

## **Session 2**

# **THE NATION and THE LAND**

# INTRODUCTION

The land is “a central, if not the central theme of biblical faith.”

(Walter Brueggemann)

“The notion of land is intrinsic to the notion of peoplehood. Any people’s identity is rooted in the land ... Taking seriously God’s commitment regarding the land is involved in taking seriously the link between ‘people’ and ‘land.’

(John Goldingay)

# QUESTIONS

- How do OT writers look forward to the future of the nation and the land? What is their vision for the future?
- Do NT writers show us how the disciples of Jesus came to think about the identity of Israel, the Jewish people, and the land? Did their ideas change or develop as a result of following Jesus?
- If they did change/develop, why did this happen? Two major factors:
  - (a) Jesus looked forward to gentiles coming into the kingdom of God
  - (b) There must be consequences for Israelites who don't recognise Jesus as Messiah

# The NATION in the OT

## God's promise to Abraham

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make of you a **great nation**, and I will bless you, and make your name great, **so that you will be a blessing**. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed** (Genesis 12:1-3).

## The covenant at Sinai marks Israel out as 'a holy nation'

"Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but **you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation ...**" (Exodus 19:5-6).

"You are a people **holy to the Lord your God**; the Lord your God has **chosen you** out of all the peoples on earth to be his treasured possession" (Deut 7:6).

## Isaiah uses titles reserved for Israel and relates them to foreign nations

<sup>23</sup>On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. <sup>24</sup>On that day **Israel** will be the third **with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth**, <sup>25</sup>whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "**Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage**" (Isaiah 19:23-24).

# The NATION in the OT

Isaiah looks forward to gentiles being included in the covenant and worshipping in the temple in Jerusalem

<sup>6</sup> And **the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,**

to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,  
and to be his servants,

all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,  
and hold fast my covenant—

<sup>7</sup> these I will bring to my holy mountain,  
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;

their burnt offerings and their sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;

for **my house shall be called a house of prayer  
for all peoples.**

<sup>8</sup> Thus says the Lord GOD,  
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,

I **will gather others** to them  
besides those already gathered (Isaiah 56:6-8).

# The NATION in the OT

The psalmist's vision of gentiles being born in Jerusalem and knowing Yahweh

<sup>1</sup> On the holy mount stands the city he founded;

<sup>2</sup> the LORD loves the gates of Zion  
more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

<sup>3</sup> Glorious things are spoken of you,  
O city of God.

<sup>4</sup> **Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon;  
Philistia too, and Tyre, with Ethiopia —**  
“This one was born there,” they say.

<sup>5</sup> And of Zion it shall be said,  
“This one and that one were born in it”;  
for the Most High himself will establish it.

<sup>6</sup> The LORD records, as he registers the peoples,  
“This one was born there” (Psalm 87:1-6)

Zechariah's vision of Gentiles joining themselves to the Lord

<sup>10</sup> Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! For lo, I will come and dwell in your midst, says the LORD. <sup>11</sup> **Many nations shall join themselves to the LORD on that day, and shall be my people;** and I will dwell in your midst. And you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you (Zechariah 2:11)

# The NATION in the NT

## John the Baptist's warning about relying on descent from Abraham

<sup>7</sup> But when he [John the Baptist] saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruit worthy of repentance. <sup>9</sup> **Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor';** for I tell you, **God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.** <sup>10</sup> Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; **every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire** (Matt 3:9-10).

## Jesus looks forward to Gentiles joining with Israelites in the kingdom of heaven

<sup>10</sup> When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one<sup>l</sup> in Israel have I found such faith. <sup>11</sup> I tell you, **many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,** <sup>12</sup> **while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**" (Matt 8:11-12).

# The NATION in the NT

Jesus looks forward to 'other sheep' becoming part of the one flock

<sup>11</sup> "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> **I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd** (John 10:11-16).

Peter warns of the consequences of not listening to God's prophet

<sup>2</sup> Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. <sup>23</sup> **And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people.'** <sup>24</sup> **And all the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, also predicted these days** (Acts 3:22-24).



# The NATION in the NT

Paul speaks of Jesus breaking down the wall that divides Jews from gentiles and creating 'one new humanity'

<sup>11</sup> So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision” — a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands— <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> **But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.** <sup>14</sup> **For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.** <sup>15</sup> He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself **one new humanity [one new man NIV]** in place of the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. <sup>17</sup> So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; <sup>18</sup> for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> **So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God,** <sup>20</sup> built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. <sup>21</sup> In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are **built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God ... that is the Gentiles have become fellow heirs (*sunkleronoma*), members of the same body (*sussoma*), and sharers (*summetokha*) in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel** (Eph 2:11-22; 3:6).

# The NATION in the NT

All who belong to Christ are 'Abraham's offspring'

<sup>26</sup> ... for **in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.** <sup>27</sup> As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> **And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise** (Gal 3:27-29).

Gentiles will be called 'my people ... children of the living God'

<sup>24</sup>..... including us whom he has called, **not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?** <sup>25</sup> As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they shall be called **children of the living God**" (Rom 9:25-26)

Titles normally reserved for Israel are applied to Jewish and gentile believers

<sup>9</sup> But **you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession**, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but **now you are the people of God**; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet 2:9-10).

# The LAND in the OT

## The promise of the land

“I will give you, and to your offspring after you, **the land** where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, **for a perpetual holding [as an everlasting possession NIV] ...**” (Gen 17:8).

## The land belongs to God

The land must not be sold permanently, because **the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants** (Lev 25:23).

## Enjoying the land is conditional on obedience

<sup>24</sup> Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. <sup>25</sup> **Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.** <sup>26</sup> But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the foreigners residing among you must not do any of these detestable things, <sup>27</sup> for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. <sup>28</sup> **And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you”** (Lev 18:24-30).

# The LAND in the OT

Devastation of the land and exile will follow as consequences of disobedience

<sup>2</sup> Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: ... <sup>9</sup> Therefore diligently observe the words of this covenant, in order that you may succeed in everything that you do... <sup>18</sup> It may be that there is among you a man or woman, or a family or tribe, whose heart is already turning away from the LORD our God to serve the gods of those nations... <sup>20</sup> the LORD will be unwilling to pardon them, for the LORD's anger and passion will smoke against them... <sup>22</sup> The next generation, your children who rise up after you ... will see **the devastation of that land** and the afflictions with which the LORD has afflicted it ...<sup>24</sup> they and indeed all the nations will wonder, "Why has the LORD done thus to this land? What caused this great display of anger?" <sup>25</sup> They will conclude, "It is because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their ancestors, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. <sup>26</sup> They turned and served other gods, worshipping them, gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them; <sup>27</sup> so the anger of the LORD was kindled against that land, bringing on it every curse written in this book. <sup>28</sup> **The LORD uprooted them from their land in anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as is now the case"** (Deut 29:2-28).

# The LAND in the OT

The promise of return to the land if there is repentance

“When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, **if you call them to mind** among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, **and return to the LORD your God**, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, **then** the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, **gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the LORD your God has scattered you.** **Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back.** **The LORD your God will bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it;** he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors” (Deut 30:1-5).

# The LAND in the OT

## Predictions of return to the land

<sup>14</sup>Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, “As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt,” <sup>15</sup> but “As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them.” For **I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their ancestors** (Jeremiah 16:14-15).

<sup>22</sup>Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God ...<sup>24</sup> I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and **bring you into your own land.** <sup>25</sup>...<sup>28</sup> **Then you shall live in the land** that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God (Ezekiel 36:22-28).

<sup>11</sup>Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ <sup>12</sup>Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; **and I will bring you back to the land of Israel.** <sup>13</sup> And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup> I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord” (Ezekiel 37:11-14).

# The LAND in the NT

*Why is there so little about the land in the NT? Is it*

*(a) because OT hopes are taken for granted and are therefore understood literally?*

*Or (b) because the land is now understood on the context of the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus?*

The clearest reference to the land in Jesus' teaching

<sup>5</sup> "Blessed are the meek, for they will **inherit the earth** (*ten gen*)" (Matt 5:5);  
quoting Psalm 37:11 "... the meek **shall inherit the land** (*haaretz*) ..."

All who believe in Christ are 'Abraham's offspring' and inheritors of the promise

"There is no longer Jew or Greek ... for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And **if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise**" (Gal 3:28-29).

Paul speaks of Abraham inheriting 'the world' – thus universalising 'the land'

<sup>13</sup> For the promise that he would **inherit the world** (*kosmos*) did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith (Rom 4:13).

# Acts: Jesus as the new Joshua

“go and take possession of the land ... (1:11)

Different stages of the conquest: Jericho, Ai, north, south

Achan (7)

“and the land had rest from war” (11:22; cf 14:15; 21:44; 23:1

Joshua’s farewell address (23:1-19)

conquest “with the edge of the sword” (6:21 + 9 times)

“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth

From Jerusalem to Rome

Annianias and Saphira (5:1-11)

“the church had peace and was built up” (9:31: cf 6:7; 2:47; 12:24; 13:49; 19:20)

Paul’s farewell address to elders of Ephesus (20: )

“... the message of his grace ... that is able to ... give you an inheritance (*kleronomia*)” (20:32)



# The LAND in the NT

Land language is given a new meaning – it is spiritualised

**4** Therefore, while the promise of entering **his rest** is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ... <sup>3</sup> For **we who have believed enter that rest** ... <sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day. <sup>9</sup> So then, **a sabbath rest** still remains for the people of God; <sup>10</sup> for those who enter **God's rest** also cease from their labors as God did from his. <sup>11</sup> Let us therefore make every effort to enter **that rest**, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs. <sup>12</sup> Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb 4:1-13).

<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for **a place that he was to receive as an inheritance**; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he stayed for a time in **the land** he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he looked forward to **the city that has foundations**, whose architect and builder is God... All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking **a homeland**. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have opportunity to return. But as it is, they **desire a better country, that is a heavenly one**. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them (Heb 11:8-10.)

# The LAND in the NT

The inheritance of the land is now an inheritance 'in heaven'

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into **an inheritance (*kleronomia*) that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,** <sup>5</sup> who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet 1:3-5).

# CONCLUSION

*While Israel is described as the chosen people, the OT looks forward to gentiles being blessed and coming into Israel.*

*Since Jesus looks forward to gentiles coming into the kingdom, the idea of Israel has to change. Gentile believers are incorporated into Israel.*

*The church doesn't replace or supersede Israel; the church is Israel - Israel renewed and restored in the Messiah.*

*If we take seriously the link between 'people' and 'land,' when the idea of Israel changes, the idea of the land also has to change.*

*NT writers seem to show little interest in the land; but they use land terminology, giving it new meaning – universalising it and spiritualising it.*

*While Christians should understand the attachment of Jewish people to the land, there is no justification for Christians to believe that the Jewish people have a divine right to the land for all time.*