

Reviews

Edited by Edward Geary

WHOSE VICTORY?

James B. Mayfield

Fantastic Victory. By W. Cleon Skousen. Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1967. 298 pp., \$3.75.

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Fantastic Victory is without a doubt the most ambitious attempt by any "Mormon scholar" to set the recent Arab-Israeli conflict into some perspective. Cleon Skousen, in the amazingly short period of less than three months, has produced a book of nearly 300 pages. The study is divided into four parts: (1) a general description of the forces and events in the Middle East that precipitated the Arab-Israeli War of June 1967; (2) a blow-by-blow account of this "Miracle War" in which tiny Israel defeated the combined forces of the Arab world in less than six days; (3) an eighty-page synopsis of Jewish history covering a period from 1800 B.C. to 1967 A.D.; and (4) an interesting attempt to link various biblical prophecies to present-day events in Palestine in order to provide the recent actions and policies of the modern state of Israel with the stamp of "Divine Approval."

Mr. Skousen, one of the most prolific and widely read authors in the L.D.S. Church, is not a novice concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict. He has traveled extensively in the Middle East, both as a student and as a tour guide for various excursion groups. His mastery of the ancient religious and secular history of Middle Eastern peoples will not be challenged in this article. Yet, after having evaluated his analysis of modern Middle Eastern history, I must admit some hesitancy in accepting his interpretation of the past and future destinies of these peoples.

The arguments utilized by Mr. Skousen to defend his major thesis are largely based upon one-sided, biased, and distorted pieces of evidence well suited to an effective piece of propaganda, but hardly conducive to a lucid

understanding of the issues dividing the Arabs and Jews in their moment of crisis. The major transgressions of this book, as in so many studies about the Middle East, are best characterized as sins of omission. Thus, while one may be willing to admit that Mr. Skousen may not be deliberately distorting the "Palestine Question," he is, by his failure to acknowledge certain events and developments, exposing himself to sharp criticism.

Most obvious in this study is the lack of any sympathetic attempt to understand the aspirations, feelings, and frustrations inherent in Arab nationalism. Arab hatred of Israel is interpreted in simplistic terms as a function of fanatical Arab leaders. Get rid of the present Arab leadership and peace and understanding would then be possible! Yet in fact the Arabs do understand the modern secular ideology called "Zionism," and it is an understanding of its goals that activates Arab bellicosity.

Mr. Skousen's disregard for Arab feelings becomes evident when he argues that the Arabs were completely willing to accept the establishment of a Jewish homeland. This is of course a legitimate assumption, except that Mr. Skousen, whether knowingly or unknowingly, fails to note that the Zionist leader Dr. Weizmann had assured the Arab leaders that the Jewish people had no intention of establishing a Jewish *state* in Palestine, but merely wanted to help develop the country without damaging legitimate Arab interests. Amir Faisal, a leading Arab statesman, conditioned his acceptance of this "Jewish Homeland" concept with the words "Provided the Arabs obtain their independence . . . [otherwise] I shall not then be bound by a single word of the present agreement" (*The Faisal-Weizmann Agreement*).

Mr. Skousen's failure to discuss the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which denied the Arabs their independence, or the way in which the Arabs perceived the Mandate System ignores some of the fundamental aspects of Arab nationalism. His comment that only "some of the Palestinian Arabs were extremely bitter toward the Balfour concept" completely ignores the conclusions of the King-Crane Commission sent by President Wilson in 1919 to evaluate Arab feelings about Zionist immigration. Their report concluded that "nearly nine-tenths of the whole [non-Jewish population of Palestine] are emphatically against the entire Zionist programme" (*Recommendations of the King-Crane Commission*, Section E, par. 3).

His argument that the British Mandate Authorities consistently favored the Arabs fails to note the power and influence of the Jewish Agency during the 1920's and 1930's. Also, when Mr. Skousen makes no distinction between a Jewish homeland (to be established within an Arab state) promised by the Balfour Declaration and a Jewish political state (demanded by the Zionist leaders), he is ignoring a fundamental cause of Arab hostility. President Truman's "special plea" for the admission of 100,000 Jewish refugees is introduced with no discussion of the political pressures exerted upon the U.S. government by a well financed Zionist lobby. The Arabs are excoriated for their refusal to accept a UN Partition Plan which would have given fifty-six percent of Palestine to a Jewish population that owned less than ten percent of the deeded land. Nor does Mr. Skousen perceive the moral implications of reme-

dying the persecution and eviction of the Jews from Europe by evicting the Arabs from their homeland. This book goes to great lengths to show that Arab fanaticism, hatred, and intransigence do exist, that most Arabs hate and fear this state of Israel, and that Arab leaders have refused to negotiate; and yet Mr. Skousen fails to suggest why. It is sheer folly to believe that if such Arab leaders as Nasser, Atassi, or al-Shukairy were removed Arab hatred and suspicion of Israel would lessen. It is Israel, not the Arabs, that has invaded the Middle East. It is the Israelis, not the Arabs, who have expanded their boundaries beyond the UN Partition Plan. It is the establishment of Israel that has resulted in the displacement of nearly seventy percent of the Palestinian Arabs. It is a strange standard of ethics that can legitimize this eviction of over 500,000 people by suggesting that Arab leaders be blamed for encouraging their own people to move out of the path of advancing armies sent to defend the Arab homeland.

Mr. Skousen graphically portrays the sharp contrast between present-day Arab-Israeli hostility and the amicable relations that existed between the Arabs and Jews during the Middle Ages. And while he suggests that "It should be of some comfort to the Arabs to know that Israel is not destined to become a colonial empire," his attempt to equate this modern secular ideology of Zionism with specific biblical verses is somewhat tenuous. The Lord, in both ancient and modern scriptures, has promised that the Jewish people would someday be gathered to Palestine. This return is seen by the L.D.S. Church as a prophetic manifestation of Joseph Smith's divine calling. Nearly a half century prior to the first Zionist Congress assembled in Switzerland, the Prophet Joseph Smith commissioned Orson Hyde to visit Jerusalem and to dedicate this land for the returning of the House of Judah. In the last section of *Fantastic Victory*, Mr. Skousen seeks to interpret various scriptures in an attempt to equate this secular State of Israel with the promised gathering of Judah. While all members of the Church are committed to "the gathering of the Jews" one need not accept the too-often assumed corollary that the present Israeli state, which is committed to socialism and military Zionism, is necessarily acting under the inspiration of the Lord. Many Church leaders have quoted the Book of Mormon in order to delineate between a "token gathering" of unbelieving Jews and the later "full recovery" of the House of Judah which is to be predicated upon their conversion to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (see III Nephi 20:29-34 and James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, pp. 333-34). The small number of Jews (less than 15 percent of the world's Jewish population) now residing in Palestine should more properly be seen as a "sign of the times" but not necessarily as a fulfillment of specific scriptures.

Mr. Skousen may feel that he has presented a valid description of a complex and crucial conflict. Yet the tragedy of this type of analysis lies in its inability to recognize that the Soviet Union's success in the Middle East during the past decade is primarily due to an American foreign policy based upon this one-sided view of the Arab-Israeli crisis. This was indeed a fantastic victory — not, however, for Israel, but for the Soviet Union.