

Israeli/Arab Conflict and the Bible

By Wilbur M. Smith (Glendale, CA: G/L Publishing, 1967), 162 pp., out of print (paperback).

I happened upon this book in a small used bookstore in [Lynden](#), Washington which we try to check out whenever we are in the area. Lynden has a strong Calvinistic reformed influence and valuable pre-owned Christian titles can often be found in the store.

Although this is the first book I've obtained by the author, I am acquainted with Wilbur Smith's name as he has written the preface for a number of other authors I've read. Given the nature of the works which the author had endorsed, I knew the book would be worthwhile.

The *Dictionary of Christianity in America* says of Smith:¹

Presbyterian fundamentalist educator. Born in Chicago to parents who were personal friends of the early fundamentalist leaders, Smith studied at the Moody Bible Institute for one year (1913–1914), and then at the College of Wooster (Ohio) for three years after that, but earned no academic degrees. He left Wooster in 1917 to assist the pastor of the West Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, Delaware. For the next twenty years Smith pastored Presbyterian congregations in Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania. From 1937 to 1947, Smith taught at the Moody Bible Institute. In 1947 he helped design Fuller Theological Seminary and then joined its faculty. He departed in 1963 following a controversy over biblical inerrancy, but was recruited to serve half-time at the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Smith finally retired from teaching in 1971.

I've read a significant amount of material on the Biblical teaching concerning the nation of Israel. This was never an intentional focus: I was driven in that direction from encountering so much confused teaching concerning the role of Israel in Scripture—especially the view that Israel is the church or that national Israel (the Jews) have no significant role in unfulfilled prophecy. But in reading on this issue, I've also come across a significant amount of hype and sensationalism which often attends the subject of Israel in prophecy. Over time, one learns how to avoid the hype and find the quality authors who deal with the topic carefully. Wilbur Smith is one of these.

I am not approaching this subject as something new for my own research and consideration. I have been reading books on prophetic matters and have been doing some writing on them for something over thirty years. I trust that nothing that I have ever written in the past, or even said from a professor's desk, or from a pulpit, was found to be erroneous or ridiculous in succeeding years. I have studiously avoided the temptation to be sensational, or to make unfounded guesses. (p. 6)

¹Daniel G. Reid, Robert Dean Linder, Bruce L. Shelley and Harry S. Stout, *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

If you've studied what the Bible has to say concerning Israel, both in the OT and the NT, then you'll find Mr. Smith's treatment of the subject to be on solid ground. He deals with many of the arguments of those who hold that Israel is of no future significance to prophecy and manages to walk the fine line between “newspaper exegesis” and ignoring the relevance of Israel today in history.

Like many careful Bible scholars, Mr. Smith understands that the promises concerning Israel's restoration to the land can neither be fulfilled in the past nor spiritualized away:

There are four different attitudes toward these prophetic announcements concerning the return of Israel to Palestine. One is that these prophecies were all fulfilled in the return of the Jews under Ezra and subsequent decades. This, however, is contradicted by three facts: The Jews that returned under Ezra, and later leaders, did not come from the four quarters of the earth an from all the nations of the earth, but only from Babylon and Persia. Isaiah 11:11 speaks clearly of a return that is designated as a second one, and there has been no second one up to this century. Finally, the passages we have been discussing which predict a return insist that when this takes place, Israel will be planted in the land forever. She was not so planted with the return under Ezra. Another theory proposed is that God is through with Israel and that in her rejection of Christ she forfeited all expectations of being specially dealt with by the Lord at any future time. The answer to this is that Israel's apostasy and disobedience are foreseen by the very prophets who also speak of a time to come when Israel will turn from disobedience and accept her Messiah. A third theory is that these prophecies are fulfilled in the history of the church. This principle of interpretation is called spiritualizing and leads to a chaotic, confused suggestion as to what these phrases mean when they speak of the land and Jerusalem and agricultural richness, and especially the reign of David their king over Jerusalem. The church is not a body of people originally belonging to God and now being brought back to him, but is made up of lost sinners. They never knew God and are brought out of their spiritual death to newness of life. This newness of life can never be identified with a migration to Palestine.(pp. 38-39).

While Smith's discussion of Israel's promises and their interpretation are valuable (and refreshing in light of so many modern interpreters who deny their plain meaning), this reader was especially interested in a number of passages from earlier interpreters who also understood the Bible to predict a literal restoration of Israel as a nation. These quotes are particularly interesting because they show how careful expositors, who uphold a literal interpretation of Scripture, are able to accurately predict the future by simply setting forth that which God has revealed. Some examples follow:

In 1673 an interesting book was published, with a preface by Dr. John Owen, “A Collection of Prophecies which Concern the Calling of the Jews and the Glory that Shall Be in the Latter Days.” The scores of references were classified under eight headings which may be of interest to my readers: “I.

The Jews shall be gathered from all parts of the earth where they now are scattered, and brought home into their own land. II. They shall be carried by the Gentiles to their place; who shall join themselves with the Jews, and become the Lord's people. III. Great miracles shall be wrought when Israel is restored, as formerly when they were brought out of Egypt--viz.: 1. Drying up the river Euphrates. 2. Causing rivers to flow in desert places. 3. Giving them prophets. 4. The Lord Christ himself shall appear at the head of them. IV. The Jews, being restored, and converted to the faith of Christ, shall be formed into a State, and have Judges and Counsellors over them as formerly: the Lord Christ himself being their King, who shall them also be acknowledged King over all the earth. V. They shall have the victory over all their enemies, and all kings and nations of the earth shall submit unto them. VI. The Jews, restored, shall live peaceably, without being divided into two nations, or contending with one another any more. VII. The land of Judea shall be made eminently fruitful, like a Paradise, or the Garden of God. VIII. Jerusalem shall be rebuilt, and after the full restoration of the Jews shall never be destroyed, nor infested with enemies any more." All of this material was quoted by the famous Dr. Philip Doddridge in a work now seldom seen [Philip Doddridge: "Works," Leeds, 1802, Vol. V.] (pp. 47-49).

The first of [Increase Mather's] many works on prophecy was published in London in 1669, entitled "The Mystery of Israel's Salvation Explained and Applied--a discourse concerning the general conversion of the Israelitish nation." . . . Concerning the matter of their return to the land, Mather is clear: "Some have believed and asserted a general conversion of the Jews, yet have doubted whether they should ever again possess the land of their fathers. But the Scripture is very clear and full in this, that you see not how it can justly be denied or questioned." . . . Even the great period of Israel's tribulation was not hidden from Mather's mind. Later in the book he amplifies this truth: "A little before the conversion of the Jews, there will be the most terrible doings in the world that ever were heard of in respect of wars and commotions, the waves of the sea roaring, confused noise, and garments rolled in blood, blood and fire, and vapor of smoke; but after the kindome [sic.] shall be restored unto Israel, then shall be glorious days of peace and tranquility." (pp. 49-50).

Such quotations are golden nuggets, some of which have been lost (or scrubbed) from modern access by those who deny the Biblical significance of modern Israel. Yet previous careful students of the Word saw the things we seen in retrospect, yet in advance of their day—how encouraging for the faith of us who yearn to see other promises of God continue to move forward on the stage of history!

Along the way, Smith mentions another interesting "nugget" from Govett's commentary concerning how the two witnesses of Revelation 11 could possibly be viewed by the entire world in only 3 and ½ days—given that modern technology was yet unknown even

in Govett's time:

*The outstanding New Testament scholar, Robert Govett, wrote of this passage more than one hundred years ago (1864): "The word translated 'look upon,' 'blepo,' denotes not merely the nations seeing them, but their directing their eyes to this great sight and gazing upon them . . . 'But how,' it is asked, 'is it conceivable that men all over the earth should be rejoicing at the news when only three days and a half intervene between their death and resurrection?' . . . Is it not perfectly conceivable if the **electric telegraph** shall than have extended itself at the rate it has done of late years?" [Robert Govett, *The Apocalypse Expounded by Scripture*, London, 1929, pp. 246-247] (p. 112).*

I don't know about you, but I find it completely thrilling when an earlier expositor is faced with a clear passage in the Scriptures which, on the face of knowledge *available at that time*, seems "impossible." Yet, when our faith stands firm in God's inerrant Word—and we go out on a limb and agree with what the passage says at face value—we can expect to be vindicated just like these earlier expositors! May we have the faith and clarity to stand as firmly as they did!

Much of what Smith has to say relates to the restoration of Israel to her land, and especially the restoration of Jerusalem—and how during the "Times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24) which we are now in—we can expect Jerusalem to remain a political "hot button" for the Gentile nations. Smith makes several important observations concerning Jerusalem and cites another source showing how the city has undergone so much conflict throughout history.

The famous historial Milman has aptly said: "Jerusalem might almost seem to be a place under a peculiar curse; it has probably witnessed a greater portion of human misery than any other spot under the sun." The most satisfying list I have seen of battles waged in and around this city is in a book by Jacob Gartenhaus, "The Rebirth of a Nation," who has kindly granted me permission to reprint it here: B.C.: 1. By David about 1000; 2. Plunder of the Temple and city by Shoshenk I of Egypt about 930 (1K. 14:25, 2Chr. 12:2); 3. Partial overthrow by Jehoash of Israel about 790 (2K. 14:13); 4. Attack by Aram and N. Israel about 734; 5. Siege by Sennacherib, 701; 6. Surrender to Nebuchadnezzar, 597; 7. His siege and destruction, 587-6; 8. Sack by the Persians, 450; 9. Destruction by Ptolemy Sotar, 320; 10. Siege of Akra by Antiochus Epiphanes, 198; 11. Capture by Jason, 170; 12. Destruction by Antiochus Epiphanes, 168; 13. D Siege of Akra and the Temple, 163-2; 14. Siege of Akra, 146; 15. Siege and levelling of walls by Antiochus VII, 134; 16. Unsuccessful siege by the Nabateans, 65; 17. Siege, capture, and destruction by Pompey, 63; 18. Sack of Temple by Crassus, 54; 19. Capture by Parthians, 40; 20. Siege and partial destruction of Heron and Sosius, 37. A.D.: 1. Insurrection and some ruin on the visit of Florus, 65; 2. Unsuccessful siege by Cestus Callus, 66; 3. The great siege and destructions

by Titus, 70; 4. Seizure by the Jews under Bar Chocheba, 131; 5. Capture and devastation by Hadrian, 132; 6. Capture and plunder by Chosroes, the Persian, 614; 7. Recapture by Heraclius, 628; 8. Occupation by Omar, 637; 9. Capture by Moselm rebels, 842; 10. Ruin of Christian buildings, 937; 11. Occupation by the Fatimite Dynasty, 969; 12. Destruction by Khalif Hakim, 1010; 13. Occupation by the Seljik Turk, 1075; 14. Siege and capture by Afdhal, 1096; 15. Siege, capture and massacre by Godfrey, 1099; 16. Occupation by Saladin, 1187; 17. Destruction of walls, 1219; 18. Capture by the Emir of Kerak, 1229; 19. Surrender to Fredrick II, 1239; 20. Capture by the Kharesimians, 1244; 21. Plunder by Arabs, 1480; 22. Occupation by Turks, 1547; 23. Bombardment by Turks, 1825; 24. Occupation by Ibrahim Pasha, the Egyptian, 1831; 25. Re-occupation by the Turks, 1841; 26. Deliverance of Jerusalem by Field Marshall Viscount Allenby, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., December 11, 1917. [Jacob Gartenhaus, The Rebirth of a Nation, p. 101](pp. 158-160).

Those who know and accept the Biblical teaching concerning Israel, Jerusalem, and the Promised Land are not surprised by the ongoing conflict over Jerusalem. We understand this to be the city where God put His own Name and whose inhabitants, the Jews, will one day cry out for the return of Jesus—as He Himself predicted (Mtt. 23:29).

Smith's book is a reliable summary of Biblical teaching concerning God's plan for Israel and helpful for anyone who is looking to understand the Spiritual dynamic operating behind the political events surrounding Israel in our own day.

Reviewed by Tony Garland of www.SpiritAndTruth.org.