

THEME

Exile and Restoration

Your alloted Inheritance (Psalm 105:1-11) Rev. Jaap de Vreugd

The Inheritance of God. How is God's 'Inheritance' arranged? Tobias Krämer

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Colophon

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



Exile and Restoration

KEES DE VREUGD

Editor keesdevreugd@cvi.nl or over two thousand years, a large part of the Jewish people have been exiled from the homeland God had promised them. In our time, we are privileged to see many Jews return to their ancient homeland. The foundation of the State of Israel in 1948 was a landmark in history, enabling the restoration of the Jewish people in their homeland. Is the exile now going towards its termination?

Both exile and restoration of Israel raise many Biblical questions. In this volume, we try to deal with some of them, centered on what the New Testament has to tell us about exile and restoration. A very special and profound approach is taken by Rev. Edjan Westerman (author of "Learning Messiah"), who asks if one could Biblically speak of the exile of the Divine Presence. His thoughts on this question reveal deep Biblical-theological insights, as well as they reflect Jewish understandings of God, Israel and exile.

I hope and believe that the contents of this journal will be usefull for you in your ministry. Please pray for the restoration of Israel and the coming of the Messiah.

Your alloted Inheritance

Psalm 105:1-11

REV. JAAP DE VREUGD

"To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion of your inheritance." (Psalm 105:11)

> "For all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring for ever." (Genesis 13:15)



his is what Scripture is saying. It can't be any clearer than that:
Canaan is given to the children of Abraham as an allotted inheritance. It is interesting to see that the entire psalm is focused on the promise of the land (verse II) and, seeing that the Everlasting One has never changed His mind about that, it is still valid today!

SOLUTION

The politicians of the world are wrestling with this, and the wrestling is not limited to the political sphere; even in our churches, discussions about the Promised Land regularly flare up. The solution to all the problems in the Middle East, according to the churches and the world (generally speaking), is the creation of a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel in the so-called occupied areas. You can even go further, if you believe the reports of the Arab organisations for example, to say that it would also solve many more problems, like the problems of tension between the Arabs and the western world.

IDEOLOGY

In this vision, Israel is the cause of all the big problems in the world. Who wouldn't be happy with a final solution? If Israel could only compromise, the earth will become like paradise. Those who oppose the solution of the creation of two states, are soon blamed by their counterparts to be opposed to peace, and what is worse, supporters of the 'Greater Israel Ideology' which seems to be something horrifying. The word 'ideology' speaks volumes. It is what you like to call thoughts that are not your own, to portray them as negative and dangerous. You have to watch out for ideologies. I won't hide the fact that I have great difficulty with the two-state solution. I just can't see why, in addition to a large number of Arab states with an immense territory, there is a need to form another small Arab (mini) state, right in the middle of the land that was promised to the tribes of Israel. There has never before in all of history been a Palestinian state; there has only been talk about a Palestinian people from about fifty years ago, and there is much to say historically and definitely biblically about the 'Greater Israel Idea'.

'GREATER ISRAEL IDEA'

Historically, the Balfour Declaration issued by the British war cabinet in November 1917, favouring the establishment of a national home in Palestine for the dispersed Jewish nation, was incorporated by the Allied Powers into their official San Remo Resolution in April 1920. As for the indigenous people themselves, on 3rd January 1919, Dr Chaim Weizmann, as the leader of the Zionists, and Emir Feisal of Hejaz representing the Arabs, signed an agreement determining that Palestine, west of the Jordan, would be a Jewish state, next to an Arab state east of the Jordan. In fact, the Mandate for Palestine that was entrusted to Great Britain by the League of Nations from 1920 onwards, originally had all of Palestine - meaning both sides of the river Jordan - in mind for the formation of the Jewish national home. The 'Greater Israel Idea' therefore is nothing other than remembering past agreements, which have excellent documentary evidence politically, historically and geographically. But what happened?

The land is the land of hope and fulfilment

DIVISION

Two times in recent history, the Promised Land has been carved into pieces, despite former agreements and commitments. The first time was in 1922, when a decision was made to separate the mandated territory of Palestine into a Jewish part and an Arab part, with the river Jordan as the border; the biblical 'Transjordan' was cut off from the Promised Land in favour of the future Arab kingdom of Jordan. The second time it happened was in the partition plan of the United Nations in 1947; even the 23% of the land remaining for the Jews west of the Jordan was itself divided up into Jewish and Arab sections.

HUMILIATING DEFEAT

As we know, the Jewish community agreed, but the Arab world refused to agree and in 1948 attacked the young nation with great force. The war was a humiliating defeat for the Arab world, as were the subsequent wars the Arab world forced upon Israel. In the 1967 war, the areas taken over by the Arabs of Jordan in 1948 fell into Israeli hands, up to the river Jordan as originally granted for the Jewish homeland by the League of Nations. From that time on, those areas have been regarded as 'occupied territory'. But how can a promised territory be an 'occupied' territory?

BIBLICAL DATA RESOURCES

This leads me to biblical motives. Biblically speaking, there is no doubt that the disputed areas form the heart of the land that was promised to Abraham. One can dispute the borders of the Promised Land; there are several biblical data resources available on that topic. But there can be no difference of opinion about the fact that Judea and Samaria are the biblical core territories of the Promised Land. God determined this, that His land would be included in His Covenant for Israel, an essential part of His Salvation plan for the whole world.

'JUDENREIN'

In my opinion the carving into pieces of the land of God does not fit His plan. And I honestly shudder at the fact that in the 'two-state solution' this very heart of the biblical territory would have to become 'Judenrein' or free of Jews. In addition, such an Arab state would pose an enormous safety risk for Israel, given

the unmistakable objectives of the Arab-Islamic world – the gradual dismantling of the State of Israel. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind about the last statement.

It is only natural to think that the land of Israel is the 'better country'

'ALL OF PALESTINE'

Time and again, the Arab leaders have indicated their ultimate goal: the 'liberation' of all of 'Palestine'. Israel would have to disappear in favour of an Arab state, which obviously would be of Islamic character. And what would be the fate of the Jews inhabiting such a state? I will leave that to your imagination, because it will not become reality.

LAND OF INHERITANCE

As Joseph learned, holding on to God's promises to him despite his experience of prison, so also it is true for Israel today: "the word of the LORD tested him" (Psalm 105:19). In the face of these current threats, denying to Israel the land of inheritance God promised to them, the words of the Psalmist must still resound today: "O seed of Abraham, His servant, O sons of Jacob, His chosen ones! He is the LORD our God; His judgements are in all the earth. He has remembered His covenant for ever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations." (Psalm 105:6-8)

Rev. Jaap de Vreugd is a retired minister in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, and a former chairman of Christians for Israel Netherlands, and former board member of Christians for Israel International.

How is God's 'Inheritance' arranged?

"...And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ." (Romans 8:17) aul says something entirely normal: the children are the heirs of their parents. That is the case all over the world. Christians are children of God. They have God as their Father. So, they are heirs of God. And since Christ is their "big Brother", they are at the same time fellow heirs with Christ. Together with Jesus, they inherit what God the Father has to pass. That is expressed in Romans 8:17. What is meant by that, though? What do you, dear reader, imagine this inheritance to be?

THE INHERITANCE OF THE COM-MUNITY OF JESUS

In the New Testament, there is much to inherit of God: eternal life, the Holy Spirit, redemption, several different blessings. The inheritance is manifold. The real inheritance in fact is the Kingdom of God². God has prepared it for the righteous, but they will receive it only in the end of days: "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!" (Matthew 25:34) We still have to wait for this. But God is already paying out one part of the inheritance. For, as a 'down payment' for the inheritance, God has given his children the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, God is already establishing His rule and He will complete it in the end of days. So, Christians already have a foretaste how it will be one day in God's kingdom.

ISRAEL'S INHERITANCE - GOD'S INHERITANCE

Now, if we were Jews and deeply rooted in the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament, we would think differently. For the word inheritance (Greek: klēros/kleronomía, Hebrew: nahalāh/gōrāl) appears there in differing contexts. Two aspects should be highlighted:

 God promised the land of Israel (Canaan/Palestine) to the people of Israel. That is the land, which is today again the homeland of

the State of Israel. This land is Israel's inheritance. Behind this is the thought that God is Israel's "Father", who gives His child an inheritance (Jeremiah 3:10). This is clearly stated in Numbers 26:52-56: "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Among these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names. To the larger group you shall increase their inheritance, and to the smaller group you shall diminish their inheritance; each shall be given their inheritance according to those who were numbered of them." That is not to say that the other nations are not important to God. On the contrary. While God limits the land for His people Israel, this leaves room for other nations, who also receive their inheritance. In this way, all nations can live together in peace.5

to think that the land of Israel is the 'better country'

2. God sees Israel – nation and land (!) – as His personal inheritance. Jeremiah 10:16 says: "For the Maker of all is He, And Israel is the tribe of His inheritance." Israel is God's possession anyway. Israel belongs to God personally. In other places, sometimes the people, and sometimes the land is presented as God's 'inher-

itance'. That is why the nations of the world are punished, when they attack Israel, God's inheritance: "For behold, in those days [...], I will gather all the nations [...]. Then I will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; and they have divided up My land" (Joel 3:1-3). So you can say: the nation Israel is God's inheritance, His possession, therefore (Deuteronomy 32:8-0!). Nobody should dare touch it!

Now, who is right? The Christians, who appeal to their inheritance that is promised to them in the New Testament? Or the Jews, to whom in the Old Testament a different inheritance is promised? Or even both? Before I answer this question, it should be checked whether the inheritance of Israel can also be found in the New Testament.

ISRAEL'S INHERITANCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Hebrews 9:15 says: "Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." Here, the author builds on the Old Testament covenant theology, that is well-known in Israel circles. Let us recall:

- God promises Abraham a nation and a land, to bless the world through them. That is the covenant of Abraham (Genesis 12). This promise contains the destiny and the spiritual task of the nation Israel.
- God wants His nation to be a holy nation. Therefore, He gives Israel the Torah. If Israel keeps the Torah, then it will be God's possession and receive His blessing. That is the covenant of Moses or Sinai (Exodus 19). Israel, however, often breaks the covenant. The

For Israel, the eternal inheritance promised is the land

- consequence is judgment, even the loss of the land. Has God's plan with Israel failed?
- 3. Not at all! God promises his people a new covenant. The new covenant implies, that God one day will forgive the sins of His people, and will inscribe the Torah in the heart of Israel. The judgment will end, Israel will return to its land and forever be God's nation (Jeremiah 30-33). Israel reaches its destiny!

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews builds on this verse, stressing that the new covenant has come into existence through Jesus, the Messiah of Israel: "Christ, the mediator of a new covenant". What for? That "those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance". What is meant by this? For Israel, the eternal inheritance promised is the land. The land, that God had promised already to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That means: through Jesus, Israel enters the new covenant and is restored as a nation to the promised land. That is Israel's inheritance, as the prophets have always told.

Another important verse is **Galatians 3:15-18**. Paul says here: "God has granted to Abraham [the inheritance] by means of a promise" (verse 18). Even the law, which was

given later, does not change anything to that. For once given is given. The promises given to Abraham are valid. However, what was it that was promised to Abraham? The answer is

found in Genesis 12:1-3: "Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

is not only
the king
of Israel,
but also
the king
of the world

- Jews will point at verses 1-2: the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must receive a land and become the nation of God as a blessing to the world. That is their inheritance. Messianic Jews will say that this promise will be fulfilled through Jesus. Jesus is the Messiah, who will restore his people. They are right.
- Christians will point at verse 3: through Abraham, all humankind must be blessed. That is the inheritance of all who believe. Christians will say, that this promise was fulfilled by Jesus Christ. For through Jesus, the blessing of Abraham came to the nations (Galatians 3:14; Ephesians 1:3). They are right.

Stemming from Abraham, Israel has the promise to become God's people, and the nations have the prospect of inheriting blessing. In my view, both promises are contained in Galatians 3:15-18. Both of them belong togeth-

er, complement each other and are realized through Messiah Jesus.

In Romans 15:8, Paul has affirmed the connection between Israel's inheritance and her

Messiah: "Christ has become a servant to Israel to make God's promises true. This proves, that God is faithful to the promises that He has given to the fathers" (trans-T.K.). This lation means: Jesus is the way for Israel to finally take the land (the inheritance of Israel) in possession. This thought is not new. Because every child in Judaism knows that the Messiah has the task to gather and restore Israel. Paul

only says here what is obvious.

Summarizing one can say: as God's firstborn Son, Jesus is the first heir, who distributes the inheritance to His fellow heirs (Hebrews 1:2; Romans 8:17). In this, everyone receives the portion that is intended for him.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS HERITAGE OF MESSIAH: GLOBAL DIMENSIONS

The Messiah Jesus, however, is not only the king of Israel, but also the king of the world. His inheritance is not just Israel, but all nations of this earth. This universal understanding of the inheritance is already in the Old Testament in view. In Psalm 2, God says to His Messiah: "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession" (verse 8). The Messiah will establish his rule not only in Israel, but extend it over all the earth. For the world is his inheritance (cf. Daniel 2 and 7). This thought is obvious for the authors of the New Testament.

Therefore, the New Testament usually speaks in universal terms about the kingdom of God, yet without denying Israel's promises.

When Jesus will come again, He will redeem the world and give it to those, whom God will grant entrance in His kingdom. In this regard, Matthew 5:5 is interesting: "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit ten gen" Two translations are possible here: 'the land', or, 'the earth'. Jews would rather think of the land, of their land, while the worldwide community of Jesus would look forward in joy to inherit the whole earth. Both of them are in line with Biblical promises.

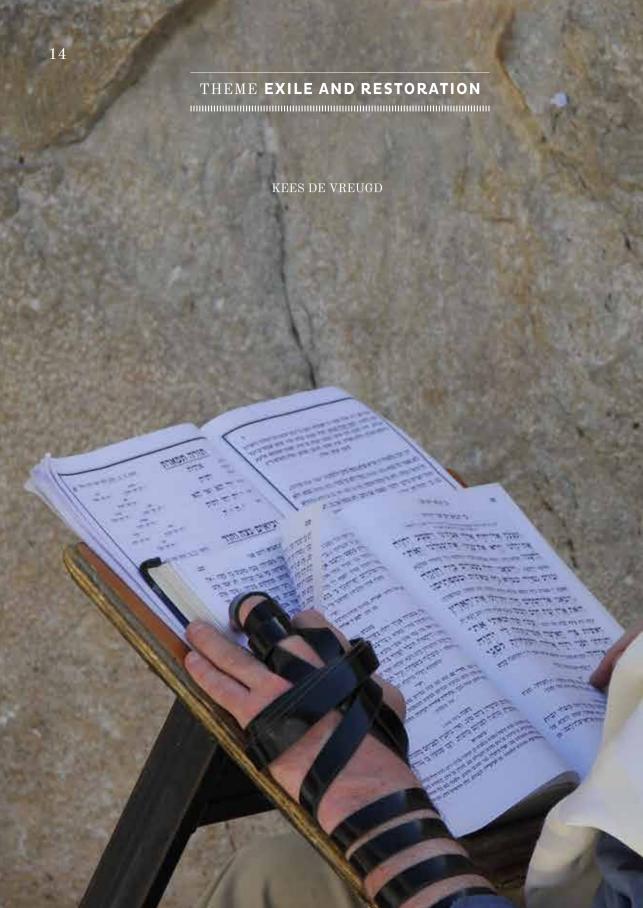
When will this be? The answer is simple:

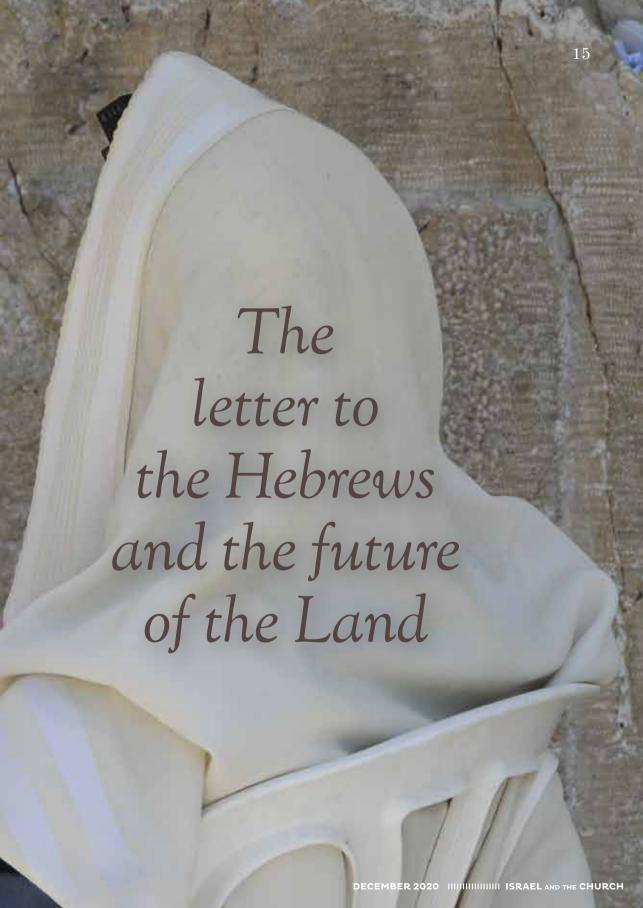
when Jesus will come again. Then, He will restore the kingdom for Israel (Acts 1:6!). And He will extend the kingdom of God over all the earth. This is described in detail in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. The Messiah Jesus will first 'clean up' thoroughly. He will deliver the earth from sin, devil, death and transience and so put the world in order. When this will be finished, Jesus will turn over the kingdom to God. Then, God will be "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). Then, everybody will have his inheritance and everything will be good. For Israel and for the nations. For all people who are in God's kingdom. Forever.

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NOTES

- ¹ Matthew 19:29; Marc 10:17; Luke 18:18; James 2:5; Ephesians 1:11-18; Titus 3,7; Hebrews 1:14; Revelation 21:4-7
- ² Cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 15:50; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5; James 2:5
- ³ Romans 8:16-17+23; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14
- ⁴ For the division of the land, cf. also Numbers 18:20-26; 36:1-12; Joshua 19:49-51; Judges 2:6. The land shall eternally belong to Israel, Genesis 17:8; Exodus 32:13; Isaiah 60:21.
- Numbers 34:1-15; Jeremiah 12:14-15; Acts 17:26. Cf. also Deuteronomy 19:14. In other contexts, the concept of inheritance can also be applied to spiritual realities (e.g. Deuteronomy 10:9; Isaiah 54:17). Therewith, a spiritual understanding of the heritage is prepared that can be found in the New Testament.
- 6 I Kings 8:51; Psalm 33:12; 68:10; 74:2; Jeremiah 16:18
- The situation is the same in Ephesians I. God has blessed the believers "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (verse 3). For Messianic Jews, this obviously implies the land, too, that is a part of this blessing, but destined for Israel.
- This is also true with regard to Matthew 21:43. There, Jesus says: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it." That is why some think that Israel will not enter the kingdom of God. But this is a misunderstanding. Jesus is addressing the spiritual leaders of Israel, not the entire people (verse 23). The kingdom of God will be taken away from the leaders. It will be given to a different 'people', a people 'producing the fruit of it'. In my opinion, 'people' here means a quantity of a higher order, not a different nation like Italy, China or Peru. The believers in Jesus are meant = the new humankind in the kingdom of God = the one new man of Jews and gentiles (Ephesians 2). Obviously, the people of the Jews also belong to the new mankind, for finally "all Israel" will be saved (Romans 11:26). The new mankind, however, will not exist of just one nation, but still of many peoples. Revelation 21:3: "He will dwell among them, and they shall be His peoples." So, in the kingdom of God, there are Israel and the nations. And they all bow their knees for Jesus, love Israel and worship the God of Israel. Only then, there will be peace (Isaiah 2:2-4).





"But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them."

(Hebrews 11:16)

"For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come." (Hebrews 13:14)

he letter to the Hebrews seems to be one of the most "spiritual" and elevated documents of the New Testament, as if all attention is shifted from this earthly reality to the heavenly hope. Moreover, it would seem as if the Old Testament has become obsolete and with this, the role of Israel. Yet, even in the verses cited above, we might discern a hint of the opposite, even a firm hope for the establishment of God's kingdom on a renewed earth, in the city of the Great King.

CITY

In both verses, the word "city" is notable. Is the "city which is to come" (13:14) the same as the city which God has prepared for the fathers (11:16), who died in hope? In Hebrews 11, a remarkable feature of Abraham is the fact that he is living in the promised land, while expecting the city which has foundations. Though he was actually living in the land, he sojourned there as a stranger, and he was still expecting the fulfilment of the promises.

Earlier, in Hebrews 4, the author portrays the people of Israel as having entered into the

land, but not into the promised "rest" of God. The writer concludes: "So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4: 9). Is that because the land does not provide this rest, or because the people were not yet qualified to receive the rest?

ABRAHAM

There seems to be a parallel and a contrast between Abraham in chapter II and the people of Israel in chapter 4. Both Abraham and the Israelites did not receive the full fulfilment of the promise of the land, even though they both actually lived in it. But while Abraham is hailed for his faith, the Israelites under Joshua are rebuked for their disobedience. Nevertheless, even their disobedience prompts God to fix "a certain day, that is, "Today," for those who hear the preaching of the Gospel and come to believe.

Abraham is an example of those who received the promise and lived by their faith. Yet, he did not receive the fulfilment of the promise. Does that mean that the promise has become obsolete? Or that the promise is

not to be taken literally? What, then, did God promise? Only the sabbath rest (chapter 4), or even the land as the firm ground for the fulfilment of the promise?

AS AN ALIEN

Let us have a closer look to how the letter to the Hebrews describes Abraham's situation. First of all, it is said that Abraham obeyed in faith when he was called to go away to the place he would receive for an inheritance. It is by the same faith, that he lived as an alien in the land of promise. He lived there, but he did not possess it. The implication of these two facts together would be that his descendants would inherit and possess the land, while

Abraham only lived there in tents. However, it is remarkable that the promise itself is said to be the content of the inheritance. Isaac and Iacob were fellow heirs of the same promise. They inherited the promise that they, or their descendants, would possess the land. They, too, lived there in tents. And Jacob eventually went to live in

Egypt. Only his descendants would return to the land to inherit it.

Again, would this imply that the promise is not to be understood in a literal sense? In other words, that it is not about actually living in the actual land, but about a different way of living in a metaphoric land, in a heavenly one? What is meant by a heavenly land, and why is this land called so?

FAITH AND HOPE

An analysis of the passages Hebrews 11:8-10 and 13-16 might throw light on these questions. Let us take verses 8-10 first. As in the sequence of the entire chapter II, these verses speak about the faith, that inspired Abraham's acts. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for" (Hebrews 11:1). The Greek word pistis (faith) first and foremost means trust and faithfulness. Verse 8 states that Abraham went to a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, though he did not know where he was going. He went in faith, i.e. he trusted God.

Verse 9 then states that he has actually lived in the land of promise. This verse also explains his mode of living there. He lived there as an alien. Why? Because the land was still possessed and ruled by the Canaanites (Genesis 12:6) and the Amorites (Genesis 15:16).

The land

is the land

of hope

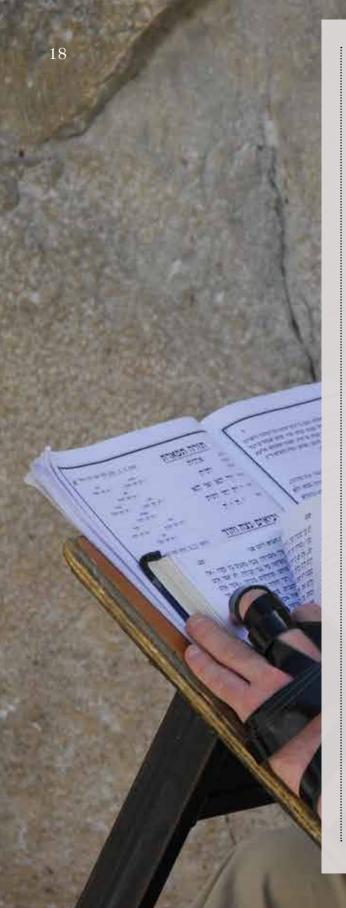
and

fulfilment

The land of promise suggests a temporary dwelling, as opposed

to living in a firm house in a city 'with foundations'.

Abraham's faith is further qualified in verse 10 as his expectation that God will build a city for him. So Abraham's life is characterized both by being underway, living in tents, and the expectation that this is only temporary, and that he will live in a city in the promised land. But it is God who will build that city, just as it was God, who called him to go out. So we see Abraham going and living in the land in a temporary way, namely in tents, as a sojourner, trusting that God will change his temporary condition by building a city, in the land that He promised. The land is the con-



stant factor, whereas the conditions of living in the land are subject to change. Moreover, the fact that Abraham was actually living in the land, was the ground for his expectation that God would build him a city. The land is the land of hope and fulfilment.

Obviously, Abraham's conditions reflect the situation the first hearers of the letter found themselves in. Regardless whether the letter is to be dated before or after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, they faced Roman oppression in the land, and had not yet seen the full deployment of the reign of Messiah. Just as Abraham, they were living by faith and expectation.

We may conclude, then, that in verses 8-10 the promised land and the expected city are concrete realities on earth. Is that also the case in verses 13-16?

HEAVEN AND THE EARTHLY RE-

Verses 13-16 of Hebrews II portray the matriarchs and patriarchs as strangers and exiles on the earth, in search for a country for their own. That is not the country from where they had departed on their way to the promised land. They could have returned to their native land, but they did not (verse 15). That already implies, that they were waiting for the promise to be fulfilled in the land in which they were living as strangers and exiles (verse 13). Note, that the Greek word gē, like the Hebrew 'erets, can mean both 'land' and 'earth'. So we should keep in mind the possibility of translating "that they were strangers and exiles in the land".

Since they were actually living in the land of Israel and did not think of returning to their land of origin, it is only natural to think that the land of Israel is the "better country" of verse 16. This is the heavenly country they were desiring. There are a lot of parallels in Jewish tradition that describe the land of Israel as a heavenly country. But let us confine ourselves to a Scripture, that is closely re-

lated to the other great theme of the letter to the Hebrews, the tabernacle. Moses was told by God to make the tabernacle after the model God had showed him on the mountain (cf. Exodus 25:40). Apparently, there is a heavenly original, that finds its counterpart on earth.

The other parallel line of thought concerns Jerusalem. In Judaism, the thought is widespread that there is a Jerusalem on earth, and a Jerusalem above (cf. Galatians 4:26; Revelation 21). The Jerusalem above is both the origin and the destiny of the earthly Jerusalem. We are 'only' waiting for the present Jerusalem to answer to its heavenly destiny.

Third, it might be relevant that in Second Temple Judaism, it was common, in order to avoid mentioning the Name of God, to speak of Heaven instead. In the Gospel of Matthew, the expression 'Kingdom of Heaven' means 'Kingdom of God'. In Revelation 21:2, we see it side by side: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."

These concepts might provide a background for understanding Hebrews II:16. Taken together, they imply that there is a heavenly reality, that corresponds to the reality on earth as its origin and pattern. While this correspondence may be obstructed through the reality of sin, in time it will be restored again. Abraham and the other patriarchs desired for the present situation of the land to change into the divinely promised reality. God will build the city He has prepared for them in the land He has promised them. But it is in this concrete land, on this concrete earth.

TIME OF TRANSITION

Meanwhile, the present time of sojourning is really a transition period. And through the heavenly sacrifice of Jesus as the high priest in heaven, followers of Jesus already experience the reality of the heavenly things to come.

It is only natural to think that the land of Israel is the 'better country'

"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem..." (Hebrews 12:22). In the end, there will be a "Yet once more" (Hebrews 12:26-27). It is a time, that God "will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven," so that the things that cannot be shaken remain. Creation will be freed from decay. And God will establish His unshakable kingdom. This is the city which is to come (Hebrews 13:14). The present city, in its conditions of foreign occupation and rebellion against God, will not last. But Jerusalem will be a city that continually offers up a sacrifice of praise to God.

Kees de Vreugd is a theologian and editor of Israel and the Church.



This article deals with the given that our understanding of the faithfulness of God (toward Israel) confronts us with our understanding of God Himself. The measure in which we have learned to understand God's self-revelation - as given to us in Scripture - enables us or hinders us in our understanding of God's faithfulness toward His people, and per consequence also in the understanding of God's faithfulness toward the whole of His creation, including ourselves.

Focusing in this article on the exile and return of the Shekhina² gives us an opportunity to understand the interrelatedness of our view of God and our understanding of His faithfulness.

This again has a bearing on the manner we look at the actual history of His people Israel.

ACTUALITY AND THEOLOGY

write this article in May 20103, in the center of Jerusalem, on the sixth floor, with our balcony overlooking the city, with a view on the Mount of Olives. There, I experienced together with the whole of Israel sorrow, remembering both the Shoah, and all fallen soldiers and terror victims. Here, I followed the news about the many hundreds of rockets hitting Israel anew from Gaza. Here I am sharing in the Jewish life of this city. And here I also meet on a daily basis men, women and children, whose lives have been seriously affected by the brokenness of this world - also an uttermost painful experience of Israel and the world not yet being fully redeemed.

The reason of mentioning the above is that it all is in some way connected to the exile of the *Shekhina*, which is the theme of this article. It also could be said that this all is in some way related to the Mount of Olives - visible from here - as a place of Divine 'movement activity,' - in going and coming⁴ - although this might seem strange to us because of our limited Christian perception of that specific place.

Let's start with this last point: in Christian theology the Mount of Olives is above all the mountain from which Jesus gloriously entered Jerusalem, and later was taken up in heaven, and the mountain also where He will

triumphantly return. These aspects have to do with 'victory' and carry associations of a more or less triumphant nature. The mountain then is or will be a place of victorious Divine acting. And it is this line of interpretation that has overshadowed all other aspects that there are to this place.

For yes, there is a totally different side to this mountain also, bringing with it a different line of theological evaluation of history, bearing even on our experience of the actuality of day-to-day life, here in Jerusalem, and elsewhere.

THE MOUNT OF LEAVE-TAKING AND PARTING IN SORROW

Lying eastward of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives formed the threshold to the desert, situated between Jerusalem and the Jordan River. This mount so 'saw' sorrowful partings happen. David, fleeing Jerusalem for his rebellious son Absalom, made there his first stop.

Ezekiel saw in his visions how the Presence of the LORD - the *Shekhina* - left the Temple, with all that this implied, and sat itself on the Mount of Olives. Looking back, as it were, to His House that He just had abandoned and which would suffer destruction. Later, the people would follow into exile, passing this mountain.⁵

In a striking parallel to this vision of Ezekiel, we see Jesus leaving the House of God, thereby finishing His actions and words in the Temple, and setting Himself on this very mountain. Overlooking the Temple and city, He speaks solemnly about the hard times that will come for the people.6 He parts in sorrow with the Temple and the city, as He had wept there over her a few days earlier. The mountain of His weeping is therefore also the mountain of His leaving. This place of honor-bestowing by God (i.e. Jesus' exaltation to heaven) is simultaneously also a place of entering into a dishonoring exile, being not welcomed by the whole of the people also.

His birth as Mary's son - His 'enfleshment'7 within the Jewish people - already made Him share too in the life of the people that had not yet returned fully from exile.8 But also His death has an exilic aspect. It can be interpreted as the entering of this Firstling from Israel into the darkness of the Day of the LORD, implying entering the

deepening of the (still existing) exile, in entering the deepest form thereof in death.

Also, even His ascension can be understood to have a leave-taking aspect that is in line with the sorrowful partings mentioned above. Besides the honor-bestowing aspect, it can simultaneously be seen as in line with the going into exile of David, and that of the Presence of the LORD, and as the consequence and seguel of Jesus' own taking leave from the Temple.

The Mount of Olives therefore has an exile aspect to it, with regard to both the people of God, and God and His Presence Himself. And since the feet of the Messiah have not yet victoriously returned there9, this exile aspect of this mountain should also mold our thinking. It is a place that confronts us with the (going into) exile of the Shekhina - the exile of the Presence of God. And when this exile in some way still is a present reality - as is my opinion-, then this fact has direct bearings on our knowledge of God, and therefore on our knowledge of His faithfulness.

THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD AND THE WAYS OF HIS PEOPLE

The great privilege that Israel is granted in the Exodus is that the LORD Himself leads the way. The Pillar of Cloud and the Pillar of Fire, it is the Presence of the LORD that accompanies, guards and guides His people.10 Following His mighty revelation and Presence

The Mount

of Olives

has an exile

aspect to it

at Sinai, His Presence takes a dwelling in the Tabernacle.11 And from then on He shares the way of His people. Where the Presence moves, the people follow.12 The way of God to His land is the way His nation has to walk.13

The Shekhina is moving toward its resting place.14 And the people have to follow, for it is the way

toward their own rest. 15 Later God's Presence comes down to its resting place when the Temple has been built.16 And it is there that He dwells, and hears.17

It is striking that God shares the ways of His people, as the people are called to share in His ways. The covenant of Sinai - as a marriage covenant enacted under the huppa of the Cloud, 18 - is followed by a shared life and a 'moving in togetherness.'

The question is, however, if this togetherness will be 'for better and for worse.' Or will the Presence of the LORD leave His people when they become unfaithful toward the LORD? Will He abandon them when they abandon Him? Will His Presence then be taken away? The people left without it? Or will



He somehow, also then, be present 'for better and for worse'? The measure of our understanding of God's self-revelation is crucial here. will He somehow, also then, be present 'for better and for worse'? The measure of our understanding of God's self-revelation is crucial here.

TOGETHER IN EXILE

Jacob, fleeing into exile, met the LORD on his way, and was told that God would accompany Jacob on his self-inflicted exile, and would not leave him, but promised His abiding Presence that would accompany him also in his return to the land. 40 And Joseph was seen and cared for when exiled to Egypt. 20 In the same manner, the Presence of the LORD would not forsake His people when their exile to Babylon was at hand. 21

The vision of Ezekiel, received while he was already in exile, showed that although the Presence of God would leave the Temple, the people itself would not be left alone. The LORD Himself speaks about His Presence among the exiled people, albeit in a 'diminished' manner.²² He is present and shares all pain of His people.²³ Also the other visions granted to Ezekiel and Daniel as such make clear that exile does not equate with Absence of God.²⁴

It could be said that the vision of Ezekiel shows that also in that special situation the LORD led the way. His parting with, His taking leave from the Temple, would be followed by the people having to leave the God-given land. But like Hosea²⁵, God too shared the pain of 'for better and for worse,' irrespective of the fact that the exile constituted His punishment. This thought might be strange to us. It confronts us with our God-view. It shows us how deep God's love is, how far He will go in His faithfulness. He will not even depart from His people when judgment is coming, with all that this entails.

This also makes us understand that God also can be, and in fact is, Rest-less. He longs for His final Rest, His Resting place, in the physical-geographical midst of His earth, in His land.²⁶ We must therefore also learn to think, and pray, from this perspective of a longtime suffering and wait-

Will God somehow be present 'for better and for worse'?

ing by God. His love and His longsuffering really affect Himself. We learn to pray for the promised return of the Presence of God to His House, first of all for His sake. And then also, because of His people, for His return will be accompanied by the return of the people to its God-ordained resting place in His land.

This 'Togetherness in exile' of God has also a bearing on our understanding of the reality that took place, and 'enfolded' Jesus. Per consequence it will also deepen our understanding of God's faithfulness toward the whole of His people.

YESHUA/JESUS IN EXILE

Christian theology has stressed the victorious aspect of Jesus' death and resurrection, underlined by His enthronement to the right hand of God. His 'enfleshment' within Israel however in itself already shows an indissoluble connection with the existence of the whole of God's people.

Could this imply that He stays in connection to the *whole* of His people, even when enthroned? Even when not recognized and honored by all Israel? Could it be that He still shares in all distress of *all* Israel? Could His name *Immanuel* not only mean: nearness and incarnation for atonement, but also nearness and sharing as Israel's Firstling the dark ways of the whole people?

The parallel, observed above, between the Presence of the LORD leaving the Temple

and setting itself on the Mount of Olives, and Jesus doing the same, is striking. The 'not-yet' of the fullness of redemption and the 'already' can also be found here. As stated above, it is possible to interpret Jesus' death as being *simultaneously* an entrance into exile and as His great Exodus.²⁸ His enthronement to God's right hand simultaneously implies the reality of the 'not-yet' of His kingship in Jerusalem, for thereby He is in fact not yet 'at Home' in Jerusalem. He is yet distanced from His kingship in that geographical place.

In a certain sense His death meant entering into physical exile from the city and the land. One can say that also in this respect He leads the way. For later on we see how also His 'firstlings' are 'exiled' from Jerusalem, ²⁹ later to be followed by the whole of Israel, exiled by Rome. ³⁰ One can say, therefore, that also in Him, God's Presence shares the ways of the people. In a deep sense, He is *Immanuel*, also in this respect.

Simultaneously He is in heaven, and also present on the earth, where He suffers in His followers.³¹ He is the waiting 'Hebron-king,' who endures the pain of the estrangement of the whole of His people.³² His presence at the Throne also implies that the whole of Israel is being pleaded for and represented there. Prayer is offered there that arises from sharing in all sufferings of His people, as a true High Priest would do.³³

EXILE AND THE NATIONS

Not alone did the Presence of the LORD not forsake His people in the exile existence, but through their exilic life God reached also out to the nations. This interpretation of exile can be found also in the Talmud. God 'sows' His people among the nations, so that the exile enables proselytes to join His people.³⁴ In the Tanakh we see this truth happening in reality.³⁵ It contributed to the creation of the multitude of God-fearers we meet in the New Testament.

But in a mysterious way we see the same

happening when Jesus enters the (deepest form of) exile, followed by His followers. The 'not-yet' of His kingship - implying also a physical-geographical exile from Jerusalem, and a reaching out to both His own people and the nations - brings the good tidings about Him to all nations. It is clear from the New Testament, however, that this reaching out to the nations is limited in time. ³⁶ When it will end there will be a healing restoration of the people of God.

GOD FAITHFULLY SHARING THE PAINFUL REALITY OF EXILE

Whether it was caused by certain theological-philosophical preferences, or by some form of triumph-theology, or by supersessionist inclinations, mainline Christian theology has not recognized the reality of God and His Messiah sharing in the (pain of) exile of His people.

Texts that speak of Divine judgment have been read and incorporated in our theological thought, as have been texts about future mercy and faithfulness of God. But faithfulness and togetherness as a *present* reality all through the history of the Jewish people, this has not been recognized by mainline Christian theology. And this in its turn has affected (as it also has been caused by) our view of God, our reading of Scripture and our interpretation of history.

DIVINE TOGETHERNESS 'FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE'

The loving Presence of God shares the ways of His people also in exile. This implies that there has been, and always will be, a loving togetherness of God with His people.

God indeed embraces His people with two 'arms.' The arm of the message and Presence of the Risen Messiah and the arm of God's faithfulness sharing the life of exile and beginning of restoration, that coincides with 'the arm' of the unrecognized Messiah, sharing the ways of His people in exile and in the beginnings of returning.

Christian thinking has very often only recognized 'the arm' of the resurrected and enthroned Messiah, thereby in an essential manner limiting the togetherness of God with His people. This contributed to a deprecatory, sometimes derisive, and distancing view of the Jewish people as a whole, with exception perhaps (and that not even always) of the Jewish followers of the Messiah. It caused us to not have a theological category, or 'instrument', that could have enabled us to relate the actual history of the whole of the Jewish people to God's ways and heart in a more positive way.

When we, however, also recognize the other 'arm' with which God holds, embraces, cares for, guards, and reaches out to His people, the 'arm' of His togetherness in exile, and thus also the togetherness of His Messiah even in exile, even in this time of waiting for the final redemption and the unification of the whole of the people in the 'Jerusalem-kingship' of the Messiah, then we also learn to look differently on (the history of) His people as a whole.

Then we also start to really believe in, recognize, and expect very concretely God's watching over Israel, His Guardian activity, in which He neither slumbers nor sleeps.³⁸ We have to reckon with the reality of His togetherness (during all ages) toward the whole of His people. And this togetherness is not something from a distance, but it is from within, through the sharing of the *Shekhina* in the reality of exile.

'FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE': WHAT IT MEANS TODAY

Looking to the Mount of Olives, I realize that the feet of the Messiah did not return there yet. Final redemption has not come yet. Many Jews have returned home, so that many of God's people live now again in His land, but the actual remembering of the *Shoah*, and the actual threat of rockets, and the real suffering that I witness, together with so much reverence for God and longing for His reign,

and for His Torah, and for His tikkun olam the restoration of all things - within all different strands of Judaism, in so many colors, and all this again also mingled with so much secularism, it makes clear that we are still waiting. It shows that the complete return of the Shekhina has not taken place yet.

But again, it also implies that in some way, the Almighty God Himself stands besides His people on Yom HaShoah,39 still suffering - pre-

The longing

for

the return of

the Shekingh

is present

at the Throne

sumably deeper than we could ever imagine - from the sinister onslaught on the apple of His eye.40 It implies that He stands still with them on the streets on Yom HaZikkaron,41 that He is under attack from Gaza, and that He is actively caring for those who share in an uttermost physical manner in the pain of unredeemed-ness. It makes that we pray that He will move speedily toward His final return, and that He, with both 'arms,' will

be present around His people in all that the life of the whole of Israel - whether in the land or still elsewhere - entails.

WAITING FOR THE RETURN OF THE SHEKHINA AND THE 'JERUSA-**LEM-KINGSHIP' OF MESSIAH**

Christians have heard the call of Jesus to follow Him.42 What we did not understand well enough is that this implies following His Presence wherever that may lead us, in close parallel to the Shekhina leading the way of the people of Israel.

Paul, on his road to Damascus, in a stunning manner meets a Messiah still being persecuted.43 He later writes that in his life and ministry he participates in what is still left of 'tribulations of the Messiah.'44 We are called to share not only in the 'already' activities of the enthroned Messiah, but also in the 'not-yet' activity, now from the waiting and suffering of the vet hidden and exiled Messiah.45

Since we 'dismembered,' so to speak, God's love by not recognizing His 'both arms,' and consequently behaved disapproving and condemnatory toward His people, we now have to learn to share His ways, instead of offending Him in His love. We should learn to discern His footsteps - although their fullness

will stay hidden⁴⁶ - re-

turning toward Zion, as this return shows to be a phased process, as is the ending of exile also.

We might not be able to precisely know and recognize how this dual loving faithfulness of God 'works,'47 and how both 'arms' interrelate. But we may expect it to be active in this dual form. And therefore, we will prayerfully wait for, and by our love in manifold ways serve, the unity

of all Israel around her God and His Messiah. Awaiting the kingship of the Messiah from Zion, His 'Jerusalem kingship.'

TOGETHERNESS IN PRAYER AND EXPECTATION

The longing for the return of the Shekhina is present at the Throne. It is God's own heart's desire. He wishes to take up His Rest there. The longing is also present there through the Messiah, who, 'enfleshed' within Israel, embodies both God's longing Presence and Israel's longing for its return to Zion. Both aspects meet before the Throne in the Messiah. Also there He literally is Immanu-El.48

The whole of Israel's existence is therefore also present in the prayers at the Throne through this High Priest, who knows all suffering from within. A reality that is hard to grasp, when one thinks of all that Israel has befallen, including the sinister reality of the *Shoah*.

This togetherness at the Throne is the heavenly expression of the togetherness that God and His Messiah grant to all Israel on earth, either in the land or still in the diaspora. It is a togetherness that we - believers from the nations - may share in also. In Messiah we may share in God's love for His people, in Him we learn also to be attuned to His prayers as an expression of the longings of God Himself. At the Throne the longings of God, the prayerful longings of Israel and our prayers in Messiah come together. There the Spirit of God brings news about what is going on, on the earth,49 there the groaning of the Spirit for both Israel and the whole of creation is being uttered and shared with us on earth.50

Heaven also awaits 'the sons to be revealed.'51 When God's Presence will return to Zion, then Israel will be restored to the fullest by this renewed togetherness. When the Messiah, being the embodiment of God's Presence, will be revealed, that is when He - the Son as no one else - will be revealed, then also His Body, his kehillah will be revealed to the world for what it really is, and then also all Israel will become His perfected kehillah,

In some way, the Almighty God Himself stands beside His people on Yom HaShoah, still suffering

and be revealed to the world as such.⁵³ When this all will take place, restoration will flow from Zion to all nations and all of creation. Therefore, I keep looking, so to speak, to the Mount of Olives - from nearby or from far away - expecting to see ultimately God's faithfulness 'for better and for worse' to become visible there.

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www.messiasleren.nl www.learningmessiah.com

NOTES

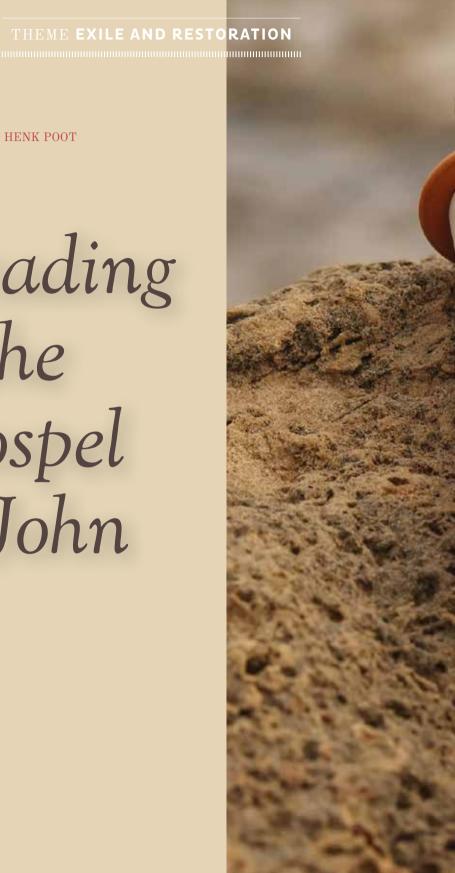
- ¹ A Dutch version of this article was published in Israël en de Kerk 18/3, September 2019. An extended version will shortly appear in Kesher: a Journal for Messianic Judaism. www.kesherjournal.com.
- ² Shekhina means 'dwelling', and is in Judaism the accepted Hebrew word for the Presence of God (ed. I&theC). The theme of exile (both of the Shekhina and of Messiah Yeshua/Jesus) and the related theme of the Hebron-kingship and the Jerusalem-kingship of the Messiah are elaborated upon in Edjan Westerman, Learning Messiah, Israel and the Nations: Learning to read God's way Anew, Eugene, OR, Wipf and Stock, 2018, especially chapters 18 and 19. Also other elements within this article are elaborated upon in this book. Also visit www.learningmessiah.com.
- ³ This article is meant to briefly present some lines of interpretation. The format of the article left room for only limited biblical substantiation.
- 4 Cf. Psalm 121:8
- 5 Cf. 2 Kings 25:4
- 6 Matthew 24; Mark 13 and Luke 21
- For this expression see Learning Messiah, 15.2, p.164. This literal translation of 'incarnation' expresses the Indwelling of God's Son in the flesh of Israel in a more bodily manner.

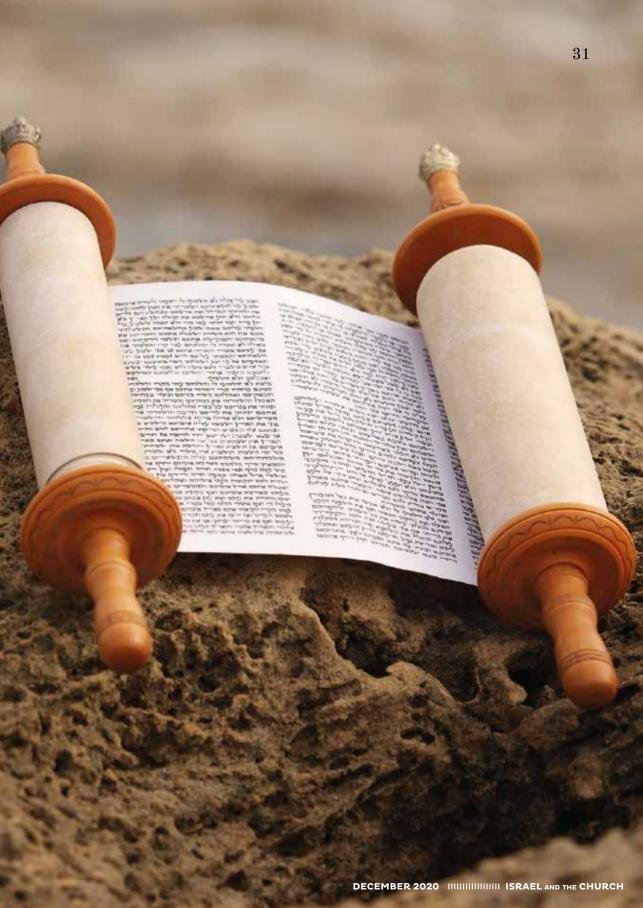
- 9 Zechariah 14:4
- 10 Exodus 13:21-22.
- ^п Exodus 40:34-35.
- 12 Exodus 40:36-38.
- Exodus 33:14-16. Gods' Presence in its midst makes Israel differ from the nations.
- 14 Psalm 132:13-14.
- Numbers 10:33-36. God's Presence looks for a resting place for the people.
- 16 2 Chronicles 6:41-7:3
- ¹⁷ 2 Chronicles 6:18-40.
- ¹⁸ Cf. Exodus 19:18-20; 24:18.
- Genesis 28:15 shows that the LORD meets Jacob on his exile flight, but it states also that the angels climb up to God (in order to 'bring news,' to report on Jacob's situation?) from the place where he lay down. Thereby it was revealed that he was not left alone.
- ²⁰ Cf. Genesis 39:23.
- ²¹ In Leviticus 26:44, the LORD promises that He will not despise His people, even when He sends it into exile.
- Ezekiel III:6. Interpretations of the Hebrew (lemikdash me'at) vary from stating that God's Presence among the people will be 'for a little while' (meaning either for a limited time, or [as promise] for the short period that exile will last) to His Presence being 'diminished' due to the fact that the exiles do not have access to the (destructed) Temple, or to His Presence having a lesser degree. Traditional Jewish interpretation finds here the promise of 'little sanctuaries,' meaning synagogues and houses of learning.
- ²³ Isaiah 63:9.
- ²⁴ Cf. also W. Zimmerli, who states that also without Temple the exile is not the space of pure absence of God ("nicht der Raum der reinen Gottverlassenheit ..."). There remains a form of nearness in the space of the abandonment ("eine Form der Nähe im Raum der Verlassenheit").
- 25 Cf. Hosea 1-3.
- Psalm 132:13-14. Ezekiel 43:4-9. Cf. also the 'use' of Psalm 95:7-11 in Hebrews 3-4 intended to show that a future rest is to be expected.
- ²⁷ Par example, see Ezekiel 37:26-28 in the context of the whole chapter.
- Luke 9:31 speaks about Jesus' death as His exodus.

- ²⁹ Acts 8:1-4.
- 30 Luke 21:24.
- 31 Cf. Acts 0:4.
- Just like David (cf. 2 Samuel 2:4 and 5:1-5) waited for the unity of all Israel in the recognition of his kingship. Cf. also footnote 1.
- 33 Cf. Hebrews 2:7-18 and 4:15.
- b. Pesachim 87b, interpreting Hosea 2:25; cf. Zechariah 10:0.
- One can think of Ruth, and of the multitudes that joined themselves to Israel at the times of Esther (8:17; 9:27). Cf. also Isaiah 56:3.
- ³⁶ Matthew 24:14; Luke 21:24; Romans 11:25.
- This is, of course, an anthropomorphic metaphor, describing, however, a dual — and utterly real — continuing relation from the side of God toward the people of Israel.
- 38 Psalm 121:4.
- ³⁹ The (Jewish) Remembrance Day of the Shoah.
- ⁴⁰ Zechariah 2:8 calls the people of Israel the apple of God's eye. Perhaps we must, by means of this metaphor, learn to 'see' in a much deeper manner the unbearable pain of God because of all forms of brutal attack on the apple of His eye.
- ⁴¹ The (Israeli) Remembrance Day for all soldiers and terror victims.
- ⁴² In a deep sense the call issued by Jesus to follow Him could be interpreted as following the Presence of the LORD as manifested in Him (cf. John I:14).
- 43 Acts 9:4-5.
- 44 Colossians 1:24. Cf. also 2 Corinthians 1:5; 4:9-11.
- ⁴⁵ Both aspects of the Messiah come forward also in the dual Messiah concept within Judaism, e.g. the victorious Messiah Ben-David (Son of David, ed.) and the suffering Messiah Ben Joseph (Son of Joseph, ed.).
- 46 Psalm 77:20.
- ⁴⁷ Elaborating on this theme would ask for more space than this article allows for.
- 48 Matthew 1:23.
- 49 Zechariah 4:10 (cf. 1:10; Psalm 11:4; 2 Chronicles 16:9).

REV. HENK POOT

Rereading the Gospel of John





Without doubt, the Gospel of John is one of the most beloved books of the Bible. You could summarize her content with the famous John 3:16: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

It is the universal message of God's love for all people.'

THE ACCURACY OF JOHN

hat happens when we realize that John had a special ministry for the Jewish people (Galatians 2:9) and that the world of John 3:16 has not a geographical but

a moral significance? Do the familiar and famous words of the gospel perhaps take on a different sound and meaning? The Gospel of John is very different from the other three gospels. John is the only one to write about a three-year ministry of his Master. Accurate to the day, he tells about the events of the first week in which Jesus appears in public, starts His work and calls the first disciples.

The same accuracy can be found in the description of the events in the last week. He knows exactly when Jesus returns to Jerusalem in the days before Easter, and when the meetings take place after His resurrection. He follows it all closely. The places Jesus visits are described in great detail, especially in comparison with the Gospel of Luke. Many places are mentioned: the Sea of Galilee, Tiberias, Bethsaida, Capernaum, Nazareth, Cana, Ephraim, Sychar, Aenon. Luke describes many details in Acts, but he is not very familiar with the topography of Israel. When he tells that Jesus goes to visit Martha and Mary, we read: 'He came to a certain village', while John mentions Bethany and even knows the distance

from the village to Jerusalem. Moreover, he also knows about another Bethany, the place across the Jordan where John the Baptist was baptizing (Luke 10:38-40; John 11:18 and John 1:28). In chapter 4, he describes with a certain detail the place where Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman took place: Sichar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. In other words: the writer of this Gospel travels through the land he knows. John also knows the characters of the various people who pass by up close and personal. He knows who Pilate is and knows the character of his fellow disciple Thomas, who is not only a physical part of twins, but also has an inner duality. The image of Mary and Martha is also much more nuanced. In John 11, you notice that Martha is not just busy in the kitchen, but has a devote spiritual life.

A JEWISH GOSPEL FOR JEWS

Tradition tells that after the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70, John and Mary, the mother of Jesus, fled to Ephesus, where there was a large Jewish community. Presumably, he wrote down his gospel there. And the question is with what message he wants to reach his fellow people in the promised land and in the diaspora. There are indications in the gospel that he might be addressing the Jews in the diaspora in the first place. To give an example: in one of the discussions with the Jews, Jesus says to his opponents: "You will

seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come." Their response is that they say to one another: "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?" (John. 7:34 and 35)

What also stands out is the use of the Targumim (Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible) and the Jewish explanation of the Bible which is hidden under some passages. This could only be understood by Jews who were familiar with the message that was heard in the synagogue. To give an example: when the

patriarch Jacob has to flee from his brother, he spends the night in Bethel and there he sees the angels ascending and descending in the night. The lewish interpreters note that it would be more logical for the angels in the dream to descend from heaven and then ascend again. However, it says that the angels ascend. The explanation given is that those angels were already there, down at Jacob's place. They derive this explanation from a verse in Psalm

91: "For He will command His angels to keep you in all your ways. They will carry you on your hands, so that you do not put your foot on a stone" (Psalm 91:11,12). The angels in heaven, however, ask the angels below who God has entrusted to them. After all, angels are curious. They are curious about the ways of God with men. Then the angels accompanying Jacob tell them that it is Jacob, an Israelite in whom there is no deceit. The angels from above then descend from heaven to contemplate this special man in silence. When they see his face, they say they recognize it. It is the human face that also

appears on the throne of God. We know from Ezekiel's vision that the throne of God depicts an ox, an eagle, a lion, and a man (Ezekiel 1:10).

A NEW MOSES

The gospel can be divided into two parts. The first with the prologue includes chapters I through II and is also called the Book of Signs. It covers the three years of Jesus' ministry, in which Jesus does signs that reveal who He is and what His calling means. The second part, chapters 12 through 21, describes the last two weeks of Jesus' ministry on earth, His suffering and death, and the resurrection.

John had a special mininstry for the Jewish people

Going deeper into the different chapters of the first part, one discovers that John wants to make clear that in Jesus, we are dealing with a new Moses, and that the image of the exodus and the desert journey becomes visible again.

LIKE MOSES' FIRST MIRACLE

Just as it was Moses' first miracle to turn water into blood, Jesus first sign was that He turned water into wine (John. 2). In John 3, the image of the serpent and the

punishment of God when Israel refused to travel to the promised land (Numbers 21) is remembered. In John 5, we hear about a crippled man who has been ill for 38 years. It is a reference to the wandering of the Jewish people in the desert after the history of the spies. From the holy spring, Kadesh Barnea, it took another 38 years for the people to enter the country. In John 6, we hear about the gift of Manna. Jesus proclaims that He is the true Manna that descended from heaven. In John 7, Jesus tells that He is the source of living water, like the rock in the desert, and in John 8 the column

of light, both images from the desert journey. In John 10, the person of Joshua is recalled, who, as successor of Moses, tends the flock of Israel and brings the people into the land.

The coming redemption of Israel is in many ways a repetition of the first redemption

Moses was also a shepherd, as the Bible tells us. The ending of Psalm 77 says that God led his people as a flock through the hand of Moses and Aaron. According to ancient Jewish tradition, Moses was a very good shepherd. Isaiah 63 recounts in a wonderful way how God placed His Holy Spirit in the heart of Israel and at the side of Moses led His flock through the Red Sea (Isaiah 63:11-14). Also the Jewish tradition dwells on the shepherdship of Moses. For example, it is told that God tried the herdsmanship of Moses and David before He gave them the lead over His people. When Moses was with Jethro, so the story goes, he watched over the flocks with love and care. In this way, he let the lambs graze first, so that they got the best grass. It happened once that a lamb wandered away from the flock and when Moses followed it, he saw how it stopped at the flowing water. Poor little lamb,' he said, 'I didn't know you were so thirsty and looking for water. I also see how tired you are. Moses carried it on his shoulder back to the herd. During the forty years that Moses herded his father-in-law's sheep, not a single sheep was attacked by a wild beast and the flocks grew into an incredible crowd. Likewise, the Messiah was expected to pasture his people as a wise and gentle shepherd.

The following is said of Joshua in Numbers 27:15-20:

"Moses spoke to the Lord, saying," Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep that have no shepherd." So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. You shall invest him with some of your authority, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey."

Eleazar is the Hebrew name of Lazarus, the friend of Jesus mentioned in John 11.

A NEW EXODUS

The setup of the Gospel runs from Easter to Easter, with in the middle (Chapter 7-10), the great chapters that take place during the Feast of Tabernacles, the feast of the passage through the desert and the coming of the end time.

All in all, the gospel depicts the image of a new Exodus.

Jewish expectation in the days of Jesus also counted on the fact that the coming redemption of Israel would in many ways be a repetition of the events from the time of the first redemption. Signs would happen and miracles would repeat themselves. The Midrash Rabba declares in Ecclesiastes 1:9: "What was there will be there again': 'R. Berekiah spoke in the name of R. Isaac: As the first Redeemer was, the last Redeemer will be. And Moses took his wife and his sons and put them on a donkey (Exodus 4:20). Likewise shall it be with the last Redeemer, as it is said: 'Humble and riding a donkey' (Zechariah 9:9). As the first Redeemer caused manna to

descend, as it is said, 'Verily I will cause the bread to rain from heaven for you (Exodus 16:4)', so will the last Redeemer cause manna to descend, as it is said, 'May he be like a rich cornfield in the land (Psalm 72:16)'. Just as the first Redeemer caused a spring to spring forth, so the last Redeemer shall water, for it is said: 'And a fountain shall spring forth from the house of the Lord, and it shall water the valley of Sittim' (Joel 4:18).

HE CAME TO HIS OWN

The fact that Jesus is a new Moses is not simply accepted by the Jews. It is true that a new Moses was promised in Deuteronomy. But the consequences are great: If it is Jesus, everyone must acknowledge his authority, if He is not, then He must be put to death as a false prophet (Deuteronomy 13).

What we as Christians have often forgotten is that the ingathering of the children of Israel is one of the great promises of God and one of the main tasks of the Messiah (Isaiah II:12 and Isaiah 49:5). Jesus undoubtedly understood this and John shows that He is thinking about the collection of all the tribes of Israel. In John 6, after the sign of the feeding of the five thousand, all remaining chunks are collected and twelve baskets are filled. We see that the Samaritans and the people of Galilee believe in Him and in the Gospel Jesus is emphatically called the King of Israel (John I:51 and I2:13).

This also brings us to one of the remarkable sides of the gospel. No gospel is so Jewish and at the same time so anti-Jewish, people have said. And indeed it seems so, but it is important to understand that the Jews in the gospel are the *Judaioi*, the Judeans and especially the spiritual and political elite of Judea, the then center of power. Jesus himself is also a Judean. If John says in his prologue that Jesus came to His own, but that His people did not accept Him, but that those who accepted Him are called children of God, then the antithesis is not Jews and Gentiles, or Jews and Christians, but Judeans and the other tribes of Israel. This is later confirmed in John 4:43: "After

the two days he departed for Galilee. (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown). So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast."

It is important to note that the his own hometown of verse 44 is in Greek tè idia patridi and that this idia corresponds to what is written in John 1:11, the ta idia.

The discussions with the Judaioi, which occupy such a large place, in fact reflect the time after the fall of Ierusalem. Two movements within the Jewish people are opposed to each other. The Pharisee movement that chooses a modest low-profile attitude and the movement of followers of Jesus, who believe that the end of days has come and that now is the time for the whole of Israel to be gathered together, to shake off the contamination of paganism, to renew the faith in God through Christ and to prepare for the return from the diaspora. This is also the real meaning of John 3:16. This is not about heaven and hell, but about being collected as the flock of Israel or continuing to wander in the diaspora and being exposed to the danger of assimilation and getting lost. The authority of Jesus is at stake here. And the identity of Jesus therefore plays an important role in the gospel. How

Jesus
is thinking
about the
collection of
all the tribes
of Israel

can the Jewish leaders reject Him with an appeal to the Torah if He is the incarnate Torah in person?

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS DEATH

The return was made possible by the death of Christ on the cross of Calvary. The prophets spoke about the scattered lews as about prisoners in the power of the world (Isaiah 49:9, 61:1, Jeremiah 31:11). Jesus broke the power of the prince of the world, Satan, on the cross by dying with the sins of Israel. This is also what the apostle Paul writes in Col.2:15: He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him. Iesus says on the threshold of his dving that there is a judgment going through the world and that the ruler of the world is thrown out (John.12:31). In complete peace lesus goes to the cross with royal dignity. There is no shouting, there are no mockers, no betraval with a kiss, He Himself carries the cross, the struggle in Gethsemane is not found in this gospel. Not that it is denied, but the light falls on something different: For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father (John 10: 17,18).

On Calvary, the men next to him are not mentioned as mockers or criminals, they are just two men and thus the dying of Jesus with outstretched hands between two others takes on much more the meaning of Moses' spiritual battle on the hill during the fight with the archenemy of Israel, Amalek. And what is more, John alone mentions that the bones of Jesus were not broken, a reference to the Paschal Lamb of the Lord, that once was the beginning of the Exodus.

Suddenly a completely different light falls on the death of Jesus. He is the gift of God to lead Israel out of the diaspora and prepare for the coming of the Kingdom. It is striking that Caiaphas, when saying to the Sanhedrin: Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish," spoke prophetic words that say that Jesus would die to bring the dispersed children of God home.

REREADING THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

So, the gospel of John is not at all as universal as is thought. It is a call to Israel.

With Paul we have now understood that the times have been postponed and that an interlude has come until the fullness of the nations has entered. But John's message remains and is perhaps more actual than ever in this day and age. And what about me? I may also read John 3: 16. But in a different way. Much more with the question of whether I perhaps have a tendency to wander off and become equal to this world. And when it comes to the return of the Jewish people, the prophetic word is clear: We are the ones to help the tribes of Israel come home, and in this way serve the Messiah (Isaiah 14:2 and 60:4).

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