

Book Review

Darrell L. Bock, and Mitch Glaser.
*The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel:
Israel and the Jewish People in the Plan of God*
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INTRODUCTION

The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel: Israel and the Jewish People in the Plan of God (hereafter *PLFI*) is a collection of essays by top evangelical minds about Israel and her people as they relate to theology in the OT, NT, Jewish Rabbinic thought, Christian hermeneutics, and eschatology. The collection was edited, as well as contributed to, by Mitch Glaser, President of Chosen People Ministries, and Darrell Bock, NT scholar, and senior research professor at Dallas Theological Seminary.

SUMMARY & EVALUATION

“The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel” conference was held in New York City in October 2013. *PLFI* contains the papers and essays presented at this conference. The topics covered are the people, the Land, and the future of Israel as relating to the Hebrew Scriptures (chapters 1-4), the New Testament (chapters 5-8), Hermeneutics, Theology and Church History (chapters 9-13), and finally Practical Theology (chapters 14-17). Each chapter provides an excellent “suggested reading” list and questions for discussion. Experts in their respective fields, such as Walter Kaiser, Michael Brown, Darrell Bock, Craig Evans, Mark Saucy,

Michael Vlach, and Mitch Glaser (et. al.) weigh in on the issues.

Hebrew Scriptures

A prominent theme in the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) is that everything is created for God’s glory; the same goes for Israel, this section claims (37). Israel was chosen for a mission and was given the promise that the people would endure until the very end of time, and in the world to come. Walter Kaiser concludes that the Hebrew canon ends with the promise given to David, namely that God indissolubly connected His name with David, his line, and the Land (51). The prophetic vision, as observed by Robert Chisom Jr., is return from exile as a people and the restoration of Zion (66). For this to happen the people of Israel have to be a viable political entity in the Land of Israel.

Michael Brown links these themes as they are seen by the rabbis. He explains that rabbinic literature looks forward as much as it looks to the past, maybe even more so. Rabbinic literature also sees in the pages of Scripture a “paradise restored” (80). The prophets foretell, and rabbinic literature echoes, says Brown, that there will come a time when Israel will not be uprooted (82). And he reminds the readers that dwelling in the Land, in the presence of God,

is the ultimate expression of Jewish future hope (*ibid*).

New Testament

Chapters 5-8 seek to engage the misconception that the gentile “international” Church has replaced Israel as the people of God. The conclusions made by the authors in contradiction to this theory are: (1) the Gospels teach that the Church is part of the promises to Israel, and the Kingdom of Heaven includes the restoration of the Land (100); (2) for the writer of Acts, gentile inclusion does not mean Israel’s exclusion (113); (3) Romans 9-11 explains the current (post-cross) and future *chosen-ness* of Israel and her coming restoration (123-30); (4) the audience of the Epistles are for the most part genetic descendants of Abraham and are constantly reminded by the authors of God’s promises to Israel (ethnic) and the application to all who choose to follow the God of Israel and place their trust in his Son, the Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth (145).

Hermeneutics, Theology and Church History

This section takes the reader on a journey through the often misunderstood and more often contended issue of hermeneutics. Craig Blaising attempts to show the weakness of “replacement theology.” A more holistic reading of the Bible is preferable, he argues (165). A redefining of Israel (best case) or outright replacement (worse case) is to ignore the theological importance of Israel and its people, and trade a robust eschatology for a thin concept of the Kingdom of God (*ibid*).

The next chapters cover the necessity of Israel in Biblical Theology (Saucy), in eschatology (Feinberg), and throughout Church history (Vlach). Saucy seeks to explain the crucial part

Israel plays in the biblical narrative, and not only the people, but also the Land. For his part, Feinberg looks to Daniel 9:24-27, Zechariah 12, and Isaiah 19:16-25. For Feinberg, these prophecies are proof that there needs to be a literal Israel. Furthermore, Israel’s rejection of Messiah did not cancel out these prophecies (193).

Vlach and Leventhal tackle Israel in Church history. Vlach specifically covers the view of Israel throughout Church history. He reviews for the reader the development of “replacement theology” and also the development of the Church’s recognition that there is a future for Israel. He correctly concludes that Israel is a mixed bag in Church history (209).

For Leventhal, despite the Holocaust’s dark shadow on history, the rebirth of Israel looks forward and allows for the spiritual rebirth of Israel that is envisioned by the Scriptures in the world to come. Coming through Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers and theologians who grapple with the Holocaust, Leventhal concludes that, “God planted a Zionist component” into His people, a desire to return to the Land of their fathers, and despite the horrors of history, He is leading His people home. One of the longer chapters in the book, it connects the reader with an often overlooked issue in the Christian world.

Practical Theology

The last and final section of the book literally deals with more practical matters. However it begins with the immortality of the Jewish people. Its author, Michael Rydelnik, posits that the continued existence of the Jewish people is evidence for the truth of Scripture. He suggests that the Church should take God at His word; if God said that He will never forsake the Jewish

people, then He meant it. God has kept His people, restored them to the Land, kept for Himself a remnant (e.g. Messianic Jews), and will also be true to His word for the future and final restoration of Zion.

The last of three chapters of the final section deal with: Evangelism (Glaser); Israel and the local pastor (Epstein); and a brief survey on the view of Israel in modern day seminaries (Hagg). Glaser and Epstein argue for the need for Jewish evangelism and the Church's calling to love the Jewish people, respectively. Christian love for the Jewish people should lead to bridge building, and an honest, bold evangelism that shows the Jewish people their Jewish Messiah. Both do a quality job expressing the need for the Church to reach out to the Jewish community.

Hagg, commenting on a ten-question survey sent to 70 seminaries, sees an unfortunate trend in evangelical scholarship – namely, an apathy or under-appreciation of the Jewish people and Israel as they relate to the topics discussed in this book. The book ends on a somewhat low note and the last chapter offers little by way of conclusion. It simply states the case and offers no solution to the apparent apathy towards Israel in today's seminaries.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The purpose of PLFI is to present a broadly Pre-Millennial view on what the Bible teaches about the Jewish people, the Land of Israel, and the future of Israel. It can provide Bible students with a much-needed, broad biblical theology on the subject. The book, its authors, and editors accomplish this fairly well. However, PLFI's strength is also its weakness. It seems it was written for a lay audience and would not serve as a strong academic book, although this should not discourage professors from using it in the classroom. However, an expanded, more academic version of this book and its contents is needed, perhaps in a multi-volume set. The arguments presented in this book are not entirely new, but that is hardly an issue to bring up as some reviewers have. These "tested" arguments are compiled into one book, easily accessible in one volume, and this makes PLFI an excellent primer.

