

## Tracing ‘Land’ Through Scripture to Christ

Tony Costa, Ph.D.

---

**Abstract:** The subject and theology of “the land” in Scripture plays a major role in the OT. However, this concept seldom appears in the NT. The key to understanding the paucity of references to the land in the NT is that the land as a conceptual point of reference has among other things been subsumed in Christ as the ultimate focal point of the law and the prophets, including all of God’s covenantal promises. The land promise also finds its fulfillment in Christ. The concept of land throughout Scripture begins not with Israel, but with Eden which serves as the archetype and develops throughout the OT narrative to Israel, and ultimately the whole earth finding its ultimate consummation in the new heaven and new earth. The connection between the promised land and the presence of God is another important motif which also finds its fullest expression in Christ and his relationship to the church. The subject and theology of the land continues to be a point of disagreement among Christians in an eschatological context. Dispensationalists argue that the present land of Israel has a place in Christ’s future rule on the earth during the millennium, while others who hold to Covenant Theology and New Covenant Theology would see the concept of the land as a microcosm of the whole earth being ultimately subsumed under Christ’s sovereign rule.

In the study of Christology much has been written on the relationship of Christ to various themes such as Christ and the believer, Christ and the Law, including the Sabbath,<sup>1</sup> the feast days, and the sacrificial system, Christ and his relationship within the Trinity, and many other divers and sundry topics. One area which has not received as much attention is the

---

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller treatment on the Sabbath and its relation to Christ see Tony Costa, “The Sabbath and its Relation to Christ and the Church in the New Covenant,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 20/1 (Spring 2016):123-47. Also see Terrence D. O’Hare, *The Sabbath Complete: And the Ascendency of First-Day Worship* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

area of Christ and the land, by the land I mean, the land of promise, an extremely important concept embedded in the theological framework the Old Testament (hereafter OT).<sup>2</sup> It must be admitted at this point as Bruce Waltke and Charles Yu have recognized that, “The trajectory of the Land motif into the New Testament, however, is the most difficult motif to track. This is so because the New Testament rarely uses the term ‘land’ for salvation history after the death of Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

The paucity of references to the “land” in the New Testament (hereafter NT), is indicative of the fact that the land has been Christologically redefined and interpreted. It also indicates a shift from the old covenant to the new covenant, and the emphasis on the meaning of ‘land’ as reinterpreted now that the Messiah has come. The citizenship of the Christian believer is said to be ideally a heavenly one (Phil 3:20), and not an earthly one. The hermeneutical principle as enunciated by Augustine applies here as well that “the New is in the Old concealed, and the Old is in the New revealed.”<sup>4</sup>

The importance of the land theme begins in the book of Genesis. Humans were created to care for the earth, as one of Adam’s tasks was to tend the garden and keep it (Gen 2:15). Scripture also describes God’s wrath in judgment on the last day in “destroying the destroyers of the earth” (Rev 11:18). The Dutch Reformed theologian, Abraham Kuyper, put it succinctly when he said, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”<sup>5</sup> Everything that exists, belongs to Christ for, “All things

---

<sup>2</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 187.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 559.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 560.

<sup>5</sup> James D. Bratt, ed. *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 461.

were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3)<sup>6</sup> and all things exist “for him” (Col 1:16).

The concept of the land like everything else, has as its ultimate reference point in Jesus Christ himself. Christ is not only the goal and end of the Law and all that pertains to it (Luke 24:44), he is not only the goal of history itself, he is the ultimate focal point of the totality of existence. All of God’s promises (including the land promise) find their ‘yes’ in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). Thus, the land, and by extension, the whole earth, is also ultimately Christocentric and Christotelic.

In order to understand the trajectory of the importance of the land throughout Scripture, we will begin with the beginning itself. There is a theology of the land in Scripture. Human beings are necessarily linked to the land, and it is from the ground of the earth that God made Adam (Gen 2:7). The redemptive purposes of God in history are linked to the land as we shall see. In Genesis 1:1, Scripture begins with the statement that God created the heavens and the earth. God’s creation including the earth is declared to be “very good” (Gen 1:31). This one verse demonstrates God’s sovereignty and ownership over all created things, and most importantly the distinction between Creator and creation. Those lines of demarcation must never be blurred. The word “earth” in Genesis 1:1 is the Hebrew word *‘erets* which appears approximately 2400 times in the OT.<sup>7</sup> The word *‘erets* is also the fourth most frequent word used in the OT.<sup>8</sup> It can be translated as “earth,” “land,” “whole earth,”<sup>9</sup> “ground,” “piece of land,” “territory” as well as the “underworld”.<sup>10</sup> The word *‘erets* can thus be used both as a partitive (the land of Israel), or as a whole (the earth). Thus Psalm

---

<sup>6</sup> All biblical citations unless otherwise noted are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

<sup>7</sup> W. L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Based upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1997), 28

<sup>8</sup> Waltke with Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 534, 558.

<sup>9</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Boston / New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1906), 76. Hereafter, BDB.

<sup>10</sup> Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 28. In modern day parlance, Jews speak about the land of Israel as *‘erets*.

24:1 states, “The earth is Yahweh’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it”.<sup>11</sup> Yahweh is the owner of the entire earth including what and who is in it. Psalm 24 then proceeds to go from the macrocosmic level (the earth; 24:1-2), to the microcosmic level in Psalm 24:3 where it asks the question, “Who shall go up to the mountain of Yahweh? And who shall stand in his holy place?”<sup>12</sup> The psalm then ends with an affirmation of Yahweh’s royal sovereignty as the King of glory, thus tying Yahweh’s sovereignty to his possession of the earth (Ps 24:7-10). The first use of *‘erets* in Genesis 1:1 sets the stage for all that will follow in the Scriptural storyline which will culminate in Revelation 21-22, with a new heaven and a new *‘erets* (earth). What comes in between Genesis and Revelation is important to see how God’s redemptive purposes are worked out through Christ in relation to the land.

The best way to understand the schematic paradigm is to view it as whole-part-whole, or as a macrocosm-microcosm-macrocosm. It can also be understood progressively as follows:

*Heaven and Earth* → *Eden* → *Israel (Jerusalem)* →  
*Whole Earth* → *New Heaven / New Earth / New*  
*Jerusalem*

The trajectory moves from the greater to the lesser and back to the greater. Eden is the archetype for the land of Israel, the tabernacle and temple,<sup>13</sup> and the whole earth and finally the new heaven / new earth and new Jerusalem. That Eden points to a heavenly dimension is seen in the fact that the LXX translates the word “garden” in Genesis 2-3 as *paradeisos* from where we get the word ‘paradise’. In the NT, the word *paradeisos* always refers to a place of blessedness beyond the earth (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor 12:4, also called the “third heaven” in 2 Cor 12:2; Rev 2:7).

---

<sup>11</sup> Author’s translation.

<sup>12</sup> Author’s translation.

<sup>13</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 711.

## 1. Creation and the Land / Earth as God's Temple

As noted, in Genesis 1:1 the first usage of the word *'erets* is further expanded in the creation account. It has been recognized by many scholars and commentators that the language found in Genesis 1-3 reflects temple language found not only in the Bible, but also in the Near Eastern literature of the neighbours of Israel. The creation accounts of the ancient Near Eastern cultures such as the *Enuma Elish* were associated with the building of the temple for the gods such as Marduk.<sup>14</sup> The earth is described as part of God's temple abode. The humans who are created as God's image bearers (Gen 1:26-27), are called to serve in this temple abode.<sup>15</sup> The idea of the temple in the ancient Near East was that it served as a microcosm of the world, and this was illustrated in the temple's structure and depiction. The first temple built by Solomon depicted among other things Edenic elements, such as palm trees, open flowers, pomegranates, and the bronze Sea in the courtyard,<sup>16</sup> and the cherubim.<sup>17</sup> In the furnishings of the temple there were recalls of Eden such as the menorah which was situated in the centre of the tabernacle / temple, which resembled a tree and may have harkened back to the tree of life in the centre of the Garden of Eden.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 211. On the *Enuma Elish* and its comparison with Genesis see John N. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 99-104. For text, translation and notes of *Enuma Elish* see Stephanie Dalley, *The Myths of Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others* (Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 228-77.

<sup>15</sup> For a fuller treatment of this theme and subject see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT 17; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Lam, "The Biblical Creation in its Ancient Near Eastern Context 3" [cited July 6, 2017]. Online:  
[https://biologos.org/uploads/projects/lam\\_scholarly\\_essay.pdf](https://biologos.org/uploads/projects/lam_scholarly_essay.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> A. S. Kapelrud, "The Gates of Hell and the Guardian Angels of Paradise," *JAOS* 70 [1950]: 151-56; D. N. Freedman and M. P. O'Connor, *TDOT* 7:307-19.

<sup>18</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 211. See also Joan E. Taylor, "The Asherah, the Menorah and the Sacred Tree," *JSOT* 66 (1995): 29-54. Taylor notes, "It is well-known that the origin of the iconography of the menorah is to be traced to Near Eastern representations of the sacred tree... and hark back to ancient Mesopotamian depictions of the Tree of Life" (29-30).

One of the most salient features of ancient temples was that they were considered to be the realm and abode or dwelling place of the god. Thus, the language used of temples, is that they are the houses of the gods. In the OT the temple is called the house of Yahweh, where Yahweh takes up residence (1 Kgs 8:10). However, it should be noted that the Jerusalem temple was also a microcosm of God's heavenly temple, "But Yahweh is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him" (Hab 2:20).<sup>19</sup> Similarly there was a close association between these ancient temples and ancient monarchies. The king was seen as the representative and vice-regent / viceroy of the god, and the royal palaces were generally built in close proximity to the temple. In the OT, the king's palace was also in close proximity to the temple.

In Genesis 1 the whole creation (heaven and earth) is depicted as God's temple and the domain of his sovereign rule. This notion was clearly understood in the OT as we see in Isaiah 66:1, "Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?'" The earth is described here as God's footstool. The royal motifs of throne and footstool cannot be missed here, as Yahweh is being described as a king.<sup>20</sup> The reference to Yahweh's place of rest denotes not only temple language but also harkens back to the seventh day rest of God in Genesis 2:2-3. The reference in Isaiah 66:1 to the earth as a "footstool" is important as this is a macrocosm.<sup>21</sup> The microcosm of this idea is found in the temple language used in 1 Chronicles 28:2 where king David expressed, "I had it in my heart to build a house of *rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD and for the footstool of our God*, and I made preparations for building."<sup>22</sup> The reference to "rest" again echoes Genesis 2:2-3, but of particular interest is the association of the "ark of the covenant of the LORD" with "the footstool of our God". The Ark of the Covenant in the temple represented not only the presence of Yahweh, but also his footstool, and

---

<sup>19</sup> Author's translation.

<sup>20</sup> The description of Solomon's throne is also elegantly described as having a footstool of gold (2 Chr 9:18).

<sup>21</sup> Jesus made reference to Isa 66:1 in Matt 5:35 as well as Stephen in Acts 7:49.

<sup>22</sup> Italics mine.

thus the Holy of Holies represented Yahweh's throne room as it were which was veiled.<sup>23</sup> Yahweh is depicted as enthroned above or on the cherubim of the ark (Exod 25:22; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; 1 Chr 13:6; Ps 80:1; 99:1; Isa 37:16). Sometimes the whole temple is described as Yahweh's footstool (Ps 99:5; 132:7; Lam 2:1).

The idea of God's temple and as his place of rest is noted in Psalm 132:13-14, "For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his *dwelling place*: 'This is my *resting place* forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.'"<sup>24</sup> The dwelling place of God is a place of rest echoing Eden again. After God creates the human pair and place them in the Garden of Eden, his temple abode, God rests on the seventh day. The idea of rest which culminates the creation account is also closely associated with the land throughout the OT. Being in the land and being given rest are central covenant themes that run throughout the OT.

## 2. Humans as God's Image Bearers on the Earth

The creation of humans is another central aspect in Genesis. Humans are made in God's image. The biblical view of the image of God differently significantly from its Near Eastern counterparts. The idea of the image of a god in the ancient Near East usually applied to idols or images of the gods, made usually of precious metals. These idols would be placed in the temple of the gods that they represented. Humans functioned as servants of the gods. This service involved rendering homage to the idols / images of the gods in that they would clothe, feed, wash, bathe, anoint with oil, and put makeup on these idols.<sup>25</sup> These idols were treated with such care because they were believed to be the very image or representation of the god among the people. In the biblical context, Yahweh strictly forbade the making of idols or images for worship (Exod 20:4-5; Deut 5:8-9). Yahweh could not be represented in any fashion (Deut 4:15-18). In the tabernacle

---

<sup>23</sup> According to Josephus the outer veil portrayed an image of the universe. Josephus, *J.W.* 5.212, thus further proving that the temple was a picture of heaven and Eden. See David Ulansey, "The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark's Cosmic Inclusion," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110:1 (Spring 1991): 23-25.

<sup>24</sup> Italics mine.

<sup>25</sup> Lam, "The Biblical Creation in its Ancient Near Eastern Context 4."

and later in the temple, unlike other Near Eastern temples, there were no idols or images of God.

In the Genesis account, the contrast is stark. Human beings are not mere servants or slaves of the gods to take care of them, as in the Mesopotamian creation myths, rather, humans are the living image of God themselves. In the biblical context, humans are the image of God who serve in his temple. An extremely important point to note is that God's image in Genesis 1:26-27 is defined as "male and female". This is the first use of the binary terms "male" and "female" in the Bible, and their referents are the first human pair, Adam and Eve. The image of God is defined as humans, who are male and female. This is a major departure from the social conventions of ancient Near Eastern norms and customs. The only human who would have been given the honourific title of "image of God" would have been the king, who is obviously male. Thus, already at the point of creation, both men and women collectively share the image of God, and both share in serving God in his temple.

This equality is later magnified and comes to full fruition in the NT where we are told that in Christ Jesus (who is the true image of God; Col 1:15), there is equality between male and female, Jew and Gentiles, and so forth as they are one in Christ (Gal 3:28). Moreover, in the NT, both male and female believers share in the royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:5). The concept of serving God in his temple abode evokes the idea of priesthood. Adam in essence was a priest, serving in God's temple which was Eden, a part of the earth.

The verb *'ābad* which means to "serve" or "work"<sup>26</sup> and the verb, *šāmar* to "guard" or "keep"<sup>27</sup> are used to describe the working / tending and keeping / guarding of Eden (Gen 2:15). The same language used of the priests in the tabernacle is used of Adam in Eden.<sup>28</sup> The priests were also to guard and serve in the tabernacle (Num 3:8). In this respect Eden which is part of the land, is God's temple abode where his people serve and

---

<sup>26</sup> BDB, 713.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 1037.

<sup>28</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 211-12.

minister to him as priests. The land then takes on a significance as God's temple. Adam and Eve were not only to be priests before God, but as God's vice-regents they were also royal rulers, just as Yahweh is the king of the universe. The jurisdiction of Adam's rule was to be over the earth and what it contained. He was ordered by God to not only have dominion over the earth, but to subdue it as well, to bring it under his dominion (Gen 1:28). This is the language of kingship where monarchs not only had dominion but also subdued their enemies under their reign. Adam was to rule to the earth as God's representative, his image bearer. This royal language as we have noted is seen in Genesis 1:26 where humans are told to have "dominion," (*rādâ*)<sup>29</sup> over the created order.

The verb *rādâ* is also used of the messianic king (Ps 78:2). Another verb to describe this regal rule is *kābaš*, "subdue" which carries the notion of bringing something into bondage (Gen 1:28).<sup>30</sup> Adam and Eve are called to "subdue" the earth. They were to rule from Eden outwards and fill the earth and subdue it under their regal stewardship. The geographical boundaries of the garden were to extend until Eden covered the whole earth.<sup>31</sup> The whole earth in effect was to become Eden. Eden is sacred space, and the rest of the earth is to be subdued and consecrated to God. Thus, we observe a distinction between Eden, and the rest of the earth, similar to distinctions between the land given to Abraham as sacred, and Mesopotamia where he came from. A similar notion is seen in Exodus 20:1-2 (cf. Deut 5:6) where a distinction is implicitly made between the land of Egypt, which is equated with the house of bondage or slavery, and the eventual land of promise and freedom which Israel would inherit. The land of Israel later is distinguished from other lands as it is God's "holy land" (Ps 78:54; Zech 2:12), and the land which God calls "my land" (Isa 14:25; Jer 2:7; 16:18; Ezek 36:5; 38:16; Joel 1:6; 3:2).

The same word *kābaš* is later used in the OT to refer to the nation of Israel subduing the '*erets*, i.e., the land of Canaan (Num 32:22, 29; cf. Josh 8:1; 1 Chr 22:18). The same mission given to Adam is repeated to the nation

---

<sup>29</sup> BDB, 922.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 461.

<sup>31</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 81-82.

of Israel, to subdue the land / earth. Adam is thus depicted as a king who has dominion over the earth and its creatures. This picture is also brought out in Psalm 8:4-8 where the psalmist recalls the creation account in Genesis 1-2. The imagery of the kingship of Adam, and by extension, the whole human race, is recalled in that man is said to be crowned with glory and honour (Ps 8:5), and that dominion has been given to him and all things have been placed under his feet (Ps 8:6-8). This is ideal language. While Adam failed in his mission, the last Adam, Christ, did not. Thus, it is not surprising that the text of Ps 8:4-8 is applied to Christ in Heb 2:6-9 as the one who truly fulfills this mission. Adam also fulfilled the office of a prophet in that he and his wife both heard from God and would no doubt have spoken to each other about his instructions. Eve knew of God's prohibition about not eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but went beyond it by adding her own ideas (Gen 3:2-3). We can see Adam functioning as a priest, king, and prophet. All of these would function as a type of Christ who would be the true priest, king, and prophet.

### **3. The Presence of God and the Earth as His Temple**

The most important aspect of the land and earth being God's temple abode is his presence. The presence of God is what infuses holiness into sacred space. In Eden, God walked in the garden with Adam and Eve and they were familiar with his voice (Gen 3:8). I am convinced that this was a real physical presence, a theophany in human form, a prelude to the Incarnation itself when God the Son would permanently take on human form. The Incarnation has ramifications for the eternal order in the new heaven and new earth where once again God will personally walk among a redeemed humanity (Rev 21-22). The presence of God in the OT was closely tied to the tabernacle and finally the temple. The instructions of Yahweh to Israel for the building of the tabernacle was so that, "I may dwell in their midst" (Exod 25:8-9). In the NT we see that Jesus is both the tabernacle (John 1:14), and the temple (John 2:18-22).<sup>32</sup> It should also

---

<sup>32</sup> The word used in John 2:19-21 for the temple in reference to the body of Jesus is *naos* and not the usual word for the temple which is *hieron* as seen in the rest of John's gospel ( John 2:14-15; 5:14; 7:14, 28; [8:2]; 8:20, 59; 10:23; 11:56; 18:20). John seems to reserve the word *naos* only for the body of Jesus. While the words *naos* and *hieron* can be used interchangeably, the word *naos* seems to

be noted that there were cherubim placed in Eden to guard the way to the tree of life following the Fall (Gen 3:24). The cherubim also appear later in relation to the ark of the covenant and in the panels and doors of the temple. However, the presence of God was not only tied to the temple in Jerusalem, but it was also inextricably tied to the *land* of Israel. This is not to deny the omnipresence of God, but in the OT the land of Yahweh, the God of Israel, or his special jurisdiction, was the land of Israel.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4. Cosmic Mountain and Eden

Another important motif connected to the land is what some biblical scholars refer to as the cosmic mountain motif.<sup>34</sup> Eden is not just a garden,

---

carry with a more restrictive sense in referring to the shrine within the temple proper. See *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; revised and edited by Frederick William Danker; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), no. 5041a. Louw and Nida note that *naos* “may often be rendered as ‘the house of God’ or ‘the place where God dwells’ or ‘God’s building.’ In some languages it is most naturally referred to as ‘the holy house’ or ‘the holy place.’” J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 7:15. Timothy and Barbara Friberg argue that *naos* is more restrictive than *hieron* in that it refers to “in a narrower sense, the inner sanctuary within a sacred precinct...where the divine being resides *shrine, (inner) temple*”. Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 269. (italics in original). In this respect, Jesus is referring to his body as the very shrine, the holy of holies where the divine presence was believed to dwell.

<sup>33</sup> This idea becomes very pronounced in the narrative about Naaman, the Syrian who was healed of his leprosy through the agency of Yahweh’s prophet, Elisha (2 Kgs 5:1-18). After Naaman’s healing he recognizes that only the God of Israel is the true God (2 Kgs 5:15). Prior to his return to Syria, Naaman asks permission from Elisha to take a load of earth from the land of Israel enough that a pair of mules can carry. He also promises not to offer any sacrifice to any god except Yahweh (2 Kgs 5:17-18). In taking this earth or dirt from the land of Israel, he takes a portion of the land with him which is associated with Yahweh’s presence and jurisdiction.

<sup>34</sup> See Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1972); Daniel T. Lioy, *Axis of Glory: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Temple Motif in Scripture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010); *idem.*, “The Garden of Eden as a Primordial Temple or Sacred Space for Humankind,” *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 10 (2010): 25–57; Ronald E. Clements, “Sacred Mountains, Temples,

it is called “the garden of God” (Ezek 28:13), but it is also described as “the holy mountain of God” (Ezek 28:14, 16). One of the indications that Eden is a mountain in Genesis, is that mention is made of a river that flowed out of Eden to water the garden (Gen 2:10), and that it was divided into four rivers. While the four rivers are mentioned by name, is it possible that the four may metaphorically refer as well to the four cardinal points of the earth? A river naturally flows *downwards* and not upwards. This suggests that Eden was on an elevated area.<sup>35</sup> The imagery of Eden as the source from which this water flows is tied up with the presence of God in his temple abode. The same language is later used by Ezekiel in his vision when he speaks about the water issuing forth from the temple, and surging into a great river, and rejuvenating the land with life (Ezek 47:1-12). The ultimate source of the temple from which this river flows is the presence of God, as the name of the city will be called, “Yahweh is there” (Ezek 48:35).<sup>36</sup> In Rev 22:1 the water of the river of life flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. Thus, Eden functions as the nucleus or center of the earth, the mountain of God, the microcosm of God’s temple where God’s presence is. It is thus no surprise that the significance of mountains is a common theme in Scripture, and in the literature of the ancient Near East (cf. Isa 14:13; “mount of assembly”).<sup>37</sup>

The ark with Noah and his family, lands on the mountains of Ararat when the flood waters are abated. Abraham is told to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah, the law is given on Mount Sinai, Elijah vindicates Yahweh’s superiority over Baal on Mount Carmel. Later Jerusalem becomes the nucleus, the city on Mount Zion (Yahweh’s “holy hill”; Ps 2:6), where the house of Yahweh is established and Yahweh is enthroned, and where the Davidic king, Yahweh’s vice-regent rules from. For this reason, Jerusalem is called “the city of David” (2 Sam 5:7, 9; 6:16; 1 Kgs 2:10; 9:24; 2 Kgs

---

and the Presence of God,” in *Cult and Cosmos: Tilting toward a Temple-Centered Biblical Theology*; Biblical Tools and Studies 18 (ed. L. Michael Morales; Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 69–85.

<sup>35</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 212.

<sup>36</sup> Author’s translation.

<sup>37</sup> A reference to Mount Zaphon where the gods assembled in Canaanite religion similar to Mount Olympus among the Greeks. See also Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 212.

15:7; Neh 12:37),<sup>38</sup> but it is also called the “city of God” (Ps 46:4; 48:1, 8; 87:3), and “the city of the great King” (Ps 48:2; Matt 5:35). As the Davidic king is Yahweh’s vice-regent, the city of the king is also by association, the city of God.

Mount Zion is also where Jesus enters in his triumphal entry as the messianic king (Zech 9:9), where he dies, where he rises again. This mountain is where the nations of the world will flow into and be taught by Yahweh. As Isaiah prophesied, “For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isa 2:3). We see this come to fulfillment in the commission of Jesus to his disciples in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” The starting point is Jerusalem (Mount Zion), and outwards to the ends of the earth.<sup>39</sup> It should be noted that all the earth is in view here. The Messiah Jesus is reclaiming the whole earth to himself through his church. One of the blessings that Jesus enunciated on his sermon on the mount was, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt 5:5), a quotation from Psalm 37:11 which is eschatologically oriented (Ps 37:18, 29), and a text considered to have messianic significance in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QpPs37) collection.<sup>40</sup> That Jesus is using this text in an inaugurated eschatological context is seen in his reference to his disciples, that “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3 10). Jesus applies Ps 37:11 in a global scale to refer to the whole earth.<sup>41</sup> What should not be missed is that the great commission in Matthew (Matt

---

<sup>38</sup> In Luke 2:4, 11 the “city of David” is used to refer to Bethlehem, no doubt because it was David’s birth place and also because the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem like his ancestor (Mic 5:2).

<sup>39</sup> The same idea is communicated in Luke 24:47, 49, “and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, *beginning from Jerusalem*...But stay in the city [of Jerusalem] until you are clothed with power from on high” (italics mine).

<sup>40</sup> Oren R. Martin, “The Land Promise Biblically and Theologically Understood,” in Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting A Course Between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 269.

<sup>41</sup> Waltke with Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 559.

28:18-20) is given on a mountain (Matt 28:16),<sup>42</sup> where Jesus declares that all authority has been given to him in *heaven and earth* (Matt 28:18), a harkening back it seems to Genesis 1:1 where God creates *heaven and earth*. Jesus is presented here as the rightful sovereign over heaven and earth. Jesus ascends from Mount Olivet from where he also commissioned the disciples (Acts 1:12; cf. 1:8).

## 5. The Fall and Its Consequences on the Earth

The Fall not only separated humans from God, but it also affected the created order including the land and the earth. With the Fall, the ground was cursed because of Adam's disobedience (Gen 3:17-19), and thus nature has come under the effects of the Fall. Adam as God's priest, prophet, and king fails in his capacity and function. Since the Fall, there has been a tension between two areas, what Augustine called "The City of God"<sup>43</sup> versus the city of the world. The first occurrences of the Hebrew word *îr*, "city"<sup>44</sup> in the Bible are negative. The first time it appears in Genesis 4:17 it refers to a city that Cain built in the land of Nod (Gen 4:16). The word Nod comes from the Hebrew word for "wandering"<sup>45</sup> a play on words, as Cain was described as a "wanderer on the earth" from the presence of Yahweh (Gen 4:12, 14). It also carries the meaning of to wander aimlessly as a fugitive and to be homeless.<sup>46</sup> In the absence of right relationship with God there is no point of reference or direction even in the land. Like Adam (Gen 2:15), Cain worked the ground, and both fell by disobedience connected to fruit, or the produce of the land. Thus, in Cain, the Fall is re-enacted again.<sup>47</sup> Nod is also described as being "east of Eden"

---

<sup>42</sup> On the mountain motif in Matthew, see Terrence L. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985).

<sup>43</sup> R. W. Dyson, ed., *Augustine: The City of God Against the Pagans* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> The LXX has *polis*.

<sup>45</sup> BDB, 627.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 627. Also see Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 230.

<sup>47</sup> This re-enactment reinforces the reality of original sin. Every time one sins, he / she is ratifying what Adam did in the Garden of Eden.

(Gen 4:16), and in the biblical context, the east is usually associated with opposition and strife (Babylon is situated in the east).

After the expulsion from the Garden of Eden cherubim were placed at the “east of the garden” to keep Adam and Eve from re-entering (Gen 3:24). This indicates that the entrance to the garden was in the east. The entrances to the tabernacle and temple were also in the east. They too were guarded by the golden cherubim that hovered over the ark of the covenant, and were displayed in embroidery in the veils of the tabernacle (Exod 26:31), and later decorated on the walls of the temple (1 Kgs 6:23-29; Exod 25:18-22; 26:31).<sup>48</sup> The next time a city is mentioned is in the tower of Babel narrative which also carries with it a context of judgment in the confounding of the languages. In the story of Noah, there is a new beginning, a new earth as it were, and Noah becomes a new Adam, the progenitor of a new human race. The same command given to the animals in the antediluvian world is repeated with Noah in the new world (Gen 8:17), just as the same command given to Adam is now given to Noah to multiply and fill the earth (Gen 9:1, 7). In a similar vein, just as Adam was placed in a garden where he also fell, Noah plants a vineyard which also leads to his eventual fall in drunkenness, and his subsequent severe cursing of Canaan (Gen 9:20-25). The failure of Noah as a new Adam is ironically seen in his name. The name Noah from the Hebrew *Noach* carries the meaning of “rest”.<sup>49</sup> This name was given to him by his father Lamech with the hope that Noah would have been the one who would reverse the curse of the ground, thus implying a messianic hope (cf. Gen 3:15): “and [Lamech] called his name Noah, saying, ‘Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands’” (Gen 5:29). Note the reversal of the curse is associated with relief from toilsome work, an echo of pre-Fall Eden where the ground was blessed, and work was enjoyable. The irony is that Noah did not live up to his name, the curse on the ground continued

---

<sup>48</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 211.

<sup>49</sup> For a fuller treatment on the name Noah, see E. G. Kraeling, “The Interpretations of the Name Noah in Genesis 5:29,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 48 (1929): 138-43.

thus pointing still further to not just another Adam, but to *the last Adam*, Christ himself (1 Cor 15:45).<sup>50</sup>

As the last Adam, Christ truly fulfills the mandate to have dominion over the whole earth and to subdue it. Christ recapitulates in himself not only Adam, but Israel, and the Davidic king. He is not only the second man / the last Adam, he is ideal Israel,<sup>51</sup> he is the ideal Davidic king *par excellence*. Here we see the principle of ‘the one and the many’. The one represents the many, and thus, those who are “in Christ,” have Christ as their federal representative, advocate and high priest. As a result, those who are in Christ, in the last Adam, will rule with him as we become the corporate Adam in him. As Christ is the true image of God, as the last Adam, those who are in Christ are also renewed as they “have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge *after the image of its creator*” (Col 3:10; italics mine), and have also “put on the new self, created *after the likeness of God* in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:23; italics mine). The language of “image” and “likeness” in these two passages echo the language of Gen 1:26-27, where humans are made in God’s image and likeness.

## **6. Noah, the Patriarchs, the Nation of Israel and Their Relationship to the Land**

After the Noah narrative, humanity multiplies but disobeys God in refusing to expand and fill the earth. They decide to centralize themselves in one place and make a name for themselves and attempt to gain access to heaven in the construction of the tower of Babel (Gen 11).

---

<sup>50</sup> In 1 Cor 15:47 Paul also calls Christ “the second man” to distinguish him from “the first man” Adam. The difference between the first man Adam and the second man Christ, is that these two persons correspond respectively to the federal headship between two humanities, those who are “in Adam” and those who are “in Christ”. Christ is the second man as he is the new head of a redeemed humanity. Scripture never uses the phrase “the second Adam” as the Adam figure is repeated through the OT in Adam, Noah, the nation of Israel, the Davidic king, and finally climaxing in the Messiah.

<sup>51</sup> R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 483.

With the patriarchs, beginning with Abraham, of whom God said he would make his name great (Gen 12:2), in contrast to the grandiose claims of the people at Babel of making a name for themselves (Gen 11:4), the importance of the land is reiterated. In the first call of Abram, Yahweh instructs him to leave one land for another land. Abram, like his later physical descendants undertakes an exodus of his own,<sup>52</sup> when he is ordered to leave Ur of the Chaldees:

*“Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country [‘erets / land] and your kindred and your father’s house to the land [‘erets] that I will show you” (Gen 12:1).*

It is important to stress that before God makes any promise of multiplying Abram’s seed and making of him a great nation, which God now takes upon himself to fulfill, which was the original creation mandate given to Adam (Gen 1:28) and Noah (Gen 9:1),<sup>53</sup> the first command given to him is concerning the land that God would show and give to him, but also to his descendants (cf. Gen 15:7, 18-21). Closely related to this land promise is the promise that in Abram’s seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Thus, there is an important connection between the land and the seed who is ultimately Christ. An important point needs to be made about the seed of Abraham and the land. The word “seed” can be used both in a particular and general sense. It can refer to Abraham’s physical seed (Isaac, Jacob, corporately a in the nation of Israel, Christ), but also generally to all the families of the earth who are “in Christ” (Gal 3:7, 29).

The concept of land also functions in the same way, having a particular referent (Eden, Israel) and general (whole earth and new heaven and earth).<sup>54</sup> Abraham functions also as a new Adam in a land that he has been placed in. Abraham offers up sacrifice like a priest (Gen 22:13), he relays God’s messages like a prophet, and he is considered a royal figure of a type in that he wages wars against other kings and conquers them in rescuing his nephew Lot from their clutches (Gen 14:1-17). While God

---

<sup>52</sup> Waltke with Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 538.

<sup>53</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 709 n128.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 707.

promised Abraham the land of Canaan, which was only a part of the whole earth, Scripture indicates that this land was not Abraham's final inheritance. Rather, "the promise to Abraham and his offspring [was] that he would be *heir of the world*" (Rom 4:13a; italics mine), through his seed, Christ. The NT makes it clear that Abraham's inheritance was partitive (the land of Canaan / Israel), but there was much more as seen in Hebrews 11:8-10,

*<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.*

*<sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.*

The reference to living in tents is indicative of a nomadic lifestyle. Never permanent, but transient and moving, like the tabernacle or tent in the wilderness which was portable and had no permanent place. The temple would be built in a permanent location, Jerusalem, but it too would be destroyed twice, pointing again to something greater and more permanent. The ultimate inheritance is a stable one with foundations built by God himself. In short, Abraham's ultimate inheritance was the new Jerusalem, in the new heaven and the new earth, the final home of all the elect of God. This would seem to indicate that Abraham understood that the land promise was not restricted only to one particular piece of land, but rather that through his seed, it would encompass all of the earth.<sup>55</sup> The writer of Hebrews also points out that all of the faithful mentioned in Hebrews 11 could only be made perfect or complete with the NT believers (Heb 11:39-40).

The same land promise is also given to Isaac (Gen 26:3), and Jacob (Gen 28:15). The land is closely associated with the people in covenant with

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 708.

God. The OT paradigm is that of God, his people, and the land. Obedience to God insures staying in the land. Disobedience to God results in expulsion from the land. The expulsion from the land of promise for disobedience echoes the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden also for disobedience. The sanctity of the land of Israel is patterned after the sanctity of Eden where God's presence dwelt, and where he walked with Adam and Eve. There is a direct relation between sin and the land. Thus, Scripture can figuratively and yet vividly speak of the land as vomiting people out when they defile it,

*“lest the land [‘erets] vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you” (Lev 18:22).*

*“You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land [‘erets] where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out” (Lev 20:22).*

A corresponding corollary to the expulsion of Israel from the land due to their breach of the covenant with Yahweh, was Yahweh's departure from the temple and Jerusalem, and allowing it to be destroyed (Ezek 10; 11:23). In a sense, while Israel was moved out of the land due to sin, Yahweh also moved out of the land, hence the promise of the return of Yahweh's glory back to the temple and the city (Hag 2:1-9; Mal 3:1-7), a promise which would be ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Jesus.<sup>56</sup> In the Babylonian captivity, the reason the exile lasted 70 years was so to make up for the sabbatical years (Lev 25:1-7; Neh 10:31) that the land was deprived of. It would seem that such a judgment against the people was quite severe just over land. This severity in punishment underscores that much more is at stake here. The land and the enjoyment of its sabbatical year rests were extremely important to God in that they were echoes and pointers back to the Edenic rest, but also forward to Christ and ultimately the new heaven and new earth. The mention of a Sabbath for the land

---

<sup>56</sup> On the theme of Yahweh's return to Zion after the exile, see N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (2nd ed.; London: SPCK, 1993), 268-279, 299-301; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 126-133, 202-210.

denotes that even the land required redemptive rest.<sup>57</sup> The exile was “to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land [‘*erets*] had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years” (2 Chr 36:21; cf. Jer 25:11; 29:10; Dan 9:2; Zech 1:12; 7:5). The weekly Sabbath that was enjoined on Israel, the corporate Adam, was also connected to the land rest. On the Sabbath, no work on the land was permitted, so that one day in seven the land rested as well. The Jubilee year, which came every 50 years, also figured prominently as it was a time of the emancipation of slaves, the cancellation of debts and the return and restoration of lands to their original owners (Lev 25:8-55).

Jesus declared himself to be the Sabbath (Matt 11:28-30), and in him the Jubilee year has begun as he has come to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:16-21). Slaves are set free, debts are cancelled, and the land is restored in the inauguration of the kingdom of God, which will begin small and expand throughout the whole earth. Just as the sphere of God’s reign goes from Eden outwards, so the reign of God goes outwards from the land of Israel. It begins small (microcosm) and takes over the whole earth (macrocosm).

This idea of the smaller to the greater is seen in Daniel’s vision of the stone made without hands that dashed the great image to pieces, “But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Dan 2:35; cf. 2:44). Notice the reference to the “great mountain” which is connected to God’s kingly rule. This imagery is seen again in Isa 11:9, “They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” Note again the smaller to the greater, from the mountain, to the earth. The Davidic king is not only to rule over the land of Israel, but he is given a global reign, having dominion from “sea to sea” and “to the ends of the earth” (Ps 72:8; cf. Zech 9:10). No Davidic king has ever exercised this kind of rule except Christ Jesus, the ideal Son of David. Thus, Yahweh’s

---

<sup>57</sup> O’Hare, *The Sabbath Complete*, 153.

kingship will not be just over Israel, but all the earth, “And the LORD will be king over all the earth” (Zech 14:9).

In Daniel’s vision the stone that struck the image became a great mountain, it increased. In speaking of the Messiah’s kingdom Isaiah also prophesied, “Of the *increase* of his government and of peace there will be no end” (Isa 9:7 ESV; italics mine), or “His authority shall grow continually” (NRSV). The kingdom of God has been inaugurated and is in progress.

The land promise in the OT in terms of the land of Canaan that Israel would possess, appears to have been fulfilled twice. Once in the days of Joshua (Josh 21:43-45), and secondly in the reign of Solomon (1 Kgs 4:20-21). However, in each case it seems that “the fulfillment of the land promise falls short due to the failure of the nation and the Davidic kings.”<sup>58</sup> With this shortcoming, the prophets point forward to an ideal Adam, Israel, David who is to come to fully realize and fulfill these promises.<sup>59</sup> Another important fact concerning the land promised to Abraham is that specific texts in the OT “that lay out the geographical borders of the land are *not* consistent and precise (Gen. 15:18-21; Ex. 23:31ff; Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Josh. 1:2-4). The extent of the land of promise is not identical in each.”<sup>60</sup> Some liberal scholars have seized on this discrepancy as an example of editorial redaction of the texts.<sup>61</sup> The fact that no attempts were made by later scribes to harmonize these texts suggest that there is an intended element of flexibility.<sup>62</sup>

Paul Williamson argues that there are textual clues in the Abrahamic covenant that the Promised Land “was never permanently fixed, but was

---

<sup>58</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 712. See also Paul R. Williamson, “Promise and Fulfillment: The Territorial Inheritance,” in *The Land Promise: Biblical, Theological, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Philip Johnston and Peter Walker, eds.; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 28-32; Waltke with Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 539.

<sup>59</sup> G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 65-66.

<sup>60</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 708 (italics in original).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 708.

<sup>62</sup> Williamson, “Promise and Fulfillment,” 20-21.

subject to at least some degree of expansion and redefinition.”<sup>63</sup> Various texts in the Pentateuch regarding the land “indicate the possibility of expansion of the land beyond the geographical parameters indicated elsewhere (Gen. 26:3-4; Ex. 34:24; Num. 24:17-18; Deut. 19:8-9).”<sup>64</sup> The ambiguities in these texts concerning the borders and parameters of the land appear to indicate that one cannot merely reduce the land promises to just one particular piece of land, but suggests rather something greater.<sup>65</sup> The land promise will extend beyond the environs of the land of Israel, and encompass the whole earth through the promised seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ. This ambiguity in the borders of the land of promise also suggest that Abraham and by extension his seed, were anticipating something more than just mere land with strict borders. They were ultimately looking forward to a land without borders, the full manifestation of the kingdom of God.

## **7. Christ and the Land Promise**

In Christ, it is clear that the land of promise has expanded to the whole earth, the jurisdiction of Christ’s hegemony and kingly rule. The risen Christ affirmed that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him (Matt 28:18), the reference to “heaven and earth” echoing Genesis 1:1. An example of this expansion of the land from Israel to the whole earth is clearly seen in Ephesians 6:1-3, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’” Paul is not addressing inhabitants in the land of Israel, but in the Greco-Roman world, and he applies a commandment from the Decalogue which in its original context had the land of Israel in mind but is now expanded to refer to the whole earth. Paul understood Christ’ Lordship and reign as universal.

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>64</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 708 n125.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 708.

The land of Israel in essence becomes the new Eden. It is Eden regained.<sup>66</sup> Just as Eden was the microcosm of God's temple abode, so Israel would become the place, the jurisdiction of Yahweh, and Jerusalem would become the nucleus where the temple of Yahweh would be established. Eden is described as a beautiful and lush garden. The language that is used for the land of Canaan which Israel was to usurp by divine command, also reflects this idea. The land is described as a land "flowing with milk and honey" (Exod 3:8, 17; 33:3; Lev 20:24; Num 14:8; Deut 31:20), a term denoting blissfulness and fertility.<sup>67</sup> It is also called a "good" land (Exod 3:8), evoking God's pronouncement over his creation as "good" in Genesis 1. The land is also called "the most glorious of all lands" (Ezek 20:6, 15), "the pleasant land" (Ps 106:24; Jer 3:19), a "plentiful land," and the land Yahweh calls "my land" and "my heritage" (Jer 2:7). It would be a land of plenty, with trees bearing their fruit, the land yielding its increase, brooks of water, a land of wheat and barley, vines, fig trees and pomegranates, and the hills are filled with copper, with the added promise by God that he would give peace in the land (Lev 26:3-6; Deut 8:7-9). Again, the connection between the fruitful land and peace in the land echoes Eden. God promises to walk with his people in the land (Lev 26:12; Deut 23:14), using the same verb form to describe God walking with Adam and Eve in Eden (Gen 3:8).<sup>68</sup>

In addition to promising peace, the element of rest is also tied to the land, "And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers" (Josh 21:44).<sup>69</sup> The same thing was said of David, "Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies" (2 Sam 7:1), just as Adam entered into God's rest in Eden. The idea of possessing the land in the OT so that God's temple

---

<sup>66</sup> Munther Isaac, *From Land to Lands, From Eden to a Renewed Earth: A Christ Centred Biblical Theology of the Land* (Carlisle: Langham, 2015), 154-55.

<sup>67</sup> Isaac, *From Land to Lands*, 156-57. Christologically the reference to milk and honey can also refer to the sweetness that is found in Christ. Waltke with Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 587.

<sup>68</sup> Isaac, *From Land to Lands*, 156; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 211.

<sup>69</sup> See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 710 for further discussion on this theme.

abode would be among his people is universally and ultimately recognized in Rev 11:15, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”

The wars in the OT also have a significance that is tied to the land. The purpose of these wars was to evict the enemies of Yahweh from the land, and to sanctify the land for God’s dwelling among his people. What is usually neglected is that these wars were necessary to not only plant Israel in the land, but also to pave the way for the coming of Christ. The redemptive work of Christ was to take place in the land of Israel. He would be born there, begin his ministry there, and in particular he would begin in Galilee as prophesied (Isa 9:1-3; cf. Matt 4:12-16), Galilee being the first region in Israel where the exile began with the Assyrian invasion in 722 B.C.<sup>70</sup> Conversely, it is in Galilee that Jesus comes to first declare the emancipation from exile and captivity (Luke 4:16-21). Jesus first showed his glory in Galilee at the wedding of Cana (John 2:1-11). In Matthew and Mark in particular, Galilee is central and important. Jesus begins his ministry there, all his disciples are Galileans except one who is believed by his name to be from Judea, namely Judas Iscariot,<sup>71</sup> the betrayer. After the resurrection the risen Jesus meets his disciples in Galilee (Mark 16:7; cf. 14:28; Matt 28:7, 10, 16) where he gives the great commission.

Since that time, Christ’s kingdom has expanded over the world. None of this would be possible if the Canaanites were in possession of the land. Just as God promised redemption and provided a covering for Adam and Eve in Eden (Gen 3:15, 21), so God would provide redemption in the new Eden, the land of Israel thus fulfilling the hope of Abraham, “So Abraham called the name of that place, ‘The LORD will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided’” (Gen 22:14).

---

<sup>70</sup> Zebulun and Naphtali are mentioned in Isa 9:1 because they were the first regions to be annexed by the Assyrians (2 Kgs 15:29). Waltke with Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 565 n11.

<sup>71</sup> D. J. Williams, “Judas Iscariot,” in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove / Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 406. The term Iscariot applied to Judas means “a man of Kerioth”. The place Kerioth is mentioned in Josh 15:25 as one of the towns of Judah (Josh 15:20).

## 8. The Ultimate Redemption of the Land and the Whole Creation

Thus, the land, the earth, and the whole creation needs to be redeemed as well from the effects of sin.<sup>72</sup> As we saw with the sabbatical year which came every seven years, the land of Israel was to rest and lie fallow. However, the need for the land to enjoy Sabbath rest has a global significance too that applies to all the lands, indeed the whole creation. God's redemptive plan also includes the restoration of the created order. This is clearly stated in Romans 8:19-23,

*<sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*

*<sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

Just as the cursing of the ground followed the Fall of humanity, so the blessing and restoration of creation, the removal of the curse from creation will follow once the children of God have been fully restored in resurrection ("the redemption of our bodies"). It is for this reason that the creation is described as waiting "with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom 8:19), because it is this event that will trigger creation's renewal. The earth cannot be renewed until redeemed humanity

---

<sup>72</sup> This idea is captured in the well-known Christmas hymn, "Joy to the World" especially the third stanza,

No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make His blessings flow Far as the curse is found

Quoted from *Worship and Service Hymnal for Church, School, and Home* (Carol Stream: Hope Publishing, 1957), 27.

reaches its goal. This ultimate restoration is also in view in Ephesians 1:9-10, “making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which *he set forth in Christ* as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (italics mine), and similarly in Col 1:20, “and through him [Christ] to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

God will achieve all this through Christ who will restore and recapitulate all things to their perfect order. It is thus not surprising that the canon of Scripture draws to a close with the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, including the nucleus of this new creation, the new Jerusalem (Rev 21-22). Where Genesis begins with the creation of heaven, earth, and Eden, Revelations culminates with a new heaven, new earth, a new Eden where the curses are repealed (Rev 21:4). The OT prophets also knew of this restoration and creation of a new heaven and new earth (Isa 65:17; 66:22). Thus, in Isaiah 65:1-66:21 the new Jerusalem takes on the borders of the entire creation, and the rule of the Davidic king finally extends to the whole creation (Ps 72:8-11; 17-19).<sup>73</sup> In the new Jerusalem there will be no temple, because its temple will be God and the Lamb (Rev 21:22). Thus, the ultimate hope of the Christian believer is the awaiting of this final restoration through Christ, which ushers in the eternal order as expressed in 2 Peter 3:13, “But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”<sup>74</sup> In the meantime it is important to stress that the new creation has already begun as it has been inaugurated with the first coming of Christ in the establishment of the new covenant. All who are now in Christ are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), they are the temple of God collectively (1 Cor 3:16), and individually (1 Cor 6:19). They are God’s temple where he walks among them (2 Cor 6:16). They are being built as a “holy temple in the Lord...a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph 2:21-22), and the

---

<sup>73</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 712.

<sup>74</sup> Many Christians assume that their eternal destiny is merely to “go to heaven” at death. This however is short sighted and fails to take into account the ultimate purpose of the believer which is to share in the resurrection of the body and to dwell in the new heaven, the new earth and the new Jerusalem forever. This is the eternal order of the resurrected saints in Christ.

cornerstone of this temple is Christ himself (Eph 2:20). The language of temple and God's dwelling is no longer applied to the physical temple in Jerusalem, but to the new covenant people of God. We are now positionally seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:1-7). The new creation is in progress and will reach its apex and fullest manifestation and realization with the return of Christ. The paradigm of the 'now and not yet' which is seen throughout the Bible is also seen in this area. We are in the new creation, but not yet. We share in the new creation spiritually and positionally in Christ now, but the fullest manifestation of this new creation will be fully realized, not yet, but at Christ's return.

In the new covenant all will know Yahweh, from the least to the greatest. They will be no need to teach them to know the Lord, in the new covenant there will be immediate knowledge of God (Jer 31:31-34). While the physical temple in Jerusalem served a purpose in God's economy of revelation and salvation, after Pentecost, its importance begins to recede. In fact, in Galatians 4:25-26 Paul speaks allegorically using Hagar and Sarah to refer to two Jerusalems. The physical Jerusalem represents Hagar and Mount Sinai and describes those who are currently in spiritual bondage and slavery (which include the Judaizers in Galatians). Paul goes on to say that believers belong to "the Jerusalem above" which is "free," and which is "our mother". Paul concludes from this that believers are children of the free woman, spiritual Jerusalem above, and not the slave woman, the present physical Jerusalem (Gal 4:31). So radical was Paul's view of the heavenly reality of land promises made in the OT that W. D. Davies comments, "[Paul's] silence points not merely to the absence of a conscious concern with [the Land promise], but to his deliberate rejection of it. His interpretation of the promise is a-territorial."<sup>75</sup> According to Davies, the land has been "Christified".<sup>76</sup>

The writer to the Hebrews also argues in the same vein. In contrasting Mount Sinai, the mountain of judgement and fear and the law, the writer goes on to say, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the

---

<sup>75</sup> W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 179.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 368.

living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering” (Heb 12:22). It is clear from this text that the writer (writing presumably to Jewish believers), understood that the earthly Jerusalem was only a type, a shadow of something much greater that has now been made manifest through the coming of Christ (cf. Col 2:16-17). He uses the same OT language of Jerusalem such as Mount Zion, and the city of the living God, but then he qualifies that language by calling the city “the heavenly Jerusalem” where angels are gathered. Here we see a clear trajectory from the shadow to the reality in Christ. The writer of Hebrews warns his readers not to return to the temple, to the sacrifices, all of which are connected invariably to the land. In short, he warns them not to return to Judaism which would be a step back into the shadows after the reality (Christ) has come. God does not move backwards in salvation history, but forward. In the book of Revelation, Jerusalem is only used of the new Jerusalem which is heavenly, and physical Jerusalem is figuratively referred to as “Sodom” and “Egypt” and called the place where the Lord was crucified (Rev 11:8). The reference to Sodom would recall immorality and Egypt would evoke the idea of bondage and slavery (cf. Gal 4:25-26). It is clear that from the standpoint of the NT that the OT references to the land have been given a Christological and Christotelic meaning with a globalized reach.

## 9. Conclusion

The subject of the land while a major concept in the OT, seldom appears in the NT. The reason for this is because the land promise has been subsumed in Christ. Jesus taught his disciples that everything in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms pointed to him and were fulfilled in him (Luke 24:27, 44), as he is their ultimate reference point. That also included the promises concerning the land. Thus, we are called to read the OT through Christological lenses and use Christ as our interpretive filter. Christopher Wright correctly observes that,

In one sense the land is almost completely absent from the New Testament. The *physical territory* of Palestine is nowhere referred to with any theological significance. The land as a holy *place* has ceased to have relevance...The spiritual presence of the living Christ sanctifies any place

where believers are present... The promise of Jesus to be present wherever his people meet, effectively universalizes the Old Testament promise of God's presence among his people in their land, for now the people of Jesus are everywhere.<sup>77</sup>

Eden is the archetype that begins in Genesis and finds its ultimate fulfillment in Revelation 21-22 with the new heaven and new earth where God and the Lamb dwell. In one sense, in the new covenant, the land and the people have merged. Rather than being in the land of promise, God's people are "in Christ". Jesus promised that where two or three are gathered in his name, he is present with them (Matt 18:20). What marked the sanctity of the land in the OT including the tabernacle / temple was the presence of God himself. The presence of God today abides with his people by and through the Holy Spirit, who are now his temple (Eph 2:21-22), not in one region of the world, but all over the world. Believers in Christ are a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:5), who now serve in this new spiritual temple, which is located, not merely in Jerusalem, but wherever and whenever believers in Christ gather in his name. Thus, the promise of Jesus that wherever two or more gather in his name, he is present in their midst (Matt 18:20).

The language of temple and priests are now applied to believers as they are like "living stones" which are "built up as a spiritual house" to be a "holy priesthood" in order that they can "offer spiritual sacrifices" to God (1 Pet 2:5). As God's rest was in Eden, and in Zion, so today God's rest is found in Christ, and those who have believed have entered his rest (Heb 4:3). Christ gives rest to all who come to him (Matt 11:28-30). Where is this "spiritual house" or temple geographically? It is wherever the people of God are and assemble. This was anticipated in the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman, "the hour is coming when neither on this mountain [Mount Gerizim] nor in Jerusalem [Mount Zion] will you worship the Father" (John 4:21). The worship of God would be in spirit and truth (John 4:24) and would be universal in Christ's church. That hour did come with

---

<sup>77</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 187 (italics in original).

Volume 20(52). December 29, 2019

the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in the inauguration of the new covenant. The people of God today are not only the temple, the royal priests, they are the land of promise, for in them, Christ their federal head, and the goal and end of the law resides.