

The Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism  
31<sup>st</sup> Annual North American Conference  
Wheaton College, Chicago, IL  
March 3, 2014

**Answering the New Covenant Perspective's Charge on  
The Absence of Restoration to the Land Texts  
In the New Testament**

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**Introduction**

A critic of Israel once asked a Jew, “Why couldn’t you Jews just accept a country like Uganda? Why do you have to go back only to Israel? Equal to the question, the Jew replied, “Why do I go all the way across the country to see my grandmother, when there are plenty of old ladies nearby?” To say that someone is equally at home everywhere is to say that he is at home nowhere. That home is “somewhere” was established in the legal definition of “home” as set forth by the English jurist William Blackstone: “Home is that place, from which, once a man has set forth, he is a wanderer until he returns.” To the Jew, every other land is an exile, which is why Jews have historically referred to life outside the Land as the *Diaspora*. Both by divine decree and the hubris of the nations, the Jew has been dispersed among the nations and considered the “wandering Jew” for the very reason that no homeland has been his except that from which he was exiled some two millennia ago. This conviction, so unwelcomed by the politicians and secularists has also been become a stumbling block for religionists:

What are we, finally, to make of this doctrine of The Land which gives theological significance—as it has been crudely put—“to a piece of real estate”? Many Jews, no less than Gentiles, have dismissed it as a bizarre and anachronistic superstition, unworthy of serious consideration. To many rationalists, and even humanists, especially since the Enlightenment, in a rational universe the doctrine is an affront. This response is generally coupled with the assumption that the doctrine is simply an aspect of that other doctrine of “chosenness” or “election” that –so it is claimed—has irrationally and arrogantly afflicted (a verb chosen advisedly) the Jewish people, the particularism of The Land being, in fact, an

especially primitive expression of the unacceptable particularism of the Jewish faith.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet, for the student of Scripture, the Land doctrine cannot be easily dismissed. It remains an undeniable fact of Holy Writ, a fact Old Testament theologian Walt Kaiser, Jr. reminds us of when he addresses this recognition within the Christian community:

Christian theologians are once again reclaiming the fact that “the land is central, if not *the central theme* of biblical faith,” and therefore, as W. D. Davies warned, “it will no longer do to talk about Yahweh and his people, but we must speak about Yahweh and his people *and his land*.” Likewise, Gerhard von Rad summarized the situation by saying, “Of all the promises made to the patriarchs it was that of the land that was the most prominent and decisive.” In fact, few issues are as important as that of the promise of the land to the patriarchs and the nation of Israel: the Hebrew word *‘erets* is the fourth most frequent substantive in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>2</sup>

These comments are generally accepted by both Jewish and Christian scholars as accurate with respect to the Old Covenant. The Land of Israel was the stage for the great drama of salvation history and the Nation of Israel was at the center of this stage serving as the Chosen People for the LORD’s demonstration of His Presence and power in that history. However, everything changes when we move to the New Covenant, and for Christian scholars, to the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the language used for predicted events associated with the New Covenant, often within the same context as the language used to describe known historical events, is said to be hyperbolic or symbolic since the description portrays a surreal utopia for an Israel of the last days. In the New Testament, it is claimed, nothing like this is encountered and the New Covenant is seen as a distinctly Christian experience. In sum, this view sees the Old Covenant as replaced by the New Covenant, Israel replaced by the Church, and the Christian mission has moved from the limited territory of a place in the Middle East to the entire world (cosmos).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W.D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism*, 1st ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Pr, 1992), 127.

<sup>2</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Land of Israel and the Future Return (Zechariah 10:6-12),” in *Israel the Land and the People*, ed. H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998), 209.

<sup>3</sup> The Covenant of Grace assumes all of the biblical covenants were originally intended for the church (Israel). Therefore, the Land promises were designed to ultimately have a spiritual fulfillment. There was a promise of restoration to the Land made to Israel according to the flesh, but this was conditioned on Israel’s obedience and its national failure abrogated such fulfillment. However, it found fulfillment with spiritual Israel on a universal scale. The New Covenant Perspective sees the Abrahamic Covenant (and the Land promises within it) fulfilled by Messiah and therefore irrelevant today as Christ’s commission is to the world.

Reformed scholar O. Palmer Robertson says, “When Christ actually came, the biblical perspective on the “land” experienced radical revision.”<sup>4</sup> Colin Chapman explains this revision as a result of a new Christocentric interpretation that he believes was taught by Yeshua Himself:

Yeshua seems to be silent about the subject of the land because for him the theme of the kingdom of God took the place of the theme of the land and everything else associated with it in the Old Testament. He used language from the Old Testament about the land, the ingathering of the exiles to the land and the redemption or restoration of the nation of Israel to describe his own ministry.”<sup>5</sup>

For those who have been taught to think that the final goal of the redemptive program is the Church and that all of the types and shadows of the Old Covenant were intended to yield this ideal, it is inherently wrong and patently absurd to not view everything under the New Covenant in terms of the church.<sup>6</sup> From this perspective, Yeshua came to end the Old Covenant under which national Israel was the experiment, and the New Covenant and the Church is the final result. There is simply no possible concept of an Israel in the New Covenant that is not the Church. The primitive and earthly beginnings of ethnic distinctions and territorial boundaries have reached their ordained spiritual and heavenly goal in the Church. Its corporate unity can allow no ethnic distinctions (all its members are and only Christians) and its universal mission cannot be limited to a focus in the Middle East. Under this New Covenant, everyone is the chosen people and everywhere is the holy land.

Although an unbiased reading of the text would lead to a literal interpretation of a future kingdom for a spiritually restored Israel in the historical Land of Israel, no such unbiased reading is possible due to the constraints of hermeneutical approaches that have captivated and now control the thinking of the majority of contemporary scholarship as well as the pastors, teachers, apologists, and missionaries they educate in their classrooms and through their writings. Contemporary scholars argue for the priority of the New Testament in understanding the Old Testament and for its reinterpretation in light of a Christocentric interpretation that has made the

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<sup>4</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *Understanding the Land of the Bible: a Biblical-Theological Guide* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1996), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land? the Continuing Crisis Over Israel and Palestine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 175.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent critique of this view see H. Wayne House, “Traditional Dispensationalism and the Millennium,” *Criswell Theological Review* 11:1 (Fall 2013): 3-27.

Israel of the past irrelevant for the present. George Orwell observed in his novel *1984*: “Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.” Understanding this in light of historical and eschatological interpretation, as well as present politicized attitudes of the church toward the Jewish State, there is a concern for Jewish evangelism that is both informed and motivated by these issues. Therefore, it is necessary to consider and critique the hermeneutical issues put forth by the New Perspective concerning the biblical promise of restoration to the Land under the New Covenant.

### **Hermeneutical Issues Concerning the Land and the New Covenant**

New Testament scholars and systematic theologians have the most trouble with the Land promises because they are not the focus of the New Testament and they tend to dismiss them as having any continuing significance in light of the New Covenant program they interpret as global and Christ-centered, not land-centered. Old Testament scholars have a better understanding of these texts, however, because of the influence of higher critical theories and need to conform to creedal covenantalism, they typically view the restoration texts as either idyllic aspirations fulfilled historically under the Old Covenant or hyperbolic language that was intended to find fulfillment under the New Covenant through Christ and the Church. Consequently, the name given to their interpretive approach is the “New Covenant Perspective.”

#### *The Literary Motivation Interpretation*

Eugene March, Professor of Old Testament at the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, explains this perspective in contrast to the futurists school of interpretation:

The simplest version of the argument among Christians is that all the words of the prophets must be fulfilled because the prophets were predicting the future. Some prophecies have been fulfilled, but many have not. Among the latter is the prediction that at the end of time or at the beginning of the messianic age, the people of Israel—scattered abroad when their nation was destroyed as punishment from God—will be gathered and returned to their former land. Sometimes in this view, the return is seen as the beginning of a time when Jews will be converted to Christianity or at least will acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ. For others, the ingathering of Jews is simply a sign of the end time, when Christians will be

delivered from this evil world before final judgment falls on all nations. On the surface, the argument is persuasive if the texts in question are read according to the presupposed theology. But a number of criticisms may rightly be lodged against this interpretation. First, the texts are taken out of their literary and historical contexts and understood as predictions, when in fact they were words of accusation and hope directed to particular audiences of real people. These were not mysterious words that would only be understood thousands of years after they were uttered. The whole notion is based on a misunderstanding of the character and intention of the biblical prophets and their work ... The words were intended to assure God's people of ongoing divine care and compassion. They may help us articulate a vision, but they do not constitute a deterministic program we can use to predict God's time."<sup>7</sup>

The literary contexts for these prophecies are indeed concerned with real and desperate historical conditions (desecration, destruction and exile). Moderns can scarcely appreciate the degree of defilement the punishment of exile from the Land imposed on the Jewish People.<sup>8</sup> But it must be asked if words designed to address such real needs really engender hope and consolation if they are merely words and were not intended to constitute a real promise to alter these conditions? The hope of the exilic and post-exilic communities was for a real *restoration*, whether in the near or far future. God's promise for Israel's future deliverance was often compared with His past deliverances (e.g., the exodus). If the Prophet's audience interpreted past divine intervention as real history, why should they not interpret the future promise of deliverance in the same manner? Hyperbolic rhetoric and literary devices may satisfy modern literary critics, but they did nothing for a people who needed to count on God acting in history for the future of their Nation. Can we seriously believe that the prophets' (or worse, God's) words to Israel never intended a historical fulfillment of restoration in the Land, but only a reassurance of the LORD's care and compassion? If the promise was only meant to be words of encouragement, how was this encouragement to be realized? It could hardly have been realized in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. return from exile since by the prophet's own assessment this was disappointing on almost every level (nationally, politically, socially, and spiritually).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> W. Eugene March, *Israel and the Politics of Land: a Theological Case Study* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 69, 70.

<sup>8</sup> To be sent out of the Land was to be sent into a place without God, i.e., the world of idolatry: "So I will hurl you out of this land into the land which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers; and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I shall grant you no favor" (Jer. 16:13). The Nation had been warned of this awful state of ritual defilement as a consequence of covenant violation in Deut. 4:27-28.

<sup>9</sup> The books of Ezra and Nehemiah and their prophetic contemporaries Haggai and Zechariah record the fact that only a remnant of those in exile returned to Judah and once there failed to complete the Temple (Ezra 3:6; Hag. 1:2-

### *The Cosmic Reinterpretation Interpretation*

Others scholars who share a non-literal interpretation for these prophecies concede that the Prophets thought in literal terms, but that this was a misunderstanding later corrected by the New Testament's transformation of the nationalistic concept of land to a cosmic scope under the New Covenant. This is explained by Lisa Loden, Director of Programs for the Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, when she asks:

How does this perspective affect an understanding of the return to the land described by Ezekiel and other prophets? In the nature of things Old Testament writers such as Ezekiel could only employ the images with which they and their hearers were familiar. In their case, the idea of restoration to the geographical land from which Israel had been deported represented the fulfillment of their fondest hopes. Yet in the context of the realities of the new covenant, this land must be understood in terms of the newly recreated cosmos about which the Apostle Paul speaks in Romans.”<sup>10</sup>

This viewpoint fails to observe that the Prophets also predicted the creation of a new heavens and earth (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22), but also, and like Paul, the deliverance from the curse imposed on the present earth (Zech. 14:11; Rom. 8:18-25). Hebrew University of Jerusalem Professor Moshe Greenberg makes the observation that a cosmic reinterpretation of the Old Testament hope in the Land cannot be maintained in light of the necessary bond of the Jewish People with the holy Land that defines them as a holy people:

Christians and Muslims, it is commonly said, differ from Jews in the nature of the holiness ascribed to the Land of Israel: the former have holy memories and holy places here, while for Jews the Land itself is holy. To Jews, every other land is an

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9, yet constructed their own homes, failed to repair the breaches in the walls (Neh. 1:3), and in violation of the Mosaic legislation, had not separated from the ritually unclean peoples of the neighboring lands, but had even married foreign wives (Ezra 9:1-2; 10:10-44), labored and traded on the Sabbath (Neh. 13:15-21), and engaged in usury (Neh. 5:1-9), as well as other social sins (Zech. 7:9-10). Looking to a future restoration in the last days (Zech. 8-14), these prophets' sought to encourage the Jewish communities by focusing on the eventual fulfillment promised their Nation (with which they shared a corporate solidarity) in the Land. If God could be trusted with the future, he could be trusted with the present.

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Loden, “Knowing Where We Start: Assessing the Various Hermeneutical Approaches,” in *The Bible and the Land: an Encounter*. Eds. Lisa Loden, Peter Walker, Michael Wood (Jerusalem, Israel: Musalaha, 2000), 77-78. In this statement the author is critiquing the [Reformed] New Covenant position with particular attention to Peter Walker's comments in *Jesus and the Holy City*. Ed. Peter Walker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 313.

exile, but whatever happens here is significant, and the people living in the land are called to be a holy people.”<sup>11</sup>

The consequence of such a view that forces a reinterpretation of the Old Testament, effectively nullifying its central promise of the Land to national Israel, is well stated by Menahem Benhayim, former Israel Secretary of the International Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel of Israel:

In dealing with the theology of the Land in the context of Scripture, we must therefore not be tempted to do what the heretical Marcionites did—namely throwing out the earlier Scriptures as a relic from another ‘god’ and therefore quite irrelevant to Christians. Nor should we do what classical Christian theology has often done—namely transferring ‘Israel’ (the people and the Land) entirely to the spiritual realm. This may seem a more elegant way, but it still results in Israel being effectively irrelevant. (Unfortunately for such theology, the Jewish people and the biblical Land, have refused to accommodate to this scheme by becoming extinct or irrelevant.) Instead a realistic hermeneutic or ‘interpretation’ of the people and the land of Israel will relate, not just to the ‘extended’ meanings of Scripture, but also to its plain meaning.”<sup>12</sup>

#### *Christological Transformation Interpretation*

Another interpretive view, although one underlying all Christian non-literal views, is the position that the New Testament lens, which is focused on Christ, is the means to read and understand the Old Testament, which is focused on Israel and the Land. Representing this view as “the accepted and normative Christian interpretation,” religious ethicist Christopher Wright declares:

In New Testament theology the Christian Church, as the community of the Christ, is the organic continuation of Israel. It is heir to the names and privileges of Israel, and therefore also falls under the same ethical responsibilities—though now transformed in Christ. Therefore the thrust of Old Testament social ethics, which in their own historical context were addressed to the redeemed community of God’s people, needs to be directed first of all at the equivalent community—the Church.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Moshe Greenberg, “Theological Reflections – Land, People and State” in *People, Land and State of Israel: Jewish and Christian Perspectives*. Ed. Malcom Lowe (Jerusalem: The Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel, 1989), 25.

<sup>12</sup> Menahem Benhayim, “Reckoning with God’s Choice: The Election of a Land and a People” in *The Bible and the Land: an Encounter*. Eds. Lisa Loden, Peter Walker, and Michael Wood (Jerusalem, Israel: Musalaha, 2000), 85.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), xvii-xviii.

In response, it should be noted that in the beginning of the Church, the Jewish leadership did not possess this lens as they did not yet have a New Testament, but drew all of their understanding of the New Covenant from the Old Testament. It is essential that it be recognized that the “New Covenant” is not a mere renewal of the covenant, which occurred several times in Israel’s history (Ex. 34:1; Josh 24:19; 2 Chron. 29:10), but distinct from the Sinaitic covenant (Jer. 31:32). There are elements of continuity (both concluded by God, both made with Israel, both concerned with compliance to the Torah, and both with the same purpose to secure the covenant relationship between God and his people (Jer. 31:33b, cf. Ex. 19:5; 20:1), but, since the nation had (Jer. 31:32b) to fulfill the Mosaic legislation, a different kind of covenant, rooted in the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic Covenant, was necessary for the houses of Israel and Judah (Jer. 31:31).<sup>14</sup> The New Covenant was built upon the older unconditional covenants, but with features that are radically different.<sup>15</sup> While it has a distinct spiritual feature (Jer. 31:33a), this does not “transform” its objects, but enables them through regeneration to fulfill the terms of their covenant relationship with God (Jer. 31:33b). Though it deals with the promise of spiritual blessing it also deals with the promise of material blessing in the Land of Israel (Jer. 31: 35-37; 33:7-13). Therefore, from the defining nature of this covenant in its Old Testament context, it is made with national Israel with the intention it will be fulfilled by national Israel in the national Land of Israel. Nevertheless, it was designed to include, through Israel, the Gentile nations in its spiritual blessings (Gen. 12:3; cf. Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:14-18). This literal understanding is so natural to the text that even an Old Testament theologian such as Walter Brueggeman, who holds the transformational view, warns that the land can have both physical and spiritual meaning, but the “literal sense will protect us from over-spiritualization.”<sup>16</sup>

When we come to the New Testament, nothing in the recorded teaching of Yeshua, which was also drawn from the Old Testament, offers a methodology for such a radical revision of the promises made to the fathers. Nowhere does Yeshua declare that the Church will be the organic

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<sup>14</sup> For the defense of this interpretation of the New Covenant as the “new” covenant, see Willem VanGemen, “A Guide to Old Testament Theology and Exegesis” in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999): 34.

<sup>15</sup> This point is well expressed in the standard text by Andrew Hill and John Walton, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009): 540.

<sup>16</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977): 2.



continuation of Israel, bear its titles and privileges, and fall under its ethical responsibilities. These were imbedded in the Mosaic Law that had been an exclusive conditional covenant with the Nation and which was repeatedly denounced with the Jewish People throughout the history of the Church. Where then is this transformation except in the minds of those church fathers, who in seeking to distance themselves from the Jewish People who they regarded as apostate enemies to the Faith, sought to take their recorded blessings for themselves? To be certain the New Testament expands the New Covenant promises of the Old Testament to include the Church, but does not exclude national Israel with whom the promises of future physical and spiritual blessings were originally made. If Messiah came as a member of national Israel (Lk. 1:21-39) in the Land of Israel (Matt. 2:20-21) to the lost sheep of the House of Israel (Matt. 15:24; cf. Jer. 50:6), how could it be imagined that they would be excluded as such in any christocentric interpretation?<sup>17</sup>

### *Past Fulfillment Interpretation*

The overwhelming majority of Old Testament scholars hold that the restoration promises were fulfilled in the past with the return of the Jewish remnant from Babylon to reestablish a Jewish community in the Land, rebuild the Temple, and increase its population and agricultural production. While these details are part of the restoration promises, the efforts of the returnees were only meager improvements over the exilic condition and most of the Jewish population remained outside the Land in Egypt and Persia while those in the Land remained under foreign domination. Moreover, the Prophets railed invectives against the resident Jewish community for repeated violations of the Law (the very thing that produced the punishment of exile in the first place), as evangelical Old Testament scholar Walt Kaiser has observed:

But despite this overwhelming array of texts to the contrary from almost every one of the prophets, many still insist on saying that this promise to restore Israel to her promised land was fulfilled when Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah led their respective returns from Babylon back to the old land of Canaan. However, there is a serious deficiency to this line of reasoning. How then shall we explain the

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<sup>17</sup> Note Luke 15:4-6 where the Messiah teaches that inclusion, not exclusion, is the goal of the shepherd. In light of vs. 6 which focuses on the condition of repentance corresponding to the condition of a lost sheep being “found,” it is not difficult to understand the national repentance of Israel (Zech. 12:10-13:1; cf. Rom. 11:26-27) as the means by which the lost sheep of the House of Israel will be included in the future.

prophecy in Zechariah 10:8-12 that announces in 518 B.C. a still future return, which would not only emanate from Babylon, but from around the world?<sup>18</sup>

Why, then, do Old Testament scholars demand that fulfillment has taken place under such inferior conditions and lack of historical verification, even from the rabbis who continued to hope for future restoration based on these texts long after the Jewish community had been established in the Land during the Second Temple period? The explanation can only be a supernatural bias and predisposition against the miraculous that would require divine intervention on the scale of restoration literally described in the New Covenant texts.

### *Present Fulfillment Interpretation*

Swinging the hermeneutical pendulum the other direction, some in the Christian Zionist movement have attempted to find a literal fulfillment of this prophecy in the present-day events surrounding the formation of the modern State of Israel, finding the 1948 rebirth of the State fulfilling Isaiah 66:8, Israeli sovereignty over east Jerusalem in 1967 fulfilling Luke 21:24, and the reclamation of the Negev as fulfilling the blooming deserts of Isaiah 35:1 and 51:3. However, others in their own camp have countered that while such events may be significant in God's preparation for future fulfillment,<sup>19</sup> they do not meet the conditions for present literal fulfillment:

From this perspective on Ezekiel's prophecy, it would seem evident that the return of the Jews to the land in the twentieth century should not be regarded as a fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy. Their re-formation as a state in 1948 involved no opening of graves, no resurrection of the body, no in-pouring of the Spirit of God, and no affirmation of Jesus Christ as the Lord of the covenant. However the restoration of the state of Israel may be viewed, it does not fulfill the expectation of Ezekiel as described in this most vivid prophecy. Instead, this picture of a

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<sup>18</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Land of Israel and the Future Return (Zechariah 10:6-12)," in *Israel the Land and the People*, ed. H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998), 213.

<sup>19</sup> Contending that historic events in the reestablishment of the modern State of Israel do not meet the criteria of fulfillment of particular prophetic texts in New Covenant contexts does not preclude the interpretation that this worldwide return fulfills the initial return to the Land in such texts as Isa. 11:11a. For supportive data on this issue see Eugene J. Mayhew, "Current Status of the Worldwide Return and the other Promised Lands," *Michigan Theological Journal* (Spring/Fall 1994) 5:86-104.

people brought to newness of life by the Spirit of God naturally leads to a consideration of the role the land in the new covenant.”<sup>20</sup>

Reading the text christologically and transformationally so that every prophetic statement in the Old Testament about the Land is applied to the global mission of the Church is not spiritual, but anti-spiritual, for it robs God of the glory He has planned for Himself in history by a demonstration of His sovereign mercy in restoring national Israel (Ezek. 36:23, 36; Rom. 11:28-36). It may also be a contributing factor to the new anti-Semitism, which is directed toward the Jew in his national aspirations, i.e., Zionism. To deny the validity of the historic Jewish claim to the Land (based in part on the Bible), and consequently a return to the Land as a Nation, is to render the Jew not only homeless, but defenseless in a world where he is increasingly threatened as a Jew. The New Covenant itself is stripped of its distinct features related to the Land, the allotment of Tribal inheritances, the Temple and the priesthood, and the witness of Israel to the nations of God’s reversal of Israel’s condition is nullified. How can these features be envisioned as even “spiritually fulfilled” by a marginal Jewish remnant within the predominately Gentile Church? On the other hand, the fact that God has preserved a remnant of national Israel in the Church according to His gracious choice is the present assurance of the fulfillment of His promised future work when the full number of the Gentiles has been added to the Church and the hardening of national Israel has ended and national repentance will have brought the full blessings of their New Covenant to those for whom it was originally promised (Rom. 11:25-27).

The hermeneutic driving the New Covenant Perspective is the priority of the New Testament as the interpretive basis for the Old Testament. Kim Riddlebarger, senior pastor at Christ Reformed Church in Anaheim, CA declares, “The first [major presupposition that ought to guide interpretation] is that the New Testament should explain the Old. This is one of the most basic principles of Bible study.”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Hans K. LaRondelle states “the New Testament is the authorized and authoritative interpreter of the Old Testament.”<sup>22</sup> In the same vein, Louis Berkhof remarks, “The main guide to the interpretation of the Old Testament is certainly to be found in

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<sup>20</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, “Leaving the Shadows: A New Covenant Perspective on the Promised Land” in *The Bible and the Land: an Encounter*. Eds. Lisa Loden, Peter Walker, and Michael Wood (Jerusalem, Israel: Musalaha, 2000), 76-77.

<sup>21</sup> Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), p. 3.

the New.”<sup>23</sup> On this principle Riddlebarger concludes “Jesus Christ is the true Israel. Jesus Christ is the true temple. Jesus Christ is the heir to David’s throne, and so on.”<sup>24</sup> The aversion to reversing this principle and viewing the Old Testament as the Bible of Yeshua and the early Church and the context for understanding the promises related to national Israel is that it appears to make the Church a temporary age followed by a Jewish age. Oswalt Allis, whose early work *Prophecy and the Church* set forth the classic argument of Covenant theologians on this topic, explained the aversion to a “Jewish age” in which the “weak and beggarly elements will again be given all the importance which was attached to them under the Old Dispensation.”<sup>25</sup> Allis goes on to affirm that “The New Testament ... which makes it plain that literal interpretation was a stumbling block for the Jews ... the limitations and peculiarities of Judaism have been done away ... for ever ... There is a great and glorious future for the Jews. But that future is to be found in and through the Christian Church.”<sup>26</sup> In addition, while this view may differ in interpretation on some aspects of fulfillment in relation to national Israel (e.g., Amillennialist John Murray sees national Israel “converted” as national Israel at the end of the age), there is no difference in interpretation on the fulfillment of Israel’s national Land. “Amillennialists,” Ryrie observes, “while not agreed on the time of fulfillment of the land promise, unanimously agree that it will not be fulfilled in a future earthly millennial kingdom.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the promise of Israel’s national restoration to the Land is seen as having no place under the New Covenant, except as stripped of its national and geographical elements.

It is for this reason that it is necessary to examine the witness of the New Testament with regard to its statements about Israel under the future New Covenant and determine its degree of continuity with the Old Testament promise of the Land to a national Jewish entity.

### **New Testament Texts Teaching Restoration to the Land in the New Covenant**

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<sup>23</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), p. 160. A defense of NT priority is developed in Bruce K. Waltke, “Kingdom Promises as Spiritual,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, John Feinberg, ed. (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1988), esp. pp. 264-66.

<sup>24</sup> Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Allis, Oswald T. *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945), p. 50

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 258-9.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1986, 1999), pp. 526, 529-30.

When we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament, we remain historically and theologically in the Land of Israel with national Israelites, whether the focus is in the Land or in Jewish contexts outside the Land. In every case, it is national Israelites taking the Gospel to the Gentiles under the administrative charge of the central apostolic authority in Jerusalem (Acts 15:4). Paul was under this authority (Acts 15:22-29; 21:18-19) and frequently reminded his foreign audience that he was a national Israelite (Acts 26:4), a Pharisee (Acts 26:5), and held to the national promise given by the Prophets, the same promise that was commonly held by all Israel (Acts 26:6-7). Moreover, he asserted his continued allegiance to the Temple and the customs of national Israel (Acts 23:1; 24:12, 18; 25:8; cf. Acts 20:16; 21:26), and used the Law of Moses and the Prophets in his preaching to the nations, which he believed was consistent with the message of Yeshua (Acts 28:23). Given these historical facts, it is strange to hear Gary Burge declare:

At no point do the earliest Christians view the Holy Land as a locus of divine activity to which the people of the Roman empire must be drawn. They do not promote the Holy Land either for the Jew or for the Christian as a vital aspect of faith. No Diaspora Jew or pagan Roman is converted and then reminded of the importance of the Holy Land. The early Christians possessed no territorial theology. Early Christian preaching is utterly *uninterested* in a Jewish eschatology devoted to the restoration of the land. The kingdom of Christ began in Judea and is historically anchored there but it is not tethered to a political realization of that kingdom in the Holy Land. Echoing the message of the Gospels, the praxis of the Church betrays its theological commitments: Christians will find *in Christ* what Judaism had sought in the land.<sup>28</sup>

It should be remembered that the focus of the Book of Acts and the epistolary literature is largely outside the Land of Israel and with non-Israelites to whom the promise of the Land was not given. A concern for the Land in relation to Gentile *converts* would properly be part of the discussion over the application of Jewish requirements for covenantal identity in the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Law (aspects of which are carried over into the New Covenant for national Israel). This thinking would make sense if the Gentiles were being brought under Israel's New Covenant as converts to Judaism, but the counter argument, based on God's clear choice of the Gentiles as Gentiles (Acts 10:34-36, 44-48; 11:18; 13:48; 14:1, 27; 15:3) is that

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<sup>28</sup> Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: the New Testament Challenge to* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 59.

they are not so obligated (Acts 15:5-11). Therefore, the Gentile relationship to the Abrahamic Covenant is by faith (Rom. 4:9-12; Gal. 3: 9,14) and as fellow members of the body of they enjoys the spiritual blessings of Israel's New Covenant, which were originally intended to include them (Gen. 12:3; Acts 3:25; Rom. 4:13; Gal. 3:8, 29). He has no covenant relationship with the Land and therefore no promise or hope for restoration to the Land. For this reason, we should, in Burge's words, "expect him to find in Messiah what Judaism had sought in the Land," but we must include, "what Jewish believers sought in Messiah and in the Land." Therefore, with respect to Israel:

This hope is not redefined or clarified in the new era in a way that old promises are lost. It is the hope of the ages for the nation. It is the restoration of order with Israel having a central role. It is, to match the language of Acts 1:6 to which the terminology here alludes, the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. What Gabriel promised to Mary, what Mary hoped for, and what Zacharias predicted of Jesus in Luke 1-2 is what Peter hoped for here. There is a kingdom hope that applies to Israel and that is explained in what is now called the OT. The existence of the church has not canceled that hope for Israel.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Restoration to the Land in the New Testament***

We should not be surprised that there is no concern for restoration to the Land in the New Testament because the time its events record, as well as during the time of its writing, national Israel was still in the Land. It is true that independent rule had been lost with the Roman invasion under Pompey (63 B.C.), and this concern is reflected in the disciples' question to the Lord concerning "restoring the *kingdom* to Israel" (Acts 1:6). However, restoration to the Land was not at issue since Yeshua's entire ministry was Land-based and the first church was centered in Jerusalem (Acts 1:12, 15; 2:14, 46; 3:1, 11; 4:27; 5:12, 16, 22, 28, 42; 6:7; 7:58; 8:1; 13:13; 15:4). The Lord's commission in Acts 1:8 was certainly to take His witness to "the remotest parts of the earth," but it was to begin in the capital city of "Jerusalem" and continue to the whole Land of Israel ("Judea and Samaria"). Even after AD 70 the Land remained the Land of Israel and the concern for restoration concerned the practice of Judaism and rebuilding the Temple, since Jewish communities remained in the Land of Israel. For example, the Book of

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<sup>29</sup> Donald K. Campbell & Jeffrey L. Townsend and general editors, *A Case for Premillennialism: a New Consensus* (Chicago: Moody Pr, 1992), 189.

Revelation, though written to Diaspora communities well after the Roman destruction of the Temple (AD 95), appears to have the focus of its prophetic events centered in the Land.<sup>30</sup> Certainly before the Temple's destruction, Diaspora communities felt connected to the Land via their contributions to the Temple, the exile (*galut*) from the Land becomes a voiced concern only after the failure of the second Jewish revolt and the punitive measures imposed by Hadrian, especially his ban on a Jewish presence in Jerusalem. All of this comes after the orthodox New Testament canon had been completed.<sup>31</sup> We should also not expect the epistolary concern to be Israel's restoration, but the church's relationship. Finally, the Bible of the early church (*Tanach*) already offered a complete manual on the subject of the Land and its future restoration. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. makes this point when he writes:

What about the land promises? They are not mentioned in the NT. Are they, therefore, canceled?" In my opinion the apostles and the early church would have regarded the question as singularly strange, if not perverse. To them the Scriptures consisted of our OT, and they considered the Scriptures to be living and valid as they wrote and transmitted the NT literature. The apostles used the Scriptures as if they were living, vital oracles of the living God, applicable to them in their time. And these same Scriptures were filled with promises regarding the land and an earthly kingdom. On what basis should the Abrahamic promises be divided into those to be fulfilled and those to remain unfulfilled? Finally, there is no need to repeat what is copiously spread over the pages of the Scriptures. There seems to be lurking behind the demand a false principle, namely, that we should not give heed to the OT unless its content is repeated in the New.<sup>32</sup>

It is not that the Jewish leaders of the church did not have a concern for the restoration to the Land on the scale envisioned by the prophets, for Peter includes this as guaranteed when Messiah comes following Israel's national repentance (Acts 3:19-21), but they had understood from

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<sup>30</sup> In Revelation 11 the setting is Jerusalem as there is mention of the Temple (vs.1) and its desecration (vs.2), the assault on the Two Witnesses in "the great city" (vs. 8), and earthquake in the same city (again in 16:19), in chapter 12 Satan focuses his persecution on national Israel (vs. 13), the reference point for the attack of the "kings from the east" seems to be Israel (16:12), and Christ's advent and enthronement (chapter 19-20) appear to be in Jerusalem, as Rev. 20:9 implies with its reference to "the beloved city" and the comparable Old Testament prophetic texts (e.g., Zechariah 12-14) indicate.

<sup>31</sup> By AD 100 all of the books of the New Testament were in circulation and only Hebrews, 2 Peter, James, 2-3 John and Revelation still lacked universal acceptance. However, by the time Marcion's restricted list appeared (AD 125-144), the core of New Testament books were already widely used. However, the *Muratorian Fragment* (now redated in its archetype to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD) indicates that there was not unanimity on all of the 27 books of the New Testament until this period. For discussion see Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders, editors: *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), pp. 341-354, 374-385, 405-415.

<sup>32</sup> S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "Evidence from Romans 9-11" in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*. Eds. Donald K. Campbell & Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 222-23.

Yeshua's response in Acts 1:7-8 that event was not the immediate goal of the New Covenant, but it was its ultimate goal. The Jerusalem Council further evidenced this understanding in their citation of Amos 9:12 and allusions to other texts (Deut. 28:10; Isaiah 63:19; Jeremiah 14:9; Daniel 9:19) in Acts 15:15-18 in their explanation of Gentile inclusion under the first phase of the New Covenant (the Church Age). Therefore, when the Gospels and the Epistles were penned, this was already a settled issue with the Apostles and the believing Jewish community. The spiritual inclusion of the Gentile remnant along with the Jewish Remnant during the church age would lead to the complete realization of the second phase of the New Covenant for "all Israel" (national Israel) and "all of the nations" (Gen. 12:3) with the return of Messiah. Paul recognized this in Romans 11:25 in his timing text on the duration of national Israel's judicial hardening "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." Therefore, the concern for church formation, especially the merging of the Jewish and Gentile elements, was the primary concern of the Apostles. Yet, this necessary shift in focus should not be taken to imply that they had abandoned the eschatological hope of final restoration, which was the climax of the messianic program (not the church). From the frequent mention of the eschatological goal as motivation (2 Cor. 5:10-12; Rom. 13:11-14; Phil. 2:15-16; 3:20-21; 2 Pet. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; Tit. 2:11-14; Heb. 10:25; Jas. 5:8-9), encouragement (Phil. 1:6, 10; 1 Thess. 2:19; 4:13-18; 5:23; 2 Thess. 1:5-12; Heb. 9:27-28; 1 Pet. 1:7-12; 1 Jn. 3:1-3; Rev. 22:12, 20), correction (Rom. 11:1-28; 1 Cor. 15:23-27, 50-58; 2 Thess. 2:1-9), or warning (1 Pet. 4:7; 2 Pet. 3:3-13; 1 Jn. 2:18; Rev. 1:7), it is clear that this was a compelling conviction, if not the driving force, of the first-century church. As has been noted, there was no need to reteach what was already well understood (the New Covenant promises to national Israel), but to instruct on what was new (the realization of the spiritual blessings to the Gentiles under the New Covenant).

The restoration promises made to national Israel require a future fulfillment *in the same manner* as the redemptive promises have found past fulfillment. As the Messiah's first advent was originally directed to national Israel (Matt. 15:24), and was accomplished literally in terms of Israelite redemptive expectation (Isa. 53; Dan. 9:26), so the Messiah's second advent will fulfill the prophetic expectation of Israelite restoration (Acts 1:6; Rom. 11:26-27; 2 Thess. 1:5-10; 2:3-12; Rev. 19:11-20:9). If this was to be understood otherwise, why did Yeshua in the Olivet Discourse (24:31; 25:31) and Peter in Acts (3:19-21) project its fulfillment to the time of the



Second Advent? How in the Church Age are “the times of the Gentiles” “fulfilled” (concluded), the “time of the indignation” ended (Dan. 8:17-19), and Israel’s fortunes restored (Rom. 11:12, 15)? The only way to harmonize these discrepancies and resolve this discontinuity is to reinterpret historic fulfillment of Israel’s restoration in the Land in terms *different* from the Old Testament prophets. However, if this methodology is applicable to restoration texts, why not to messianic texts, most of which are a part of these restoration contexts? The answer is that such a dilution of the literal fulfillment of messianic prophecy would deprive Christianity of the essential apologetic for its founder. On the other hand, the dilemma of consistency is a dilution of esteem for theology of the church fathers and their heritage of supercessionism.

However, when one looks at the Gospels through the lens of the Old Testament with the covenantal promises in view, the message of Yeshua to His People, especially in proclaiming “the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7), was to confirm the promises made in the biblical covenants through the establishment of the New Covenant: “For I tell you that Messiah has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, *to confirm the promises made to the Patriarchs*’ (Rom. 15:8) ... “*Theirs* is ... *the covenants* ... and *the promises*’ (Rom 9:4) ... ‘for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable’ (Rom. 11:29).”

To answer the specific charges of the New Perspective concerning an absence of restoration to the Land texts in the New Testament, it is necessary to examine texts in the Gospels (for Yeshua’s view of restoration to the Land) and in Acts and the Epistles (for the Apostolic view). Recognizing these texts, in their Jewish context and situation in the Land of Israel at the end of the Second Temple period, evidences the understanding of the Messiah and the early Church on this matter.

### **Matthew 5:5**

This passage is recognizable as part of the Beatitudes, which Yeshua delivered first and foremost to His disciples, but through them to a Jewish audience in the Galilee. Yeshua’ words in Hebrew (יִרְשׁוּ אֶרֶץ) “they shall inherit the Land” would have been recognized by all who heard them as one of the most familiar promises of the Old Testament (cf. Ex. 32:13; Num. 33:54; Deut. 1:38;

12:10; 19:14; Psa. 25:13; 37:9; 69:36; Isa. 49:8; 57:13; 65:9). This phrase used by the Lord has a parallel usage in one Israel's most memorable psalms, Psalm 37: "the humble will inherit the land" (vs. 11), "those blessed by Him will inherit the Land" (vs. 22), "the righteous will inherit the Land" (vs. 29).<sup>33</sup> Yeshua's "Sermon on the Mount" concerns "the kingdom of heaven" (i.e., the coming theocratic kingdom, Matt. 4:17; cf. 3:2), and this reference to the Land of Israel (veiled by our English translations of γῆ as "earth"), holds out the promise of restoration in the Land under the New Covenant. Though the commentators recognize this, their theological supposition of transformation and replacement condition their acceptance of its intent:

The "earth" (τῆν γῆν) originally referred to the land of Israel, ie, what was promised to the Jews beginning with the Abrahamic covenant (cf Gen 13:15). But in the present context of messianic fulfillment it connotes the regenerated earth (19:28; cf Rom 4:13, where κόσμος, "world," replaces γῆ), promised by the eschatological passages in the prophets (eg, Isa 65–66)."<sup>34</sup>

The Hebrew word underlying πραεῖς ("meek, gentle") is עָנָוִים ("humble, pious," but also "afflicted"). This term occurs in Isaiah 61:1 (where the LXX translates it as πτωχοί, "poor") and with reference to inheriting the Land in verse 7, where the LXX translates with a parallel to Matthew 5:5: κληρονομήσουσιν τῆν γῆν, "they will inherit the Land." If this text was also in the mind of our Lord (cf. His use of it to credential His messianic identity in Lk. 4:17-21 and 7:22), then there is clearly a New Covenant restoration context in view. Isaiah 61:8 speaks of a future "everlasting covenant" made with Israel in the Millennial Kingdom where those who are in Zion are called "oaks of righteousness" (vs. 3) and "priests of the LORD" and "ministers of our God" (vs. 6), and will trade their shame and humiliation (caused by the nations) for a "double portion in their Land," in which the nations will now enrich (vs. 7) and divine "blessing" (vs. 9). Based on these biblical references, there is no evidence that Yeshua intended His words in Matthew 5:5 to mean anything other than what had been promised in the coming kingdom. The commentator's supposition that Paul made an intentional theological change from Land (γῆ, *ge*) to world (κόσμος, *kosmos*) is incorrect. The original promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3

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<sup>33</sup> Psalm 37 is an alphabetic acrostic psalm written to encourage memorization and was likely well known by most Jews in the time of Yeshua. The Qumran community revered Ps 37 and saw themselves as those about to experience the vindication that would come with messianic fulfillment (4QpPs 37). As a wisdom psalm of King David, employing proverbial statements to teach trust in the LORD, it has a comparable theme and style to the Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>34</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*. Word Biblical Commentary. 33A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 93.

extends the covenantal blessings through national Israel to “all the families of the earth.” The word “earth” is אדמה (*“dāmāh*), a term that literally means “ground,” but from its reference in Genesis 3:17 to the “cursed ground” (ארורה האדמה, *“rūrāh hā-“dāmāh*) it indicates the fallen world (cf. ματαιότητι, *mataioteti* in Romans 8:20 with its allusion to הבל, *hevel* from Ecclesiastes 1:2 et. al), whose condition will only be reversed when national Israel comes under the Millennial New Covenant (NC2) with a physical and spiritual renewal of men and nature (and nations).<sup>35</sup> This original idea has not been lost to all commentators as the comments of James D.G. Dunn (in the same series as the former commentator) who calls this “a most nationalistic formulation” reveals:

That Abraham should be “heir of the world” might seem an odd rendering of the promises of Gen 12:2–3 and 15:5, even in their subsequent form (17:4; 18:18; 22:17–18). But in fact this was how the promise to Abraham was regularly understood. Indeed it had become almost a commonplace of Jewish teaching that the covenant promised that Abraham’s seed would “inherit the earth.” It is not by accident that Paul takes up this more grandiose form of the promise—the promise to Abraham or his seed (we might say “through his seed”) that he should inherit the world. For the promise thus interpreted was fundamental to Israel’s self-consciousness as God’s covenant people: it was the reason why God had chosen them in the first place from among all the other nations of the earth, the justification for holding themselves distinct from the other nations, and the comforting hope that made their current national humiliation endurable.<sup>36</sup>

### **Matthew 8:11/Luke 13:29**

This is one of several texts that relate to a pivotal event after Messiah has returned to the Land and assumed sovereignty as theocratic King. The text reads: “And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven/God” (Matt. 8:11; Lk. 13:29). The event is known as the Messianic Banquet, which the Lord also alludes to in his words to His disciples at the Last (Passover) Supper (see comments below for the explanation of the eschatological meal and the allusion to Isaiah 25:6-9

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<sup>35</sup> See Keil and Delitzsch F., *Genesis. Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996): “The blessing of Abraham was once more to unite the divided families, and change the curse, pronounced upon the ground on account of sin, into a blessing for the whole human race. This concluding word comprehends all nations and times, and condenses, as *Baumgarten* has said, the whole fulness of the divine counsel for the salvation of men into the call of Abram.”

<sup>36</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8. Word Biblical Commentary 38A* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), p. 233.

in Matthew 26:29/Mark 14:25). In that passage the focus is on the disciples participation with the Lord at the Passover Seder, whereas in this text the focus is on “many” who will come from “the east and west” to share in the meal with the Nation’s founding fathers, the Patriarchs. Isaiah 25:6 also says that this banquet will be for “all peoples,” in contrast to the sectarian Qumran text, based on Isaiah 25:6 and instructing its separatist community on the preparation for the eschatological event, that says only “the men of renown” (probably those of their sect) would be invited. Under Israel’s New Covenant, those from national Israel will join together with those from the nations (as they did in the Church Age), but also with the resurrected Old Testament saints (and probably the resurrected Church Age and Tribulation saints) in Jerusalem to celebrate with the Messianic King at the inauguration of the Millennial Kingdom. As will be seen below, Matthew 26 also contains an allusion to this Messianic Banquet, but without reference to the Gentiles. However, the previous context (Matthew 25) describes the separation of the righteous Gentiles among the nations and with the understanding of “many” in this text and “many peoples” in Isaiah 25:6, the basis for this inclusion was established.

### **Matthew 19:28/Luke 22:30**

Unique to Matthew, likely because his gospel was directed to the believing Jewish community, is this account of shared rule over national Israel in the Millennial Kingdom. The text reads: “And Yeshua said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” The term τῆς παλιγγενεσίας, *te palinnesia* (“the Regeneration”) is a synonym for the Kingdom Age, also known as the Era of Redemption, Time of the Restoration, Messianic Era, the Day of the LORD, and the World to Come (Hebrew, ‘*Olam Ha-Ba*’).<sup>37</sup> Gundry ascribes this term to: “Israel’s renewal when God fully establishes his kingdom on earth.”<sup>38</sup> This term complements the prophetic concept of eschatological renewal in the restoration which we saw in Ezekiel 36:24-38, and which also occupied the prophetic

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<sup>37</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, Sung Wook Chung, *A Case for Historic Premillennialism* (2009), note: “In certain sources, *Olam Ha-Ba* is uniquely associated with teachings about collective redemption and resurrection, but in other places *Olam Ha-Ba* is conceived of as an afterlife realm for the individual.”

<sup>38</sup>Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Arts*, p. 392.

message of Isaiah (e.g., 49:5-13; 56:1-8; 60:1-22; 66:18-24).<sup>39</sup> The same idea of a renewal of both the Land and the people of Israel is found in the apocalyptic literature (e.g., *Tobit* 13:16-17; 14:5-6; *Jubilees* 1:15-17, 26-28; *IQM* 2:2-7).

Yeshua's promise to the Twelve "who have followed" Him (which would exclude Judas Iscariot, Jn. 6:70-71, but include Matthias, Acts 1:21-22, 26) is delegated oversight of the "Twelve Tribes of Israel" in His coming administration. The specification of the "Twelve Tribes" makes it difficult to suggest that Yeshua is speaking of some other group other than national, ethnic Israel. Matthew mentions twelve thrones corresponding to the Twelve Tribes, but Luke does not. Bock observes that Matthew makes this addition in order to make certain the connection is made to Israel.<sup>40</sup> It has been suggested that Luke's omission may have been an attempt to eliminate speculation that Judas would be included.<sup>41</sup> With all considerations made, there is great reason to accept Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:30 as valid prophetic passages for the future restoration of national Israel. Once the Land is brought under the blessings of the New Covenant, which includes the topographical changes in the Jerusalem area (Isa. 2:2; Ezek. 47:1-12; Zech. 14:8, 10) occupation of the original territorial boundaries and the allotment of the tribes within these boundaries (Ezekiel 47-48), the resurrected Twelve will function as New Covenant administrators, possibly in a role like that of Moses' 70 elders who represented the Nation and mediator of Moses' commandments to their respective tribes (Ex. 19:7) and accompanied Moses' into the Presence of the LORD on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:1, 9). Similarly, the Twelve, who were closest to the Lord in the days of His flesh, will have privileged access to Him and will represent (and possibly reinforce) His will to the tribes. Furthermore, in this passage, the disciples are encouraged to look forward to sharing an earthly rule with Yeshua as the messianic King: "when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the

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<sup>39</sup> The term in its New Testament usage and context clearly indicates an era yet future, cf. *TDNT*, s.v. "palligenevsi/a," by Friedrich Buschel (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976) 1: 686-689, and F. W. Burnett, "Palingenesia in Matt. 19:28: A Window on the Matthean Community?," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 17 (February, 1983): 60-72.

<sup>40</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 2: 1741.

<sup>41</sup> Walter L. Liefeld and David W. Pao, *Expositor's Bible Commentary: Luke – Acts*, vol. 10, eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 317.

twelve tribes of Israel."<sup>42</sup> As Saucy observes, the idea behind this kind of judgment is more than simply partaking in the judging process when "Israel is called to give account for their response to the Messiah. Although this judicial function is included, judging also conveys the idea of ruling or governing."<sup>43</sup> What Yeshua was assuring the disciples of was more than authority to exact judgment on disobedient Israel, He was assuring them of the privilege of joining Him in carrying out the future messianic reign on earth.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, if the disciples and the early Jewish-Christian community were awaiting the imminent arrival of the messianic Kingdom, as was their stated goal (Acts 1:6), they would have originally remained in Jerusalem, since it was to Jerusalem that he was expected to return (cf. Zechariah 14:4) and from which his rule, and theirs, would begin (Jeremiah 3:17; Zechariah 14:9, 16-17).<sup>45</sup>

The parallel passage in Luke 22:30 adds the statement, "I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom." This recalls Messiah's remark about eating and drinking Pesach in the kingdom (Luke 22:15-16).<sup>46</sup> The description of the messianic kingdom in relation to a banquet feast was already mentioned in Luke's Gospel (Lk. 13:29, 14:15), but was based on the prediction of the messianic banquet in Isaiah 26:6-9:

And the LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, *and* refined, aged wine. And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering, which is over all peoples, even the veil, which is stretched over all nations. He will swallow up

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<sup>42</sup> The role of the disciples would be governors functioning as tribal judges (cf. II Kings 15:5; Psalm 2:10; Isaiah 1:26), similar to the traditional role of the phylarchs, the princes of the twelve tribes, who would rule over Israel in the period of the restoration as depicted at Qumran (e.g., 1QM 3:3; 5:1-2), and the apocalyptic literature (e.g. Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs - Testament of Judah 25:1-2; Testament of Benjamin 10:7), cf. William Horbury, "The Twelve and the Phylarchs," *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 503-527, esp. pp. 512, 524.

<sup>43</sup> Robert L. Saucy. *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 267.

<sup>44</sup> See Matt. 20:20 where the mother of the sons of Zebedee certainly is asking for her sons the honor of sharing the Messiah's rule. This idea of "judgment" here is clarified by Yeshua's own reference in verse 25 to those who have authority and power to carry out commands – vice-regents, rulers. Had something else been intended the concept of the mother would have received correction. See also, Rev. 20:4 indicates a reign by those who will sit on the thrones with the phrase "judgment was given to them," i.e., the grant of an authority to rule and govern (cf. Friedrich Büchsel, "κρίνω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 923.

<sup>45</sup> While the early Jewish-Christian community's expectation of Israel's restoration was valid, their remaining at Jerusalem was invalid. In Acts 1:6 when they expect the restoration from Yeshua after the resurrection, they are told by him (verse 7) that it awaits the predetermined time of God, and that they, rather, are to spread the news about Messiah beginning from Jerusalem, but extending all over the empire (vs. 8).

<sup>46</sup> The common understanding of this as a metaphor for the messianic age in Second Temple Judaism is discussed by Bock, *Luke*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2: 1741.

death for all time, and the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken. And it will be said in that day, “Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.” (NASV)

The Prophet Isaiah here describes a future age of redemption (N.B. vs. 9, “that He might save us”) that is formerly begun with an inaugural event that scholars have termed the “eschatological or messianic banquet.” This is a victory banquet attending the time when the LORD of hosts deals decisively with the enemy of humanity (death). The participants will celebrate in the LORD’s presence on Mount Zion with food (meaty bones with their marrow/blood and fermented wine) that seems to belong more to the New Covenant than the restrictive diet prescribed under the Mosaic legislation. It is understandable that given such conditions there would be an association with the advent of the Messiah and the messianic age. Unless Psalm 23:5-6, which combines the motif of a shepherd and a banquet) alludes to such a future event, Isaiah 25:6–8 is the earliest reference to this eschatological banquet in the Bible. The expression of this in Second Temple Judaism was demonstrated in the sectarian text known as *Messianic Rule* or *Rule of the Community (IQSa)*. It was found in Cave 1 at Qumran along with another text known as *The Community Rule (IQS)*, to which it may have been appended. Both were pivotal documents detailing the sect’s order and lifestyle. *Messianic Rule* is dated to 175-100 BC and with *The Community Rule* it describes the communal meals of the Qumran sect, and in particular an eschatological meal to be shared as priests with the Messiah. James VanderKam says that the messianic character of these communal meals is unmistakable.<sup>47</sup> Certainly the repeated mention of the Messiah in *IQSa* 2:11-22 as a main participant in the eschatological banquet makes this point. That it was understood as eschatological is evident from the opening words of the text: “This is the Rule for all the congregation of Israel in the last days.” Moreover, the linkage to this text in Isaiah can be seen by the restriction of the banquet to “men of renown” (*IQSa* 2.11) was made to insure that it applied to those who were considered ritually pure (such as the priestly community at Qumran). Moreover, the fact that *IQSa* concerns a “feast” and explicitly mentions “new wine” (*IQSa* 2.17-19) strengths the linkage with the Isaianic text.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> James VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 175.

<sup>48</sup> The excavations at the settlement of Qumran under the direction of Roland de Vaux discovered a dining hall stocked with multiple cups, plates, and bowls. It had apparently been abandoned after the earthquake of 31 BC that seems to have interrupted the sect’s habitation at the site. The remains of the communal meals, including the bones,

According to *IQSa* 2.22, the communal meal was to be a regular observance and required at least ten men (a *minyán*) to sit together. This may imply that part of the community's preparation for their part in expected Messianic advent to lead the "sons of light" into a final battle against the 'sons of darkness' as described in the *War Scroll* (also stored with this document in Cave 1) may have been a rehearsal of this anticipated banquet.<sup>49</sup> In *IQSa* 2.11-22 instructions are given on the order of sitting and the timing of the elements (bread and new wine) served in the meal. This literal expectation of "eating and drinking" as part of an eschatological feast in the Qumran texts, supports the literal interpretation of the same concept in the Gospels.

### **Matthew 23:37-39/Luke 13:34-35**

Another set of prophetic texts dealing with the future restoration of Israel are Matthew 23:37-39 and Luke 13:34-35. In continuity with the past, one of the essential restoration features of the New Covenant for national Israel will be the return of Davidic rule over the Nation, the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the revival of its priesthood (Jer. 33:14-26) in the Land. One of the passages that advocates of the New Covenant Perspective use in support of the end of the Old Covenant (and everything that was a part of it) is Matthew 23:37-39 in which s announces (some say pronounces) the judicial curses for covenant violation (Lev. 26:31-33; Deut. 4:26-29; cf. 1 Kgs. 9:6-9)<sup>50</sup> upon the Nation symbolized by the religious institution and authority centered in the Jerusalem Temple. In the New Covenant Perspective, this passage should be linked with others such as the cursing of the barren fig tree (Mk. 11:13-21) to conclude that the destruction of the Temple and the new exile from the Land (A.D. 70) dealt a decisive blow

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ashes, and pottery vessels used to prepare, cook, and serve the meal, have been found carefully buried on the outside of some of the community buildings and especially on the southern plateau. Such areas were considered "clean places" that conformed to the biblical laws regulating the ritual disposal of sacrificial remains (Lev. 4:12; 6:11; 10:14; Num. 19:9). These animal bone deposits were interpreted by DeVaux (and others) as evidence of a priestly community that practiced ritual purity.

<sup>49</sup> A number of scholars have interpreted these in relation to Isaiah 26:6-9 as indicting that the Qumran Community in some way rehearsed or was preparing for the eschatological banquet through a regular observance of these meals, see Lamar Cooper, "Qumran and the Messianic Hope," *Criswell Theological Review* 7:1 (Fall 2009): 63-80 and his further comments in "Qumran Pottery Factory Revisited" Unpublished paper delivered to the Near East Archaeological Society, Evangelical Theological Society Meeting, Baltimore, MD, Nov 19, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> The uses of these covenantal cursing texts by the New Covenant Perspective either overlooks or reinterprets as being fulfilled in the Christian New Covenant Church, the restoration passages which follow and are part of God's Promise-Plan to national Israel (see Lev. 26:40-45; Deut. 4:29-30).



against national Israel and signaled the predicted end of the old promise of national residence in the Land.

However, an overview of the context of these passages prevents drawing an improper judgment of Yeshua's attitude toward the Nation. In Matthew the context is Yeshua's last public address to the Jewish people and is often referred to as the "Eight Woes" ("Seven Woes" in Luke). Yeshua announced (not pronounced) judgment on the nation of Israel because of its national rejection of the Messiah, the culmination of prophets sent to elicit national repentance and bring about the restoration promises they predicted. In Luke the context is Yeshua's teaching in villages on his way to Jerusalem and verses 34-35 are part of His response to the Pharisees' who have warned Him that Herod Antipas (the King of the Jewish Nation) wanted to kill him (verse 31). The language used by Yeshua is that of the Mosaic covenant, whose form (Suzerain-vassal treaty) promised divine protection (blessing) or divine discipline (cursing) based on the Nation's obedience or disobedience. In both contexts it is revealed that the Nation (based on the response of its political and religious leaders) has violated the covenant and is therefore liable under its terms to suffer divine discipline.

Yeshua laments (and this should not be overlooked) that Israel "would not" come under divine protection, represented by the feminine metaphor of a "hen and chicks" (Matt. 23:37),<sup>51</sup> but adds the judicial sentence "your house is left to you desolate" (Matt. 23:38; Lk. 13:35). The term "house" could understand both the city of Jerusalem and its Temple (and by extension Israel as a nation), since the part is inseparable to the identity of the whole.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, the focus is upon the Temple since it symbolized the relationship between God and the Nation. I have dealt elsewhere with the issue of Temple desolation reflected in this passage as well as its role in the larger inseparable motif of desecration and restoration,<sup>53</sup> but verse 38 specifically alludes to Jeremiah's announcement of divine discipline on Judah for idolatrous worship and ritual

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<sup>51</sup> See discussion of this metaphor in *Ibid.*, 561. Likewise, Darrell Bock notes, "The image of god as a bird is common in the Old Testament and Judaism," *Luke*, BECNT 2:1249.

<sup>52</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 562.

<sup>53</sup> See my "Desecration and Restoration of the Temple as an Eschatological Motif in the Tanak, Jewish Apocalyptic Literature, and the New Testament" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1993), and my chapter "Historical Problems with a First-Century Fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse," in Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, eds., *The End Times Controversy* (Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), pp. 377-98.

pollution at the end of the First Temple period (Jer. 12:7-13; 22:5-9). However, the next verse (verse 39) is a citation from Psalm 118:26 where we find the messianic prediction of national rejection (vss. 22) in the context of the Temple setting (vss. 19-27). In this context of the well-known Hallel psalm, the leaders of national Israel (symbolized by “the builders”) will reject Messiah (symbolized by “the chief cornerstone”). This was the understanding of Yeshua elsewhere (Matt. 21:42-44) and of the Apostles (Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7). Yet, this statement of national rejection is embedded in a Thanksgiving Psalm whose final verses (vss. 22-29) anticipate a future day when the One rejected will be accepted and bring “salvation” (הושיעה) and “prosperity” (הצליחה).<sup>54</sup> Yeshua reflects His understanding of this restoration event in verse 39 with the little word “until” (ἕως) followed by the words of Psalm 118:26 ברוך הבא בשם יהוה (“blessed is the one who comes in the Name of the LORD”). Yeshua’s use of this citation is with reference to the character of the national repentance that will signal His return (Zech. 12:10; cf. Matt. 24:30).

This text, therefore, holds out the promise of a future restoration of national Israel (after national repentance) in the Land, since the repentance formula in Psalm 118:26 is issued “from the house of the LORD” and in context Yeshua’s words are directed to the religious leaders and the people (the Nation). In other words, Yeshua is saying that the desolation of the Temple (which represented national Israel’s political and religious life in the Land) will continue until the time of national repentance when this condition will be reversed and the Messianic Era will begin with its full blessings under the New Covenant for Israel. The citation from Psalm 118 also reveals that Yeshua as Messiah has as His ultimate goal the Nation’s deliverance. Salvation, not judgment, was expected from the Messiah, and that is held out as the final realization for the Nation. As Michael Vlach notes, “The joyful context of Psalm 118 makes it likely that the quotation of this psalm in Matt. 23:39 and Luke 13:35 refers to a joyful deliverance of a restored Israel.”<sup>55</sup>

It is also important to observe in these accounts that the positive response called for in Yeshua’s citation of Psalm 118:26 could not refer to the Triumphal Entry. In Matthew’s account the words

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<sup>54</sup> The eschatological inference is made here by the phrase “they will not see him *again*” (cf. Jn. 14:19) and has reference to His eschatological revelation as the glorious Son of Man (Matt. 24:30).

<sup>55</sup> Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 188.

were clearly spoken after the Pesach (“Triumphal”) entry, so the future reference could only be to the messianic advent at the end of the age.<sup>56</sup> In Luke’s account the timing is not as clear, however, understanding that Yeshua was acting on the belief that God would restore Israel in the future,<sup>57</sup> and that his account of the Pesach (“Triumphal”) Entry includes an announcement of divine judgment (19:41-44),<sup>58</sup> it likewise argues for a fulfillment at the end of the age. Therefore, Matthew 23:37-39 and Luke 13:34-35 both provide proof of a future restoration of Israel.

### **Matthew 25:31-46**

The New Covenant was designed to include the redeemed Gentile nations in fulfillment of this provision of blessing in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:3). After the installation of the Messianic King in His Kingdom, one of His functions will be to “judge between the nations” (Isa. 2:4a). There is no judgment of Israel as a Nation because this takes place after its national repentance (Zech. 12:10-13:1) and salvation (Isa. 59:20-21; Rom. 11:26-27). Messiah’s first order of judgment with the nations will be to separate the unregenerate element that failed the test of faith with respect to their treatment of the believing national remnant (“My brethren”) in the Land (vss. 40, 45) that suffered dispersion in the Land because of the desecration of the Temple by the Anti-Messiah (Matt. 24:15-25; cf. 2 Thess. 2:3-4; Rev. 11:2).<sup>59</sup> The righteous Gentiles who demonstrated their faith at the cost of their lives by caring for Jewish Tribulation saints who will be a special target of Satan and the Anti-Messiah (Rev. 12:13-17; 13:10) will share in national Israel’s blessings of the New Covenant in the Kingdom (vs. 34). Interestingly, Rashi held that the future allowance of Gentiles with Jews in the World to Come (Ezek. 47:23) would be based on the foreigner demonstrating that he had “embraced Judaism,” not when it was convenient and advantageous, but while Israel was in exile. The reasoning behind this is that if the Gentile had converted to Israel’s God (i.e., identified with Israel) during the time of its

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<sup>56</sup> Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 265.

<sup>57</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 2: 1251.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> For alternate views on this see Eugene W. Pond, “Who Are ‘the least’ of Jesus’ Brothers in Matthew 25:40?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:636 (October 2002): 436-49. Pond opts for these being “believers slain for their faith during the Tribulation and who will return with the risen Lord at His second coming . . . These witnesses are called the “brothers” of Yeshua because they will be His devoted disciples, and they are called “the least” of Yeshua’s brothers because many of them will have been put to death for their faith” (p. 449). I do not see why his view could not be restricted to *Jewish* Tribulation martyrs.

suffering shame among the nations, then it had merited the right to share its inheritance after it had been restored. Only in this way could their conversion be demonstrated as genuine.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, the judgment of the nations and consequent entrance of the believing group into the Messianic Kingdom accords with the predicted timing of Israel's regathering from the nations and restoration to the Land (Isa. 11:10-12).

### **Matthew 26:29/Mark 14:25**

At the Last (Passover) Supper the Lord assured His disciples that He would return after the Intercalation ("from now on until that day") to celebrate in a new way in the Millennial Kingdom (referred to as "My Father's kingdom" in Matthew and "the kingdom of God" in Mark). The Old Testament text Yeshua has in mind is Isaiah 25:6-9 which describes the messianic banquet that inaugurates His rule after the conclusion of the final campaign of the battle of Armageddon (Zech. 12:2-9; 14:2-9, 12-15; Rev. 19:11-21). This victory celebration will follow the national repentance of Israel, its ritual purification and regeneration in the Land (Zech. 12:10-13:2; Ezek. 36:22-27) and the removal of the curse and will be the first official act as Messianic King that initiates His New Covenant relationship with national Israel as His People and He as their God (Ezek. 36:28). It seems that just as the Last Supper was the last intimate association with His disciples, so this "supper" will be the first intimate association as they "inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34)<sup>61</sup>, which they had expected to take place in the Land after the resurrection (Acts 1:6) and now is finally fulfilled.

A recent study on this topic, and especially its appropriation by Yeshua with respect to His eschatological promise to His disciples, provides insight into the importance of this pivotal event in the Land prior to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom under the New Covenant:

The prophets of the Hebrew Bible frequently describe a coming age of prosperity in terms of eating and drinking. The event is called an "eschatological banquet" in

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<sup>60</sup> Other rabbis contend they do not get an inheritance only the benefit of atonement and the right of burial in the Land. For discussions pro and con on this issue see Eisemann, p. 747; cf. Breuer, *Yehezkiel*, p. 431.

<sup>61</sup> The thought here is that the Messianic Kingdom was part of the eternal redemptive plan and that righteous Gentiles will be included in it with national Israel, which in this context has already received salvation (Rom. 11:26), and so is not included in this judgment reserved for the Gentile nations.

scholarly literature, whether this is an inaugural meal at the beginning of a future age (Isa 25:6–8) or an ongoing Edenic feast in an idealized age (Isa 32:15–20, Ezek 34:25–31, Ps 23:1–5). That the eschatological age will be inaugurated by a victory banquet is found initially in Isa 25:6–8. Isaiah 25:6–8 describes the eschatological age as beginning when the Lord himself deals decisively with the enemy of humanity (death).<sup>62</sup>

Yeshua obviously taught His disciples by His promise of a renewed celebration with them that there would be a fulfillment of the restoration to the Land where this future event would take place.

### **Acts 1:6-7; 3:19-21**

These two texts deal with the subject of the promised restoration of Israel. In the first the disciples ask Yeshua if “it is at this time He is going to restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6). In the second, Peter speaks of Yeshua bringing “the period of restoration” (Acts 3:21). From these references it would appear that these texts would help define what Jesus and His disciples meant by the term “restoration of Israel” and the time in which it is to occur. However, there has been considerable debate over Yeshua reply to the disciples’ question: “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority” (Acts 1:7). Was this a rebuke? Did the disciples still not understand? Why didn’t Yeshua answer the question more straightforwardly? Advocates of the New Covenant Perspective see this passage as evidence for the shift of the notion of a literal restoration of a political kingdom away from national Israel to a spiritual restoration in the Church. For example, Gary Burge states:

Yeshua’ correction of the apostles (“It is not for you to know the times or periods...”) should not be taken to mean that Yeshua acknowledges the old Jewish worldview and that its timing is now hidden from the apostles. Instead Yeshua is acknowledging their incomprehension. He in effect says, “Yes I will restore Israel—but in a way you cannot imagine.”<sup>63</sup>

This view depends on interpreting the response of Yeshua to His disciples as a “correction” of

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<sup>62</sup> Phillip J. Long, *Jesus the Bridegroom: The Origin of the Eschatological Feast as a Wedding Banquet in the Synoptic Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), p. 43.

<sup>63</sup> Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: the New Testament Challenge to* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 61.

their concept of national restoration. However, a careful examination of the text reveals otherwise. It should be recognized that this statement is post-resurrection and after the disciples had received understanding from the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26; 20:22) and after Yeshua had spent 40 days with the disciples “speaking of the things concerning the Kingdom of God” (verse 3). In this context it is clear that the disciples still believed Yeshua was “the Restorer of Israel’s Kingdom” (Acts 1:6). Their question to Yeshua is not whether there will be a national restoration, but when. There is no evidence that they ever asked such a question to Yeshua previously. It would appear that now that they have been enlightened (cf. Lk. 24:46; Jn. 20:9) to the proper sequence of messianic events “to suffer and be rejected and killed and rise again on the third day” (Matt. 16:21/Mk. 8:31-32/Lk. 9:22) and to “come in His glory ... with His angels” (Matt. 16:27/Mk. 8:38/Lk. 9:26) that they expected the messianic advent and with it the attendant New Covenant blessings. The Lord’s reply to this does not concern the truth of their expectation, only the timing of its fulfillment. Contrary to Burge, this was not an unimaginable fulfillment, but it was an unexpected one. Yeshua’s statement in verse 8 is that there was to be a postponement of final fulfillment for national Israel until the witness to the remnant of Israel and the nations was completed. Vlach agrees: “It seems unlikely that the disciples would be misguided in their perceptions of the kingdom after having received 40 days of instruction about it from the risen Lord.”<sup>64</sup> It is far more likely that the disciples were confused about the timing of the coming kingdom than about the entire nature of the kingdom. James Sanders argues that the concept of restoration taught by Yeshua and repeated by His disciples was consistent with the view of the Prophets and non-canonical Jewish apocalyptic writers:<sup>65</sup> “the hope that seems to have been most often repeated was that the restoration of the people of Israel ... the kingdom expected by Yeshua ... is like the present world - it has a king, leaders, a temple, and twelve tribes.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 191.

<sup>65</sup> This concept was of an earthly messianic reign preceding the eternal state, sometimes of a thousand years duration, as at Revelation 20:4, but also of varying length, cf. J. W. Bailey, “The Temporary Messianic Reign in the Literature of Early Judaism,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 53 (July, 1934): 170-187. This literal hope of restoration was even shared by Philo, though accustomed to allegorization of Jewish religious beliefs, nevertheless could write: “the cities that now lay in ruins will be cities once more,” *De Praemiis et Poenis*, p. 168. For the documentation of this view of an eschatological earthly kingdom at Qumran cf. Shemaryahu Talmon, *The World of Qumran from Within: Collected Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1989), p. 300ff.

<sup>66</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 87, 103.

The disciples understood a literal earthly kingdom from previous discussions with Yeshua. He promised ruling positions to the disciples (Mt. 19:28, Lk. 22:30) and the disciples clearly believed in some sort of physical hierarchy in the kingdom (Mt. 20:20). All along, Yeshua is never recorded as rebuking the disciples for viewing the kingdom as physical. McLean explains, “In view of the consistent ministry of Yeshua to correct the disciples when they were in error, it seems correct to conclude that in their question in Acts 1:6 they properly anticipated a future restoration of the kingdom of Israel.”<sup>67</sup> If the kingdom is to be something other than physical, Yeshua would have to be either naïve or deceptive in His dealings with the disciples. Yeshua certainly was not naïve to the messianic hope held by the nation of Israel, and His compassion and patience with the disciples dismisses the claim that He was deceptive. On the contrary, Yeshua was a perceptive teacher. From this, McKnight concludes, “Since Yeshua was such a good teacher, we have every right to think that the impulsive hopes of his audience were on target.”<sup>68</sup> Therefore, Yeshua’s refusal to answer an inappropriate question should not be taken as a rebuke of the substance of the question, but conversely as an affirmation of what the disciples believed. Yeshua was not rebuking the disciples, but redirecting their focus to the evangelism of the Gentiles (Acts 1:8), which was a part of the spiritual blessings mediated by Israel under the New Covenant, a fact Peter later reminds the “men of Israel” (Acts 3:25).

Further evidence that Yeshua did not correct the disciples view of the restoration is found in Peter’s explanation to “the men of Israel” in Acts 3:18-21. Peter and the disciples had received the full promise of the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4), so if they had misunderstood the concept of the restoration, even after Yeshua’s supposed correction, it is hard to accept that they would have been left in error by this point. However, Peter’s statement of a national restoration after the messianic advent (verses 19-21) revealed that he continued to have his original understanding of national restoration under the New Covenant. Moreover, Peter roots his understanding in “all the prophets” (verses 21-24). This is hardly a spiritual restoration in the Church, as Ben Witherington reminds: “It is clear from this passage in Acts that the subject of restoration is the

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<sup>67</sup> John A. McLean, “Did Jesus Correct the Disciples’ View of the Kingdom?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (April-June 1994): 219.

<sup>68</sup> Scott McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 130-131.

Jews and the nation of Israel.”<sup>69</sup> In this passage, the divine promise Peter expresses almost certainly have their source in Yeshua own teaching (e.g., Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30) and the post-resurrection instruction referred to in Acts 1:3.<sup>70</sup> The terminology, however, was drawn from the prophetic context of New Covenant blessing in the national Land. The promised "times of refreshing" are said by Peter to "come from the presence of the Lord" (vs. 19) and will come with Yeshua who “must remain in heaven” (vs. 20) “until the period of the restoration of all things” (vs. 21). This sequence of events fits the national restoration outlined by the prophets: national repentance (vs. 19a; cf. Zechariah 12:10-14; Ezekiel 37:11-14; Isaiah 59:20-21/Romans 11:25), divine forgiveness and national cleansing (vs. 19b; cf. Ezekiel 36:25-29; Zechariah 13:1; Romans 11:26-27), the return of *Israel's* Messiah (N.B. "appointed for you") to effect its restoration (vss. 20-21; cf. Romans 11:12, 15), the geographical enthronement of the glorified Messiah within Millennial Jerusalem (vs. 19b; cf. Jer. 3:17; Ezek. 37:27; 43:7; 48:35) and the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom (vss. 19a, 21; cf. Isaiah 11:1-9; 65:17-25).

## Conclusion

It should be noted that this survey has only treated a small representation of the New Testament texts that concern Israel’s restoration to the Land.<sup>71</sup> However, these have been sufficient to

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<sup>69</sup> Witherington III, Ben. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 187.

<sup>70</sup> The terms in:20-21 are drawn from the language of the prophetic discourses. The phrase in verse 20, *kairoi ajnayuwxew* is parallel with the phrase *crovnwn ajpokatastavsew* in verse 21. The former use of *ajnavyusiß* is attested in the LXX only in Exodus 8:15 [Heb. 8:11] where it must have the sense of “relief,” “respite,” following the MT’s כַּיִסּוּף, קִיּוּף. The idea, then, is of a “relief” from Gentile oppression through the deliverance from Gentile domination accompanying the advent of the Messiah (cf. Zechariah 12-14). This domination was considered a judgment from God for past apostasy (cf. Deuteronomy 28:36, 47-50) that would find a reversal with Israel’s restoration (cf. Isaiah 11: 11-12, cf. Luke 21:24; Romans 11:25). The latter use of *ajpokatastavsew* is identical to Acts 1:6 of the “restoration” or “establishment” of Israel’s Kingdom, and parallel in sense to *palliggenevsia* (“renewal, regeneration”) in Matthew 19:28. The prophetic hope here is that the restoration of Israel’s blessings - politically and spiritually - would be conditioned upon repentance, which in turn would bring the Messiah to fulfill the promise of the messianic age. Note also that Acts 3:19-21 qualifies this eschatological age with restoration motifs: *kairoi ajnayuwxew* ("times of refreshing") and *crovnwn ajpokatastavsew* "pavntwn" ("the times of the restoration of all things"), clearly stating that this period yet to come was predicted by the all the writing Prophets of Israel (*pavtwn aJgivwn aujtou' profhtwn ajpj ajjwnon*).

<sup>71</sup> Among these other texts are Matthew 24:15-20, where Yeshua affirms the validity of the Old Testament prophecies of Israel, Acts 3:11-26, where Peter clearly extends hope to Israel, Romans 11:25-28, a principal defense of Israel’s future national restoration, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 and Revelation 6-19, which like the Olivet Discourse is patterned on the seventieth week of Daniel 9:27, a text describing Israel’s transition to national repentance and restoration.



demonstrate that the New Testament cannot take interpretive priority over the Old Testament, but must remember that “the sense of the Old Testament text must be determined within its historical and cultural setting, and that sense is determinative for the New Testament fulfillment.”<sup>72</sup> Even though the New Testament includes progressive revelation, we understand with Charles Ryrie that “New revelation cannot mean contradictory revelation [because] if this were so, the Bible would be filled with contradictions, and God would have to be conceived of as deceiving the Old Testament prophets when He revealed to them a nationalistic kingdom.”<sup>73</sup> The same, of course, must be said concerning the restoration Land promises which are part and parcel to this kingdom. We conclude that the restoration to the Land texts in the New Testament are in continuity with the Old Testament revelatory context and have therefore not been transformed in the manner proposed by the New Covenant Perspective.

Finally, it should be noted that the restoration Land promises to Israel were made to Israel with God’s full knowledge of its national rejection (one that began with national rejection of Prophet Moses, continued with the Prophets, and culminated in the Greater Prophet Yeshua, Deut. 18:15-19; Jn. 5:46) and were included by God in His promise of Israel’s New Covenant with a binding oath (Jeremiah 31:35-36; 33:20-25). The Church did not replace Israel, as though the Church had no relationship to Israel. Rather the Church is comprised of both a remnant of national Israel, who have the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant, and a remnant Gentile nations, who have promise blessings in that covenant mediated by national Israel and have been presently grafted into the covenant so as to enjoy its spiritual blessing (Gen. 12:3; Rom. 11:17, 19, 24). This serves as a proleptic preview and divine assurance of the complete realization of universal blessing at the time of the New Covenant Restoration in the Millennial Kingdom. Today a remnant of National Israel and a remnant of the nations participate as the Church in the New Covenant, but the fulfillment of the New Covenant with national Israel and the Gentile nations can only be experienced in the restored Land of Israel with a regenerate national Israel and redeemed Gentile nations under the rule of the Messiah.

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<sup>72</sup> Paul Feinberg, “Hermeneutics of Discontinuity” in *Continuity and Discontinuity*. Ed. John Feinberg (Westchester, IL.: Crossway Books, 1988), p. 127.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.