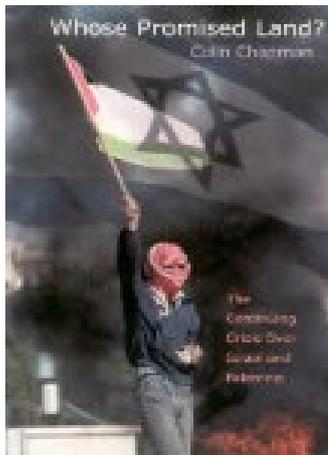




Biblaridion

Whose promised land?



A review of "Whose Promised Land?" - The continuing crisis over Israel and Palestine by Colin Chapman

Introduction

The Rev. Colin Chapman, who brings to the subject his experience of both living in the Middle East and lecturing as an Islamicist, has produced four editions of this book ensuring that it remains relevant. [\[1\]](#) The book examines the history, politics and theology surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian question and is divided into three major sections – (1) understanding the history (2) Interpreting the Bible (3) Appreciating the Issues Today. [\[2\]](#)

Truth and Justice

The motivation behind the book is the commendable desire for truth and justice. Truth is always the first casualty in any conflict and Chapman attempts to present a balanced account of the

injustices perpetrated by both parties; he produces an equal number of Jewish and Arab sources in his "anthology of quotations" and examines both the duplicity [3] and the guilt [4] of Western Christian nations that have contributed to the current circumstances. Particularly relevant regarding "truth and justice" is his observation that those who are willing to appeal to the Torah to justify the possession of the land (the Abrahamic covenant) should not neglect the prophetic pronouncements concerned with "truth and justice", especially towards the dispossessed and the alien. In this book and elsewhere, Chapman objects to the misinterpretation of scripture in order to justify injustice in offering unqualified support to the nation of Israel. [5]

Interpretation and theology

Although Chapman admits that *"the State of Israel has happened under the sovereignty of God"* he does not recognise the theological importance of Israel's existence; *"there is no theological significance about the State of Israel."* It is not *"the fulfilment, or a preliminary stage in the fulfilment, of all that God promised and predicted in the Old Testament"*. He admits that his approach is distinctly amillennial [6] but does not subscribe to 'supersessionism' or 'Replacement Theology'. [7]

On Interpreting the Old Testament Chapman states that, *"Christians today do not have the liberty to interpret the Old Testament in any way that appeals to them. Everything in the Old Testament has to be read through the eyes of the apostles. It is they, who so to speak, give us the right spectacles for a genuinely*

Christian reading of the Old Testament." [8] For Chapman Jesus not only represents Israel, Jesus *is* Israel: [9]

Old Testament	New Testament
Israel is the flock, with Yahweh their shepherd (Psalm 23:1; Ezekiel 34:1-31, especially 31)	Jesus speaks of himself as 'the good shepherd' (John 10:1-21, especially 11,14,16)
Israel is spoken of as the 'son' of God (Exodus 4:22-23; Psalm 80:15; Hosea 11:1)	Jesus speaks of himself as 'the son' who reveals 'the Father' (Matthew 11:27; John 14:5-14)
Israel is described as 'the vineyard' or 'the vine' (Psalm 80:8-16; Isaiah 5:1-7)	Jesus speaks of himself as 'the true vine' (John 15:1-17)
Israel in Daniel's vision is described as 'the son of man', a corporate figure which includes 'the saints of the Most High' (Daniel 7:13-28)	Jesus speaks of himself as 'the son of man' (Mark 2:10;8:31;14:62)
Israel is described by Isaiah as 'the servant of the Lord' (Isaiah 42:1-7;49:1-7;50:4-9;52:13-53:12)	Jesus speaks of himself as the servant (Mark 10:45)

The book also carries a forceful critique of the theocratic and ethnocentric theology supported by Christian-Zionism, particular the effect that this has "on the ground" for the Palestinians. Referring to the Christian-journalist Grace Halsell he says; "Among other things she explained why forty million evangelicals in the USA, many of whom would call themselves Fundamentalists, are totally and almost blindly committed to the support of Israel, why the Israeli government has been delighted for many years to have the support of a lobby which is at least five times larger than the Jewish community, why the Israeli government provided Jerry Falwell with his own jet and pilot to fly it, and how even some of Ronald Regan's utterances revealed the Armageddon mentality of Christian

Zionism.” (George Bush is probably an even better example of this). Chapman cites Stephen Sizer’s summary of Dispensationalism [p.276] and points out that Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan along with the ‘televangelists’ Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Jimmy Swaggart and Billy Graham all belong to the Dispensationalist school. [\[10\]](#)

Solutions

In the last section of his book Chapman explores various options [\[11\]](#) but finds them all more or less unsatisfactory – he comments; *“It is not much comfort for anyone to be told by certain kind of Christians that ‘the situation is so bad and the problems so complex that things will only be resolved when Jesus comes again’.”* [p.305] Accordingly, *“the only way Israel can guarantee its own security is to make peace with the Arabs”* [p.300]. In a separate article Chapman concludes: “Building a consensus among religious leaders; understanding the Islamic dimension of Palestinian nationalism; understanding Jews and Judaism; challenging Christian Zionism; and sustaining hope. This isn’t the end of the story by any means. But it’s where I would at least want to make a start in exploring the contribution of *Christian theology* to peace-making in the Middle East.” [\[12\]](#)

Discussion

Although the current reviewer shares Chapman’s evaluation of Christian-Zionism and his warnings against over literal

interpretation of the Old Testament these are neutralised by reservations over his theology. For example, the Rev David W Torrance observes that the return of Israel to the land *must be theologically significant* – simply because Jesus tells us so:

“When Jesus said that he would gather his elect from the four winds, North, South, East and West, he was not simply speaking spiritually and speaking of the Church. He was speaking of the literal restoration of the Jewish People and the restoration of the nation to the Land. In that context, Jesus' words, “*learn the lesson of the fig tree*” that has withered to its roots (the nation that has been utterly destroyed) is deeply significant. When you see it “*become green again (that is, the nation restored) know that summer is near.*” ” [\[13\]](#)

According to Chapman the apostles say nothing about the land or the nation of Israel, but Jesus himself spoke of an eschatological witnessing mission to the Jews [\[14\]](#) – a theme reinforced in Revelation 11; the resulting national repentance and restoration is equated by the apostle Paul in Romans 11 with ‘*life from the dead.*’ [\[15\]](#) Therefore, the ‘resurrection’ of national Israel (*cf.* Ezek.37) is synchronous with the ingathering of the saints of all ages at the sounding of the last trump. The revivication of Israel cannot be separated from the divine purpose for the saints.

Chapman is correct in understanding Christ as the idealized Israel; but although Jesus replaces the institution of the temple, (as the place where God is worshipped in ‘spirit and truth’) *he does not replace the worshippers*, but rather, Christ represents them in a

corporate sense. If this were not so, both Israel *and the church* would be superfluous. Jesus can rightly claim to be the embodiment of the covenant promises, [\[16\]](#) but the New Testament is not saying that the Old Testament promises have been completed in Christ's death and resurrection, but rather that their future fulfilment has been made possible through these key events, and thus God's promises have received confirmation. The apostle Paul states that, "*all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God*" (2 Cor.1:20). [\[17\]](#)

Unfortunately the inclination to 'spiritualise' all the promises is compounded by the erroneous understanding of orthodox Christianity concerning the nature of the kingdom, which is perceived to be in heaven (see note 6). This is exacerbated by the belief in the immortal soul and heavenly bliss; ideas that owe their provenance to ancient Greece and not to scriptures. [\[18\]](#) In contrast the "New heavens and earth" of Revelation describe heaven **coming down to earth** and the "New Jerusalem" describes the city **coming down to earth**:

"And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." (Rev.21:3)

Jesus (the Tabernacle/Temple) and his saints (the city) will dwell in the midst of the people – just as God had dwelt among them during the wilderness wanderings. In Israelite theology the Tabernacle and the Temple were **cosmological** symbols – made

after the pattern of the "Heavenly Sanctuary". [\[19\]](#) The Tabernacle/Temple (and even the Garden of Eden) stood therefore as symbols of a close communion between heaven and earth. Heaven had in fact come down to earth. After all, Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the kingdom to come and for God's will to be done on earth.

The present Zionist state is then part of the divine purpose for Israel –but it is a return in unbelief– and therefore remains under divine wrath. A parallel can be drawn with Jacob, who was forced by circumstances to return to his homeland and to confront his brother whom he had cheated out of his birth-right. Jacob came to the realisation that he was not just wrestling his fellow man, but God himself. Under the heading 'The concern for prophetic justice' [p.210] Chapman appeals to the example of Elijah who condemned Ahab for stealing Naboth's vineyard by arresting him on trumped up charges and having him murdered. Chapman comments; "*The sequel to the story indicates the seriousness of Ahab's crimes in the eyes of God.*" (...in the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood, yes, yours! - 1 Kgs.21:17-19). Chapman continues; "*This story is especially relevant to this conflict since, in the words of Naim Ateek, 'the death and dispossession of Naboth and his family has been re-enacted thousands of times since the creation of the state of Israel.'*" It is here that Chapman completely misses the point, probably deliberately; in order to avoid the charge of blood-libel or anti-Semitism – for the man **Naboth typifies Christ not the Palestinians:**

³³"Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a

winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ³⁴When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. ³⁵"The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. ³⁸"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' ³⁹So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." (Matthew 21: 33-41)

The vineyard, a metaphor for the nation including the land (Isaiah 5:1-7), is neither the possession of Israel nor the possession of the Palestinians – **it is God's vineyard**. It was God who was dispossessed and his son who was murdered. To quote Stephen Sizer:

"One more thing about the Land. The Land never belongs to Israel in the Torah. The Land belongs to God. Land cannot be permanently bought or sold. It cannot be permanently given away, let alone stolen or confiscated. The Land is never at the disposal of Israel for its national

purposes. Instead it is Israel who are at the disposal of God's purposes. The Jews remain tenants in God's Land."

'The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.'

Leviticus 25:23 [\[20\]](#)

The Jews did not receive a mandate to conquer the land (as they did under Joshua) and establish a Zionist state – never the less, God in his foreknowledge has allowed it to happen in order to work out his programme of repentance and deliverance for the nation. When God does this, *"Israel will know that I am Yahweh"* – there will be no doubt that Christ is the manifestation of God and bearer of the divine name. [\[21\]](#) But also, *"Then the nations will know that I am Yahweh."* Despite multiple failings Israel becomes the means whereby God will reveal his saving power to the Gentile nations as with the Exodus deliverance from Egypt.

Whose promised land? It is the meek who will inherit the earth. Jesus Christ the *"King of the Jews"* will reign over Israel and the feet of Abraham will once again walk on the land promised to him and his descendants. But who are Abraham's descendants? They are the people who display the faith of Abraham, whether they are Jew or Gentile – faith that is not limited to ethnocentricity or exclusivist religiosity.

Abraham is our father," they answered.

"If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are

determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does." (John 8: 39-41)

The inheritance is by faith not by physical descent. Even so, there will be a Jewish nation, in a Jewish land; it is God's righteousness that will accomplish this – despite the intransigence of his people. Colin Chapman has no real solutions to offer and dismisses the notion that the problem can only be resolved when Jesus returns. Yet the prophets inform us that the problem is intractable and humanly speaking unsolvable – it will draw in all nations and destroy anyone who meddles with it:

I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling..... I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves. (Zech.12:1-3)

Chapman's statement that, "*the only way Israel can guarantee its own security is to make peace with the Arabs*" is untrue, for, **they need to make peace with their God first** – then the rest will follow.

Conclusion

In conclusion we have to agree with the praise lavished on the book by the *English Churchman*:

"Well worth reading for the sympathetic presentation of the cases of the two sides. One does not have to agree with all the author's conclusions to profit by his learning."

Unfortunately Colin Chapman's amillennial position negatively influences his understanding of the theological issues, but his book clearly demonstrates that no one emerges from the current situation without blame. The Jewish nation for their rebellion against God and the injustices perpetrated against their fellow brethren - also descendants of Abraham; the Christians nations for their persecutions and anti-Semitism and the Arab nations for the "perpetual hatred" of their brethren. Christians bear extra responsibility for Jewish alienation caused by centuries of corrupt doctrines concerning the nature of Christ. What is necessary is the prophetic witnessing mission predicted by the Lord Jesus himself - not just to declare to 'Jacob his transgression' but to urge all parties concerned to repent.

Colin Chapman, citing Denys Baly [p.198] says that Baly suggests what a prophetic passion for truth might do to the whole Christian church:

"Repentance is not merely an act; it is an attitude of mind. It is a passion for the truth, an urgent desire to know the worst as well as the best, a readiness to begin again in a new way, a constantly proceeding examination of one's way of life, and with it all an ever remade decision to put right what is wrong.....What is needed there [in the Middle East] almost more than anything else is a ruthless

intellectual honesty which will break every barrier of emotionalism, sentiment, tradition and nationality, so that at the last people will be found able to question their own motives and behaviour. Hardly anywhere does it exist, and neither Islam nor the type of Judaism which is found in Israel encourage it...Only if the Christian Church can regain this passion for truth, whatever it may cost, will they begin to see it as a way of life."

Notes

[1] See the website "Whose promised?" land for a short biography:
<http://www.whosepromisedland.com/index.html>

[2] An overview of the contents can be found @
<http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/2204.htm>

[3] The British exacerbated the problem by making contradictory promises to both Jews and Arabs. To the Jews: the Balfour Declaration of 1917 which favoured the establishment of Palestine as a national home for the Jewish people, and which Arthur Koestler described as *"a document in which one nation solemnly promises to a second nation the country of a third nation."* To the Arabs: the Hussein-McMahon correspondence of 1915 promising the Arabs hegemony over Palestine in return for an alliance against the Central Powers [p.67].

[4] Chapman quotes the Quaker report of 1970 which points out how the Palestinian Arabs feel that they have been made to suffer for the sins of the great powers of the 'Christian West'. [p.75].....
"The most significant and terrible action by an outside power which contributed to the establishing of the State of Israel (and

consequently the Arab-Israeli conflict) was the Holocaust in Europe” (p.74 citing the British council of Churches report 1982).

[5] “*If only* the Christian Zionists, not only in America but all over the world, could see how their biblical interpretation and their theology work out in practice in the lives of Palestinians. And if only they could see that their crusade on behalf of Israel creates an enormous stumbling block to the gospel in the minds of Muslims all over the world. There are *other ways* of interpreting the biblical promises and prophecies which accept the full authority of Scripture but read everything in the Hebrew Bible in the light of Jesus and point to a much more even-handed approach to the conflict.”

[\[PDF\] APOCALYPSE NOW IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE? BY REVD COLIN CHAPMAN](#)

[\[DOC\] APOCALYPSE NOW IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE? BY REVD COLIN CHAPMAN](#)

[6] “It should be evident by now that it is this third [amillennial] position that underlies the whole of this book.” Chapman defines this as follows: “The amillennial interpretation is that the 1,000 years in the book of Revelation is not to be understood as a literal period of 1,000 years, but rather as a symbol describing the period of time in which we now live, following the victory that Christ has won through his death and resurrection.” Chapman cites the American theologian Anthony Hoekema; “The scene (in Rev. 20)...is set in heaven. Nothing is said in verses 4-6 about the earth, about Palestine as the centre of this reign with Christ or about the Jews. The thousand-year reign of Revelation 20:4 is a reign with Christ in heaven of the souls of believers who have died. This reign is not something to be looked for in the future; it is going on now, and will be until Christ returns. Hence the term realised millennialism is an apt description of the view here defended” [pp.186-188].

[7] “...it is never appropriate for Christians to think that Christianity has ‘taken the place of Israel.’ This idea, which is

sometimes described as 'supersessionism' or 'Replacement Theology', find no support in the New Testament. While one can speak of Jesus 'replacing' the temple, there is no justification for saying that the church 'replaces' Israel."

[8] *Ibid*, p.184. Chapman gives the following example: "Therefore if Christians today find that certain details in books like Ezekiel appear to fit certain situations in the Middle East today, they should resist the temptation to draw direct connections with these contemporary events. The reason is that since the apostle John has given *his* interpretation of Ezekiel's visions, this should be seen as the *normative Christian interpretation* of these visions, and not only *one possible interpretation*. Christians do not have the liberty to work out from Ezekiel 38 the scenario for a Russian invasion of Palestine in contemporary history; *or* to draw a plan of Ezekiel's temple from chapters 40-47 and expect that it will one day be built in Jerusalem; *or* to draw a map of Palestine according to Ezekiel's division of the land in chapter 48 and expect that this will one day be the territory occupied by the State of Israel. Christians do not have this liberty simply because this is not how the apostle John interpreted these visions."

[9] *Ibid*, p.240

[10] For the view presented by Dr. Stephen R. Sizer see the following site: ["Whose Promised Land: Israel and Biblical Prophecy"](#)

For the *Biblaridion* article on Christian-Zionism see:

<http://www.biblaridion-online.net/christian-zionism.html>

[11] (a) The one-state solution (b) The creation of a singular secular state (c) The crushing of the Palestinians (d) The

destruction of the state of Israel by the Palestinians and the Arabs
(e) The two-state solution [pp.298-300].

[12] Rev Colin Chapman, BARRIERS TO PEACE? WORLD VISION & CHRISTIAN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT SEMINAR (London, 1 September, 2004). How can Christian theology contribute to the search for a just peace in the Middle East?

[DOC] [BARRIERS TO PEACE? WORLD VISION & CHRISTIAN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT ...](#)

[13] Review of '*Whose promised land?*' by the Rev David W Torrance @ <http://www.apologetics.fsnet.co.uk/chapman-torrance.htm>

[14] See the *Biblaridion* article on Elijah:

http://www.biblaridion-online.net/pdf_archive/2006q2/elijah.pdf

[15] See the comparison table between Romans 11 and Revelation 11 in the *Biblaridion* article on Christian-Zionism.

<http://www.biblaridion-online.net/christian-zionism.html>

[16] "I am the way, the **truth**, and the life" (John 14:6) Compare Micah 7:20; "Thou wilt perform **the truth** to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old."

[17] Green S., *God's purpose with Israel*, (2004, The Testimony, Norwich ISBN 0 9517992 3 1)

[18] See the *Biblaridion* article on the afterlife:

http://www.biblaridion-online.net/pdf_archive/2006q4/koran-afterlife.pdf

[19] *"Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, [that] thou make all things according to the **pattern** shewed to thee in the mount."* (Heb.8:5) The "seven sisters" of the Pleiades (*cf.* seven stars Rev.1: 12; 16; 20) represented by the tree of life (in Eden) and the seven-branched Menorah (in the tabernacle). The entrance to Eden and the Tabernacle was from the east (direction of the rising sun) and the tribal layout around the tabernacle was inspired by the Zodiac constellations. Cherubim guarded the way to the tree of **life** and also the ark, which contained within the symbols of **new life** (the resurrection). G.J. Wenham also notes further correspondences between Eden and the later Sanctuaries; God walks in Eden (3:8; *cf.* Lev.26: 12; Deut.23: 15; 2 Sam.7: 6-7) the command to "work" is also applied to the Levites (*cf.* Num.3: 7-8; 8: 26; 18:5-6) the river from Eden (*cf.* Ezek.47: 1-12) and the gold and onyx of Eden (2:11-12) which was used to decorate the later sanctuaries and priestly garments (*cf.* Ex.25: 7, 11, 17, 31 about 100 references to gold and seven to onyx in connection with the Exodus tabernacle)

[20] *Ibid*, Sizer: ["Whose Promised Land: Israel and Biblical Prophecy"](#)

[21] God manifestation is not the same as Incarnation:

http://www.biblaridion-online.net/pdf_archive/2005q4/phanerosis.pdf