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110 NORTH PEARL STREET, ALBANY, NY 12207-2231

Telephone: (518) 463-4449 - Fax: (518) 463-4830

There Is No Law

Six Israeli soldiers carrying automatic weapons move slowly down the narrow streets of the old city of Hebron. We follow. We are members of a Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) delegation visiting Israel and the Occupied Territories. Our purpose is to be a visible and non-violent presence in a situation of conflict. On this particular afternoon we encounter the soldiers on one of our regular walks through the city. One of the soldiers turns toward us. "You must keep back at least 10 meters."

"Last week we were told 3 meters," one of the CPT members replies. "Which is it? We will comply, but what is the law?"

"There is no law," says the soldier.

We continue to follow them through the narrow streets. The soldiers come to a home and enter through a doorway. They do not bother to knock. They do not ask for permission. They are not invited in. They simply enter. "There is no law."



They go up the stairs and through the living area and pass three young boys. Later we learn that some weeks earlier the boys had been taken by Israeli soldiers and detained for several hours. Why? Perhaps they had thrown stones. Or been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Or had been insolent. They had no lawyer. No charges were filed. Yet they were among the more fortunate. After a few hours they were released. Some children have been imprisoned for months. "There is no law."

Earlier in the week we had visited an Israeli settlement. "Rachel" graciously welcomed us into her home and shared her story with us. She had grown up in a nominally Christian family in the U.S., converted to Judaism as a young adult, and emigrated to Israel. Like many who emigrate to Israel to live in a settlement, she benefited from government policies that facilitated her path to Israeli citizenship, subsidized her housing, and helped to locate her and her family in an upscale community in the West Bank. This is the law.

But she has also suffered greatly. Her sixteen-year-old son, a student at a Jerusalem Yeshiva, was shot and killed by a Palestinian extremist. There is no law that will bring him back.

We were also hosted by a Palestinian family. Their home is in a refugee camp in Bethlehem. 13,000 people, over half of them children, are crowded into half a square kilometer. All of them are former residents or descendants of former residents of small Palestinian villages near Jerusalem just a few kilometers away. In 1947 they were forcibly removed from their homes. Some of those who resisted were killed. The villages were destroyed. The site of the former villages has been converted into "green space," American Independence Park and Menachem Begin Park. The Palestinians have never been compensated for their loss. They are not allowed to return. They are not even permitted to enter Jerusalem. This is the law.

We are praying for a different world; a world where laws do not persecute some and benefit others. A world where laws bring people together rather than drive them apart. A world of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and self-control. Against these things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

John Paarlberg