

Darrel M. Bock and Mitch Glaser, eds., *Israel, the Church, and the Middle East: A Biblical Response to the Current Conflict*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018. viii+ 296 pp. Paperback US\$ 24.99.

Darrel L. Bock is executive director of cultural engagement and senior research professor of New Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. A former president of the Evangelical Theological Society, he is the author of the best-selling *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* and numerous works in New Testament studies, including *Jesus According to Scripture*. Mitch Glaser is the president of Chosen People Ministries. Mitch and his wife, Zhava, are Jewish believers in Jesus and have each worked for more than twenty years in ministry among the Jewish people. Mitch holds a PhD in intercultural studies. This book is an interdisciplinary anthology that addresses the relationship between Israel, the church, and the Middle East. It is divided into four parts, (1) biblical foundations, (2) theology and the conflict, (3) Yeshua in the midst of the crisis, and (4) current challenges to peace in Israel. Thirteen scholars from various fields of study explore and analyze this multifaceted topic, providing a biblical response to the ongoing discussion.

In part 1, “Biblical Foundations,” Richard E. Averbeck offers a systematized understanding of biblical covenants. Although covenants are understood differently from the perspective of covenant theology and dispensational theology, the author divides them into five covenants: the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenant. In light of these, the author draws the connection that the covenant includes the land promises as seed promises and concludes that it is “irrevocable” and “permanent” (p. 28). He quotes Paul (Rom 9:4–7, 11, 23–26; Eph 3) and reflects how the covenant includes all who have faith in Christ the Messiah. Walter C. Kaiser Jr delves into Isaiah 19 and discusses the prophecy connected with Israel and Egypt. He highlights God’s judgments that are announced against the

neighboring nation of Israel, Egypt. First, there will be a political disaster where anarchy and civil war takes place. Second, an economic disaster is predicted resulting in the drying up of the river Nile, which is so important to the life of the Egyptians. Third, an intellectual disaster will come as a result of foolish decisions and a lack of wisdom. It comes as a result of her hostility towards the nation of Israel. However, despite this, God also pronounces salvation and deliverance to Egypt. At the eschaton, all the surrounding nations of Israel will be converted and will partake of the glory and remain triumphant.

Mark Yarbrough underscores the point that the overarching genre of the Bible is presented as a story. The central narrative of the story is about the Creator God making a covenant with His people, Israel. God does not abandon His people or neglect His promises. Yarbrough quotes, "We wait for the consummation of God's promises to Israel. This is a pinnacle of grace in the grand story of Scripture" (p. 61). Many scholars question the evidence from the NT in regard to the land promises of Israel. First, it is objected that the NT does not mention it. Second, these promises are seen as transferred to the church. And third, these promises are understood to have been universalized and do not involve a historic land. However, Michael Rydelnik concludes this section by underscoring the point that while the Old Testament affirms the land promises to Israel, the New Testament reaffirms the same, although in an implicit manner. He proposes, first, a hermeneutical framework that harmonizes both Testaments and, second, reading the New Testament through the lens of the Old Testament. Adhering to this will prevent supersessionism. Hence, the covenant includes the land promises to ethnic Israel and remain forever.

In part 2, the authors provide a theological understanding of Israel and the Church. Craig Blasing elaborates this understanding by defining various key concepts such as supersessionism (ethnic supersessionism and economic supersessionism), dispensationalism (traditional and progressive), and the kingdom of God. One of the central questions in his chapter is, "Does the spiritual formation of Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ remove their ethnic identities so as to disassociate them from the ethnic and national promises of the kingdom?" (p. 96). According to him, the spiritual union in Christ was recognized as transcending ethnic and national differences without erasing them. Mitch Glaser takes this concept further and highlights the dangers of supersessionism (replacement theology).

According to him, supersessionism is like a cancer that causes anti-semitism. Bridging this gap requires reconciliation not only between Israel and Palestine, but also between Western Christians on both sides of the conflict. This understanding has led to a movement known as Christian Zionism, who believe that the land of Israel rightfully belongs to the Jewish community and that the nations must support the modern state of Israel. However, he concludes that without a proper understanding of the covenant validity of the Jewish people, issues on this will continue to persist. Michael J. Vlach discusses an important aspect, namely “restorationism.” By this, he means that one day, the nation of Israel will play a crucial part when Christ reigns on earth.

Vlach briefly highlights “restorationism” through church history and why the church largely abandoned it. According to him, four factors contributed to it: First, an influx of gentile converts, which resulted in *ecclesia ex gentibus* (church of the Gentiles). Second, the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, resulting in God’s permanent rejection of Israel. Third, the church’s re-interpretation of the Jewish Scripture. Fourth, the emergence of scriptural allegorization in the early church. Although the author provides several scholars in church history that championed “restorationism” he does not adequately provide biblical evidence that harmonizes both the OT and NT. Most verses that are used in favour of this concept are a result of proof-texting, allegorical interpretation and the influence of Greek philosophy.

In part 3, the authors explore how Yeshua is portrayed in the midst of the Crisis. Erez Soref identifies the emergence of various Messianic Jewish movements post-great awakening during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They differentiate themselves from general Christendom and make a distinction between the larger evangelical church and traditional Christian churches (Catholic and Orthodox). According to the Messianic Jews the return of Jewish people to Israel is “an act of God” (p. 144). Central to their beliefs is the coming of the Messiah and the fulfillment of prophecy. Furthermore, Tom Doyle, explores the status of the Palestinian Church within Israel in the 21st century. This is significant since Arabs were also present during the Pentecost (Acts 2:11) and showed a rather fast start-up church in that region. He highlights the point that despite the geopolitical disputes between Jews and Palestinians, the love of Christ unites the two

groups. After interviewing various groups, he summarizes that Palestinians can love Jesus and Jews, too (pp. 152–53).

In part 4, the authors discuss current challenges to peace in Israel. They pose questions such as, should Christians support the Modern state of Israel? Is it sinful to divide the land of Israel? According to a recent poll, eighty-two percent of white evangelicals believe that the land of Israel was given by God to the Jewish people. Hence, the term “Zionism” is employed for those who promote and support the cause of Israel. Mark. L. Bailey provides biblical reasons for this support. First, God made a covenant with the Jews. Their sin and unfaithfulness did not abrogate or nullify the land promises. Second, the centrality of the covenant and Christ’s mission begins with Israel and then with the other nations. Third, the Scriptural mandate to display genuine Christian love that is impartial, the kind that transcends political and geopolitical lines.

Furthermore, Mike Brown, points out that most evangelicals hold fast to the belief that God will judge those who divide the land of Israel (Joel 3:2–3). He further concludes to answer this question by reminding the readers that the land of Israel belongs to God. However, they are not entitled to its full possession unless they are fully repentant. Although there are no concrete dogmatic reasons that either decision is a sin, Brown recommends that one must carefully approach this conflict keeping in mind that Israel is God’s land in a unique and special way.

The book concludes with a valuable and relevant bibliography that will be helpful for readers who are interested in exploring the topic further. It also includes a Scripture, name, and subject indexes.

The book is well-written in terms of language and clarity. The authors communicate their points of view in an appealing manner. The chapters are systematically outlined, beginning with the biblical foundation and ending with current conflicts. One of the highlights of the book is found in chapter 4, “The Hermeneutics of the Conflict.” Here Rydelnik, presents a fairly balanced view of Scripture where he discourages proof-texting and encourages the readers towards a macro-hermeneutical and inter-textual hermeneutics that promotes a harmonious view of Scripture. In my opinion, this is key to understanding this prevalent discussion. Another strength of this book is how the authors analyze this topic and connect it well with the modern state of Israel. The insights are fresh and up-to-date and presents testimonies and

statistics of the people who represent the Messianic Jewish community.

While acknowledging the strengths, there are also a few critiques or weaknesses to consider. Given that the book is written in celebration of Israel's seventieth anniversary, Bock and Glaser's unwavering support for Israel as the rightful heir to the land promises is clearly emphasized. Although one section is devoted to biblical foundations, the authors place greater emphasis on defending Israel than on examining the role and significance of the Church. Additionally, in part 2, Glaser focuses primarily on the dangers of supersessionism. Incorporating a more balanced discussion of other models would enhance the depth and maturity of the conversation. The book appears to take a presuppositional stance in favor of Israel and dispensationalism. However, from an Adventist position, the system of dispensationalism is not supported and is biblically incoherent. Israel and the Church are not different groups. God has one mission and purpose for His people (Gal 3:28–29). Although the Jews rejected Christ as their Messiah, salvation is still available to them through genuine faith and repentance.

Scripture portrays God as inclusive, where believers and non-believers are grafted into His covenant (Rom 11:11–31).

Furthermore, Adventist eschatology has no distinct events specifically for any ethnic group of people. All those who profess faith in Christ are part of His Church (Gk. *ekklesia*), meaning "gathering" or "assembly." In the culmination of earth's history, Apostle John attests that there are but only two groups, the righteous and unrighteous (Rev 22:11).

Overall, the book is engaging and relevant for those who are interested in ecclesiology and eschatological issues. It raises important issues for the church to address, especially when it pertains to geo-politics. It further stimulates the readers to dig deeper into this topic as a lot more can be discussed. I recommend this book to biblical and theological students and pastors who have an interest in understanding the relationship between Israel and the Church.

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