

I Stand with Israel

By Reverend Raphael Warnock

I was born in Georgia, raised in Savannah, and for the past 15 years have served as the Senior Pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Leading from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s historic pulpit, I am proud to continue his legacy of leadership and friendship between the Black and Jewish communities of Atlanta, Georgia.

In 1958, the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation Temple was bombed following Rabbi Jacob Rothschild's outspoken support for the Civil Rights movement and Dr. King. This twisted act of violence had the unintended consequence of strengthening the camaraderie not only between the two men, but also binding two communities of faith.

Rabbi Rothschild and Dr. King understood then what I know to be true today: our communities face threats that are part of the same sickness of bigotry and hatred and we need each other to defeat them.

More than 60 years later, I continue in that tradition of interfaith understanding and respect, working with Rabbi Peter Berg and other leaders of our Jewish community in Atlanta on joint services and fellowship in recognition of our shared values.

As a candidate for the U.S. Senate, many are still learning of my background and my interfaith commitment to the world around us, and in particular to the Jewish community and to Israel. Unfortunately, my opponent is already misrepresenting my views for political gain.

That's why I believe it's critical the community hear directly from me.

I wholeheartedly and unabashedly echo Dr. King's declaration that "Israel's right to exist as a state in security is incontestable."

Claims that I believe Israel is an apartheid state are patently false -- I do not believe that.

I pray for the day that military assistance and arms are no longer needed anywhere in the world, but I understand the critical nature of our current partnership to Israel. That is why I support President Obama's security assistance memorandum of understanding that protects Israel, and I agree with President-Elect Biden that placing conditions on our assistance would be a mistake.

In the spirit of John Lewis and so many civil rights heroes I revere, I recognize the First Amendment right to protest is an American value we must protect. But I strongly oppose the BDS movement and its anti-Semitic underpinnings, including its supporters' refusal to acknowledge Israel's right to exist.

I understand and recognize Israel's unique historical importance as the greatest proponent of democracy in the Middle East and America's most important partner in the region. I understand the many threats that face Israel and as a U.S. Senator I will work to ensure Iran does not obtain a nuclear weapon.

It is true that I am deeply concerned about continued settlement expansion – I believe it is a threat to the prospect of a two- state solution, which I believe is the only path to enduring peace. I will continue to advocate for self-determination for the Palestinian people because I want to see a Palestinian state living side by side with a safe and secure Israel.

In my final year of seminary, I wrote a master's thesis on two of my favorite theologians: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Of course, Dr. King was the central figure and most prominent voice of the civil rights movement in its fight against segregation while Bonhoeffer was an important leader in the small, minority voice of Christian resistance to Hitler, The Third Reich and "Christian" Aryanism in Germany.

Both were pastors operating in the public square, confronting anti-Semitism, racism and bigotry in their contexts and calling upon their congregation and their country to create a more loving, peaceful and just society.

King said, "We are caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Bonhoeffer averred, "We have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated — in short, from the perspective of those who suffer."

Their moral legacy has informed my activism, the coalitions of conscience that I have strived to create, and the work that I do.

Without reservation, you can count on me to stand with the Jewish community and Israel in the U.S. Senate.