

Southern Baptists stranded in Middle East war zone

ASHKELON, Israel (BP and local reports) – The Palestinian terrorist group, Hamas, launched a surprise attack on Israel on Oct 7, firing thousands of rockets and swiftly moving 1,500 armed jihadists across the Gaza border into Israeli settlements.

At last count, more than 1,000 Israelis and over 700 people in Gaza have been killed in the conflict. More than 2,500 Israelis have been injured, and another 100 have been taken captive by the terrorists. The White House in Washington, D.C., reported late Monday afternoon that 14 Americans are known to have been killed. It is not known if any U.S. citizens are being held as hostages.

At least a half dozen organized groups of Southern Baptists were in Israel at the time of the attacks, sources said, with most involved in tours of the Holy Land. It is not known how many individual Southern Baptists could be visiting friends and relatives at an especially high time of travel to the area.

Ric Worshill, executive director of the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship, noted that the attack came on the last day of Sukot, one of the holiest of days on the Jewish calendar. Sukkot, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles, is an eight-day festival that celebrates the harvest.

“It’s horrible,” Worshill told Baptist Press (BP). “It’s just heartbreaking because this year has been the highest in anti-Semitism throughout the world since the Holocaust, and it’s really sad that they would pick the last day of a Jewish holiday to do all this barbaric stuff.”

News media reports from the area indicate that the terrorists

indiscriminately slaughtered men, women, and children, even throwing grenades into packed bomb shelters. There are reports that the terrorists paraded naked, bloodied women hostages through Gaza streets, and promised to execute the captives if Israel staged retaliatory attacks for the incursion.

Worshill asked Southern Baptists to unite in prayer for those involved in this conflict. "We need to be one. We need to be one about everything. We need to be one about the Lord. We need to be one about politics.

"We need to be one about being against the attacks of Satan in prayer. That's the biggest thing I can say. There should be no division in the body of Christ. We, Southern Baptists, need to stick together."

John Hall, a spokesman for Texas Baptist Men (TBM), told BP the ministry has been preparing for this moment since 2018 when it began a partnership in Israel. The group has multiple mobile kitchens in Israel, built specifically for situations like this.

Hall is unsure when the logistical challenges of inserting volunteers into a war zone will ease and TBM will be able to begin feeding people in Israel, but they are planning to send in teams as soon as possible.

"We know that there are two situations that create great need right now," Hall said. "There are the communities that have been hit directly by the rockets and have lost their homes or cannot cook for themselves.

"[There] are also entire communities that have spent much of their time inside, sheltering in bunkers. For safety's sake, they don't have access to a lot of food. They can't really cook safely so we're going to prepare meals for them and deliver them to them."

Hall asked Southern Baptists to provide a "blanket of prayer"

as TBM prepares to travel to the other side of the world in the middle of a war to help the hungry and displaced in the name of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

“Pray for safety as we serve, as well as the safety of those that we’re serving. Pray for peace. Pray for it to come swiftly and miraculously. Pray that needs are met, and we minister well,” he asked.