

**Book Review : J. W. Deenick, *Not on This Mountain: An Alternative Christian Perspective on Zionism*. Enumclaw, Washington: Pleasant Word, 2003, 234 pp.**

**Alastair McEwen**

*Introduction*

J. W. Deenick, as he tells us in the Foreword to this challenging and relevant book, had a Dutch Calvinist upbringing. Also he was involved in hiding Jews during WW II and, for this, he and his family have been recognized as 'Righteous Gentiles.' His book reflects his background. His Calvinism is seen in the book's biblical worldview, as well as in the non-Scofieldian hermeneutic used for the interpretation of prophecy. The 'Righteous Gentile' aspect is seen in the genuine concern for Jewish people that is evident throughout the book. The Dutch character of the author is apparent in the European, rather than American, stance taken towards Zionism. Above all the Dutch culture manifests itself in the forthright, if not blunt, manner in which Zionism is severely and unrelentingly criticized. Hence this book presents an informed and special contribution to the debate about the Christian stance with respect to the State of Israel today.

The thesis that is at the heart of the book is that Zionism is based on faulty racist and nationalist ideology; that the State of Israel, Zionism's offspring, has no validity in international law nor justification from biblical givens; that the Jewish State is one of the greatest sources of international disharmony in the world today; and that Israel needs to grow up, move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and become a democratic, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and religiously tolerant entity in the context of some form of political and/or economic union with the other states of the Middle East. The case supporting this thesis is set out in sixteen chapters.

## Summary

The first chapter raises a basic question in its title, 'Zionism, Was It Such a Good Idea?' Deenick's answer is clear. It was not. First, the establishment of the State of Israel was based on the deceptive and faulty concept encapsulated in the motto, "A land without a people, for a people without a land." This was a gross error because in Palestine "there always remained a core of the earliest (non-Jewish) inhabitants" and "that they lived there and had inalienable ties to the region could not be called into question..." (p. 12) Also Zionism was founded on an ethnically based ideology, and such an ideology, in the modern world, increasingly is becoming an anachronism. Third, there is a dividedness in Judaism itself which Zionism cannot overcome, and which inevitably causes instability in the state. In short "Zionism has created...no more than a painfully vulnerable refugee camp for a rather limited number of Jews who are irredeemably divided among themselves." (p. 18) This is not a very positive evaluation of the Zionism and its dream!

Chapter 2, 'Zion, God's Eternal Mountain', considers whether Mount Zion, from which Zionism derives its name, should be reckoned so special. Some may seek support for an affirmative response to this question from biblical passages such as Psalm 132. Yet, the author contends, the "forever" wording of promises such as those in this psalm should not be taken in the absolute sense of "eternal." Biblically it can be seen that "forever" could be terminated, especially if the obligations of the covenant in which the promises stood were violated. Hence the "forever" Davidic monarchy ceased to exist in 586 BC. Then there was the destruction of the "forever" temple in AD 70. Rather God fulfills these promises through Jesus Christ whose throne is in heaven, where also his present 'temple' service is being carried out, and not 'on this mountain.' Mt Zion, biblically, is not so special. In addition, in this chapter, Deenick challenges the notion that Jews for 2000 years have yearned to return to the land, noting that, in practical terms, few in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries showed any inclination to return. So he concludes that Zion is not God's eternal mountain, and, in real terms, Jews have not yearned for dwelling near it as much as has been believed. Zionism

therefore neither reflects a biblical principle nor a strong desire in the Jewish Diaspora.

The third chapter, 'Zionism, Its Historical and Ideological Roots', points out that the ideological roots of Zionism "are found nowhere else but in the ideology of nationalism and the nationalist sentiment of Zionism's European environment at the time." (p. 38) In reaction to the doctrine of the divine right of kings, "the new 'nationalist' movement argued that what binds people together as 'nations' is their blood relationship, their loyalty to native land, their common language, their cultural heritage, and their traditions." (p. 38) This is not a Christian concept, but arose from the Enlightenment. It led to two World Wars! But, Deenick claims, now this old nationalism is disappearing and being replaced by the "multi-national, and multi-religious nations that are wider and richer than the nation states of the past." (p. 48) This makes Israel's foundation, as well as it being inconsistent with Christian principles, out of phase with a modern world. Furthermore, the negativity of this nationalistic sentiment is seen clearly in the writing of former Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, and his boasting in Jewish might of past and present. Such self-gratulation frighteningly resembles "the self-glorification of the Nazi's when they boasted of the empowerment of the German nation and the Aryan race." (p. 49) This last observation may not be considered politically correct, but it comes from one who, favouring the Jews, opposed the Nazi's error and whose ear has been attuned to the tones of such dangerous ideology, from wherever it should emanate. Hence Zionism's roots have the potential for producing quite poisonous fruits.

The next chapter, 'Zionism and Ethnicity', considers whether Zionism and the State of Israel are racist. He notes that ethnicity has played a significant role in the formation of the State of Israel, since it is intended as a homeland for Jews, though different definitions may be given for who is a Jew. On the other hand he points out that Jewish history itself indicates that the ethnicity of those who call themselves Jews today is not all that pure. There are clear biblical examples of foreigners mixing into the Israelite people. In later times proselytizing, varying in intensity over the centuries, also meant that Jewishness was not so pure. Just the same Deenick will allow that

“the world’s Jews can still be considered (somewhat of) an ethnic community.” (p. 56) Yet this should not be so important since ethnic purity was not the main concern of Moses and the prophets but rather religious purity. Rightly, he goes on to ask the significant question, Is Israel a racist state? He answers, “Zionism as a movement (has not) proceeded from the concept that Jews are racially superior to non-Jews.” (p. 60) So, speaking precisely, Israel is not a racist state. Yet it clearly is a discriminatory state, and that on ethnic grounds. “The State of Israel discriminates...in favour of those who claim a particular ethnic background.” (p. 61) In some ways that is no different from any other state. Yet, with Israel, there is a bitter edge to this policy that is

most obvious with regard to the so called ‘right of return.’ Those with a demonstrable background in the Jewish diaspora, no matter where they come from, are welcome to enter and settle in Israel. Arabs who have lived in the region for generations but became refugees...do not have the same ‘right of return.’” (p. 61)

Of course the return of such would be suicide to the Jewish nature of the state. Yet the grief and trouble that this policy causes worldwide only highlights the fact that “the whole Zionist project of a Jewish state in a region where other people had lived for a great many generations was a badly conceived idea in the first place.” (p. 61)

Chapter 5, ‘Zionism and Judaism’, is concerned with the nature of the Jewish religion and the dividedness of Judaism today. Believing in the value of mutual frankness Deenick takes the position of Jesus and the apostles who “found (the various forms of Judaism) to be in error, and fatally so.” (p. 68) So, after tracing Judaism from the Pharisaism of New Testament times and through its post- AD 70 developments he states, “Judaism was then and is now a law-and-works religion that makes powerless the gospel of God’s unmerited and unconditional grace.” (p. 71) So Judaism is a dead-end road, as is all humanism. Not recognizing John the Baptist as a true prophet, Judaism has had not word from God since the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. The

establishment of the State of Israel may have raised positive feelings about the future but these are now fading. With the range of Judaism's on offer, from ultra-orthodox to secular and pluralistic, Judaism is severely divided, so much so that one can say that "(a)s a people, they have become so divided that...it has become quite unrealistic to speak of Jews as still being one people." (p. 86) These are all matters that need to be stated, for they clarify the nature of the people who are at the centre of concern. On the other hand, in this chapter, the connections between Judaism as a religion, the divisions amongst Jews, and the present state of Zionism is not made clear.

Is there a Palestinian nation? There is a focus on this question in chapter 6, 'Zionism and the Palestinians'. However nation is defined, it can be said that, when the Zionists targeted Palestine as a homeland, there were people already living there. Though not a pure ethnic grouping, these were and are predominantly Semitic. Yet it is the "more recent political circumstances (that) have made the Palestinians into somewhat of a people and nation of their own." (p. 89) In the forefront of these circumstances is the well-known Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which the British government favoured the establishment of a 'national home for the Jewish people.' Deenick comments, "For the Palestinians, there was nothing legitimate about the Balfour Declaration or the claims of the Zionists; and in the context of international law they were perfectly right. There was no legitimacy whatsoever about any of Zionism's demands." (p. 91) This illegitimacy he also sees adhering to the UN decision of 1947 to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab States. Against these illegitimacies, in 1964 the PLO was formed, the *intifadas* pursued, and more recent terrorist acts have been perpetrated. Of course there have been Israeli responses, also viewed as terrorist, for "terrorism led to more terrorism....(and t)errorism is still terrorism, whether conducted in uniform or not." (p. 97) But what is the answer? "In the end, there can be no solution unless *Lebensraum* is created for both Palestinians and Jews." (p. 97) So the Palestinians are seen as an entity that cannot be ignored, nor driven from the remaining land, but whose rights must be taken into account in any settlement of the present impasse.

In 'Zionism and Anti-Semitism' (Chapter 7) the author makes the important point that anti-Judaism and anti-Zionism are not the same as anti-Semitism. "(A)nti-Semitism differs from anti-Judaism in that it is racially motivated. In anti-Semitism, people discriminate against Jews not because of their religious beliefs or their traditional way of life but because of the racial differences between Jews and non-Jews." (p. 108) This point needs to be made because the anti-Semitism label can be used to stifle or ignore legitimate criticisms. In fact "there is nothing reprehensible...about anti-Judaism.... Christians have been anti-Judaists all along; in the same way as there is a very long tradition of anti-Christianism and *Jesu-phobia* among non-Christian Jews. (p. 102) He acknowledges that some Christians have been deceived by anti-Semitism and conspiracy theories, but this is not to be condoned. On the other hand he notes that Zionism does not help quell anti-Semitism. Rather the "Zionist State of Israel is by its very nature, an 'us-over-against-them' state.... As a result, Zionism, born from a wave of anti-Semitism, will almost automatically create new waves on that sentiment." (p. 109) So he identifies the racism of anti-Semitism but also the racism of "an ethnically based pro-Jewish prejudice" as being "the most imbecile ideologies ever proposed." (p. 110) Such racism, including anti-Arabism, has no grounds in Old or New Testaments and is to be condemned. On the other hand legitimate criticism of Judaism, Zionism and the State of Israel is not to be quashed for fear of the charge of anti-Semitism.

In the next two chapters, Deenick deals with Jewish opposition to and Christian support for Zionism. It is helpful to be reminded, as in chapter 8, 'Opposition to Zionism Amongst Jews', that there has been and still is such opposition. When Zionism arose, the Reform movement was extremely critical. "Having been conceived and born as an offspring of German 'Aufklärung' with its philosophical optimism and universalism, Jewish Reform was essentially the very antithesis of Zionism." (p. 119) While the Reform movement has softened its stance "now that Israel, being there, needs a lot of help" (p. 121) ultra-orthodox opposition remains adamant. Since, for the ultra-orthodox, the kingdom is to be established by the still-to-come Messiah, for them "the secular State of Israel has been conceived in sin, born in iniquity, and is doomed to fail." (p. 122) On the other

hand Christians have favoured Jewish return to the land even before Zionism's rise, as the chapter, 'Christian Zionism And Where It Has Gone Wrong', points out. This emphasis has been strong in the USA. It has been based on a certain literalistic interpretation of the Old Testament prophets, encouraged by the notes in the Scofield Reference Bible. Though the establishment of the State of Israel gave impetus to Christian support of Zionism, the author maintains that it cannot be sustained by sound exegesis. And, while there has been more recent theological support for a view that Jews have an alternative path to God, thus giving succor to some who would hold that the covenant promises find their fulfillment in the Jews, it has to be asked, "Do then the Jews *as a people* still have a special mandate to fulfil in the history of God's kingdom?" (p. 142 his emphasis) The author is emphatic. "The gospels and the epistles teach us that, after the Messiah had completed his work on earth, the only mission left for the Jews was to make known to the world that Jesus is Saviour and Lord." (p. 142)

The question, "Are the Jews then in any way still special in God's eyes?" (p.145) takes up a main interest of the previous chapter and gives direction to chapter 10, 'Ammi/Lo Ammi.' Deenick answers that "when the people of Israel were no longer interested in and no longer lived by their special relationship with YHVH, they could no longer be considered his people." (p. 147) This was true not only of the northern tribes to whom Hosea addressed the words *lo ammi* – 'not my people' – but also of the southern tribes as well. Yet God did preserve a faithful remnant to fulfil his purposes and '(I)n the Gospels, we meet this faithful remnant in men and women like Zechariah and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary, Simeon and Anna. ..." (p. 149) This remnant continued in those who repented and believed on the Day of Pentecost. The remnant today are those who are the continuation of those Pentecostal believers. Deenick also points out that so-called replacement doctrine is wrong. "Believing men and women from the Gentile world have joined the Christ-believing Jews; not the other way around. (p. 153) Yet "ethnicity has little, if any, significance within the kingdom of God" (p. 154) and so should not be a factor for evangelical thinking about the State of Israel. So Jews as Jews hold no special place in God's redemptive plan today.

Still there is one further question raised in this chapter. “Could there not be a remnant of those (Jews) who hear the gospel of *free* salvation in their own *Tenach*?” (p. 157 emphasis his) This the author seems to allow for, or at least certainly does not rule out. This then would allow for Jews today being saved without hearing about Jesus. Certainly this is an issue worth wrestling with, though, at best, this direction, not unique to Deenick, seems odd in the light of New Testament emphasis on and practice of taking the name of Jesus to the Jews and at worst appears to deny some very explicit Scriptural statements. Tantalizingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, the reader is left with the question unanswered.

A significant issue, and, for some, almost heretical suggestion is raised by the title of Chapter 11, ‘Will The Jews Survive As Jews?’ Uncompromisingly, Deenick deals with the belief that the continued existence of the Jews is a miracle. He notes that, in fact, while the preservation of the Jews in the face of persecution and dispersion has been remarkable it is not unique. Taking the example of the Scots, noting their wide dispersion while preserving their culture and identity he asks, “Is then Jewish-ness really so dramatically more of a ‘miracle’ than Scottish-ness?” (p. 164) The same point is made by considering the preservation of the Chinese, perhaps a better parallel. Hence Deenick sees the continued existence of the Jews as no signal of a special place in the plan of God, for “when God sent them (the Jews) his ultimate prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, they rejected him. Why then should we expect the Jews to survive as a nation any more than other nations do?” (p. 164) He goes on to cite other factors telling against the continued survival of the Jews. There is their present dividedness as a people, the small size of their community on a world scale, and the very real threat of assimilation. While he sees more hope for the Jews as a religious community, even this is not certain. “Thus, whether we regret it or not, it is not very likely that the Jews as Jews have a great future....” (p. 172) Even Romans 11 is seen as giving no special guarantee to the Jews because “since the day of Pentecost, there have been no special privileges left for special nations.” (p. 173)<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See article on pp. 4-49 for an interpretation of Romans 11 with a more positive interpretation of the role of post-Pentecost Israel.



Logically following on the previous discussion, chapter 12 poses the question, 'Is There A Future For The State Of Israel?' Answering from the stance of one who believes that there is no special prophesied place for a Jewish state in the plan of God, the author points out that, for all its military strength vis-à-vis its neighbours, "as a Zionist state it is structurally extremely weak. It has, in fact, no valid basis at all." (p. 178) This is because, in the present world context, Zionism's ideology of nationalism is on the way out. The modern model is of nation states combining in wider unions, as well as becoming more ethnically and culturally diverse within themselves. States like Israel are becoming anachronistic. "The problem with Zionism," he reiterates, "is that it rejects in principle the non-ethnic state..." (p. 181) The alternative he proposes is Israel becoming a modern state, with a truly democratic constitution "in which Jews and non-Jews are equally welcomed as settlers and have the same rights and privileges before the law." (p. 185) Hence he sees no real future for the State of Israel as it now is.<sup>2</sup>

In 'Jerusalem's Future in Prophecy and Gospel', chapter 13, Deenick sets out his understanding of Scripture on the topic of Jerusalem's future on the basis of a "Christian, non-Scofieldian, interpretation of the Word of God." (p. 187) With a focus on the two significant passages of Joel 2:27-3:1 and Ezekiel 37:21-28, he notes that prophecies are to be viewed as panoramas, the nearer objects presented more clearly than the more distant. Also it is to be understood that prophecies were to be fulfilled over time and in stages until the final consummation. Ultimately it is the New Testament that gives direction on the meaning and application of prophecy. So with respect to Jerusalem "Jesus...saw no future for Jerusalem as an earthly city.... Paul.... wrote that our Jerusalem is not a city in Palestine; it is 'above' and that our Jerusalem citizenship is 'in heaven'...." (p. 191) So "there is nothing in the New Testament, nothing at all, that supports the concept that after

---

<sup>2</sup> While at first this may seem a somewhat naïve view in the light of the present Middle East situation, it is a view canvassed within the Jewish community itself (see the article by Eliahu Salpeter, 'Israel is bad for the Jews', <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/357713.html>, (accessed 16.15, 7.11.2003)

Pentecost Jerusalem continues to have a special place in the story of divine revelation and redemption.” (p. 195)

Chapters 14 and 15 are entitled “Why We Should Love and Respect the Jews” and “Why we should Love and Respect the Palestinians’. Of the first he asks, “Are there any good reasons why Christians should love and respect the Jews more than they love and respect any other people?” (p. 199) He answers in the affirmative. First, “because at one stage in the history of redemption God chose them and set them aside for a very special purpose.” (p. 199) Second, “(w)e should love and respect them for the way they fulfilled their calling and represented the God who is One and who justifies those who put their trust in him.” (p. 201) Of course, as he notes, we should not “respect what the Israelis do to their Palestinian neighbours.” (p. 202) Third, “we should single out the Jews for our love and respect” because “even under the best of circumstances living the Jewish live is a considerable burden to carry. (p. 202) This is because they suffer the consequences of rejecting Jesus, because they are disunited among themselves, and because of “all the *halakhah*” they have to follow. (p. 203) “No Jewish slavery has ever been more merciless as then Jewish bondage under the law.” (p. 204) Certainly we should love and respect the Jews.<sup>3</sup>

And why should we love the Palestinians? First, because so many are refugees from the 1948 and 1967 conflicts with Israel, with no right of return acknowledged by Israeli governments. Yet “(f)rom a perspective of international law and human rights, there is no doubt that the Palestinian refugees have every right for their cause to be heard.” (p. 209) Second, we should love the Palestinians because those in the West Bank and Gaza “on and off, for more than 35 years...have been kept under Israeli military occupation.” (p. 210) While certainly note condoning terrorism, “Christians should

---

<sup>3</sup> A weakness in the argument may be noted here. While the discussion starts with the premise that we should love and respect Jewish people *more* than any other people, the argument only supports the contention that we should love them equally, though here may be special aspects of their being towards which our love might be directed or which might motivate us to this love. Also, if ethnicity is so insignificant it is not clear why present love for people should be shown on the basis of the significance of their ancestors, as in the first two reason given above.

maintain their indignation over what has been done to the Palestinians....” (pp. 211f) Third, Christians should love the Palestinians because “they are served badly by their organizational and political leadership.” (p. 212) As well, because “they have so few Christian friends,” he calls on Christians to “re-assess their evaluation of the Palestinian question.” (p. 213)<sup>4</sup> Certainly we should love and respect the Palestinians.

After this lengthy critique of Zionism, Deenick’s concluding chapter, ‘Not On This Mountain’, proposes a solution to ‘the Jewish question’. What is needed is a reshaping of Israel “according to God’s will....” (p. 216) This means Israel becoming a modern state “where an egalitarian, democratic, multi-racial, and multi-religious community develops in freedom.” (p. 216) In connection with this he points to the “new, universal covenant through which all nations were to share in the kingdom of (God’s) grace.... From Christ onwards, God’s kingdom was to be extended worldwide no matter what happened to the ‘nations’ as ‘nations’, including the Jewish nation.” (p. 217) A redeemed and reconstituted non-Zionist Israel would be a place where all would have the same rights and obligations, would not find support in the belief that “there is something uniquely holy about a few square kilometers of real estate around Mt Zion....” (p. 218), would no longer adhere to narrow Jewish nationalism, so accepting diaspora peoples of any nationality as is done in the USA and Australia, and be part of a “united States of the Middle East or a Middle East Economic and political union....” (p. 219) This the author sees as “the christianization of Zionism” and “the Christian solution for the ‘Jewish question’ because...(it is) one of the (long delayed) consequences of the teachings of Moses, Isaiah and Jesus.” (p. 220) This is seen as not just “a modern or democratic solution” because “democracy is viable only, and will survive only, as long as its beliefs and practices are based on the teachings of Jesus.” (p. 220)

---

<sup>4</sup> This is a necessary admonition in the context of where so many, especially conservative, Christians support the State of Israel virtually unthinkingly.

## *Evaluation*

While it is difficult in a limited space to deal adequately with all the issues involved in the Israeli-Palestinian question, it would have been helpful if there had been a deeper engagement, in some areas, with those who held contrary views to those presented in the book. This would have been particularly helpful on the questions of the legality of the establishment of the State of Israel, and the moral equivalence between Israeli and Palestinian aggression. Also there seems to be a fairly uncritical view of the modern multi-cultural state as being the answer to the troubles of humanity, including those of Jews and Palestinians. A more thorough exegetical presentation on Romans 11 would seem necessary since it is seen as such a significant passage for a Christian view of God's will for the Jewish people. Even if limitation of space precluded longer discussion, direction in the endnotes to sources dealing more thoroughly with such issues would have enhanced the usefulness of the book. And certainly the book could have done with a very thorough proof read before publication, as there are numerous typographical errors throughout.

On the other hand it has to be said that this book has many positives. It is refreshing to have a conservative Christian voice identifying and critiquing the ethno-religious discriminatory basis of the State of Israel, and sympathizing with the real plight of the Palestinians. The bold comparisons between the Zionist nationalistic ethno-centricity and the ideologies of National Socialism are telling and should not be dismissed in an embarrassment of political correctness. Also it is healthy that we are encouraged not to be cowed into avoiding criticism of Zionism, Judaism or the State of Israel by fears of being charged with anti-Semitism. With respect to exegesis, a number of simple but helpful principles are given to help counter the flawed dispensational literalistic interpretations so popular in current evangelical circles. And overall the book introduces the reader to the issues in the Israeli-Palestinian question that need to be thoughtfully considered. The book deserves to be read widely as a Christian voice calmly but firmly presenting a biblical alternative to much of today's shallow popular prophetic sensationalism.

Yet finally some particular disappointment must be registered with respect to the last chapter. This is because the vision for Israel presented there falls so far short of that for which, in Scripture, we are encouraged to hope. That greater vision is the recognition by Israelis, Dutch, Australians, Scots and Chinese that Christ is King and the submission by them to his lordship – the desire for every thought, including political thought, being captive to Christ. Rightly in his last chapter Deenick points us to “the prophet Isaiah (who) saw in a vision the day when ‘they will neither harm nor destroy on all (God’s) holy mountain, and when the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea’ (Is. 11:9).” (p. 222) Yet he fails to point also to that element which is essential for the realization of this desirable condition – essential in Israel and essential throughout the world. The state of peace and harmony envisioned by Isaiah will be and only be when and to the extent that the nations rally to the Root of Jesse, the one whose resting place will be glorious. (Is. 11:10) Only will these conditions develop as rulers of nations and their peoples abandon their rebellion against the LORD and his Anointed, and kiss the Son. (Psalm 2) As this book is read, as it is hoped it will be, may it be remembered that any lesser goal, any mere christianization of Zionism without commitment to Christ, any reflection of Christian principles without the Christ of the principles is in the end trading Christ’s lordship for human autonomy. It’s not a good trade.