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THEME The promise of the land

Promised Lands for Every Nation

THEME The promise of the land

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Israel and the Church is a journal for biblical and theological reflections concerning Israel and the Church in God's plan for this world in the light of His coming Kingdom.

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INTRODUCTION



The promise of the land

KEES DE VREUGD Editor keesdevreugd@cvi.nl t is obviously one of the central themes, if not the central theme, in the stories of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and probably in the Old Testament as a whole: God has promised a land to the people of Israel.

In this new edition of the journal *Israel and the Church*, we try to trace the theme of the land promise throughout the Scriptures of Old and New Testament. Rev. Glashouwer focusses on the subject of covenant and land, especially in the Old Testament. I discuss the theme of the land in the New Testament.

Tobias Kraemer (Germany) considers theological implications of the land promise. The land question is not a minor matter. It is about nothing less than God, about the God of Israel, to which also the Gentiles have access through Jesus.

Another interesting perspective is offered by James Patrick (UK). Scripture knows a land promise for all nations of the earth. The restoration of Israel is an exhortation to all nations to recognise the God of Israel in faith, and to receive their own portions.

The journal opens with a sermon meditation by Rev. Jaap de Vreugd (NL). You may use this meditation for preparing a sermon on the restoration of Israel.

Israel and the Church is sent within the network of Christians for Israel International. We invite you to share it with others. Moreover, we would be very glad with your reactions. Also, we invite you to participate in our ministry by sending us your articles on theological topics related to Israel, from the perspective of your nation.

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THEME THE PROMISE OF THE LAND

Return and restoration

Amos 9:11-15

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The book of Amos closes with an incredible saluation prophecy. According to some interpreters, the words could not have come from the same mouth as the previous prophecies of doom. Wouldn't the prophet make prophecies of coming judgement powerless by closing with a saluation prophecy? If everything still has a happy ending, perhaps the judgments won't be so bad after all?

REV. JAAP DE VREUGD

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owever, if you think this way, you ignore the power of the prophetic Word. God is indeed deadly serious with His announcements of coming

judgements, and it is good that we tremble because of His Word! But, like another prophet has said, "Lord, ... in wrath remember mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2). God always remembers His mercy in His judgements. Judgement is never God's last word. The entire message of the Bible, certainly that of the prophets, is full of tension between judgement and mercy, verdict and compassion. Whoever would try to remove this tension would render the biblical message powerless. This tension between judgement and mercy goes right back (if I may say so) to the heart of God Himself. He is moved with compassion for His people, and because of that He cannot just tolerate unrighteousness and sin. As a Father, He chastises His children, but He does not give up on them! He is faithful to His covenant. In Amos' announcement, judgement is inevitable, still the Lord does not let go of His nation, but makes a new beginning.

He will again rebuild the "fallen shelter of David": Israel and Judah will become one nation in the restored kingdom, whose borders are extended even wider; the nations around Israel and even all nations of the world will share in the utopia of the restored empire of David. The Lord shall give rich blessings; "new wine will drip from the mountains". In conclusion, God will bring back again the remnant of His people. "I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them." This is nothing less than a promise that, after the return from the great Diaspora, there will be no more exiles; God will plant them in the soil He will give them. We read it correctly - "the land I have given them" - because the land is God's land. He intended the land to be for His people, preserved for those whom He has inscribed on the palms of His hands (Isaiah 40:16). He will plant them in Judea

As a Father, God chastises His children, but He does not give up on them! and Samaria and Galilee – in the traditionally Promised Land. This land was robbed of its inhabitants for centuries, and has long awaited its reunion with the chosen people, a nation preserved by God. "They will never again be uprooted from their land."

It is a beautiful prophecy of the coming new age. James cites this prophecy in Acts 15 to show that God wants to include the govim, the Gentile nations. "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name" (Acts 15:14). But with this, the prophecy is not exhausted! Today we see how God is fulfilling this prophetic Word to Israel. The appointed time in God's plan, when Israel is planted again, has arrived. Throughout all of history God leads His people and fulfils His promises. The Turkish empire, the British Mandate, the League of Nations, the United Nations, and all those sometimes confusing and obscure political world events with opposing interests and extremely complicated rounds of negotiation and peace proposals - all of this has to be dealt with as current political reality. But through it all, it remains true: "I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them." God is realising His plan right through all the devices of man. The U.N. cannot stop it, nor the U.S., nor the Arab world, nor Hamas, nor whoever. God is the God of history. He leads everything towards His goal of Israel taking up its unique position.

The history of the nation is strange – time and again taken out of their land and forced into exile, and the last time into an exile that lasted for centuries and was worldwide. Yet they always returned and were given back their land, by God! Time and again they were robbed of their national independence, but it was restored. Time and again they were robbed of their capital city, but Jerusalem was restored to them, by God! No other nation has had to deal with so many attempts to eradicate them and wipe them off the map, as has Israel in its long history. All the attempts have failed - whether that be the plan of destruction by Pharaoh, or the inquisition, or the pogroms of the middle ages and later, up to and including the dark schemes of Hitler. They have all failed. Also, the deeply rooted hatred of the Islamic-Arab world will not succeed to wipe out Israel, even though that world has been threatening Israel with genocide over and over again. Israel will live in safety. In the meantime, this situation is frequently debated around the world. And sometimes also in the churches, when the Christian world does not unreservedly choose solidarity with the people of God's choice, "beloved for the sake of the patriarchs" (Romans 11:28). From several angles, Israel's right to exist is denied, both by the world and by the church. We witness this daily - anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism, hate propaganda – but the tough resistance against Israel, against the nation, the land and the state, will have no future! For resistance against the plans of God has no future.

Anyone who turns against Israel has to remember, that because the future is in God's hands, He is working towards His own intended future. The Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of the Messiah, is coming; as sure as the Lord lives, the Son of Man shall come in glory. Only then will there be true peace, true righteousness and complete safety – the Kingdom which the prophets saw from a distance – and as its centre, the land of which the Lord spoke through Amos: "I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them." THEME THE PROMISE OF THE LAND

God loves Israel

The basis of God's relationship with Israel is: LOVE

In light of the fact that God loves Israel and has chosen the Jewish people for Himself, one can conclude that "love and marriage", confirmed by an oath, was and is the basis of God's relationship with Israel. After the Lord had chosen Abraham to be the father of the chosen people and the nation of Israel, the Scripture records that He decided to show that His choice was unchangeable by making an "everlasting covenant".

REV. WILLEM J. J. GLASHOUWER

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euteronomy 7:6-9: "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the

earth to be His people, His treasured possession. The LORD did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath He swore to your ancestors that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh King of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His Covenant of Love to a thousand generations"

EVERLASTING COVENANT

It all started with the calling of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. This is the basic covenant that God made with this forefather of Israel and the cornerstone of all the following covenants as well. All other covenants with Israel are an enlargement of this covenant. "The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"" (Genesis 12:1-3).

Seven times, God uses the formula "I WILL", either expressed, or understood!

The three basic elements of this Abrahamic Covenant are a land, a nation/people and a blessing – a blessing for Abraham himself, for Israel, and through Abraham for all nations/ peoples on earth.

THE LAND OF ISRAEL

"He is the Lord our God; His judgments are in all the earth. He remembers His Covenant forever, The word He commanded, for a thousand generations,

The Covenant He made with Abraham, The oath He swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, To Israel as an everlasting Covenant: 'To you I will give the land of Canaan As the portion you will inherit." (Psalm 105:7-11)

These are impressive words. The eternal God made an eternal covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and with Israel, their descendants. The Lord has made a solemn oath.

When we take an oath, we use the words, "So help me God," sometimes with one hand on the Bible and the other raised toward Heaven. A more serious declaration cannot be made, and perjury is severely punished. The Lord cannot swear by anyone higher than Himself, for no such person exists, so He swears by Himself: "By Myself I have sworn, My mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked," the Lord says to Isaiah (Isa. 45:23). And to Jeremiah He says, "But if you do not obey these commands, declares the Lord, I swear by Myself that this place will become a ruin" (Jer. 22:5). In a psalm the Lord says, "Once for all, I have sworn by My holiness - and I will not lie to David" (Ps. 89:35).

When God makes an oath, it is absolutely trustworthy. He made a solemn oath to Abraham (see Gen. 12:1-3; 17:4-8), and Isaac (see Gen. 26:2-5), and Jacob (see Gen. 28:13-15; 35:9-12), and an eternal covenant with Israel, when He said, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit."

What does the word 'eternal' mean? Only until Jesus Christ? Only until a majority of Jews rejected Him and handed Him over to the Romans to be crucified? Only until a small mob of Jewish people shouted, "We don't want this man to be our king" (Luke 19:14b). Did the everlasting Covenant suddenly dissolve? No, of course not. Eternal means eternal, everlasting means forever. That Covenant is still valid today.

What was the content of this everlasting Covenant, based on a solemn oath that God had sworn by Himself? "To you I will give the land of Canaan." That was what God said to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, and repeated to Isaac and Jacob, and at numerous other occasions. "It is My land," said God (Lev. 25:23), "and I give it to you, O Israel."

Was the land not inhabited when the Lord promised it to Abraham? Was it an empty land? No. It was inhabited by the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites (see Gen. 15:13-21; Deut. 7). Yet God gave the land to Israel.

Did He Himself see to it that before Israel took possession, those peoples had willingly moved on? Did Israel enter an empty land? No. Israel had to conquer the Promised Land in order to possess it. Moses' successor, Joshua, under whose leadership the people of Israel would enter the land after wandering in the desert for forty years, therefore had to be strong and very courageous. Many times, he and the people of Israel were told, "I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses" (Josh. 1:3; see also Deut. 31:1-8, 23; Josh. 1:1-9). The promise by God meant that Joshua had to be very courageous. He and the people of Israel had to go in faith and put down the soles of their feet on the land. Step by step. Faith is like that. If you go in faith and obedience, you will find that you will possess what the Lord promised to you. But you have to go and move and take and claim God's promises in faith.

JUDGEMENT IN SPITE OF COVENANT?

Why was the land of Canaan taken away from the heathen peoples who lived there? It was because the measure of their wickedness was full (see Gen. 15:16; Deut. 9:3-6). God's judgement and wrath was finally executed because of the appalling sins these nations had committed. "God said to Abram, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." (Genesis 15:12-19, NASB)

So the Lord was patient for four hundred years to give these Amorites a chance to change their terrible practices. During those years, His people Israel suffered in slavery in Egypt, where even their baby boys were drowned. All because the Lord was being patient with the Amorites. But finally, enough is enough.

Yet just as God punished the wickedness of the nations in Canaan, so also He had to punish the wickedness of Israel. Moses warned them:

"If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name – the Lord your God – the Lord will send fearful plagues on you and your descendants... Just as it pleased the Lord to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please Him to ruin and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess. Then the Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other." (Deuteronomy 28:58-59, 63-64a; see also 28:60-68; II:22-32; I2:29-32; 8:19-20)

During Israel's history, that punishment was enforced several times. The ten tribes of Israel were taken into Assyrian exile (2 Kings 17:20-23) and the two tribes of Judah into Babylonian captivity (2 Kings 25:8-12). A remnant remained in Judah (2 Kings 25:22), and after seventy years, some of the Jews who had been taken to Babylon (42,360 of them, to be exact – Ezra 2:64) returned to Israel (Ezra 1–2). Large Jewish communities remained in the Diaspora, in Babylon and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, Israel had returned to the Promised Land. Jerusalem and the Temple were rebuilt after the Babylonian exile, and for several centuries existed in relative indepen-

dence. But when the Romans finally took over and destroyed the Temple and the city, Israel once again went into exile – this time worldwide, as Moses had foreseen (Deut. 28:64).

But does that make the eternal oath and the everlasting Covenant that God had sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob utterly worthless? No! Not at all! When God makes an eternal Covenant, it is an everlasting Covenant. He does not go back on His word. He is absolutely trustworthy. The Old Testament contains numerous references to the oaths

that He has sworn and the pledges He Himself has made to Israel, and His promise to give them the land of Canaan (see Exod. 6:7-8; 13:5,11; 32:13; 33:1; Num. 14:30; Deut. 1:8,34-35; 6:10,13; 7:8,13; 8:18; 9:5; 10:11; 11:9,21; 19:8; 26:3; 28:11; 30:20; 31:7; Josh. 1:6; 21:43-45). Israel may plead for that.

THE MIRACLE

God made a promise to Israel, and Isaiah called on Israel to hold God to His promise:

"And give Him no rest till He establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth. The Lord has sworn by His right hand and by His mighty arm, 'Never again will I give your grain as food for your enemies, and never again will foreigners drink the new wine for which you have toiled; but those who harvest it will eat it, and praise the Lord, and those who gather the grapes will drink it in the courts of My sanctuary'." (Isa. 62:6-9)

This has been the prayer of Jewish people

over the ages at Pesach/ Pascha, the Jewish Passover, when they pray, "Next year in Jerusalem!"

That prayer remained unfulfilled until 1948, when the miracle happened. On 14 May 1048, David Ben-Gurion called the independent state of Israel into being. Prior to that date, on 29 November 1947, the United Nations had adopted a plan for the partition of Palestine. As soon as that plan was announced, the powerful Arabs embarked on a ferocious battle to drive the Jews into the sea and nip the new Jewish State in the

When God makes an eternal Covenant, it is an everlasting Covenant

> bud. Despite heavy losses, the Jews prevailed. This bloody conflict and Arab opposition to the plan (aided and abetted by the British) led the United Nations to propose the dissolution of the partition plan. But within six months, before the plan was revoked, David Ben-Gurion proclaimed an independent Jewish State. And in 2018, the independent Jewish State of Israel with its undivided capital Jerusalem celebrated its 70th Anniversary.

The prophet Ezekiel says, "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from

all the countries and bring you back into your own land." (Ezekiel 36:24). The Jewish people are returning from the four corners of the earth where they were scattered: this is Israel's national restoration.

The Lord says to Israel by mouth of the prophet Isaiah: "Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth. Everyone who is called by My Name, and whom I have created for My glory. Whom I have formed, even whom I have made." (Isa. 43:5-7)

We see with our own eyes the prophecies being fulfilled

When you hear about North, South, East and West in the Bible, you of course have to put your feet in Jerusalem, in Israel – because there the Bible originated – and then look on the map of the world to the North, South, East and West.

We see with our own eyes the prophecies being fulfilled, even as we speak. For over a hundred years by now, the Jewish people have been returning from all over the world to the Promised Land.

BEGINNING OF REDEMPTION

The modern State of Israel has been in existence for seventy years now. It is the beginning of redemption, as the rabbis call it. But the formation of the Jewish State of Israel and the return of the Jewish people to Israel and to its capital Jerusalem set an irreversible process into motion. We have passed points of no return.

The prophet Amos says, "I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from their land I have given them, says the Lord your God" (Amos 9:15). Israel is there to stay. It will not be exiled again. Only two times the Lord raises His hand to bring Israel back to the land. The first time was after the Babylonian Captivity between 600 – 500 BC, the second time is now, after the 'Roman' Captivity of almost two thousand years.

"In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to Him, and His place of rest will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out His hand a SECOND time to reclaim the remnant that is left of His people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea. He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; He will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth." (Isaiah II:I0-12)

Nowhere do we read in the Bible that the Lord will raise His hand a third time. Israel is here to stay. They will not be uprooted again. The redemption process has started. National restoration happens first, and it will be followed by spiritual restoration. Messiah is coming.

Ezekiel 39:28 promises in God's Name: "Then they [Israel] will know that I am the Lord their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations [already fulfilled] I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind." So ultimately all the Jews will return to the Promised Land, back to Zion.

ISRAEL HAS (THE) FUTURE

8 "But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham My friend,

9 I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are My servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you.

10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.

n All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish.

12 Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all.

13 For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, 'Do not fear; I will help you.

14 Do not be afraid, you worm Jacob, little Israel, do not fear, for I myself will help you,' declares the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel."

(Isaiah 41:8-14 NIV 1984)

And suddenly you realise: God is on their side. He gave everlasting promises to them. He made everlasting Covenants with them. And everything He promised to Israel He will fulfil for Israel. Just as all the promises He gave to the Church He will fulfil for the Church. It never gets out of His hand. Israel has the guarantee of the Creator of heaven and earth for their existence. As long as heaven and earth are in existence, there will be Israel. So says the Lord God.

35 "This is what the Lord says, He who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar – the Lord Almighty is His name:

36 'Only if these decrees vanish from My sight,' declares the Lord, 'will Israel ever cease being a nation before Me.'

37 This is what the Lord says: 'Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,' declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 31:35-37 NIV 1984)

May the Prince of Peace, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the Messiah of Israel, come in our days, to sit upon "the throne of His father David [in Jerusalem]" and "rule over the House of Jacob [the ten plus the two tribes of Israel]" (Luke 1:32-33), to rule over all nations, so that of His Kingdom there will be no end, and so that peace will flow forth from Jerusalem to cover the earth.

"Deliver Israel, O God, from all their troubles!" (Psalm 25:22)

Rev. Willem J. J. Glashouwer President Christians for Israel International Honorary President European Coalition for Israel

For further reading: Hosea 11:1; Deuteronomy 4:37-38; Psalm 44:3; 2 Chronicles 2:11; 2 Chronicles 9:8

THEME THE PROMISE OF THE LAND

The Land of Israel in the New Testament

Jerusalem is the centre of the earth. Such it is in biblical perspective. In the Jewish tradition, the land of Israel, the city of Jerusalem and the temple are intensely interwoven. The heart of the land is the city, and the heart of the city is the temple (mount), the place where the Most High has chosen to make His dwelling. That same interwovenness, which is rooted obviously in the Old Testament, resounds at the background of the New Testament.

KEES DE VREUGD

n most books of the New Testament, the land of Israel is a given. In the Gospels, the land constitutes the territory and background of Jesus' work. The first part of the book of Acts takes place entirely in the land of Israel, and even when Luke in the latter chapters recounts Paul's missionary travels, we see that Israel is the motherland to which the great apostle of the Gentiles every time returns. In different letters, Paul is busy raising money for Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the starting point of the worldwide preaching of the Gospel and the centre to which everything returns. Jerusalem is also the final destination of the whole of the New Testament; the book of Revelation ends in a great vision of Jerusalem, into which the kings of the earth bring their treasures (Revelation 21:24).

ISRAEL'S LAND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The land of Israel is mentioned as such only once in the New Testament. That is in Matthew 2:20-21. There we read that in Egypt, Joseph receives in a vision the instruction to "go into the Land of Israel". Thereupon, he "took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel". Thus, they returned from their Egyptian exile. These few words also make clear the identification of Jesus with (the people of) Israel: "Out of Egypt I called My Son" (Matthew 2:15; Hosea 11:1). People and land are given to each other, as the Son is to the people, and people and land are given to the Son. Thus, prophecy is fulfilled.

A few times more, Israel is mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew, but in all those cases you could think both of the land and of the people. We find an example in Jesus' words in Matthew 8:10 (and the parallel verse Luke 7:9): "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel." Perhaps in the following verse, too, we have to think of the land of Israel, only then in a future (eschatological) perspective: "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." In Jewish parlance of those days, 'heaven' is a euphemistic reference to God, used out of reverence and fear of the Name of God. The kingdom of heaven is therefore God's rule on earth, of which Jerusalem is the capital (Psalm 48:3, cf. Matthew 5:35; Zechariah 14:9, 16).

We also have to take into account the unity of people and land in the words of Simeon, spoken to Mary: "Behold, this *Child* is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel..." (Luke 2:34), and in the question asked by the apostles just before Jesus' ascension to heaven: "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)

Individual parts of the land, on the other hand, are mentioned quite often in the Gospels. Jesus' public ministry begins in Galilee (Matthew 4:12; Luke 4:14). Matthew gives an even more precise location: Jesus went to live in Capernaum, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, two tribes of Israel that Isaiah prophesies about. From Galilee, Jesus later on went to Judea (Matthew 19:1; Mark 10:1), to accomplish His 'exodus' (Luke 9:31) in Jerusalem. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus travels several times from Galilee to Jerusalem and back. On His way to Galilee, "He had to pass through Samaria" (John 4:4). He stays there for two days. In Luke 9:51-53, however, the Samaritans do not want to receive Him, because He is traveling to Jerusalem.

COVENANT

In the covenant that God made with Abraham, the promise of the land takes a prominent place (e.g. Genesis 17:8). Even though Israel in its history has known periods of being expelled and living in exile (though there are always those who remain in the land), we never hear that this covenant and this promise are annulled. The announcement of the punishment of exile is always followed by the promise of return to the land (e.g. Deuteronomy 30:5; Jeremiah 33:23-26).The apostle Paul writes that the covenants and the promises are valid for Israel (Romans 9:4). He writes in

The New Testament puts the expectation of the Old Testament in the centre

the present tense, and that has never been turned into a past tense. With regard to the covenants and promises (both plural), obviously, we also have to think of the land. In addition to the covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the other enduring covenant with David also specifically included the land (2 Samuel 7:10). Moreover, Paul stresses that Christ came to confirm the promises that were made to the patriarchs (Romans 15:8), because the "gifts" made to "the fathers" are "irrevocable" (Romans 11:28-29). The promise of the land, even though not mentioned in those precise words, is naturally implied and cannot be excluded from this. Through the coming of Christ, the Old Testament expectation of the restoration of the nation of Israel in the land of Israel has become more topical than ever in the New Testament.

BOUNDARIES

Often, the objection is raised that the land has lost its special significance in the New Testament. Has not there been an expansion to the world, since the gospel is preached to all nations? And doesn't that mean that all limits disappear? Or even, yet a step further: is it not in the end all about heaven?

With regard to the last question, we can be short. The New Testament puts the expectation of the Old Testament in the centre: "But according to His promise [Isaiah 65:17] we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). A new or (perhaps better:) renewed earth under a renewed heaven. And what then is that righteousness? Here again, as always, we have to go back to the Ancient Testament, for example Isaiah 32:16-18 or Jeremiah 23:5-8. Righteousness is, amongst other things, that the right correlations are restored. Every nation has its own allocated place. There, every nation receives its own identity. That brings us to an answer for the first objection. The nature of the covenants, in fact, the nature of God Himself, should actually be sufficient. Certainly, with Him there is no variation or shifting shadow (James 1:17). It is all about the truth of God (Romans 15:8).

However, the Most High did not promise a land only to Israel. To all nations He has allotted their own land. He did this "according to the number of sons of

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Israel" (Deuteronomy 32:8). What does that mean? After the tower of Babel there were seventy nations that spread out to settle the earth, according to the Jewish interpretation of Genesis chapters 10–11, just like Jacob went down to Egypt with seventy people (Exodus 1:1-5). Just as Israel is set apart as the special possession of the Lord, every nation has its own nature within the boundaries that are set to it. The apostle Paul gives expression to this in his speech to the Areopagus in Athens: "He [God] made of one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God"

(Acts 17:26). That applies to the nations. But as a matter of principle, it must precede that this still applies to Israel. The nations receive their own domicile just as Israel has received his.

SPIRITUALI-

And what about those texts that seem to spiritualise the land or the city? Does not Paul say clearly that it was promised to Abraham that he would be "heir of the world" (Romans 4:13)? And do we not read in the letter to the Hebrews that this same Abraham lived in the land of promise as in a foreign land, and

> that he, just like other heroes of faith, desired "a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:9-10, 16)? And what about the heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 4:25)?

> Careful reading is - as always - required. In Hebrews 11:0-10, there surely is an antithesis, but a different one than we tend to assume. That is, the "city which has foundations" is opposed to the "tents" in which Abraham dwelt, and not to the land in which he lived. Abraham was looking for God to establish this city in the land of promise. Then, it will no longer be a "foreign land", but he and his offspring will finally inherit the land according to the promise. Nowhere in the letter to the Hebrews is it written

that this promise to, or this covenant with Abraham, was revoked. When the letter to the Hebrews speaks about the Law as a shadow (Hebrews 10:1), or about a covenant that is ready to disappear, then it is clearly about the covenant of Sinai through Moses, and even more precisely, about the sacrificial service, and not about the covenant with Abraham. Moreover, we have to take into account the historical context of the letter. Jerusalem at the time was under Roman occupation. The temple was destroyed, or was about to be destroyed. The believers found their situation in the land was the same as Abraham's: they too were strangers and sojourners in a land that was promised to them, but which was still under the occupation of other nations and other gods. Or they were in exile, outside the promised land of Israel and the beloved city of Jerusalem. The writer therefore calls on them to look forward to the realisation of the divine city and the temple, of which the prototype exists in heaven (cf. Exodus 25:9, Hebrews 8:5). All this, however, will find its realisation on earth when, finally, Jerusalem and Israel and the whole world will receive their original design as God intended.

In Romans 4, the emphasis lies on the faith of Abraham - the act of trusting in God was credited to him as righteousness (Romans 4:3; Genesis 15:6). He believed God on His word that He would grant him numerous offspring. That was even before he received circumcision as a seal of the righteousness of faith (Romans 4:11). Thus, he could become the father of all who believe, both Jews (the circumcised) and Gentiles (the uncircumcised). Immediately afterwards, Abraham once more received the promise of the land (Genesis 15:7). To this Paul alludes in Romans 4:13. The Hebrew word 'land' can also mean 'earth'. However, in Romans 4:13, it says "world". That is a transition that is also found elsewhere in the Jewish tradition. In an old midrash (a classical rabbinic Bible exposition, in this case the second-century Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael), it is said that "Abraham, our father, inherited this world and the coming world only through faith". In other words, the midrash spiritualises this promise too. But just as rabbinic thinking can take a spiritually high flight, and yet does not loose the ties to the concrete, the earthly, so it is with Paul.

JERUSALEM

Finally, a brief remark about Jerusalem. Paul speaks of "Jerusalem above" as opposed to "present Jerusalem" (Galatians 4:25). The same motif appears in Hebrews and in Revelation. Present Jerusalem – obviously, we have to think of Paul's own time – finds itself in a state of bondage. But that situation is not permanent. In the end, Jerusalem will be free. The heavenly Jerusalem does not stay in heaven, but comes down from heaven (Revelation 2I). And it does not remain hanging halfway in the sky, but it comes down onto the earth, to be the centre of the renewed earth under the renewed heaven.

CONCLUSION

In biblical perspective, therefore, there is no heaven without earth. There is no earth without Jerusalem. There is no Jerusalem without Israel, nation and land. And there is nothing that will endure without God being present with it. For "the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them..." (Revelation 21:3).

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THEME THE PROMISE OF THE LAND

Theological implications of the land promise

In 2018, Prof. Klaus Wengst (Germany) gave a lecture in which he reported how he had changed from a classical theologian to a friend of Israel. The title of his lecture was: "How I have changed - and what I hope for in terms of change in theology and church".¹

TOBIAS KRÄMER, C4I GERMANY

engst reported how in 1980 he read the treatise of Celsus against Christians (2nd century). He found out

that this treatise is directed against Christians and Jews. Celsus mocks both of them. The reason for this was the image of God. Celsus was a Greek thinker for whom God was by definition the highest and most perfect. He could only speak of God in a philosophical way: God is an infinite, eternal, impersonal, abstract being. But the Judeo-Christian faith speaks of God in such a way that a story is told: the story of God with Abraham and his descendants, the story of Israel and its Messiah. This was absurd for Celsus. What should God as a transcendent power have to do with the history of a single people? This approach is foreign to Greek philosophical thought and was simply ridiculous for Celsus.²

Blaise Pascal (17th century) puts it in a nutshell when he says that God is "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob - not the God of philosophers" (*Mémorial*). In other words, God is the God of Israel, not a philosophical thought-construct. One recognises God in the history of the Jewish people, in the history of salvation, not in the logical reflection on the utmost and highest. Through *Israel* we see God. And the promised land belongs to Israel like a mother belongs to her child. It is this special piece of land, on which God's promise rests, that God claims for himself and his purposes (Lev 25:23). This is unique.³

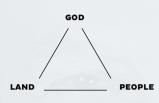
IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE LAND

God's history with Israel begins, quite remarkably, with the land. "Go out of your father's house," God says to Abraham, "into the land that I will show you" (Gen 12:1). In the beginning there is the land. This land (called Canaan, Israel, and later Palestine) has a destiny: It is the land for Israel - forever (Gen 13:15; 17:8; Ex 32:13; Isa 34:17; 60:21). And so God promises Abraham that he will become a great people and that this people will possess that land. So God wants to have a nation (people + land = nation). And this nation shall become the blessing of the world. This is God's plan with Israel (Gen 12:1-3). This goal can only be achieved if Israel is in its land. For only in the land can the people be one nation: the nation of God.

Through the promises to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Israel was chosen to be the people of God. Conversely, God has chosen to be the God of Israel (cf. Dt 7:6). Note this: In the time before Genesis 12, God was only the Creator of the world. But in the time after Genesis 12 he is now the God of Israel. Genesis 12 is therefore a turning point. Since that time, God has been in covenant with Israel, because he has bound himself to Israel. That is why God often compares his relationship with Israel with the marriage covenant (cf. Ezk 16; Hos 2). This covenant gives both sides an exclusive position: Israel becomes the people of God, God becomes the God of Israel. This act is theologically of great importance. Unfortunately, it is often not perceived.

3 I often think of the first time I went to Israel. I was a young Christian, and loved Jesus, but had no relation to Israel, I travelled to Israel only to visit a good friend. I had no spiritual expectations. But when I got off the plane, my first impression was, "The hand of God is on this land". I will never forget this experience.

So the triangle stands, which is of fundamental importance for biblical thinking. God has made Israel His people and Israel receives a gift for the wedding - the land. God plus people plus land. This triangle is indissoluble. Therefore God has an "allergic" reaction when you are against Israel, when you touch his people or divide his land (Zech 2:12; Joel 4:2). This can be compared to a husband defending his wife or property. So God watches over Israel. Therefore God is also the God of the land: It is *his* land, for *his* people.



ISRAEL'S EVENTFUL HISTORY

Abraham did not experience the fulfilment of the promises in his lifetime. It took centuries for Israel to become a great nation and to return to live in the Promised Land. Inbetween, there was the stay in Egypt, the Exodus, the desert time and the Mosaic covenant at Sinai. At Sinai, Israel was given the Torah.

4 This has not yet been fulfilled completely. It is a great miracle that Israel exists again as a state since 1948, that the Jews return to the land and that daily there are Jews who come to believe in Jesus. Today we live in the time when God is restoring his people as he promised through the prophets.

at Sinai. At Sinai, Israel was given the Torah. Through the Torah, the standards of God were revealed to Israel. Israel alone received the privilege of knowing what a life looks like that pleases God. Conversely, Israel itself was also measured by these standards. Israel often transgressed the commandments of God and experienced judgment. The strongest form of judgment was that Israel lost its status as a nation of God. That meant that Israel had to give back the promised land (the bridal gift of God!), and was "pulled out" of the land and scattered into the nations (e.g. 2 Chr 7:19-20).

God had threatened this judgment, and he fulfilled it. For centuries, the land was under foreign rule: Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Seljuks, Crusaders, Mamelukes, Ottomans, British. They all occupied the land, while a large part of Israel lived in the diaspora, far from home and far from the destiny of being a nation of God. The loss of home, property, security and community as a people was hard. Even harder was the loss of the temple and of life as a chosen people in the Promised Land. That was God's judgment. Thus, both the loss and the gift of the land are ways that God communicates. The breaking of the covenant leads to the loss of the land, while the obedience of Israel leads to being allowed to remain in the land. Judgment and grace manifest themselves in the possession of the land. In the end, God's grace is for his people.

But misunderstandings also threaten here. The loss of the land could be interpreted in such a way that God has rejected his people. This approach, which is the basis of replacement theology, completely ignores the Bible. Israel should understand the judgment only as a *punishment*, not as the end of God's choice of them (Jer 24:4-7). Israel's election remains forever, "for God does not regret his gifts and calling" (Rom 11:29). That is why God also proclaimed the greatest promises of salvation through the great prophets of judgment. One example is Jeremiah. In long passages, Jeremiah announces that God will bring Israel back from exile and "plant" them again in his country (Jer 30-33). In the middle of this scenario is the promise of the new covenant: God will write the Torah into the hearts of His people (Jer 31:31-34) so that Israel will be obedient from the heart and remain God's nation forever. The new covenant has the function of enabling Israel to remain in the land and finally live in its destiny to be the nation of God. This is salvation for Israel!4

Another misunderstanding hits God even harder. For one could understand the scattering of Israel in such a way that God is not capable of preserving his people. Through the scattering of Israel into all the world, God's name is desecrated among the nations. The nations mock Israel, and thereby, they mock God. That is why God brings his people back to his country. It is about the glory of God and the sanctification of His name among the nations (Ezk 36:19-25).

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So the loss of the land can be misunderstood in two ways:

I. the loss of Israel's identity as the people of God.

2. the loss of God's identity as the God of Israel to be the Lord of the whole world.

Both misunderstandings are to be excluded. Israel is the people of God and the God of Israel is the Lord of the world. Biblically, there is no doubt about this.

Much is at stake here. That is why God one day will bring Israel back to his country. Thus the nations will experience "that I am the Lord," says God the Lord (Ezk 36:23). The return of Israel shows that God is the Lord. Whether the God of the Bible is really God depends on Israel's return to the promised land. The land question is at the same time the question of God!⁵

ISRAEL AND ITS MESSIAH

So it is not surprising that Jesus announced the end of the judgment and thus promised the restoration of Israel. God does not fail, Israel does not fail and the Messiah will not fail either! Israel and its Messiah will come together. In the end, when the times of the nations come to an end, Israel will accept its Messiah and then the "kingdom for Israel" will also be restored (Acts 1:6; cf. Mt 23:37-39; Lk 21:24; Rom 11:26). Then the great prophecy of Isaiah 2:1-5 will be fulfilled, that the nations of the world will stream up to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel - what a tremendous perspective!

Here, if you think things through to the end, further questions arise:

I. Does the fulfillment of Isaiah 2 happen before or after the Second Coming of Jesus?

2. Is this mighty promise the end of history, or is there still something to come, for example the "new world"?

3. Will Israel still play its own role in the new (or renewed) world or will this world be a completely different world?

These questions shall not be discussed

here. But it is clear that Israel will arrive at its goal, and that this will happen substantially through the Messiah, Jesus.

OUTCOME

In 2012, the Protestant Church in Germany published a paper entitled "Promised Land? Land and State of Israel in Discussion". The authors try to show that the land promises are not about the land, but about the provision of God. The statement: God does not promise a concrete *land*, but full *provision* for his people Israel - and this provision can take place everywhere. Israel's election is recorded, but the destiny of the land is not.

However, the land question is theologically of far greater importance. It determines:

1. the concept of the holy nation Israel

2. God's destiny for the land

3. the particular territory that serves as an "indicator" for judgement or mercy

4. salvation for Israel (comprehensive restoration and redemption)

5. the destiny of the nation of Israel to become the blessing of the world.

But that is only one side. For the biblical image of God, the identity of God also depends on the land of Israel:

I. God's binding of himself to the nation of Israel

2. the faithfulness of God to his promises to the patriarchs

3. the glory of God to bring his people to their goal.

If Israel would stay on the sidelines, then God would also stay on the sidelines. But that will not happen. Absolutely not. God is approaching His goal.

The land question is not a minor matter. It is about nothing less than God, about the God of Israel, to which also the Gentiles have access through Jesus.

Translated by DeepL.

THEME THE PROMISE OF THE LAND

Promised Lands for Every Nation

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Many of my friends have said that "the silence on the land is deafening in the New Testament". Perhaps the truth is rather that the deafness of Western Christians to land in the New Testament makes it silent? Most tribes and language groups around the world value land much more highly than we do. I suggest that one important reason the nations are so determined to deny to Israel its promised land, is our lack of awareness that Israel's God has promised lands to our nations also.

JAMES E. PATRICK

his article traces the theme of 'promised land' through Scripture from beginning to end. First, Israel and all nations are given promised lands by God, after the pattern of the Garden of Eden. Second, the exile/death of Israel and their return/resurrection assisted by all nations, is promised by Moses and the prophets. Third, Messiah Jesus came at the appointed time spoken of by Daniel, to proclaim the final exile of Israel and to begin gathering all nations. They will help Israel to return, as the prophets said, ready for His own return to reign as emperor in Jerusalem. Fourth, the nations can learn from the patriarchs and from Israel's example how to live now, in the power of the Holy Spirit, preparing for our promised inheritance in Messiah.

GOD'S ORIGINAL PLAN FOR NATI-ONS TO INHERIT THEIR PROMISED LANDS BY FAITH

Before Adam and Eve sinned, the creation was "very good". We can see in Genesis 1–2 the original plan of God for the world. God told Adam and Eve to "multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (1:28). He began by planting a garden in Eden, small enough for Adam and Eve to rule over with God's help. He also spoke of their children leaving them and creating new families (2:24), which presupposes that they will also leave the Garden of Eden and plant new gardens. A river flowed out from its source in Eden in all four directions to water other lands, so every other garden would still receive its life from Eden. Thus, God's original purpose for creation includes nations each ruling over their own lands, all of them blessed by Eden. This is why we see that nations will still exist after Jesus returns, all of them blessed by Jerusalem (Revelation 5:9-10; 21:24-26; 22:2).

After the Flood, God planted humanity again in the land with Noah and his three sons. He repeated His command to "multiply and fill the earth", but to start with, the seventy nations refused to fill the earth. Instead, they built the city and tower of Babylon (Genesis 11:1-9). So God gave them each different languages to force them to separate and fill the earth. Even before this happened, though, Noah had already passed a law that Canaan's descendants in their future land would serve Shem and his descendants (9:26; 10:15-19). This is why Abram's father Terah, direct descendant of Shem, chose to leave Ur to go to the land of Canaan (11:31). When Abram finally came to Canaan, trusting God's promise, he found that the city of (Jeru)Salem had already been built, and was ruled by the 'King of Righteousness' who gave him a blessing (14:17-20). We therefore see the beginning of the age-old contest between man's city of Babylon and God's city of Jerusalem. It is not a coincidence that the ziggurat-temple of Babylon was shaped like a mountain, and Jerusalem is also a mountain city. Even the New Jerusalem will be a square-based pyramid or mountain (Revelation 21:16). The first Garden of Eden was a mountain (Ezekiel 28:13-16), which is why its river could flow in four directions. Babylon was a man-made Eden, but God had instead chosen the land of Canaan and the city of Jerusalem to be his new Eden, the source of life for the whole world (Isaiah 51:3; Ezekiel 36:35).

From the very beginning, God has prepared lands for people to live in, but they can only possess what legally belongs to them if they trust God. Adam was made outside the Garden and brought into it (Genesis 2:7-8, 15). Noah was brought back into the re-created earth by faith and obedience. Abram was given a covenant promise of the land of Canaan because he trusted God and did not take the land for himself (13:10-17; 14:21-15:21). Lot was also a legal heir of Shem, but lacking faith, he did not inherit. God also confirmed Abraham's land covenant to Isaac (26:1-6, 23-25) and then to Jacob (28:13-22; 35:1-15) only after they chose to obey His commands in faith. Their brothers were legal heirs too, but they did not inherit by faith. The whole nation of Israel after leaving Egypt could not possess Canaan until they were willing to trust and obey God (Numbers 13–14; Joshua 2–4), even though it was promised to them. This also applied to each tribe of Israel (Joshua 14; 17:14-18).

God told Israel that "the land is Mine;

for you are aliens and sojourners with Me" (Leviticus 25:23), but the Bible also says that "The earth is the LORD's, and all its fulness" (Psalm 24:1). He owns all the earth, and so He gives territories to every tribe and people group (Acts 17:26). In Deuteronomy 2, Israel was warned not to try to take any territory from Edom, Moab or Ammon, because God had given land to these nations (each also descended from Shem). In Amos 9:7, God says He led both the Philistines and Arameans in their own Exodus and Conquest, just like Israel. This is why He also punishes other nations for their sins, even if these are not against Israel (Amos 1-2; Jonah; Isaiah 13–21; 23; etc.). "When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel. For the LORD's portion is His people; Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance." (Deuteronomy 32:8-9) Every nation therefore has its own promised land, with Israel and its land as the prototype for every other nation. But this legal inheritance can only be possessed permanently in peace if they trust in God.

NATIONS THAT ENTER THE DEATH OF EXILE CAN BE RESURRECTED BY GOD'S SPIRIT

So far, we have seen how God's original plan was for every nation to inherit its own land by trusting Him, across the whole earth. But Adam and Eve were exiled from their Garden of Eden when they disobeyed God. Just as God warned Adam, they died on the day they sinned, by being separated from the source of both spiritual and physical life (Genesis 2:17; 3:22-24). Nations are also exiled from their lands when they disobey God, and being outside of their lands and cut off from God, they will inevitably die. Sodom was the first kingdom to die for its sin (Genesis 14:1-17; 18:16–19:29), but at that time Abraham negotiated a legal principle with the Judge of All the Earth. God agreed that any people group will be spared judgement if it has a minimum of ten righteous men (18:32; see Zechariah 8:23).

The Canaanites were expelled by Israel at the time of Joshua for their sins against God (Genesis 15:16; Deuteronomy 9:1-6). But God warned Israel that this would happen to them too if they broke God's laws (Leviticus 18:24-28). Eventually Israel did break the covenant of Moses, and their bones were scattered among the nations in exile, first exiled to Assyria and then to Babylon.

God promised to resurrect the nation of Israel from death

Yet God promised, even as early as Moses, to resurrect the nation of Israel from death. He would bring them back from exile in both a physical restoration to the land and a spiritual restoration to Himself (Deuteronomy 30:1-6). This is the same image used in Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (chapter 37): the exiled tribes of Israel/Ephraim and Judah will be resurrected, by the Spirit of God breathed into them like Adam, and will be placed back into their own land. The prophets speak about all nations suffering in great darkness and under the shroud of death (Isaiah 60:1-3; 25:6-8), so they need God's light to shine on them and save them and give them life (Isaiah 49:5-7; Joel 2:28-29).

Israel is described as God's "firstborn son" (Exodus 4:22; Psalm 80:27). This recognises all nations as brothers in the same human family, all descended from one man, Noah (Genesis 10; Acts 17:26). At a smaller scale, God also made Jacob/Israel a nation by giving him twelve sons who became twelve tribes (Genesis 49). The 'many tribes but one nation' of Israel can therefore be a pattern for us to understand how the many nations should function as one human family. For any nation to possess its whole land, each of its tribes must receive their portion of the land by faith. For all humanity to "fill the earth and subdue it", each nation must likewise receive its apportioned land by faith. This is why Abraham is described as the "heir of the world" in Romans 4:13. All lands are inherited by faith.

In Numbers 32 and the book of Joshua, we see how the two-and-a-half tribes east of the River Jordan could not inherit their land until they had helped the other tribes to conquer their territory. Even so, after Joshua, the tribes of Israel still had many Canaanite cities within their territories that they could not conquer (Judges 1:19-3:7). The conquest was only completed by King David, and the last Canaanite city to be conquered was the ancient holy city of Jerusalem (1Samuel 17:54; 2Samuel 5:1-12; 7:8-13). As Moses had prophesied, the temple built by Solomon was the sign that God's land was finally inherited in its entirety (Exodus 15:13-18). That is why Jerusalem became the focus of Israel's political and spiritual unity, where all the tribes went up to worship the LORD (Psalm 122).

After David and Solomon, however, the tribes of Israel broke apart into two nations, Israel/Ephraim and Judah, and both eventually went into exile for the sins of a specific king (Jeroboam I – 2Kings 17:21-23; Manasseh – 2Kings 21:10-15; 23:24-27). How then could they be resurrected as a nation in their land? The prophets realised that the sins of a king can bring exile/death to a nation, just like Adam, but in that case the faithful obedience of a king can resurrect a nation. Isaiah taught that the future son of David, God's Servant, would pay for the sins of His people Israel (God's blind Servant – Isaiah 42:10), credit them with His righteousness, and lead them back from exile into their land to reign over them for ever (Isaiah 49; 53–54). Those returning would not be just the southern tribes in Babylon, but also the northern 'ten lost tribes' (Ezekiel 37:15-28), who never returned during biblical times (Zechariah 10:3-12). Israel as God's Servant, fully restored by their King, will only then finally be able to bless all nations (Isaiah 55).

This even greater promise was already taught by Moses, who said that God would turn His favour to the nations instead of His own unfaithful people, to make Israel jealous (Deuteronomy 32:21, 43). Isaiah saw further that just as David had ruled over nations surrounding Israel, so the future Son of David would be raised like a banner to summon the nations, and become their rescuer and saviour too. Then with the help of these newly obedient nations, this anointed Servant would finally bring the tribes of Israel back into their land (Isaiah 11:10-12; 49:22-23; 55:1-5; 60-61). In this way, all nations will receive their promised inheritance together, just like all the tribes of Israel had to help each other possess their appointed territories together. At the end of this age, Jerusalem will again be the final city for the Prince of Peace to conquer (Zechariah 12 and 14). When David's Son builds His permanent temple-palace there, then all nations will gather to it to worship the Lord (Micah 4:1-8). That holy city will become the focus of unity for the world, the new Garden of Eden.

MESSIAH BEGAN THE PROCESS OF RESURRECTION AND "RESTORA-TION OF ALL THINGS"

Inspired by Isaiah's prophecy about Tyre in

That holy city will become the focus of unity for the world chapter 23, Jeremiah prophesied that Judah would also remain in Babylonian exile for only seventy years. Then God would restore them physically to their land and spiritually to Himself (Jeremiah 29:1-14). Near the end of the seventy years in Babylon, Daniel read this prophecy of Jeremiah and praved fervently that God would fulfil His promise (Daniel 9). While Daniel was praying, the angel Gabriel was sent to explain to him why the prophecy would not be completely fulfilled after just seventy years. Gabriel identified the seventy years as seventy sabbatical years, referring to the seventh year of rest after six years of agriculture (Leviticus 25). So after 490 years, Israel would be completely restored - ending sin, bringing in everlasting righteousness, and anointing the final sanctuary in Jerusalem (Daniel 9:24). Gabriel said that the Messiah would arrive in Israel after $_{483}$ years (7x7 + 7x62), but He would then "be cut off and have nothing". This would be followed by Jerusalem and its rebuilt temple being destroyed again, with war and exile (9:26). Then after an undetermined period of time, the "prince who is to come" will begin the final seven-year period. Half-way through it, he will stop temple sacrifices to God and set up an abomination of desolation, but at the end of the seven years he himself will be completely destroyed (9:27).

Jesus appeared publicly to Israel precisely when Daniel had prophesied, and He urged His followers to read and understand this prophecy of Daniel (Matthew 24:15), as Paul did also (2Thessalonians 2:1-5). Jesus knew, therefore, that He would "be cut off and have nothing", and soon afterwards the city and temple of Jerusalem would be destroyed. So He clearly prophesied His own death, and also the future destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (Luke 18:31-34; 19:11-28, 41-44; 21:5-24).

But Jesus also knew what the prophets said must happen before the end of the age, before that final seven years that leads into the "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:18-26). For one generation, Israel would be given a last chance to repent (AD 30 to AD 70 was a fortyyear generation, in the pattern of Numbers 14:26-35). Then Israel would be scattered again through all nations, as a full and final payment for all the righteous blood that was shed from creation onwards (Matthew 23:34-30). At the same time, those Jews who had believed Messiah's good news of salvation must carry it out to all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). When all nations had become "disciples" of redeemed Israel, then the "end of the age" would come, when the kingdom of God would finally be "restored to Israel", as a blessing to "all the families of the earth" (Matthew 24:14-15; Acts 1:3, 6-8; 3:25; Genesis 12:3; 26:4; 28:14). The "times of the nations" would be fulfilled, when all nations obey Israel's Messiah by helping the Jews return to govern Jerusalem (Luke 21:24). In that way, as Paul said, all Israel will be saved through mercy shown to the nations (Romans 11:25-27).

But the Messiah's mission to gather all nations had to start with Him regathering the scattered sheep of Israel. "The Lord GOD, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, 'Yet others I will gather to them, to those already gathered'." (Isaiah 56:8) Jesus echoed this passage when He said, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice, and they will become one flock with one shepherd" (John 10:16). The "other sheep" refers to both the Jewish Diaspora - the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" such as the Greek-speaking Jews who asked to see Him (John 12:20-24, 32; 7:33-36; Matthew 10:6; 15:24) - and also the nations (John 11:49-52). Jews living in the Diaspora throughout all nations usually tried to return to Jerusalem to celebrate the three annual feasts whenever they could, as Paul later did (Acts 20:16). This is why there were Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost "from every nation [and language] under heaven" (Acts 2:5-11). Jesus had ascended to God's right hand in heaven, and from heaven He poured out His Spirit on the scattered sheep of Israel in Jerusalem (or scattered bones, as Ezekiel 37 pictures

HE CHURCH

them). Soon He would lead them through the wilderness of the nations by His Spirit, as the "church in the wilderness", and gather to them other lost sheep of the nations, to make them all one flock with one shepherd (Ezekiel 20:33-44; Isaiah 63:7-14; Acts 7:38 – this is what the word "church" originally referred to).

But wandering in the wilderness is only a preparation for being brought back into the promised land. Israel would not be able to possess their promised land fully until all other nations had received their inheritance too. They must also be restored to a right relationship with God through the Messiah,

The nations must also be restored to a right relationship with God through the Messiah

to be able to live in their own lands in peace with God and with each other. So Jesus blessed His Jewish followers to "multiply and fill the earth", going out from Jerusalem as far as the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). When they did not go, like Noah's family after the Flood, Jesus scattered them with persecution (Acts 8:1-4; James 1:1; 1Peter 1:1, 17). But He also confronted the Jew who began this persecution, and appointed him as His special messenger to the nations. Paul became part of the first generation of Israel to receive the promised Holy Spirit as a pledge of their future inheritance - dwelling with God in their promised land (Ezekiel 37:24-27). But he turns from "we who were the first to hope in Messiah" to "you also", that is, the other nations who were also "sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:11-14; see also 2:11-13; 3:6). It was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Gentiles, just like He had filled the Jews at Pentecost, which persuaded the apostles that Jesus did want to bless every nation with their own promised land and relationship with God through Messiah (Acts 10:44-48; 15:7-9; Galatians 3:2-5).

Jesus described Jerusalem as "the city of the great king" (Matthew 5:35), quoting from Psalm 48:2. Psalm 47 explains even more clearly that "great king" means an emperor, the "king of all the earth" who "reigns over the nations". So Jesus looked forward to the time when He would reign as King of kings (Psalm 2; Revelation 11:15; 10:16), from His imperial city of Jerusalem. He therefore rode into Jerusalem on a donkey - the prophetic sign of the King who will "speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (Zechariah 9:9-10), while also restoring all twelve tribes of Israel from exile "because of the blood of My covenant with you" (0:11–10:12). Jesus then chose to ascend to heaven from the Mount of Olives opposite Jerusalem, rather than from the mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16), because Scripture promises His return in the same way to the same place (Acts 1:9-12; Zechariah 14:1-7; Daniel 7:13-14). When He comes, He will rescue Jerusalem from invading international armies, and then reign as "king over all the earth". At that time, "living waters will flow out of Jerusalem" in different directions, just as they did from the Garden of Eden (Zechariah 14:8-9). From then on, the survivors of all nations will "go up from year to year to worship the King"

in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles. Every nation that does so will receive a blessing in their own promised land (Zechariah 14:16-19; Isaiah 19:18-25).

OUR RESPONSE NOW, AS NATIONS CARRYING THE PROMISE OF IN-HERITANCE IN MESSIAH

If this is our "living hope" (1Peter 1:3-12), how should we in the nations behave while we wait for Messiah's return? Like Israel, we have been enlightened by the truth of Messiah, and have been allowed to take part in Israel's promise of the Holy Spirit, who guarantees a future inheritance for us too. But we face the same temptation as did the first generation of Israel's believers in Messiah. They remained in Jerusalem and built a big, powerful and respected congregation. But Jesus had told them that when they received power through the Holy Spirit, they must "go and make disciples of all nations". Only in that way would the kingdom ultimately be restored to their nation.

Like that first generation, we will be tempted to inherit now by trying to hold on to property and good reputation in our lands, rather than trusting Messiah to give us a permanent inheritance when he returns to grant us a "sabbath rest" after our labours (Hebrews 10:32-39; 13:13-14; 3:7-4:11). As followers of Messiah among the nations, we long to see the kingdom of God established in our own nation, and so we start to build good congregations in which God lives by His Spirit. Like the twelve apostles, we carry conditional promises that in the resurrection we will be granted real authority to rule with Messiah over our cities and tribes (Matthew 19:27-30; Luke 19:11-28; Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:9-10). But we must be careful not to try to take our inheritance before the appointed time.

Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are good examples for us. They all lived in the actual land God had promised to them as an inheritance, but they were treated as foreigners in their own land. They chose to live in tents rather than to build cities for themselves, because they were waiting for permanent dwellings in the land, built by God Himself at the appointed time (Hebrews 11:8-16). They knew that their country would be a gift from heaven - a "heavenly country" rather than a man-made country, Jerusalem rather than Babylon. Even when they died, they made sure that their bones were buried in the land promised to them, awaiting bodily resurrection and inheritance (Genesis 46:4 + 49:29-50:13; 48:21-22 + 50:24-26 + Exodus 13:19 + Joshua 24:32; Luke 13:22-30 + 20:37-38). But any who tried to take their inheritance early, actually lost it in the future (Genesis 34; 49:5-7; Joshua 13:32-14:5; 19:1-9). The Church must not seek to take secular power in our nations before the appointed time when Messiah returns to reign (I Corinthians 5:12–6:0a).

However, it is not enough to "live in tents" within our promised land. We will never inherit our own lands fully until every other nation is ready to inherit. Until we have made disciples of "all the nations", from all "tribes and peoples and languages" as well as Israel (Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20; Revelation 7:3-10), the end of the age will certainly not come. Even ten believers are enough to save their whole people group from destruction. So the Lord Jesus, who will return to judge the world and punish unbelievers, is "patient toward you, not wanting any [nation] to perish but for all [nations] to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10). If we do not go to the ends of the earth as we have been commanded, like workers sent into the ripe harvest fields, we will surely be scattered through persecution as other generations have been. But when all nations are ready, our great Joshua/Jesus will bring us back in to inherit our own promised lands. Then we will receive all blessings flowing out to us from Israel, from Jerusalem, where our "Great King" will reign for ever.

