then were forced out of their territory by the Nabateans, so that Edom was cut off from existence as a nation.

Obadiah attributes the source of this certain calamity to a single attribute of the Edomites, namely arrogance (v. 3). The Hebrew word translated here as "arrogance" is זָדוֹן (zadon). It is used elsewhere to convey an overconfidence that demonstrates contempt for others (Ps. 119:21), a passion that causes a person to overstep their boundaries (Prov. 21:24), and results in disgrace and strife (Prov. 11:2; 13:10). In the book of Obadiah, the rather minor nation of Edom became arrogant and acted out in ways that were exploitive, vindictive and self-serving, which ultimately put them in conflict with God Himself.

There is an important lesson to be learned here, especially when it comes to arrogance toward Israel and the Jewish people. When a Gentile nation, a denomination, or any other group interjects itself into God's business with His covenant nation of Israel, it invites a similar result to what Edom experienced. And that makes it a most serious matter. This reality profoundly relates to BDS, for the same warnings declared by Obadiah still apply, even if you dress it up with words of peace and justice.

### **Warnings to the Church about BDS in the Book of Romans**

In the New Testament, the Greek equivalent for arrogance is καυχάομαι (*kauchaomai*). It literally means "having your head up high" because it comes from a root for the "neck." It is a posture of perceived superiority, in contrast with the posture of humility, in which you lower your head, thus reducing visibility of your neck. Arrogance, in this understanding, is having an attitude in which you consider yourself to be more significant than what you actually are.

Paul warns Gentile Christians in Romans 11:18 not to be arrogant toward the people of Israel and not to be "conceited, but fear" (v. 20). And then he shows that failing to heed that warning can lead to them being "cut off" (v. 22). That warning is the exact phrase used by Obadiah when he declared that Adonai would cause Edom to be "cut off forever" for joining in the harm against Israel. And Edom did indeed cease to exist as a nation. It is used many other places in Scripture regarding capital punishment or permanent exclusion from the community, but the basic concept of being cut off means the end of existence.

The participation of Christians in the BDS movement is arrogant because it assumes a moral superiority that seeks to force Israel to do what you want. But ultimately, it results in doing the work of the Adversary in bringing harm to God's covenant nation. So, like Obadiah, Paul is warning Gentile Christian individuals, churches and denominations not to be arrogant toward the Jewish people, because it invites being cut off from the olive tree, meaning the people of God.

So, if BDS is contrary to God's way, what is our responsibility as believers when it comes to Israel? Instead of pursuing arrogance, we are given an invitation to join in an actual

constructive approach. In the same eleventh chapter of Romans, Paul exhorts Gentile believers:

- To move the Jewish people to jealousy (v. 14), which is a description of desiring something of value that others possess, and one can rightly conclude that the proponents of BDS have nothing to offer in that regard.
- To “continue in kindness (v. 22),” which is a call to show the same kind of grace to Israel that God showed to Gentiles when they were in a state of unbelief and rebellion (cf. Rom. 5:8-10; Eph. 2:11-2).
- To embrace the Jewish people as being beloved rather than treating Israel as an enemy (v. 28).
- To show them mercy in spite of being disobedient (v. 31).
- To be wise about the mystery of Israel’s partial spiritual hardening (v. 25), because a day is coming when “all Israel will be saved” (v. 26).

Taken together, these exhortations are best carried out with a gospel-centered focus. Unlike BDS that seeks to drive Jewish people away, God’s plan is about grafting unbelieving Jewish people back into the olive tree of the people of God. If it requires some chastening, then that is the Lord’s prerogative. Our role, like Paul states, is to stand by our faith, to fear God and to do our part in making it known that the Deliverer who takes away sins has indeed come. And that Deliverer is Yeshua (Jesus).

Instead of being people known for arrogance and forcing others to do what we want, let us all be known for our love for Yeshua, our dedication to the message of salvation by grace through faith in Him, and learning how to love other people the sacrificial way, while showing them grace instead of threatening them with harm. In the end, the words of Obadiah in his fifteenth verse still resonate strongly today:

“For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you.”