

Review: JAE151

A SUMMARY CRITIQUE

LOOKING FOR AMERICA IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

a book review of
American Prophecies: Ancient Scriptures Reveal Our Nation's Future
by Michael D. Evans
(Warner Faith, 2004)

This review first appeared in the *Christian Research Journal*, volume 28, number 1 (2005). For further information or to subscribe to the *Christian Research Journal* go to: <http://www.equip.org>

“Two men went looking for America—and they couldn’t find it anywhere!” This promotional blurb for the 1960s film *Easy Rider* describes the impression I had while reading Michael D. Evans’s *The American Prophecies: Ancient Scriptures Reveal Our Nation’s Future*. The author went looking for America in the prophecies of the Bible, I went looking for America in the pages of his book—and neither of us could find it anywhere.

The title of Evans’s book is misleading. *The American Prophecies* contains a wealth of information that readers may find interesting and even useful, yet in its 310 pages, including two appendices, there is nothing that resembles an exposition of biblical prophecies about America. The author, instead, develops three separate strands of thought and attempts to weave them together at certain points.

One of the strands is that of biblical prophecy about Israel, not America. The author takes a position quite familiar to readers who are acquainted with dispensationalist notions of the end times (*dispensationalism* is the theological system formulated by J. N. Darby in 1830 that places great emphasis on the place of Israel in biblical prophecy). The thesis is that ethnic Israel must be gathered in the last days to possess the land of their ancestors; that those who support this effort will be blessed by God and those who ignore or resist it will be under God’s curse; that Jerusalem is forever the holy city of God’s choosing, and is destined to become the center of the global worship of the Messiah; and that Jesus Christ will return to the Jewish people who have regathered in Israel, touching down on the Mount of Olives and entering the city of Jerusalem to take His throne for a thousand years.

The second thread in the book is a historical survey of the attitudes of American presidents, from George Washington to George W. Bush, toward the legitimacy of the concept of a restored Jewish state. The author places particular emphasis on the precise Bible verses that each president chose to have before him at his inauguration. Given the emphasis on these details, one might hope to find some correspondence of these specific texts to the subsequent activities or significance of the respective presidents. The author hints at such relevance, but seldom demonstrates it, and never makes it readily apparent.

The third thread is that which occupies the majority of the book, namely, a detailed recounting of the historical relationship of the Jews in Israel to the surrounding Arab nations. This survey includes many historical facts of interest, but seems somewhat burdened by the inclusion of excessive irrelevant details and unnecessary personal anecdotes of the author.

America, the Cursed. The author discusses these three strands, for the most part, in relative isolation from each other, though occasionally he attempts to imply that they all could be synthesized as follows: The restoration of the nation of Israel, and the Zionist movement, find their basis and legitimacy in

ancient biblical prophecies and the fulfillment of covenant promises of God to the people descended from Isaac, through Jacob. It is therefore incumbent on America (and all nations) to support these aspects of God's program actively, under threat of God's curse. The modern problems related to the war on terrorism prove that America is even now under God's curse because of neglect of this duty to support Israel. This last affirmation, in particular, seems counterintuitive, since most observers of the terrorist threat to America are inclined to view our troubles as related to our support of the nationhood of Israel, not our opposition to it.

Right Behind Left Behind. The sentiments expressed in this book will resonate with many modern evangelical readers—especially those who have read and appreciated the best-selling Left Behind series of novels. Savvy evangelicals will have guessed from the title of Evans's book that his theological presuppositions are the same as those of the authors of the Left Behind series. His book purports to identify biblical prophecies about America and obviously arises from, and appeals to, that same stream of evangelical sensationalism as did those popular novels.

What the informed evangelical could *not* have deduced from the book's title, however, is that it has essentially nothing to do with prophecies about America. Its focus is in an altogether different direction.

The American Prophecies is actually a detailed historical survey chronicling Arab-Israeli relations from ancient to modern times. The book casts the modern conflict as a continuation of the ancient animosity between Isaac (whom Evan identifies with the Jews) and Ishmael (whom he identifies with the Arabs). Evans asserts, "The Bible begins and ends with the struggle between these two sons of Abraham" (p. 16). This claim suggests that we should find references to Ishmael and Isaac in the New Testament scriptures, especially in the book of Revelation, but the author makes no attempt to identify any such references. It is not evident that any New Testament author viewed the conflict between the two sons of Abraham as having anything to do with perpetual Arab-Israeli tensions. Paul alone makes reference to the rivalry of the two brothers (Gal. 4:22–31), but does so in the context of Jewish-Christian relations, not Jewish-Arab hostilities.

I could not help but think that *The American Prophecies* would have benefited from being submitted to at least one more editor or proofreader before going to the typesetters. This is because it did not appear to have been checked for flow of thought or for spelling and grammar errors. In reading it, I got the distinct feeling that those involved had rushed it to press (releasing it in August, 2004) with the intention of having it reach the public before the next U. S. presidential election, or before the next terrorist strike on U.S. soil, or before the public interest raised by the Left Behind series could have time to subside.

The book, despite these shortcomings, contains much historical information that would interest thoughtful observers of the Middle East conflict. In the course of recounting the attitudes of various American presidents to the idea of a restored Jewish state, Evans demonstrates the significant role dispensational evangelist William Blackstone played in influencing presidents to support the rebirth of the Jewish nation (60, 68). Based on this information, it would be possible to speculate that the modern state of Israel is, in some measure, the product of strong dispensational influence in America.

A repeated theme in *The American Prophecies* is that America needs to win the war on terrorism through "moral clarity" (apparently meaning unqualified support for Israel) rather than pragmatic foreign policy. The radical Muslim sentiment that dominates many Arab nations, particularly Saudi Arabia, and that inspires and spawns terrorist acts must be seen as the true enemy of Middle East peace and of American national security. This seems to be what the book really was written to communicate, and it makes a good case for this.

Where Are the American Prophecies? The majority of readers will have picked this book off the shelf in the hope of gaining some insight into the relevance of biblical prophecy to the fate of the United States. Here the book promises much, but delivers very little. Most of the book says nothing at all about any specific prophecies, and the author does not state with confidence that any passage directly deals with America. The author early on admits, "As a Middle East analyst and minister who has worked closely

with leaders in that region for decades, I tended to be skeptical of attempts to come up with schemes to plug America into prophetic interpretations. I have often referred to such teachers as ‘Pop Prophecy Peddlers’” (5). He quickly (and predictably) retracts this position, however: “But after thousands of hours of research, I am totally convinced that America is found in prophecy, and I believe you will, too, after reading this book” (5).

Frankly, I doubt that this will be the case. It is not clear how the reading of this book was expected to have this desired effect on the reader. The statement creates the expectation that we will find in the following pages the results of these “thousands of hours of research,” whereby biblical prophecies concerning America may be identified. This never happens. No such exposition comes forth. The closest the author even comes to addressing this matter is a brief brush with the subject in chapter 2, where he writes:

While America is clearly in this river of prophecy, it is clear that [other] nations...also are specifically mentioned in the Bible. Some have also proposed that America is in prophecy disguised as the “tall and smooth-skinned” people who are “feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers” or as a young lion of Tarshish, the “two wings of the great eagle,” or even spiritual Babylon of the end times (36).

The Scripture references to which Evans alludes are Isaiah 18:2, Ezekiel 38:13, Revelation 12:13ff, and Revelation 17 and 18. The author lists 10 reasons why the identification of America with Revelation’s Babylon, as he says, “may be a possibility” (36–37).

The closest the author ventures to the mention of America in prophecy is to affirm that nations other than Israel “also are specifically mentioned in the Bible.” He does not demonstrate that America is one of these nations mentioned in Scripture, and can only bring himself to say that in four biblical passages “some have also proposed” an identification of America with certain people and entities—an identification that seems unlikely to convince a serious student of Scripture. This is the sum total of “American prophecies” to be found in the book by that name.

Not a Book for Serious Bible Students. In an attempt to find something relevant to America in the Bible, the author takes the Old Testament curses that Moses applied to apostate Israel and instead applies them to America. He writes, “The curses of Deuteronomy 28 are heading full-speed toward America, and the blessings of Deuteronomy 28 are being snatched away from our land” (247). Evans uses the same approach with other prophetic passages (234, 235, 238), failing in each case to see the obvious application to Israel, and instead finding something in them about America. He never discloses his justification for taking this approach.

The American Prophecies is not a book that careful students of biblical prophecy are likely to take seriously. There is nothing resembling exposition or analysis of any biblical text. One finds only the same assumed dispensational interpretations of prophecy that are found in every other pop-prophecy book, and with the same tendency to ignore or demonize any other view.

The author, for example, takes the obligatory swipes at what is popularly called “replacement theology,” with the groundless comparison of this view to the anti-Jew mentality that encouraged the Holocaust (55). “Replacement theology” is the pejorative label given by dispensational writers to the view that the promises made by God to Abraham and his “seed” are now fulfilled in Christ to the church, which is the new Israel. In other words, the church “replaces” Israel in God’s covenant plan. On this view, ethnic Israel has no special covenantal claims apart from Christ. The Jew as well as the Gentile must become a part of the body of Christ through conversion in order to enjoy any covenantal standing with God.

It seems to me that the New Testament declares these things in unmistakable terms (e.g., Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 3:16, 29; 4:22–31; Phil. 3:3), and never mentions any future blessings that are to accrue to ethnic Israel outside of the church. Evans, nevertheless, regards “replacement theology” (which was the view of the church fathers, of the Medieval Church, of the Reformers, of most modern Reformed Christians and

many other evangelicals) to be a great evil, a “New Age doctrine from hell” that “feeds Jew-hatred” (246). If this is indeed the Devil’s doctrine, one wonders why it took the church 1,800 years to see through it. Was not Jesus teaching some form of “replacement” theology when He declared, “the kingdom of God will be taken from you [Israel] and given to a people [the church] who will produce its fruit” (Matt. 21:43 NIV)? It was Jesus, not some “New Age” anti-Semite, who said, “I say to you that many [Gentile believers] will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom [Israel] will be cast out into outer darkness” (Matt. 8:11–12 NKJV).

Evans depicts the future “antichrist” primarily as the “anti-Jew.” Evans writes, “There is perhaps no better sign that the spirit of antichrist is again on the rise than this emergence of rabid anti-Semitism” (211). The Bible defines “antichrist” as anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 2:22)—a definition that would, incidentally, also apply to the attitude of the modern state of Israel. Dispensational writers consistently portray the future antichrist as a person whose great atrocity is his persecution of the Jews. Persecution of Jews, or of anyone else, must be viewed as a genuine atrocity, but such, I believe, never is identified in Scripture as an activity of anyone called “antichrist.”

The Real “Replacement Theology.” *The American Prophecies* is not the book that its title suggests. It is a protracted appeal for America’s political support for the nation of Israel and the Zionist cause—on the threat of further terrorist attacks and other tokens of God’s wrath against America. It, no doubt, is possible to make the case that God is not pleased with America, and that He may already have begun judging us for our sins; however, those sins are not specifically sins against the nation of Israel, but against God and against the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the seed of Abraham; for anyone to curse Christ is to bring the curse of God on him or herself: “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed” (1 Cor. 16:22 NIV). The book *The American Prophecies* is another example of pop-dispensationalism’s own brand of “replacement theology”—namely, the placing of the nation of Israel into the place rightfully occupied by Jesus Christ as the central figure of prophecy and eschatology.

— reviewed by Steve Gregg