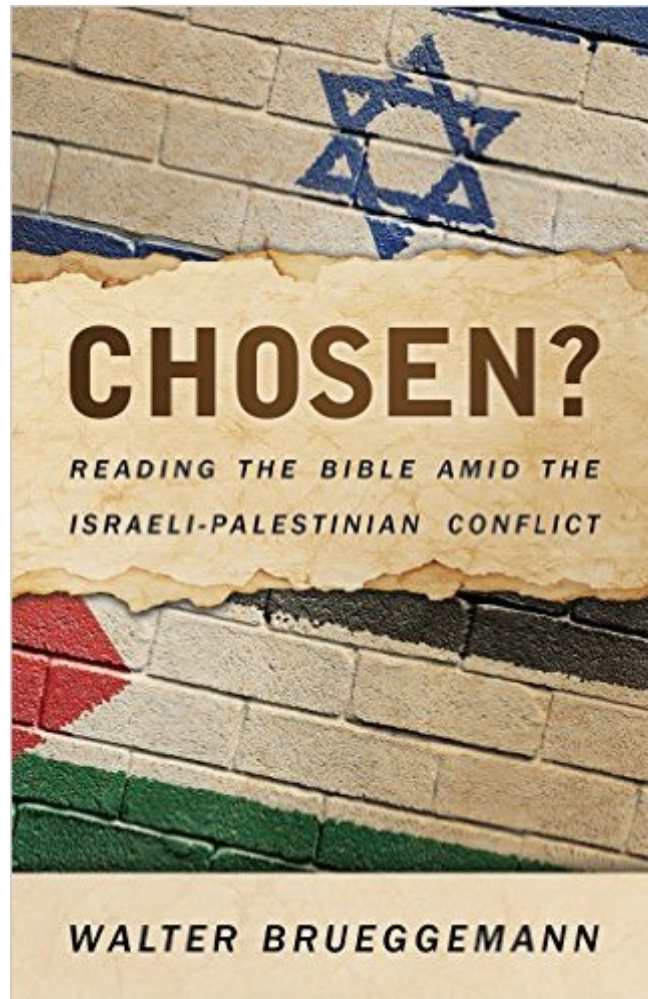


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Chosen?: Reading The Bible Amid The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict



Synopsis

“The conflict is only seemingly beyond solution, because all historical-political problems have solutions, if there is enough courage, honesty, and steadfastness.” • In *Chosen?*, Walter Brueggemann explores the situation in modern-day Israel that raises questions for many Christians who are easily confused when reading biblical accounts of God’s saving actions with the Israelites. Are modern Israeli citizens the descendants of the Israelites in the Bible whom God called chosen? Was the promise of land to Moses permanent and irrevocable? What about others living in the promised land? How should we read the Bible in light of the modern situation? Who are the Zionists, and what do they say? In four chapters, Brueggemann addresses the main questions people have with regards to what the Bible has to say about this ongoing issue. A question-and-answer section with Walter Brueggemann, a glossary of terms, study guide, and guidelines for respectful dialogue are also included. The reader will get answers to their key questions about how to understand God’s promises to the biblical people often called Israel and the conflict between Israel and Palestine today.

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Customer Reviews

This book is by no means a scholarly look at the subject. It is more Brueggemann’s feelings on the situation with some Scripture investigation and then a study guide as a springboard for discussion. He notes that he championed the idea that Israel needed to be a nation but is now having second thoughts about their national behavior. There has been indifference toward the human rights of Palestinians. The way Israel is behaving, Brueggemann writes, they are not making

a good impression as "God's chosen people." An unconditional one-sided support of Israel is not the way to move forward in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One must realistically look at the political situation if there is ever to be a solution. He explores how one reads the Bible and the meaning of Israel as "chosen." Sometimes it looks unconditional while other times conditional (as in Exod. 19:5). With respect to the land, "...we may conclude that the land is given to Israel unconditionally, but is held by Israel conditionally." Looking at the various verses in Joshua, he concludes, "Thus, the land is given, the land is taken, and the land is losable." This is evidenced in the exile, the return, then losing the land again. He also questions whether today's Israel is the biblical Israel. He gives reason to conclude, "It is simply not credible to make any direct appeal for the ancient promise of land to the state of Israel." The strength of this little book is the study guide, set up for four sessions. I have seen many Christians unconditionally support the state of Israel without really thinking through the issue and the human rights actions of the Israelis toward Palestinians within the state. Reading this book and discussing the issues may be a good way to bring some reality thinking to the situation. I received a complimentary galley of this book from the publisher for the purpose of an independent and honest review.

This book is very disappointing. In a nutshell, Brueggemann tries to politically support the Palestinians and theologically support the Jewish people. Unfortunately, Brueggemann does not unpack his claims. He neither demonstrates the oppression against Palestinians or the violations of their human rights nor unpacks his arguments for seeing the Jewish people as the chosen people of God. Although he carefully states that there are elements of continuity and discontinuity between biblical Israel and the state of Israel, he does not unpack these elements. In short, the book is not helpful. I think that the books that were written by Gary Burge or Steven Sizer or Naim Ateek are much better than this book. Further, I am also disappointed that many western theologians like Brueggemann continue to ignore Palestinian theology (for example Christ at the Checkpoint). I was not able to see one single quote from the dozens of Palestinian theological books or dissertations written by (Mitri Raheb, Yohanna Katanacho, Munzer Isaac, or others). Admittedly, the publishers asked two prominent Palestinians to write endorsements but the content of the book does not engage their works or any other Palestinian work. How can you write responsibly about reading the bible amid the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without a critical engagement of its Jewish and Palestinian theologians?

Lacking historical, political, and theological scholarship. One more partisan jeremiad that fails readers who want to understand divergent perspectives. Even if looking for resources to criticize Israeli policies and to abandon the two state project, there are far better books to consult. Meant primarily for liberal or progressive Protestants, but thin gruel indeed.

In this tiny, little book, Dr. Brueggemann says that he "was grateful (and continues to be so) for the founding and prospering of the state of Israel as an embodiment of God chosen people." Referring to his previous book, *The Land*, he explains that he took "the holy land" to be the appropriate place for the chosen people of the Bible which anticipates the well-being of Israel that takes land and people together. But, in *Chosen?* he backs up, stating that the treatment of the Palestinians in the State of Israel has been instrumental in a [his] change of mind. However, he doesn't clearly state what treatment of Palestinians has been so deplorable though he certainly makes many unjustified innuendos directed towards the Israeli government and people. He fails to give the Israelis credit for the enormous efforts that they have put into efforts for peace. His charge that "massive indifference" has been shown to the Palestinians is patently false. After the Israelis took over the West Bank, which they did only in the absence of any Post-Six-Day War negotiations, they soon began to put in place plans to improve the welfare of the people and infrastructure of the area. The results were that illiteracy, which had been the norm, dropped to 19 per cent (compare Egypt's at 61 per cent by the early 1990s), the per capita Gross National Product skyrocketed, life expectancy rose from 48 in 1967 to 72 in 2000. Israeli health programs were introduced which reduced infant mortality from 60 per 1,000 live births in 1968 to 15 per 1,000 live births in 2000. A network of hospitals for Palestinians was built, not by the U. N. or the United States, but by Israel. In addition, Israel's own hospitals are available and used by Palestinians, even by the families of terrorists, and that without fear of the Jewish medical personnel. Inoculation efforts in the territories resulted in wiping out polio, whooping cough, measles and tetanus. Under Jordanian rule, modern conveniences were owned by only a small minority, but by 1986, 92.8 percent of the population had electricity and 85 percent had running water. A comparable number owned major appliances and at least one automobile. The material standard of living had increased enormously under the occupation of the hated Jews. The education of Palestinians was also greatly improved under Israeli administration. By 1980, 6 universities and 20 community colleges and teacher-training seminaries were founded. Dr. Brueggemann also fails to take into account the hostile rejection there has been against the Jews since the very beginning of Zionism in the early 20th century. From that very beginning, there was

harassment, arson and massacres of the new residents of the land. The Jews were draining swamps, developing the land and later starting up new industry while trying to fight off the marauding Palestinians. He suggests that "surely Israeli Zionists want Palestinians to go away. Conversely many Arabs wish Israel would go away." But the reality is that it is the Palestinians who distribute hate literature, rejoice when Israelis are killed in terrorist attacks, celebrate the terrorists, suicide or otherwise, on their national holidays, waving their placards on which are pictures of the bombers. All over the Middle East in the Muslim mosques on the day of worship there has been the sound of hatred in the religious liturgy with the men rising with raised fists yelling, "Death to the Jews." The Peace Movement was very strong in Israel for many years. There was never such a thing among the Palestinians. From the beginning of the Jewish community (the Yishuv), Israel had leaders committed to good relations with their Arab/Palestinian neighbors. David Ben-Gurion, Yishuv leader and first Prime Minister of Israel, spoke at the 14th Annual Zionist Conference in 1925 on the necessity "to find the way to the heart of the Arab people." Though he perceived the difficulties in making the way into the hearts of the Arabs, he wrote to his son, dated October, 1937, "We do not wish and do not need to expel Arabs and take their place. All our aspiration is built on the assumption -- proven throughout all our activity -- that there is enough room for ourselves and the Arabs in Palestine." Over the years, there have been five major Peace Proposals presented by 3rd party and international negotiators: The Peel Plan of 1936, The United Nations Partition Plan of 1947, The Camp David Accords of 1978, The Oslo Accords of the 1990s and the Camp David Talks of 2000. The Arab nations and/or the Palestinians rejected all of these. American presidents and Israeli prime ministers attempted entice the Palestinians time after time, but the Palestinians, though sometimes entering talks, at the critical time, flatly refused. Since then there have been many other more informal attempts, but to no avail. Why? Because the Palestinians want the Zionist entity and all Jews gone from the land that once, in their minds, belonged to Allah; and such land should never, ever be claimed by other people. But in Dr. Bruggemann's book, there is no reference to these sentiments and peace efforts of the Israelis. He completely disregards the absolute rejection by the Arabs and Palestinians of the negotiations and the peace efforts through the past decades. This book is little in its ideas, small in its sentiments and little to nothing in its documentation. There are ten notes listed and no bibliography "no sign that the author has read histories of Zionism, the Middle East conflict or the modern Jewish state. There are many generalizations and half-truths as well as outright falsehoods. Out of many books on this subject, I would read the following two at first: Arthur Hertzberg: The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader, and more important: Walter

LaQueur: A History of Zionism. The latter occasionally leans over backwards to favor the Palestinian point of view, but it is a well-written general history. The Hertzberg book contains the writings of the leading Zionist thinkers. Better to read just a portion of these than a small book with little to no merit.

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