

October 5, 2008

A brief review by Mark S. Haughwout of:

*Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians*

Gary M. Burge, 2003, The Pilgrim Press 700 Prospect Avenue Cleveland, Ohio 44115-1100. Pilgrimpress.com

xvi/1 Burge states “This book is not written for the academic historian or the technically trained theologian...” and that is a very accurate description of this work for it is neither accurate historically nor theologically, as will be demonstrated by the following excerpts and notes:

xii/3 Burge states in his preface: “Since 1948, 531 Arab villages have been either destroyed by bulldozers or occupied by Israeli residents despite U.N. resolutions calling for the rightful return of these homes and lands to their Arab owners. According to U.N. records in June 1999, about 3.6 million Palestinian refugees are the victims of Israel’s nationhood.”

This statement in his preface shows the outright anti-Jewish / anti-Israel sentiments of Burge. The vast majority of Arab villages that were taken over by Israelis were abandoned by their occupants before the Israelis arrived. In 1948 the invading armies of Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt told the Arab residents to flee the land of Israel, promising them that when the war had been shortly and successfully won by the invading Arab armies, that the residents could then return. However God granted victory to the Jews over the invading armies and the Arabs that had fled their homes to join the invaders permanently lost their homes. The only Arab occupied village that was attacked and destroyed was Deir Yassin. This attack is a shameful point for the Israelis, but is not in anyway typical as Burge would suggest.

Secondly U.N. resolutions mean nothing. Both communist Russia and the United States among others in the U.N. supported the establishment of the state of Israel, yet it is God who promised the land to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Burge’s judgment of “rightful return of these homes...” shows his bias. Who is he to judge that returning these abandoned homes to people who joined the enemy forces is the “right” thing to do? That is something similar to saying that if some of the French joined the invading Nazi forces of WWII that they should have a rightful return to their old homes after the Nazis were defeated.

Finally the statement that Palestinians are “victims of Israel’s nationhood” is plainly anti-semitic. I am sure that he would not say that the millions of Palestinians are ‘victims of Jordanian nationhood’. Yet the situation is no different there. In fact the Israelis offered the Arabs in the lands that they annexed full citizenship, the Jordanians never did this. The only thing that these Muslim Arabs are victims of is their own determination to destroy the Jewish people and to “drive them into the sea”.

p2/II Burge states “The Israelis had plans for southern Lebanon as well. They wanted to depopulate it, to drive the Palestinians away from Israel’s northern border...” This is

historically not accurate and is a false statement. Terrorist attacks including rocket launches were being carried out against Jewish communities in Northern Israel (see Burge's own book on page 43!) and the Israelis were simply trying to defend their citizens from attack. There was no secret plan to depopulate the area, except in the case of terrorists. Burge here seems to be implying some secret 'Zionist' plot, yet none existed.

p7/II Burge states "...Israel has accelerated its acquisition of Palestinian land..." this is not only theologically wrong it is also historically wrong. Many of the homes bulldozed were the homes of terrorists. Israel has a specific policy of demolishing the homes of those who carry out suicide bombings. Other homes have been built illegally, that is without a building permit. The Israeli government, as the American government, has the right to demolish such a home. It is also important to remember that when the author speaks of 'East Jerusalem', that it is part of Israel, officially annexed. Every Arab there has the right to full citizenship, but most have refused citizenship because they do not want to accept the Israeli nation. Many countries in the world do not even allow home ownership by non-citizens (Mexico for example). If these Arabs do not want citizenship, they cannot expect to be treated as citizens or to enjoy the rights of citizenship.

In 1848 the United States won Arizona from Mexico in war. Yet nobody speaks of a 'Mexican' right of return or a 'Mexican' homeland in Arizona. Nor does anyone believe that a Mexican national who builds a house illegally in Arizona should be able to keep it or keep from having it demolished.

p8/I "They were refused a building permit by Israel...so that the family would leave." Here Burge is again interpreting the motivation of the Israeli government through anti-Semitic eyes. Did the family submit the proper drawings? Were the property lines adhered to? Was the utility infrastructure in place to support more housing? These reasons and others are why municipalities in America deny building permits. The need for more housing does not give anyone the right to bypass the building codes. I personally lived next to Isawiyah and have traveled its streets. Mobs of children tried to steal my personal items off my very person. Additionally they tried to alert the older members of the town to do us harm, calling the two of us Jews (neither of us were Jewish). I do not despise these children, but rather realize that they are the product of a Muslim upbringing that has taught them to hate Jews.

p48 Burge seems here to not regard the PLO as a terrorist organization and that in some way the Lebanese were okay to be deliberately harboring them.

P68 Burge ignores standard Real Estate transaction laws to try to criminalize the Israeli purchase of land in the Old city of Jerusalem. Again Burge is joining himself to the anti-Semitic groups that would deny the Jews the right to even purchase land. There is no reason that the purchaser of land should have to outline to the seller their intended use of the land, so long as it is lawful.

p71/II Burge seems to ignore the LORD's statement to Abraham about the iniquity of the Amorite not yet being complete. And even implies here and elsewhere (p74, p83,

p84) that the Israelites were not supposed to completely destroy the inhabitants of the land (the Canaanites) when in fact the Israelites are repeatedly upbraided for not doing so.

p85 The author states that Jews and Muslims worship the same God. This is not any more true than to say that Baal worshippers and Yahweh worshipers, have the same God. Being monotheistic does not in any way imply the worship of the same deity. Jews and Muslims are both monotheistic, but the ONE deity they worship is very different. Compare descriptions of Allah in the Koran with Yahweh in the Bible.

p89 (and elsewhere), the author apparently is not familiar with the different Hebrew words translated as Alien or Stranger. Specifically the word GER as used in the Torah almost always refers to someone who has joined the nation of Israel (an immigrant) and worships their God and follows their laws. Such passages cannot automatically be used to refer to Muslims who do not worship the Jewish God but rather are determined to destroy the Jewish people. As Christians we are taught to love our enemies, but as a government, the nation of Israel is not required to offer citizenship to those who wish to destroy their country.

p120 Burge makes the mistake of referring to East Jerusalemites as Palestinians. They are not. They are Israeli Arabs who have full rights to citizenship.

p121 Burge falsely claims that” the U.S. government keeps its embassy in Tel Aviv because it does not want to recognize Israel’s claim on Jerusalem.” This is not true. The U.S. recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. One of the main reasons for keeping its embassy in Tel Aviv is for offshore secure communications and because Tel Aviv is by far the largest city. In America many embassies are in New York.

p122 Burge again chooses to ignore the fact that East Jerusalemites have rights to full citizenship in Israel, but they refuse to accept it.

In conclusion Burge has been inaccurate historically and biblically. I have chosen to review only a few of his errors here. Many more could be pointed out, but these suffice to point out the flavor of his book – purely anti-Semitic, historically inaccurate and unbiblical.

A few passages to consider: Zechariah 2:8, Deuteronomy 32:10 (these speak of Israel as the apple of the eye).

Romans 9:3-5

Ezekiel 37:25

and of course the Covenants with Abraham in Genesis 15 and 17.

