

BOOK REVIEW  
SEEKING A CITY WITH  
FOUNDATION  
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## **Introduction**

The book under review, *Seeking A City with Foundations*, is aimed at getting to the mind of God about the “the tensions between the urban and rural contexts” (Smith 2011, 17). It is directed at finding out what God is saying about the ultimate hope of man. Is it to return to the “Garden” or to focus on attaining the ideal city where God rules? Many scholars have opined on this issue. The debate is heightened when one examines the Bible and note that the Bible started in the rural (garden) and ended in the Holy City. Added to this confusion is what constitutes urban, especially now that a place could be rural in outlook but urban in culture, lifestyle, and practice (Smith 2011, 19).

## **Social Analysis**

The author, Smith, saw a changing world where over 50% of the world population now lives in an urban setting. He saw cities of the rich and cities of the poor. He gave examples of newly created cities in the Middle East (Dubai) as a contrast to the slums of New Delhi, Lagos and others. In his analysis, he shared his experience and those of others. He reflected upon the Bible and examined the scholarly work of others (Smith 2011, 43). According to Smith, many theologians have opined that urbanization was not the intention of God. They are of the opinion that urbanization is the consequence of the fall and efforts must be made to return to the garden. Those scholars suggest that all the social vices associated with urbanization from the ancient times until now, such as slavery, forced labor, injustice, greed, and destruction, cannot be the mind of God for man. According to Smith, a poet William Cowper, summarized the anti-urbanization sentiments as, “God made the country, and man made the town” (Smith 2011, 22). According to Smith, on the other hand, it is possible to make a case for the city as God’s intention “since the final image in the Bible is of a city whose proportions far exceed those of

any existing megapolis, the transition from rural innocence to urban civilization is granted the divine stamp of approval” (Smith 2011, 23).

### **Theological Reflection**

In his theological reflection, Smith appears to conclude that the city could be fixed. He is of the opinion that the city is not an aberration emerging from the fall, but the plan of God from creation. He traced the birth of the city in the Bible to the procreation and dominion mandate of God in **Genesis 1:26-28**. He reviewed the impact of the fall and suggests that the totality of the Bible must be evaluated because isolating a passage could lead to the wrong conclusion (Smith 2011, 123). Smith examined **Genesis 4:16-17** regarding the Tower of Babel. He debunked the idea that the city is cursed. Smith opined that the builders of the city are made in the image of God (**Gen.1:27**). Smith examined **Genesis 12-50** and the emergence of different cities with Yahweh as against kings at the center. He gave examples of ethics and rules God gave in Deuteronomy to guide life in the city. He examined the Torah and the prophetic writings and noted how the corruption of man has affected the cities and changed the trajectory from “full of justice” to filled with “murderers” (**Isa:1:21**) (Smith 2011, 143). He pointed out God’s hope for the city in the Psalms, especially the migration “to a city where they could settle” (**Psalms 107:4-9**). He examined the questions that arose when Jerusalem was invaded and the changes made by King Solomon that triggered the crisis and the critiques of some prophets, like Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah. He opined that the Prophets did not separate social, economic and political issues “from the even more fundamental concern -that of love for God” in their condemnation of the city (Smith 2011, 152). He concluded that there is hope for the city with God’s promise of shalom (**Isa 1:26**). Smith examined the NT and concluded that Jesus lived and preached in urban settings. Even though the places had rural outlooks, they were influenced by Rome and other

major cities. He referred to many references to the cities in the gospels and the use of urban imageries like a “city on the hill” (**Mat 5:14**) (**Smith 2011, 177**). He pointed to the city of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus as regards to Passover, salvation leading to “a new and greater liberation” that will result in the “arrival of the new age of God’s shalom” (**Smith 2011, 190**). Smith’s analysis of God’s interest in the city is akin to the reflections in the book, “Why Cities Matter. (**UM & Buzzard 2013, 57-85**).

### **Implementation and Impressions:**

Smith started his implementation discussions with two possibilities. To him, it all depends on how the Bible is being preached. It could be preached as an end to injustice and suffering in eschaton through the “promise of spiritual reward in a sphere which lies entirely outside of history” (**Smith 2011, 216**). The Bible could also be preached as a call to “become agents of the kingdom” to prevent injustice by “reordering relationships with God, with men and women, with the world, and with oneself” (**Smith 2011, 216**). Smith identified the influence of idols and the idolatrous elevation of our economic process as “a power which forces its will on us” (**Smith 2011, 219**). He opined that Christians should not conform to the world (**Rom 12:2**). Christians must be courageous to confront the idols of our time like Paul did. He suggests advocacy to confront the forces of evil in our society as Christ did through the Cross. He recommended the post-Pentecost experience of creating new communities. The book is an encyclopedia of the history of the city, the pros and cons of urbanization, what God is saying about urbanization, the future of urbanization and the implementation strategies regarding what God is saying. Smith presented the two-parallel argument for and against the city. I learnt from his book, especially his theological reflections from Genesis to Revelation and implementation strategies recommended. More is still needed on implementation.

## Works Cited

1. Smith, David 2011. *Seeking A City With Foundations*. Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press
2. Um, Stephen & Buzzard, Justin 2013. *Why Cities Matter*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway