

Atlantic Baptist Article

Rethinking History: A Lesson for the “Gay Marriage” Debate

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Last year I was introduced to the writings of Chaim Potok, a Jewish rabbi/author who has written a number of historical novels including The Chosen (1967) and The Promise (1969). These books follow the friendship of two teenage Jewish boys - Danny Saunders, the brilliant son of the rebbe (or tzaddik) of a strict Hasidic sect and Reuven Malter, the son of a Modern Orthodox (Zionist) Jewish scholar.

The Chosen is set in New York during World War II. As the war ends and the horrifying spectacle of the Holocaust is revealed, the North American Jewish community is divided. The Hasidic Jews believe that, despite the atrocities of the concentration camps and genocidal attempts to destroy the Jewish people, they must wait for God to act. The Zionist Jews, on the other hand, believe that they must take matters into their own hands. They are tired of waiting for God and begin a powerful political and military campaign to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. Thus, Israel is formed amidst dissension and violence.

For me this was more than a history lesson. I had never given much thought to **how** the modern nation state of Israel was formed. I assumed that it was a simple matter of God’s timing and purpose and the fulfillment of ancient prophecy. As I read The Chosen, however, I was struck by the realization that the fulfillment of any particular prophecy ought not to be confused with God’s intervention or provision or timing. For the first time it occurred to me that it might be possible to abuse prophecy and to take shortcuts to get from where we are to where we think God wants us to be.

What if the Hasidic view (wait for God) had prevailed? Would there be no Israel today or in the future? Is it not possible that God would have brought about the creation of a Jewish state by some other means? If so, which path would be “better” – the one driven by human intent and effort or the one directed by God? Are they mutually incompatible or, in this case, was it God’s intent that Israel be born by force? I don’t know but it makes me think.

This is not simply a philosophical question. It seems to me that it raises a fundamental issue. Are we **following** God as Christ’s disciples, or are we **directing** God as His equals, or even, dare I say, His superiors? Do we grow impatient with God today and resolve to take matters into our own hands? Are we tired of waiting for God to act?

By the time this article goes to print it is likely that our Canadian Parliament will be embroiled in its debate over legislation designed to change the definition of

marriage. It's even possible that the debate will be over, at least in the House of Commons. As Director of Public Witness and Social Concerns for the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches and Canadian Baptist Ministries, I have talked about this issue in many of my columns for the [Atlantic Baptist](#). I have had an un-ease about the debate and public discourse on this issue from the outset and now, as the political debate heats up, I feel I am gaining more clarity. And I don't like what I see.

Here's the thing. I think we have (rather recklessly) taken matters into our own hands. I think we've assumed that God has authorized us to take whatever measures we deem effective to get our way. In so doing, we have allowed the public debate to focus on gay rights vs. religious rights. We have thus diverted attention away from the central issue – the value of marriage to society – and have simply pitted the individual rights of one minority group (gays and lesbians) against another minority group (conservative Christians – not to be confused with **Conservative Christians**). Before you feel offended that I would class conservative Christians as a minority, note that I'm not talking about the number of Canadians who claim some Christian affiliation or even the number who occasionally attend religious services, but rather the number for whom faith determines ideas, attitudes and actions. That is, those who live their lives according to their faith. I believe that figure is somewhere between 10 and 20% of the Canadian population.

We have entered the ring with gay rights lobbyists and are fighting the battle on their turf and on their terms. And we're making a mess of it. Even if we use political tactics and political pressure to resist a redefinition of marriage in Parliament, we have made a mess of it. I have a sickening sense that we're in the middle of a maze with no idea how we got in or how we can get out. We're simply thrashing about, chasing the shifting light and shadows.

This issue has divided denominations and compromised the true witness of the gospel. We are saying conflicting things with conflicting motives. We are driven by fear and pride and indignation, not by obedience to the God who calls us to trust Him and wait for Him and follow Him. By focusing on rights issues, we have conceded to use the tools of political warfare rather than the weapons God has provided.

The Trojan Horse is within the gates. It may be too late to re-focus public and Parliamentary attention on the unique contribution that marriage makes to society (especially when it is a marriage crafted according to God's design), but it is not too late to humble ourselves, pray, seek God's face, and turn from our wicked ways (2 Chronicles 7:14). May God forgive us for taking matters into our own hands and may He help us to understand more fully His plan and provision for redemption.