

God's Unfolding Covenant (II) – (Reflections on Genesis 15:7-21)

"And He (YHWH) said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." He (Abram) said, "O Lord GOD, how may I know that I will possess it?" (Gen15:7-8)

God's promise to Abraham in the 15th chapter of Genesis now switches its focus from the promise of offspring (the Hebrew word 'zera', seed, can be read in the singular as well as the plural) "as numerous as the stars in the sky" to the promise of land (the Hebrew for land is 'eret'). God has indicated that he is about to create a people for his own purpose and his nation will need a land of its own. Childless Abraham has just been declared 'righteous' because of his trust concerning the first part of God's promise – his offspring. Now he will need to take another step of faith with regard to the place where his offspring is to live, for he is surrounded by kingdoms that are likely to be hostile to his presence in Canaan. His second question is therefore just as legitimate as was his first. Raising a question need not express lack of faith.

There are at least three parts that belong to the sequence of this land covenant ratification:

1. First, God gives detailed instructions as to the three kinds of animals and two kinds of birds that Abraham had to bring; Abraham without having been asked cut the animals into two and laid each half opposite the other,
2. Second, Abraham had to chase the birds of prey from the dead carcasses,
3. Third, at sundown darkness and anxiety

overcame Abraham while God revealed to him what would happen to his descendants in the following four hundred years; in a night vision Abraham saw a smoking furnace/ fire pot and a burning lamp/ a flaming torch pass between those carcasses. It must be assumed that it was at that moment that God made the promise to give the land of the ten nations between the river of Egypt and the Euphrates River to his descendants.

The context of the opening of the covenant

One could have expected God to talk to Abraham about the extent of the land (from Egypt to Euphrates, 3.3), the conditions of acquisition (3.4) and ownership including some comments about how to use the land (3.5) and even an affirmation that this was God's own land that he was to possess (3.6). Yet God revealed the content of the covenant step by step. God's way to answer Abraham's question as to how he would know that he would possess the land may surprise and perhaps even repulse Western readers because of the bloody scene that followed. God's point was to make sure that Abraham understood the nature of this covenant. It is the biblical foundation of covenant theology without which one cannot understand the history of Israel

from Abraham to the end of times. One may be tempted to ask why Christian art has bypassed this foundational event of chapter 15 in classical painting? Perhaps it is the assumption that those animals simply represent a sacrifice and that those bloody carcasses need not be shown as a scene to meditate on which is the reason why none of the great masters ever dared present this loaded image. It appears that most of them felt that the binding (akedah) of Isaac in Genesis 22 was a more aesthetic sight to paint because it pointed more obviously to the sacrificial, substitutionary "Lamb of God." Nevertheless, Abraham must have derived the meaning of cutting this land-covenant from its cultural context. Whether he understood the sacrificial aspect of chapter 15 as a prophetic hint to God's ultimate solution to the problem of sin we do not know (see 1. below). God used the binding of Isaac in chapter 22 to make it clear to Abraham that He would provide the ultimate sacrifice, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." (Gen 22:8)

There are various aspects of God's everlasting covenant with his people. He had outlined it in His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 and he developed it in subsequent events. The unfolding of His covenant – including its temporal provisions in the Sinaitic covenant – is of such monumental importance that it had to be written not only on parchments but into the very history of God's people. He

1. Abraham's covenantal sacrifice

Chapter 15 opens a window into the traditional way of making or rather 'cutting' a covenant. When rulers made a treaty with their vassals in a so-called 'suzerein covenant' the two parties cut animals in half and walked between the two halves as a symbolic expression of

used the cultural tradition of cutting covenants among the Mesopotamian people in chapter 15; he reinforced it with an oath in the repeated covenant of the sacrificing of Isaac in chapter 22; he used an earth quaking mountain in smoke and fire in Exodus 19 to demonstrate his Holiness to back up the temporary provisions of the law on stone. When he announced the renewal of his covenant (in Jeremiah 31) he linked it to the very existence of the order in the universe. The latter forestalled the fulfillment of the covenantal promises with the first coming of the Messiah. Their literal fulfillment was the final pledge for the ultimate ratification of the covenant, the literal return of the Messiah as the King that would forever rule on King David's throne.

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making it clear that if either party broke the covenant it would have to experience the fate of those slaughtered animals¹. Covenant breakers faced the death-penalty. The fact God that took the initiative while Abraham merely watched the ceremony - (whether at that stage he

was still asleep or had woken up during the final part of his vision is irrelevant) - expressed the most powerfully *acted* oath of the God who does not lie. The fact that Abraham was only passively involved in the ratification of this covenant proves that the covenant was unconditional. God would keep his land covenant with Abraham and would never break it. The covenant was not only unconditional. It was eternal. What more powerful statement could God have made to give Abraham and to his descendants the assurance that the land on which Abraham had set foot would be his - for ever (Gen 13:15)? According to the Torah and Psalm 105 this covenant was made with the patriarchs whom God calls his prophets. He made it with Abraham, confirmed it by the oral and later written oath with Isaac and then made it into law with Jacob for Israel forever.

"So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." (Gen 15:9) Even though God did not require Abraham to build an altar to ratify his covenant and even though the requirement of their being 'without blemish' was not yet mentioned these were sacrificial animals that Israel was required to bring under the Sinaitic covenant after the Exodus from Egypt. Samuel's mother sacrificed a three year old bull when she dedicated her son in the

temple (1Sam 1:24). Was this merely a prophetic adaptation of a Mesopotamian tradition? Or did the cultural practice need a transformation into a sacrificial act because of the very presence of God, a transformation anticipating the temporary requirements of the Sinaitic covenant with its sacerdotal laws? Did the land covenant require a hint that the land was to be holy to the Lord (Ps 78:54, Zech 2:12) and therefore was going to need rules of living in the land that God promised?

"Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds." (Gen 15:10) The split animals were not only a cultural symbol for the fate of the covenant breaker. His passing between the slain animals was also a prophetic statement that the Holy One of Israel in his foreknowledge that Israel would break his covenant and would therefore merit the death penalty. God in His only begotten Son would have to take that penalty upon himself. Just as holy God cannot enter a covenant with sinful man without providing the solution to the sin problem in advance, a righteous God could not leave sin unpunished. Since God alone passed through those carcasses he would have to take the punishment for Israel's breaking the covenant upon himself. That was the implication of the Suzerean covenant.

2. The Birds of Prey trying to interfere in Abraham's sacrifice

"The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away." (Gen 15:11) Why was Abraham concerned with chasing them away? Is it not natural that they should be attracted and have their share? "Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather" (Mat 24:28). However, why is this only mentioned here and not as a regular feature where animal sacrifices are mentioned in Scripture? Birds of prey are

part of God's creation but in Scripture they at times represent the dark supernatural forces as in the case of fallen Babylon which will become "a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird." (Rev 18:2) Are these birds meaningless or are they forebodings that this eternal covenant with Abraham was going to be contested by the evil one from the very beginning

and will remain so until the end? Could they have eaten up or carried away the sacrifice that was ready for the

ratification of God's covenant? Abraham must have known what was at stake.

3. The night vision of the future of Israel

"12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror *and* great darkness fell upon him.

13 *God* said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.

14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.

15 "As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age.

16 "Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." (Gen 15:12-16)

According to the text Abraham had been overcome with sleep and saw the first

part of this scene as a night vision where God revealed to him four things:

- ♦ there would be a delay of 400 years of oppressive slavery in Egypt;
- ♦ judgment would fall on Egypt before his descendants would return to Canaan with great possessions
- ♦ that he would die in peace and happiness before his descendants would be enslaved in Egypt – and obviously before the land promise could be fulfilled (Heb 11:13)
- ♦ that his descendants would return to Canaan after four generations when the time of judgment would have come for the Amorites (representing the ten Canaanite nations) – who would obviously have to be conquered, removed from the land of Canaan to make room for his descendants

3.1 The "Time for the Amorites"

Abraham asked no questions as to what God meant by the clauses of his covenant. Why was Abraham's offspring assigned to slavery in Egypt for four generations? Would one not have been enough?

What purpose could God have had to let Israel suffer under the Egyptian task masters? Israel's calling was to be a blessing to the nations. First it had to become a nation in order to begin to learn the lessons of nationhood in a hostile foreign land.

At the same time, God began using Israel to reveal to rest of the nations who he is. Such revelation to a sinful world was impossible without suffering. God is holy, patient and longsuffering, He is the only true God there is, sovereign, powerful, a Father to his people. He could have exterminated the Canaanites at once but he waited for four generations in order to prepare himself a nation while allowing the sins of the Canaanites to be ripe for punishment.

During those 400 years Israel multiplied from a small number of 70 into a nation and learned to understand what it means to be strangers in a foreign land. The family of Jacob with his 12 sons from whom developed the twelve tribes grew into the multitude of people.

"Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons *in all*, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven." (Deut 10:22)

7 He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth.

8 He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations,

9 *The covenant* which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac.

10 Then He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant,

11 Saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion of your inheritance,"

12 When they were only a few men in number, very few, and strangers in it.

13 And they wandered about from nation to nation, from *one* kingdom to another people.

14 He permitted no man to oppress them, and He reprov'd kings for their sakes:

15 "Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm." (Ps 105:7-15)

This multitude became God's people with whom he identified despite of all their sins and shortcomings. This identification is carried over into the New Testament which quotes the prophet Hosea transferring it to Jesus the Messiah:

"Out of Egypt I called My son."
(Hos 11:1)

"He remained there until the death of Herod. *This was* to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON." (Mat 2:15)

At the same time God prepared the Exodus as an object lesson for man's need to be delivered from sin, which is like a slave master that prevents man from living according to God's law. The Exodus was preceded by punishment in which God revealed his power over each of the gods of the Egyptians (Exo 12:12).

Israel's history began in a time before there was any such thing as international law. It was the time of God's law. Whoever studies the reason for Israel's military conquest accompanied by the merciless extermination of its surrounding nations will discover that its violence is the consequence of God's desire to reveal himself to Israel and to the nations. God's righteousness is not man's righteousness. Israel's action was meant to reveal "His love and concern for humanity as a whole in this stern decree against the degenerate Canaanite, who, even in the universal corruption of the ancient world, stood out as notorious for his [sic] cruelties and abominations."(?)

Abraham's night vision allows us to understand that the later conquest of Canaan was timed to God's punishment of a nation that could have taken advantage of his divine patience to turn from its evil ways. Biblical and extra-Biblical evidence indicates that child-sacrifice, temple prostitution and occultism had led to the demise of the Canaanite nations. Since God does not change his character the story of the conquest of Canaan must not be used to accuse God of cruelty. Even nations who have no special revelation

like Israel need to conform to God's moral standards of behavior.

Part of Israel's sin was its refusal to radically destroy whatever belonged to the Canaanites. Israel later on would be rebuked for its failure to drive out the Canaanites (Num 33:55; Josh 17:12; Judg 1:19; Judg 1:21) The review of Israel's history in Psalm 106 makes it clear that the reason for the reproach that "They did not destroy the peoples as the LORD had commanded them" (v. 34) was Israel's temptation to allow itself to be seduced by Canaan's idol worship,

"35 but they mingled with the nations and adopted their customs.

36 They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them.

37 They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons.

38 They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was desecrated by their blood.

39 They defiled themselves by what they did; by their deeds they prostituted themselves

Abraham's calling was to be a blessing to the nations and if his descendants were to fall into the snare of Canaanite idolatry God's very plan of salvation for the nations would be in danger. Israel's calling and God's revelation to the nations about who he is was at stake. This is why

Israel was not allowed to compromise. Israel had to be tough with its surrounding nations. But it worked both ways: disobedience would result in idolatry and idolatry would cause God to allow Israel to be driven from the land:

"12 Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, *even* these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you:

13 Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out *any of* these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you." (Josh 23:12-13)

David Baron died before the Holocaust. He wrote in 1925 that the "gross forms" of Canaanite idolatry are no longer prevalent in the modern civilized world. ⁽³⁾ He nevertheless agrees that the temptations to fall into idolatry are still a snare to Israel as they are to the whole world. The post modern world needs to hear the NT warning that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Eph 6:12)

3.2 The Ratification of the Land Covenant

The most amazing sequence in this covenant cutting event is Abraham's night vision. God himself prescribes the details of the ingredients. If the specification of the animals indicates a move away from the Mesopotamian tradition this vision

gives it a very peculiar meaning. It turns it into an epiphany, a manifestation of God in his holiness.

We may speculate on the meaning of the furnace and the pot or the lamp and the

torch (depending on the translation) that mysteriously passed between the carcasses. The smoke hints to the tears that would have to be shed under the cruel slavery of their Egyptian task masters to come all they way down history's road to the furnaces of the holocaust and beyond. The fire may point to the glorious victories of God's presence in the battles to come.

What is evident in Scripture, and this seems to be consistent with the nature of this covenant, is that God himself passed between those animals. He revealed himself in smoke and fire. Smoke and fire represented the presence of the God of Abraham. His people were to experience it during the 40 years of wandering through the wilderness (Exo 13:21-22; 24:16-17). God's passing through this suzerain scene amounted to an irrevocable oath on the covenant promises that God made. Smoke and fire were on Mount Sinai where God spelled out the moral standards that his holiness implies. God is the Judge and where judgment occurs smoke and fire signal God's holiness as found in Revelation 9. Numerous are the incidences that illustrate Moses' warning that God is a consuming fire (Deut 4:24; Heb 12:29). God had manifested himself to Moses in the fiery bush (Exo 3:2) and fire fell on a number of altars confirming God's presence and approval of the sacrifices that were offered to him. The fire fell at the inauguration of the Aaronic priesthood (Lev 9:24). The fire fell on the altar of Gideon at the oak in Ophrah before the battle against the Midianites (Judg 6:20-24) and on the altar of David on the threshing floor of Ornan after the

King had seen the angel with the drawn sword on Mt. Moria (1Chron 21:26); it fell again on Solomon's altar at the inauguration of the temple (2Chron 7:1) and fell on the altar of Elijah on Mount Carmel (1Kgs 18:38). Smoke and fire are prophesied for the survival of Israel (Isa 4:5). They were present at Isaiah's calling in Isaiah 6. They identify YHWH "whose fire is in Zion and whose furnace is in Jerusalem" in his miraculous intervention against the Assyrian army before Jerusalem (Isa 31:9). A chariot and horses of fire took Elijah to heaven. Tongues of fire appeared in Jerusalem (Acts 2:3). Jesus/Yeshua in Rev 1 reveals himself to John as one with eyes like a flame of fire. If Jesus/Yeshua told the theologians of his time that he had existed 'before Abraham', would it seem too far-fetched to assume that he must have taken Abraham's place in moving through those animals? Just as God revealed himself to Moses in the fiery bush God in the Father and in the Son revealed himself in the physical symbols that moved between the sacrificial animals (see further down in Today's controversy). He identified himself with his people as is evident from the servant songs in Isaiah (Isa 49:3-6). Isaiah prophesied that he would take Israel's place in taking the punishment for sin upon him and the Gospels confirm that he gave His life as a ransom for many inaugurating the new covenant in his blood (Luke 22:20). Abraham's offspring in their rebellion and refusal to repent (teshuvah) from their idolatry and infidelity had broken the covenant and consequently should have been exterminated had God not taken the judgment of the death penalty upon himself.

3.3 The boundaries of the land from Egypt to Euphrates

"On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To

your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as

far as the great river, the river Euphrates:" (Gen 15:18)

The land covenant gives some geographical coordinates about the extent of the land. It would be the territory of the ten Canaanite nations living between the boundaries of the two rivers (The Euphrate in the North and the 'River of Egypt' in the South. This corresponds to the kingdom over which Solomon ruled (1Kgs 5:1). As Yehuda Bohrer ⁴ points out "The only time that the borders are traced on all four sides, along major landmarks, is when the object is the actual settlement of the Tribes upon the conclusion of their desert journey and their imminent entry into the Land." (Num 34:3-12) "There was no need to trace the borders because the Promised Land is defined by natural boundaries in a clear fashion." Thus to mention the corners of the land was definitive enough: from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean and from the Sinai Desert to the Euphrates (Exo 23:21). The same borders are repeated in Deuteronomy 11:24 in the form of reference points for diagonal lines across the territory, "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours; your border will be from the wilderness to Lebanon, *and* from the river, the river Euphrates, as far as the western sea." At the end of Moses' life, God takes him to the top of Mount Pisgah opposite Jericho in today's Jordan

"And the LORD showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, and all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, and the Negev and the plain in the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. Then the LORD said to him, "This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see *it* with your eyes, but you shall not go over there." (Deut 34:1-4)

After the death of Moses Joshua is told the same:

"Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory." (Josh1:2-4)

These descriptions are not enough for the British Anglican Anti-Zionist Colin Chapman.⁵ He commented in 2002 on the lack of clearly defined territorial boundaries in the Old Testament as if Moses and Joshua could have referred to the coordinates of a geographical map,

"The considerable variety in the descriptions of the boundaries of the land makes it hard to believe that anyone – whether Jew or Gentile – could use the Old Testament to define the area of the land in which Jews returning to the land since the nineteenth century should have a right to live. When we see further how promises about the land are so closely related not just to the descendants of Abraham but also 'to all the nations on earth' , we are forced to see the land promises in the wider context of God's concern for the whole human race."

He quotes Paul Williamson⁶ in support of his argument but merely proves the contrary,

"The territorial promise in its most comprehensive sense, was not limited by geographical borders, therefore such borders were not mapped out with the rigidity and consistency which otherwise we might expect."

These arguments can easily be dismissed as irrelevant as natural geographical

borders like rivers, the seashore, mountains and towns were the markers that were available in those days. Secondly that progressive revelation and the needs for each historic context need to be taken into account and thirdly, the blessings 'to all the nations on earth' are not dependant on Israel's precisely defined territorial surface.

3.4 The timing and completion of the conquest of Canaan including temporary absences

Some may think that the Israelites committed genocide in order to claim Canaanite lands. However, the Torah leaves no room for those who think that Israel committed genocide by exterminating the nations that it was called to replace. Perhaps the most famous example to prove this point is King Jehoshaphat's prayer:

10 "Now behold, the sons of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom You did not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt (they turned aside from them and did not destroy them),

11 see *how* they are rewarding us by coming to drive us out from Your possession which You have given us as an inheritance.

12 "O our God, will You not judge them? For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You." (2Chron 20:1-12)

The sin of the Amorites (representative for the Canaanite nations) according to Genesis 15:16 had not been full at the time when God made his covenant with Abraham. God deferred his judgment on them for another 400 years,

"20 For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, to meet Israel in battle in order that he might utterly destroy them, that they might receive no mercy, but that he might destroy them, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." (Josh 11: 20)

The reason for God's judgment on those nations was their lack of moral behavior in total contrast to the very purpose of their existence,

"When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations.

10 "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,

11 or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.

12 "For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you.

13 "You shall be blameless before the LORD your God." (Deut 18:9-14)

"Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt,

18 how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God.

19 "Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget. (Deut 25:17-19)

"He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26-27)

The God they were to seek is not a territorial God as those nations believed but the God of all the earth, the only true God who does not have an equal. It was he who assigned the boundaries and Israel was aware of it even if they were slow to accomplish their task.

It was only under King Solomon that Israel covered the totality of its promised land. The conquest in stages was not always due to lack of obedience but also because of God's compassion for the land and its people. The conquest was to be made 'little by little.'

"I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land." (Exo 23:29-30; Deut 7:22)

God's prediction of the deliverance of Israel from slavery after 400 years in Egypt was fulfilled when the time of God's judgment for the Canaanite nations had come. God showed Abraham that he who had created time was well able to know the future of Israel's history. Later on God predicted through Moses that Israel would lose the promised land because of its disobedience but God would one day call the people back from exile:

"So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you,

2 and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons,

3 then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you.

4 "If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back.

5 "The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.

6 "Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live." (Deut 30:1-6)

Disobedience would incur the loss of the land but never permanently. Obviously, the return was going to be conditional upon national repentance – an event that is still in the future. It ties in with the New Covenant promised by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 31:31ff). There was the prediction of Jeremiah that the exile in

Babylon would end after 70 years (Jer 29:10), a prophecy that Daniel read (Dan 9:2) and took as his orders to repent for his nation. The result was the first return from Babylon under the Persian King Cyrus (after the Fall of Babylon, 539 B.C.) The second return, "from the four corners of the earth" – one in unbelief (Isa 11:11-12, Eze 37) – has begun and will be followed by the return in national repentance (Deut 30:1-6) when the time for the judgment of the nations will have come and the Messiah himself will return to the land that God promised to Abraham and his offspring (Zech 14:4).

3.5 Ecology and the Land of 'milk and honey' that may spew its people out

Through numerous repetitions the Abrahamic covenant unfolded God's ecological precautions that his people were to take of with regard to the land. The land should not become desolate but should be cared for. If today's environmentalists studied the Biblical principles that guided the Hebrew people they would be amazed to find that Abraham's offspring did not take the creation mandate 'to cultivate and keep' the land as an excuse to exploit it. Israel's laws included rules of ecology (no overuse of the land by periodic rests and fertilization) as well as the notion of sustainability (rules about the preservation of trees, Deut 20:19-20) including biological insights.⁷

The 'land of milk and honey' was certainly more attractive than the desert. It was the nicest of all lands but nevertheless an area under climatically diverse and naturally averse conditions.

"So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey," (Exo 3:8)

"...on that day I swore to them, to bring them out from the land of Egypt into a land that I had selected for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands." (Eze 20:6)

The land had to be cultivated to produce harvests. It was God's land whose ecology was subject to the moral behavior of its tenant. The blessing and the curse would affect the agricultural life (Deut 28).⁸

On the one hand the land covenant is unconditional as Genesis 15 shows. Abraham did not pass between the animals when the covenant was "cut." On the other hand, there is a conditional aspect to it as misbehavior could cause 'the land of milk and honey' to expel its inhabitants:

26 'But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, *neither* the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you

27 (for the men of the land who have been before you have done

all these abominations, and the land has become defiled);

28 so that the land will not spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you. (Lev 18:26-28)

'You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out.' (Lev20:22)

The curses of Deuteronomy included the possibility of exile from the land. A lack of justice and disobedience were reasons to lose the right to possess the land,

"Justice, *and only* justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you." (Deut 16:20)

"It shall come about that as the LORD delighted over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so the LORD will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you; and you will be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it." (Deut 28:63)

The proof of God's holiness can be seen in the fact that because of a single failure Moses was not allowed to enter the land. The whole first generation that passed through the wilderness was deprived of the promises of Abraham. Nevertheless, while there are conditions on Israel's possession of the land God has committed himself to his covenant. His name is tied into it and if he allowed the land to be taken away from Israel he would lose his credibility. Even those who dare dividing it will be punished (Joel 3:2). This is the reason why the prophet Ezekiel often uses the phrase "for my name's sake." The land that was promised to Abraham will eternally belong to Abraham's descendants despite Israel's behavior and

despite the attempts of Anti-Zionists to prove from their principles of prophetic interpretation that what is written must not be taken literally. The land is Israel's inheritance and whoever will usurp or destroy it will face a confrontation with the God who made the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God's final judgment takes man's ecological responsibilities into account:

"And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time *came* for the dead to be judged, and *the time* to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth." (Rev 11:18)

Although the Letter to the Hebrews states:

"For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that" (Heb 4:8)

the geographical reality of the promised land cannot be annulled by the spiritual application of the "Shabbat rest" to which believers can look forward. It is true that the 'other day' came when Joshua's names sake Yeshua/Jesus provided the salvation that is not based on human efforts. Yet there is still another day at His second coming when Israel as a nation will enter that rest. In the same vein Abraham "was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb 11:10). Stephen's speech in Acts 7:5 explicitly refers to the land promise. To reinterpret that promise as forfeited or no longer a geographical reality would have consequences that would make God a liar. The apostle Paul summed it up when he said:

"What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not

nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written,

"THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."
(Romans 3:3-4)

3.6 Possession of the land ⁹ (predicted dispersions and the return)

'(Abraham) said, "O Lord GOD, how may I know that I will possess it?"

"On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite." (Gen 15:8, 18-21)

"Joshua said to all the people, **"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel,** 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, *namely*, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.

3 'Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan,

11 'You crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho; and the citizens of Jericho fought against you, *and* the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Girgashite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Thus I gave them into your hand.

12 'Then I sent the hornet before you and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before you,

but not by your sword or your bow.

13 'I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.'" (Josh 24:2-3,11-13)

Any land on earth is God's land and He gives it to whomever he wills. The former territory of the land of Canaan he gave to Israel and Israel was to own it as the tenants of God's property. Israel was not to sell it or to give it away. This is why Israel had to observe the regulations for the "Year of Jubilee:"

"The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are *but* aliens and sojourners with Me.

24 'Thus for every piece of your property, you are to provide for the redemption of the land.

25 'If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold.

26 'Or in case a man has no kinsman, but so recovers his means as to find sufficient for its redemption,

27 then he shall calculate the years since its sale and refund the balance to the man to whom he sold it, and so return to his property.

28 'But if he has not found sufficient means to get it back for himself, then what he has sold shall remain in the hands of its purchaser until the year of jubilee; but at the jubilee it shall revert, that he may return to his property.'" (Lev 25:23-28)

Abraham never saw the fulfillment of the land promise. His descendants had to wait for some 800 years before the conquest reached the full circumference of their territory during the apex of their history as a united nation under King Solomon. The nation subsequently fell apart and because of its disobedience to God's covenant the Northern kingdom went into exile in 722 (Assyria) and the Southern kingdom in 586 (Babylon). Despite of these absences from the land exiles and dispersions are temporary and cannot annul God's overall plans for the ultimate salvation of his people. God's reputation is at stake. He acted and will act for the sake of his name:

"Then you will know that I am the LORD when I have dealt with you **for My name's sake**, not according to your evil ways or according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel," declares the Lord GOD.'" (Eze 20, v. 44 and verses 9,14,22; also Eze 36, especially verses 22-23)

There was an initial or first return from Babylon 70 years later according to the prophecy of Jeremiah 25:11 only to be followed by the final expulsion under the Romans after AD 70 (destruction of the second Temple). A "second return" is predicted from the four corners of the earth according to Isaiah and Jeremiah:

" Then in that day The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the

peoples; And His resting place will be glorious.

11 Then it will happen on that day that the Lord Will again recover the **second time** with His hand The remnant of His people, who will remain, From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, And from the islands of the sea.

12 And He will lift up a standard for the nations And assemble the banished ones of Israel, And will gather the dispersed of Judah **From the four corners of the earth."**

(Isa 11:10-12)

"Therefore behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when it will no longer be said, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,'

15 but, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them.' For **I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers.**

16 "Behold, I am going to send for many fishermen," declares the LORD, "and they will fish for them; and afterwards I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them from every mountain and every hill and from the clefts of the rocks. (Jer 16:14-16)

God's intervention in history is not going to be based on merit. It will be based on his nature, on his truthfulness, on his faithfulness, on his righteousness, on his holiness:

"I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their

midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Lord GOD, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.

24 **"For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.**

25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols." (Eze 36:23-25)

In 1925, long before the modern State of Israel was proclaimed, David Baron in his chapter "The Unconditional Promise" writes

"The return in unbelief is, we believe, the necessary precursor to the resumption of God's dealing with them as a nation; but of this we are certain, on the ground of prophetic Scripture, that the Jews will never possess the land in blessing until God's long-standing controversy with them is ended. And this will not be until Israel's national repentance and conversion, when they shall broken-heartedly confess their great national sin, and look upon him Whom they have pierced, and mourn."

He ended his chapter with prophetic insight, saying that, just as the generation who came out of Egypt was not allowed to "enter His rest" because of unbelief and disobedience so the generations of the past nineteen centuries could not enjoy God's promises because of unbelief.¹⁰

"...the Jewish nation will yet learn, after bitter experience, the truth of the words of Joseph Rabbinowitch one of the noblest

Jewish patriots and pioneers, that "the key to Palestine (as well as into the Kingdom of God) lies in the hands of Jesus our Brother."

Abraham's descendants would own God's land as 'tenants' of an "everlasting possession" (Gen 13:14-15; 17:8). Since this is God's land it would seem that in this case the term 'right of living' would be more appropriate than property but the text uses the term 'possession' with the implication of property as inheritance. The land promise is part of the unconditional covenant (Gen 15). Expulsion from the land does not annul ownership. What may be confusing to many is the apparent contradiction that an unconditional covenant may include a conditional component. Possession or ownership in God's sight is not the same as the right to live on the land even though God freely gave it to Abraham and offspring. The right of living in the land was conditional upon obedience. Temporary expulsion as a consequence of disobedience was predicted from the beginning. Moses put the conditions down in no uncertain terms. They are included in the chapters on blessings and curses in Leviticus and Deuteronomy as well as in the Psalms.¹¹

It was no lesser than the Jewish philosopher Meir Simcha Sokolovsky who recognized the consequences of disobedience when he wrote about the Holocaust, "From the atrocities of World War II we see all the more clearly that the anti-Semitism, suffering and hardship which is the lot of our people is not a natural, rational phenomenon but rather an incontrovertible act of God in fulfillment of the unheeded admonitions and prophecies of the Tochechah." (The Torah portions containing the Admonitions) (12)

4. Today's controversy over the land

4.1 The Anti-Zionist view

There are two main groups that do not share the Biblical perspective on the Abrahamic Covenant: Christian Anti-Zionism and Secular (including Islamic) Anti-Zionism. Both groups have their own history and have produced an abundant literature to advance their respective arguments. In this article we limit ourselves to the Christian Anti-Zionists as they accuse the Christian Zionists of using a "profoundly flawed method of interpreting the Bible." Their argument is that the others fail to read the Old Testament with its land promises through the eyes of the New Testament.¹³ In addition, they deny that modern Israel has anything to do with ancient Israel. In their opinion it would have been better to resettle the Jews in Africa or Latin America than to allow them to return to their ancient homeland.

This view sees no continuity between the OT and the NT because it claims that for the NT writers like John "The one and only fulfillment of all the promises and prophecies was already there before their eyes in the person of Jesus."¹⁴ For such theologians, "Jesus presented his ministry as the fulfillment of the whole future hope of the Old Testament, the day of the Lord and the coming of the Messiah."¹⁵ This allows them to conclude that "A fulfillment in 1948 of a prophecy given by Ezekiel to people who lived in the 580s BC is thus nonsense: it is not a fulfillment of promises and warnings that were part of God's relationship with those people."¹⁶

Quite apart from the implication that their method of interpretation is the only right one because they reject a valid continuation between the two Testaments one needs to raise at least two questions:

- 1) Was the Old Testament only written for the sake of the Jews, for the sake of the relationship between YHWH and "those people" of ancient Israel? Of course not. Christ has 'validated' the Old Testament, not abolished it, (Mat 5:17; Rom 15:8)
- 2) Where is the Scriptural proof that the meaning of the cross of Christ and his resurrection "broke not only the bonds of death for early Christians but also the bonds of the land?"¹⁷ Were the 'bonds of death' not the consequences of sin? How then does one account for 'the bonds of the land'?

Collin Chapman's book has been criticized by various authors.¹⁸ In the conclusion of his book he says, "The coming of the kingdom of God through Jesus the Messiah has transformed and reinterpreted all the promises and prophecies in the Old Testament. ... Jesus the Messiah who lived, died and was raised from death *in the land*, has opened the kingdom of God to people of all races, making all who follow him into 'one new humanity' (Eph 2:15, NRSV)." He quotes W.D. Davies, saying that the land thus becomes part of the "mystery of Christ." The quintessence of his liberation theology is that for the early Christians Jesus not only broke the bonds of death but also "the bonds of the land."

For Chapman the early Jewish believers by entering the Church – the kingdom of God – had lost their Jewishness in becoming one with the non-Jews. They had been liberated from their "bonds to the land" because all had become Christians to form the new humanity. In Liberation Theology the rest of the Jews seems to have no further significance. Breaking the "bonds of the land" for this theology is a necessity or it will collapse although there is no such affirmation in

the Bible anywhere. It is based on a distorted reading of Israel's history. It was not Israel's idea to conquer the land of Canaan and if God had not fought on Israel's side it would have been defeated in the past just as it would be today.

Anti-Zionism rejects the connection between the land of Israel and the millennium. This teaching interprets the millennium metaphorically and applies it to the present Church Age. The land for these proponents is the new heaven and the new earth. Chapman almost condescendingly remarks, "It is perfectly understandable that Jews should believe that the establishment of Israel holds out a hope for survival in a hostile world in the twentieth century... But how can we believe that the establishment of Jewish state in the land is the fulfillment of OT hopes and aspirations for the land? Now that the Messiah has come, we cannot possibly go back." (19) No, we cannot go back but He will come back in space and time. His return will be a historic event. Zechariah 12:4 states that the Messiah will set his feet on the Mount of Olives when the nations will be judged in the land of Israel. This obviously poses a problem to Anti-Zionism and thus Chapman asks the question: "Do the NT writers encourage us in any way to relate Zechariah's words to historical events in Jerusalem between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ?" His answer is somewhat otherworldly. Instead of quoting Acts 1:11 in reply to his own question ("Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven") he escapes into this argument: "When the NT writers have given us a vision of how Jesus has fulfilled some of Zechariah's prophecies in his first coming and have given us a vision of "how others will be fulfilled at his second coming" (which?) "how can one relate them, for example, to

Arab attacks on Israel? It is rather like lighting a candle when the sun is already shining." 20 No wonder Anti-Zionists do not quote Psalm 83. No wonder they would not mind if the Jews would settle in Uganda or perhaps in Latin America.

It is worth mentioning one further passage, the apostle Paul's teaching in Romans 9-11. Chapman quotes Romans 11:1-2 ("...Theirs is ...the covenants") and Romans 11: 28-29 ("God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.") 21 Chapman simply cannot allow these words to mean what they say and thus he concludes: "Since Paul is so insistent elsewhere that Jesus the Messiah has already come as deliverer and made a covenant to deal with the sins of his people, there is no suggestion that Jesus has to come once again to complete the special salvation of the Jews." Since Paul "says nothing about land; and says nothing about political or national issues" Chapman insists that Paul's statement that "God's gift and his call are irrevocable" *excludes* the land promises of the covenant with Abraham. "Jews forfeit the blessings of the covenant through their unbelief." 22 They will eventually enter the Church in which Jews and Gentiles will be reconciled. Surprisingly he says nevertheless that they are 'loved on account of the patriarchs' (Rom 11:28) and that "Gentile Christians are to recognize that they have somehow been 'grafted into' the Jewish people." Paul's message to the Galatians that "there is neither Jew nor Greek...for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28) is interpreted by Liberation Theology in a way contrary to the implications that Paul makes. "Neither Jew nor Gentile" implies that both have the same way of salvation and both are Abraham's descendants. That passage is not about calling and identity. The distinction between 'slave and free man, male and female' is still maintained. These essential differences are not abolished. Paul wrote his Letter to the Romans to strengthen his brethren's faith

and to bring about reconciliation between Jewish and Gentile believers. Therefore this passage has nothing to do with the land.

Christian Anti-Zionism is not only the consequence of *liberal* theologies. It is also found among conservative Evangelicals as the result of certain eschatological positions. The amillennial theologian Anthony A. Hoekema interprets Gal 3:28-29, "there is neither Jew nor Gentile..." as proof that spiritually speaking Jews and Gentiles are Abraham's seed and that the church is the true Israel. Supporting this view with the Ephesian passage about reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles (2:14,16,19) he opposes the dispensationalist position – which distinguishes between Israel and the church - and says "All thought of a separate purpose for believing Jews is here excluded."²³ Based on the NT understanding that believing Jews and Gentiles are heirs according to his promise (Gal 3:29) "the promise of which we are heirs must include the promise of the land." ²⁴ Hoekema spiritualizes 'the land' in claiming that "in New Testament times the inheritance is expanded to include the entire earth." ²⁵ The consequence of the amillennial position is the denial that national Israel has a future on this side of eternity. It is by definition anti-Zionist.

Another evangelical anti-Zionist view is Preterism. Gary DeMar in a well argued document of 2003, signed by a long list of mainly Reformed Protestant and Presbyterian theologians and pastors, repeats the accusation of "serious misreading of Holy Scripture."²⁶ According to Gary DeMar the resulting political commitments concerning the land are based on "two fatally flawed propositions." The first is that God's favor is based on "ethnic descent" rather than on "God's grace" and the second is "that the Bible's promises concerning the land

are fulfilled in a special political region or "Holy Land," perpetually set apart by God for one ethnic group alone." Underlying this position is the implicit humanist concept of equality. The title of his paper says it all: "the impartiality of the Gospel." The same argument is found in Chapman and his understanding of Galatians 3:28. In order to put the record straight he summarizes the preterist position in ten points. Here is point IX for example,

"IX. The entitlement of any one ethnic or religious group to territory in the Middle East called the "Holy Land" cannot be supported by Scripture. In fact, the land promises specific to Israel in the Old Testament were fulfilled under Joshua."

His supporting footnote from Joshua 21:43-45 reads

"So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which he had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The Lord gave them rest all around, according to all that he had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing that the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass."

One wonders why DeMaar wants to see the conquest closed ignoring what Joshua tells his people in Joshua 23:5,13

"5 The LORD your God, He will thrust them out from before you and drive them from before you; and you will possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you.

13 know with certainty that the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you; but they will be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you.”

Israel's history shows that it was not under Joshua but under Solomon that the kingdom reached the full extent of the promised land. It was gradually lost under the succeeding kings whose prophets predicted the return that will only be complete when the Messiah returns for the second time.

According to preterism the land covenant because of Israel's disobedience was cancelled (even though, as we have seen, it was to be unconditional and eternal) and thus the rest of Scripture must be read to fall in line with the preterist interpretation. DeMaar summarizes Romans 3:2 and 9:3-4

“Of all the nations, the Jewish people played the primary role in the coming of the Messianic kingdom. New Testament Scripture declares that to them *were given* the oracles of God... (3:2), the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises.” (9:4) (italics are mine)

It needs to be noted that DeMar transfers the past tense to the whole list but this is not what the original says. The past tense is only used in Romans 3:2 (the oracles *were given* to them). The remainder of the list is in the present tense and thus makes it clear that the covenants *are* (not *were*) given to them. The promised heritage is still theirs. He correctly continues and writes:

“Theirs *are* the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and from them, according to the flesh, came Christ.” (italics are mine)

This view is a postmillennial one. The Millennium is understood to be figurative and identical with the so-called ‘Church age.’ The believing Jews are now the Church into which the Gentiles were and are being grafted. Furthermore, DeMar accuses Premillennialists of (partial) Replacement Theology (because according to that view the Jews only return to the stage of history after the rapture of the church) but even his *Partial Preterism* does not seem to escape Replacement Theology either.

4.2 The Biblical Zionist view

The Biblical Zionist view is found among Christians and Jews who believe the Hebrew prophets whether or not they agree on who the Messiah is. The land promise is a matter of faith. Israel “by faith” conquered kingdoms.²⁷ Abraham's faith had been counted to him as righteousness. His faith was more than a passive attitude of the heart. His faith was a trusting obedience that resulted in action. “By faith” he had obeyed by going out...²⁸ and when the promise began to be fulfilled the walls of Jericho fell down “by faith.”²⁹ That brief statement, “by faith,” is immediately preceded by the action that expressed their obedience. The army marched six times around the walls of the town in silence and seven more times by blowing the shofars. After that they blew the shofars a final time shouting the top of their lungs, and the walls came tumbling down.

Israel was to know that the conquest of Canaan was God's conquest. The defining experience of the opening battle was Joshua's encounter with the Commander of Adonai's (YHWH) army. The man that stood before him with a drawn sword must have been none other than

Jesus/Yeshua in his pre-incarnate form.³⁰ Jesus presented himself in the form of a man to make Joshua aware of the fact that the conquest of Canaan was under the command of Lord of the heavenly hosts.³¹ This is why Joshua had to take off his shoes because he stood on holy ground. The same Jesus reveals himself in John's opening vision in the book of Revelation. John sees him with a double edged sword that "went out of his mouth."³²

The Commander of the heavenly hosts has been present in the conquest of the land ever since the battle of Jericho. He will be present when the nations will be assembled for the "war of the Great Day of Adonai-Tzva'ot, at the final battle in the valley of Megiddo, in Hebrew called the battle of Armageddon."³³ Psalm 83 prophetically reports the intention of the Ishmaelite nations (today's Arabs as they claim to be Ishmael's descendants) to exterminate Israel. It also makes reference to the battle of Deborah and Sisera and the battle of Gideon against the Midianites.³⁴ Both battles are prime examples of God's direction and presence in the Israelite conquest of the land.³⁵ According to Israel's prophets the Land will be Israel's for ever even if the Jews have only recently begun to return to it to live there as a nation. This is no contradiction to the 'impartiality of the Gospel' of salvation in which there is indeed no distinction between Jew and Non-Jew. This view recognizes God's plan, calling and purpose to reveal himself not only to the Jews but also to the nations through the Jews.

The Jewish philosopher-theologian Michael Wyschogrod in his book on "Abraham's Promise" has a chapter on 'Judaism and the Land.' In it he recognizes that Israel's claim to the land is above all a matter of faith. He nevertheless demonstrates from history that the Jews rather than needing to be delivered from the land they needed and still need to understand "the theological root" of their

relationship to the land. Israel is a nation *not* like other nations. It was a nation before moving into Canaan and it continued to be a nation even after being sent into exile. Its nationality is not tied to the soil but to its religion. Wyschogrod flatly contradicts the notion that Israel needs to be freed from its bondage to the land. "It was expelled from the land and has continued to be a people after it was separated from its land. It is therefore not as bound to its land as other peoples are. It is in a sense an international people, not only because the exigencies of history have made it so but because its election takes place so that other peoples will be blessed through it (Gen 12:3)."³⁶

Israel believes that God as the Creator and the owner of the whole earth gives his land to whoever he pleases. For Israel he is more a God of time than a God of space but he is both, after all. King Solomon confessed that God is greater than space and time in that "the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee" (1Kgs 8:27). Yet he is "a God who enters space and time, who dwells in Jerusalem on the Temple Mount. Therefore, by his presence, he sanctifies the land of Israel beyond any other land on earth."³⁷ Wyschogrod points out a "dual indwelling" of God - not only in the temple but also "in the people and the land...when the people of Israel is missing from its land, the land is incomplete." There is even "a triadic relationship: the indwelling of God, Israel and the land."

This mystery cannot be comprehended without a biblical understanding of Israel's election and calling. He also says "Our historical identity is a national one that, in most cases, is not of our own choosing. And once we understand the seriousness of national identity, we have entered the historical order which is hallowed through the national election of Israel. It is hallowed because, God tells us, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation is a

possibility.”³⁸ Israel always had a problem with taking away the land from other nations. It had to be exhorted to take possession of it in order to be ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ Its election does not depend on obedience even if its possession of the land may be temporarily withdrawn because of disobedience.

Wyschogrod affirms³⁹ that even if God's presence and Israel's presence from the land have been withdrawn, their temporary absence will only last “until the reconciliation of God, Israel, and the land will have taken place. It is “a reconciliation that God promises through the prophets of Israel.” Whether or not Israel should have delayed its return may be an open question but not the return itself “because God has promised” it. With regard to those who have moved into the empty space that Israel had left abandoned, “they have been drawn into the vortex of a theological drama not of their making.”⁴⁰

The above Jewish perspective is diametrically opposed to the Christian Anti-Zionist understanding. It is possible to compare Israel to the Church, as Wyschogrod does, in that both are forming a ‘spiritual fellowship into which men bring their national identities.’ In both cases the national identity is irrelevant. It is even true that the majority of ‘the church’ understands itself “as having universalized the national election of Israel by opening it to all men who, in entering the church, enter a spiritualized, universalized fellowship, but the church is not the “new Israel” – a term that is not found in the Bible. To consider itself as the ‘new Israel’ is the result of an arrogant church that denies today's Israel “Maranatha!”

its right of existence. One might call the new humanity whom Jesus/Yeshua reconciled according to Ephesians 2:14 the ‘extended Israel’ as the Gentile remnant of the church grafted into Israel's ‘olive tree’ (the believing remnant of Israel). But the distinction between Israel and the church remains as part of God's plan of salvation.

The church does not need the land since it is international. National Israel on the contrary has an irrevocable spiritual connection to the land. This is not just a Jewish idea. It is a biblical idea. It is God's design and plan in order to reveal himself to the nations beyond Messiah's first coming. God in his land covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 has irrevocably committed himself to fulfill his promise in which His Son Jesus/Yeshua will set up his terrestrial kingdom to rule the nations from Jerusalem. He has tied the honor of His name to this plan. The reality test of the various theological positions is the way world history has been moving for the last 2000 years. It increasingly confirms the prophetically predicted cry of the enemy: “Come, and let us wipe them out as a nation, That the name of Israel be remembered no more.”⁴¹ If national Israel is wiped out as a nation and its enemies are going to triumph over it the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would have become a liar and Jesus/Yeshua would not be able to “come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11) It also confirms the growing cry in his own nation where an increasing number of Jews worldwide and in Israel is welcoming the coming Messiah “Baruch haba be Shem Adonai!”⁴² And the faithful remnant of the church is crying

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Deut 34:1-4 ... 8	Gen 15:113	Josh 24:2-3,11-	Rom 11:28).. 17
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Deut 7:22..... 10	Gen 15:169	Josh1:2-4 8	Rom 3:2 19
	Gen 15:18 8		Rom 9:3-4 19
Eph 2:14 21	Gen 15:8, 18-	Judg 1:19 6	Rom 9-11 17
Eph 2:14,16,19	21 13	Judg 1:21 6	
..... 18	Gen 15:9..... 3	Judg 6:20-24.. 7	1Sam 1:24.....3
Eph 2:15 16	Gen 17:8..... 15		
Eph 6:12 6	Gen 22:8..... 2	1Kgs 5:1 8	Zech 12:4 17
	Gen15:7-8..... 1	1Kgs 8:27 20	Zech 14:4 11
Exo 12:12 5			Zech 2:12 3
Exo 13:21-22. 7	Heb 11:10 12	Lev 18:26-2812	
Exo 23:21 8	Heb 11:13 4	Lev 25:23-2814	
Exo 23:29-3010	Heb 12:29 7		

¹ Jer 34:17-18, "Therefore thus says the LORD, 'You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming release each man to his brother and each man to his neighbor. Behold, I am proclaiming a release to you,' declares the LORD, 'to the sword, to the pestilence and to the famine; and I will make you a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

18 'I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, *when* they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts –" also see literature about the blood covenant in Mesopotamia:

Trumbull, H. Clay: *The Blood Covenant – A primitive rite and its bearings on Scripture*, Philadelphia: 1885; Impact Books: 1975, 2003 7th printing, pp 264, 322.

Intrator, Keith, *Covenant Relationships*, Destiny Image: 1989, *Cutting the Blood Covenant*: "He (God) himself would make himself liable to judicial execution." p.29 (on Jer 34, 17-18; the same Hebrew verb for 'cutting covenant' is used in Gen 15 and Jer 34)

² David Baron, *Israel in the Plan of God*, London: Morgan & Scott 1925, reprinted by Kregel, 1983, p. 243, a reference to his own *The Shepherd of Israel and His Scattered Flock*, pp 107-108

³ David Baron, p. 253

⁴ *The Borders of Holiness – The identical and natural boundaries of Israel* (Biblical Israel is defined by natural boundaries) in *The Geographic Codes of the Bible*, a collection of 26 essays, Studio Bat Ami, Berth-El, 5767, p. 242.

⁵ Colin Chapman, 'Whose Promised Land? The continuing crisis over Israel and Palestine', Baker Books, 2002, p. 119

⁶ Paul R. Williamson, 'The Land in Israel's Story: Promise and Fulfillment of the Territorial Inheritance' in Johnson and Walker (eds), *The Land of Promise*, pp 22

⁷ A.P. & A.H. Hütterman, *Am Anfang war die Ökologie, Naturverständnis im Alten Testament*, Antje Kunstmann, München 2002

⁸ In Isa 7:15 'cream and honey' indicate a difficult time for the land as cultivation will no longer be possible.

⁹ David Baron, *Israel in the Plan of God*, London: Morgan & Scott 1925, reprinted by Kregel, 1983, pp 149-154. on p. 150: "As sure, then, as God is true, this land of Canaan is the inalienable possession of the Jewish nation, whatever the Gentile world-powers may plan about it." In a footnote he adds: "To the believer in God's Word this is a sufficient answer to those who, out of prejudice against the Jews, are asserting that the Moslem and so-called Christian Arabs and not the Jews are the true claimants to Palestine."

¹⁰ Baron, op.cit. p. 154, Heb 3: 16-19

¹¹ (Deut 28:64ff, and in several other texts also: Lev 26:33; Deut 4:27; Ps 44:11; 106:34-48)

¹² Sokolovsky, Meier Simcha, *Prophecy and Providence – The Fulfilment of Torah Prophecies in the Course of Jewish History*, Feldheim Publishers, Jerusalem/New York: 1991 (1985 Hebrew), p. 206; Tochechah = Lev 26:14-46, Deut 28:15-68

¹³ Colin Chapman, op. cit., p. 282

¹⁴ Chapman, 176; Hebrews 11 serves Anti-Zionism as the ultimate proof-text for their view. The land has become 'the rest', Our 'High-Priest' and 'altar' and our 'hope' has become Jesus; the 'Holy Place', the 'tabernacle and temple', 'Mount Zion' and 'the kingdom' are now spiritual. "The only thing which we do not have is an earthly, territorial city." (Collins according to C.J.H. Wright, p. 167. If the temple and the sacrifices are spiritual, Collin asks, why "can it not also be true for the land?" The answer is simple: because the relationship of 'land' with 'rest' is a metaphorical one and refers to our salvation (see Heb 4:11 'let us be diligent to enter that rest) and because the continued existence and calling of the Jews requires a land, for there is no people on earth whose land is 'the rest.' It simply makes no sense. For the 'rest' to replace the land the Jewish people would need to cease to exist.

¹⁵ Chapman 149

¹⁶ Chapman 293

¹⁷ Chapman 285 quote from W.D. Davies

¹⁸ Pieter "Toypom" – an Amazon review. Attention is drawn to David Pawson's publication in answer to Stephen Sizer's 'Christian Zionism.'

¹⁹ Chapman, 168

²⁰ Chapman 302

²¹ Chapman 228-231

²² Chapman 228

²³ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979, pp 199-200

²⁴ Hoekema p. 279

²⁵ Hoekema p. 278

²⁶ Gary DeMar, *The People of God, the Land of Israel, and the Impartiality of the Gospel*

http://www.preteristarchive.com/PartialPreterism/2003_knox_israel-impartiality.html

²⁷ Heb 11:33

²⁸ Heb 11:8

²⁹ Heb 11:30

³⁰ Compare 1Chron 21:15 where ,the Angel of the Lord (YHWH)' appears over the threshing floor of Ornan with a drawn sword after the execution of 70'000 Israelis as a consequence of David's sin of having taken a census for motives that were not acceptable to the heavenly Commander in Chief

³¹ Josh 5:13-15.

³² Rev 1:16

³³ Zech 12; Rev 16:14, 16

³⁴ Judg 4-8

³⁵ Oreb and Zeeb, Zebah and Zalmunna are Midianite leaders referred to in Psalm 83 as a reminder of God's intervention in those battles.

³⁶ Michael Wyschogrod, p. 100

³⁷ *ibid.* 102

³⁸ *ibid.* 99

³⁹ In Isaiah 6:11 the prophet asks God until when he will have to preach his message of hardening to his own nation and God answers him "Until cities are devastated *and* without inhabitant, Houses are without people And the land is utterly desolate, the LORD has removed men far away, And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land, yet there will be a tenth portion in it, And it will again be *subject* to burning, Like a terebinth or an oak Whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump." The apostle Paul in Romans 11:25-27 explains the reason and purpose of this hardening: "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery -- so that you will not be wise in your own estimation -- that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "The deliverer will come from Zion, he will remove ungodliness from Jacob."

"This is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins."

⁴⁰ *ibid.* 103

⁴¹ Ps 83:4

⁴² Ps 118:26; Luke 13:35, the messianic Hebrew welcome greeting