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Erratum: Does the New Testament support Christian Zionism?

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Does the New Testament support Christian Zionism?

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This article evaluates Christian Zionism in light of the New Testament, with a focus on the Pauline corpus. In spite of the fact that the New Testament never mentions the promise of the land in terms of an outstanding promise of territorial inheritance for Israel, the land, which includes Jerusalem and the temple, is incorporated in God's kingdom in the new era in Christ in a way that fulfils but transcends the original territorial form of the promise. In the New Testament, the land is spiritualised, universalised and eschatologised. The deeper criteria of being God's people in the New Testament – faith and the indwelling Spirit – cohere with the understanding that historical Israel cannot be seen as continuing as God's people in the New Testament era, or as still having a valid claim on God's promises.

Introduction

While Zionism is the Jewish nationalist movement to establish a homeland in Palestine, Christian Zionism is support for Zionism on Christian theological grounds. Christian Zionists read God's promises to Abraham concerning the promised land (e.g. Gn 12:1–3; 13:15; 17:8; 28:13) as though they apply to the modern State of Israel, whose citizens they consider to be the descendants of Abraham. Most Christian Zionists hold dispensationalist views that normally include beliefs about a literal future millennial reign of peace (Rv 20:1–6) from the current Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstatement of the Old Testament sacrificial system. In terms of their eschatological timeline, they consider the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 as a signal of the 'last days' having arrived. After seven years of tribulation and the rise of the Anti-Christ, Jesus would secretly 'rapture' the church, followed by the Battle of Armageddon. After the Battle of Armageddon, Jesus would take up the throne of David and reign from the earthly Jerusalem. During these events, a certain number of Jews would be converted to Christianity, while the remainder would be annihilated (e.g. Baker 1971; Ryrie 1995; cf. Abraham & Boer 2009:90–91; Church 2009:376–378; Wagner 1992:4).

The contention that today's Jews still have a valid claim to the land of ancient Israel, presupposes that the original covenants with Abraham and Israel enjoy continuing literal application within the New Testament era, including the possession of the land of Israel. Further, the belief that Jews will be converted to Christianity at some point in the future, which is based on a certain interpretation of Romans 11:26–27, presupposes that modern Jews are included within God's salvific purposes in the era of the New Testament on the basis of their current identity. The aim of this article is to evaluate the validity of Christian Zionism in light of the New Testament, with a focus on the Pauline corpus.[1] This evaluation will focus on two aspects: first, whether the Jewish claim on the land, which includes Jerusalem and the temple, can be justified in light of the New Testament (especially Paul); and second, whether the New Testament (especially Paul) supports the continued claim on the land of Israel for descendants of historical Israel who do not believe in Christ.

It could be asked at this point why an article of this nature is necessary, since Christian Zionism has never enjoyed much support in New Testament scholarship. The fact of the matter is that Christian Zionism is a 'standard position among the evangelical Protestant religious right, especially in the United States of America' (Abraham & Boer 2009:91) and arguably in much of Western Christianity, including South Africa. As international political movement, Zionism became prominent with the Balfour Declaration in 1917, which was supported by international powers such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Although controversial, much of America's contemporary war on terror, its support to the State of Israel and its antagonism towards Israel's enemies can be connected to a strong pro-Israeli lobby within America, which, in turn, derives much support from Christian Zionists (Sizer 2004:213–215;

1. Apart from the seven undisputed Pauline letters (Rm, 1 and 2 Cor, Gl, Phlp, 1 Th, Phlm), the letters to the Ephesians, the Colossians and the second letter to the Thessalonians are included under the Pauline corpus in this article, because their authenticity is supported by most evangelical scholars (e.g. Carson & Moo 2005; Köstenberger, Kellum & Quarles 2009; see Du Toit 2013:24–25).

Wagner 1992:4–5). Some of the more vocal or popular supporters of the Christian Zionist cause include figures such as Hal Lindsey, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Oral Roberts, John Hagee (see Sizer 2004:22–24), David Pawson (2008) and the prominent Calvinist Baptist, John MacArthur (e.g. MacArthur 2012). In the South African context, Christian Zionism can be perceived as a kind of Imperial Theology that perpetuates injustice against the Palestinians, which stands in tension with Palestinian Christians that suffer as a result of such an ideology (see Kairos Document 2016). The influence of Christian Zionism in shaping the political world, especially in terms of the way in which the Middle East Conflict is perceived, is thus probably stronger than is usually acknowledged and invites continued theological reflection.

The promised land, Jerusalem and the temple in the New Testament

The most profound question behind evaluating the theology of the promised land is a hermeneutical one. Should one read all the promises concerning the promised land in the Old Testament strictly literally and territorially as dispensationalists often insist (see Abraham & Boer 2009:103–106), or should one derive one's hermeneutic from the New Testament reflection on these promises? While the New Testament on the surface seems to be silent on the promised land, the underlying fulfilment of the promised land in Christ can be discerned throughout the New Testament.

The Gospels and Acts

Jesus' proclamation of the 'kingdom of God' (e.g. Mt 6:33; 21:43; Mk 1:15; Lk 4:43; 6:20; 9:27; Jn 3:3, 5) or the 'kingdom of heaven' (e.g. Mt 4:17; 5:3) can be understood as 'fundamentally a spiritual idea, a spiritual experience that transcended any particular place or time or land' (Burge 2013:186). This can be derived from the fact that Jesus never defined his messiahship in terms of an earthly king who frees Israel from Roman rule, even though such an expectation was prevalent (Fitzmyer 2007; Wright 1992:308) and even though the disciples' minds were still on political restoration (Lk 24:21; Ac 1:6; cf. Mt 16:21–22; Mk 8:31–32; Lk 17:20; Jn 6:15). In answer to the disciples' query about the restoration of the 'kingdom of Israel' (Ac 1:6), Jesus answered that the rise of the community of believers in Jesus, from Jerusalem to the 'ends of the earth' (Ac 1:7–8; cf. Mt 28:19), would fulfil the traditional hope for the restoration of Israel, although Jesus conveyed a change of emphasis from Israel's kingship to its task as servant that would bring the light of God's salvation to the nations (Schnabel 2012:76–80; Turner 1996:290–315).[2] Similarly, Jesus' parable of the vineyard (Mt 21:33–46; Mk 12:1–12; Lk 20:9–18), which was a well-known metaphor for the Israel's rootedness in the land (Is 5:1–8; Ps 80:8, 14),[3] portrays the vineyard as being given to others after the residents of the vineyard would reject and kill God's messengers. In the same vein, Jesus' reference to the meek who will inherit the *gē* [the word that is used in the New Testament and the Septuagint for both the 'earth' and the (promised) 'land' of Israel] (Mt 5:5; cf. 2:6) seems to involve the promised land, albeit in a way that transcends a territorial understanding (Burge 2010:52–56; 2013:186–187). While Psalm 37:11, which Jesus alludes to, clearly points to the land of inheritance, the word *erets* (Ps 37:11) is here in Matthew 5:5 extended to mean the whole world (Osborne 2010:167; Robertson 2000:26–27). For Charette (1992:84–88), this eschatological inheritance is built on the idea of a spiritual return from exile to the 'land', as a transcendent promise that relates to kingdom blessings.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus himself becomes the locus of the holy place instead of Jerusalem and the temple, which were considered to be the most sacred locations in the land. This can be derived from Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well where Jesus diverts the woman's question about the location of worship (Mount Gerizim vs. Jerusalem) and denies that the worship of the Father would be confined to an earthly location. Jesus rather indicates that worship would 'now' be in spirit and truth (Jn 4:20–24). In a sense Jesus became the new Moses (Jn 1:17; Burge 2013:189; Walker 2000:92–93).[4] Since the Torah was always connected to the land, in that the inheritance and the retention of the land involved repentance (2 Chr 6:24–25; 7:14; 30:9; Jr 7:5–7; 25: 5–6; 35:15), the keeping of the Law (Lv 26:3–6, 14–20, 32–34, 43; Dt 11:22–24; 19:8–9; 28:21, 45, 63; 30:20; 1 Kgs 9:7; 14:15; 2 Kgs 21:8; 1 Chr 28:8; 2 Chron 7:19–20; Ps 37; Ezk 33:23–26, 28–29) and the keeping of the covenant (Gn 17:8–9; Jos 23:16), the 'grace and truth' (Jn 1:17) that Jesus embodied can be understood as fulfilling and replacing both the Torah and the land. Similarly, while the vineyard was a prominent symbol that signified Israel's rootedness in the land (see above), Jesus' fulfilment of the land is further indicated by Jesus being the true vine (Jn 15:1–6). John 15:1–6 convey a relocation of Israel's holy space (Burge 2010:53): 'The crux for John 15 is that Jesus is changing the place of rootedness for Israel' (Burge 1994:393; cf. Walker 2000:94). Jesus is now the true vine. In other words, Jesus displaces and 'christifies' holy space (Davies 1974:316–318, 368). Jesus is 'the reality behind all earthbound promises' (Burge 2013:190; cf. Heb 10:1). Jesus' words in John 15:1–6 could thus be interpreted as spiritualising the land (Burge 2010:56). In the same vein, the Fourth Gospel interprets Caiaphas' remark on Jesus' death (Jn 11:49–50) as pointing to Israel's ingathering from

2.This view has to be distinguished from the view that considers Jesus' response (Ac 1:7–8) as a *reinterpretation* of the traditional interpretations of Israel's fortunes (contra Barrett 1994:76; Maddox 1982:106–108). Jesus' answer rather alludes to Isaiah 32:15 where the prophet speaks of the desolation of Israel until the Spirit is poured out from on high, to Israel being God's witnesses (Is 43:10–12) and to Isaiah 49:6 that anticipates the Servant making Israel a light for the nations that God's salvation may reach 'to the ends of the earth' (Schnabel 2012:76–80; cf. Peterson 2009:110–112).

3.Although the vine metaphor in Isaiah 5:1–8 involves Israel as a nation, the fact that the metaphor in this passage also involves the *land*, can be derived from the references to the 'fertile hill' (v. 1), to the 'inhabitants of Jerusalem' (v. 3), to God's intention to 'make it waste', to God's command to the clouds not to rain upon it (v. 6) and to Israel dwelling alone 'in the midst of the land' (v. 8, English Standard Version – ESV). Burge (2010:53–56) explains that the land itself was seen as a source of life, hope and future. Psalm 8:7–13 describe how God brought a vine (Israel) out of Egypt, drove out the nations and planted it. God cleared the ground, the vine took deep root and it filled the land. The vineyard metaphor thus described Israel's rootedness in the land.

4.Compare the feeding miracle in the wilderness (Jn 6:1–34) and Jesus being the 'bread of life' (v. 35).

dispersion, albeit in a non-geographical way (v. 52; Walker 2000:93–94).

Even Stephen's speech (Ac 7:2–60) can be understood as challenging the assumption that the land is integral to the plan of God. For Stephen, the land of Israel was not the sacred domain of revelation, for he outlined how God had spoken in other foreign lands such as Mesopotamia (Abraham) and Egypt (Joseph and Moses). From this point he concludes that God's work is not confined to the land of Israel (Burge 2013:194). Stephen stressed that God does not dwell in houses made by hands, that heaven is his throne and that the 'earth' (*gē*) is his footstool (Ac 7:48–49). In this way, Stephen arguably subverted notions among his contemporaries that God's revelation and the place of worship had to be confined to these earthly locations. But as Burge (2013:195) writes, it is 'the conversion and mission of Paul, whose meeting with Christ had shattered his Jewish preconceptions about God and the world'. This led him to lands beyond the scope of the promised land.

The Pauline corpus

For Paul, Jesus confirmed the promises to the patriarchs (Rm 15:8) and all the promises of God find their 'yes' in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). Yet, Paul rarely, if at all, refers to the promised land of Israel as prophesised in the Old Testament (see below). Similarly, Paul does not mention Israel's national reign over the nations (e.g. Is 11:10-14; 42:1, 6; 49:6; 54:3; Jr 4:2; 23:5) through a worldwide earthly dominion of the Messiah (e.g. Ps 72:8-11; Is 9:7; Jr 23:5). Other theological motifs have taken their place (cf. Walker 1996:116). Paul rather regularly and deliberately rejects the territorial aspects of the promise (Davies 1974:179). In Romans 9:4, when Paul lists the privileges of ancient, historical Israel[5] (adoption, glory, covenants, giving of the law, worship, promises, Christ according to the flesh), it is noteworthy that Paul does not explicitly mention the land. Yet, it is in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 where Paul does something quite unexpected. In the popular thinking of many Israelites, salvation required descent from Abraham (Burge 2013:196; cf. Mt 3:9; Lk 3:8) and circumcision (Barrett 1975:58; adopted by Cranfield 1975:172). But more importantly, in its original form, the promise of Abraham's offspring, which involves the blessing of all nations, is only found in promises that involve the promised land (Gn 12:3, 7; 13:12–17; 17:4–5, 8, 16, 20; 24:7; 26:3–4; 28:3–4, 13–14; cf. Holwerda 1995:103). Yet, when Paul refers to this promise with Abraham (Rm 4:11–13, 17–18; Gl 3:8, 16, 19) he directly connects believers' inheritance through faith to the promise to Abraham, but deliberately omits an explicit reference to the land.

It is in Romans 4:13–14 where Paul's interpretation of how the promised land is fulfilled in Christ is probably most evident. He states that the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world (*kosmos*) did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void (ESV).

With Paul's reference to Abraham being the heir of the *kosmos*, he brings to mind the fact that the retention of the promised land was dependent on the keeping of the Law (see above). Although the *kosmos* could indicate all the nations that become Abraham's offspring through faith (Bauer *et al*. 2000, s.v. *kosmos* §6a; Wright 2002:496), all nations inhabit the whole world. Therefore, *kosmos* also involves the promise about the land itself, albeit in a way that transcends the original promise. It points to the restoration of the whole created order that transcends a territorial understanding of the promise of the land to Israel (Dunn 1988:213; cf. Davies 1974:179). Pointedly, Stott (1994:130) writes that 'the fulfilment of biblical prophecy has always transcended the categories in which it was originally given'. Further, Paul, who elsewhere identifies Abraham's seed with the Messiah (Gl 3:16), also uses the word *kosmos* here to indicate the universal dominion of the Messiah's reign. According to Galatians 3, Christ is now Abraham's single 'seed' (v. 16) and believers are now considered to be Abraham's children through faith in Christ (v. 7). They are partakers of the (whole) promise, which originally involved land, through their connection to Christ (Gl. 3:29). Galatians 3:29 thus implies that even the promise of the land is fulfilled in Christ in some way. As Brueggemann (2002) states:

> it is central to Paul's argument that the promise endures. The heirs in Christ are not heirs to a new promise, but the one which abides, and that is centrally land. (p. 178)

Although a territorial understanding of God's kingdom was prevalent in the time of the Second Temple (see above) and can be found in Jewish apocalyptic literature that postdates Paul (e.g. *4 Ez*; *2 Bar*), Paul's conception of God's kingdom transcended such an expectation. It could in fact be argued that the political, earthly messianic ruler that is envisioned within later Jewish apocalyptic thought, might in fact reflect a kind of polemic or reaction against the Christ-believers' claim of Jesus being ancient Israel's Messiah. Even though Charlesworth (1992:16) argues for Rabbinic Judaism not having a clear anti-Christian polemic, he admits that it 'could not develop in ignorance of the growing strength of Christianity, which claimed to be the true religion of Israel because it was empowered by God's Messiah, Jesus Christ'. He writes that the 'dearth of messianology' in Rabbinic Judaism 'should be seen also in the context of the struggle for survival of rabbinic Judaism alongside of, and sometimes *against*, a messianic movement heavily indebted to Judaism, called Christianity' (Charlesworth 1992:16, [*author's italics*]). Similarly, Dahl (1992:382) argues that even 'Jewish messianic ideas were to a large extent read in light of, and *in contrast to*, faith in Jesus Christ, the true Messiah' [*author's italics*].

Paul often sees the kingdom as something to be 'inherited' (1 Cor 6:9–10; 15:50; Gl 5:21; cf. Eph 5:5), which is related to the idea of being found worthy of the kingdom (2 Th 1:5) and differs from later Jewish language about the kingdom

5.That Paul primarily has ancient, historical Israel in mind can be derived from the context (see below).

(Witherington 1992:55). Human beings must have a resurrection body in order to inherit the kingdom (1 Cor 15:50), a body that transcends the current natural, earthly, mortal existence (1 Cor 15:40–54). Paul's conception of the ultimate kingdom to be inherited thus transcends the expectation of an earthly, this-worldly messianic rule (cf. Fee 2014:865–890; Fitzmyer 2008:594). The kingdom to be inherited in the Pauline corpus is rather a heavenly kingdom (see esp. *epouranos* in 1 Cor 15:40, 48, 49 and *ouranos* in v. 47). This is related to Paul defining the kingdom of God as righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rm 14:17), all of which can be seen as eschatological gifts of the Spirit (Moo 1996:857). Rather than existing in (arrogant) human words (1 Cor 4:19), the kingdom exists in power (1 Cor 4:20), which comes from the Spirit (Barrett 1976:118; Fee 2014:209) and involves a way of living (Pop 1965:98). Fee (2014:209) writes that they 'were living in the Spirit as though the future had dawned in some measure of fullness'. These notions about the kingdom all signify a present reality for believers, although containing a future element: they *already* share in and live from the eschatological, spiritual reality and power of God's kingdom (cf. Witherington 1992:57; Col 1:12–14; 4:11). While the first human being's existence is derived 'from the earth [/*land*]' (*ek gēs*) and is inextricably linked to it,[6] the raised Christ's existence, and believers' eschatological existence at the resurrection by implication (Fee 2014:877), is derived 'from heaven' (*ex ouranou*, 1 Cor 15:47). The eschatological existence in God's kingdom in which believers already share (see above), although they do not have resurrection bodies yet, is thus not dependent on earthly territory.

Another pertinent aspect of Paul's portrayal of God's kingdom is that it is universal (cf. Holwerda 1995:102–104; Walker 2000:87). In Philippians 2:9–10, Paul writes that Jesus obtained the Name above all names and that every knee in heaven and on earth should bow at the name of Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 3:21–23 Paul describes believers' inheritance such as all things being theirs: the world, life, death, the present and the future. The reason is that believers belong to Christ, while Christ belongs to God. These notions correspond to the notion that all things in heaven and earth are united in Christ in whom believers obtained an inheritance (Eph 1:10–11), that all things are placed under Jesus' feet as head over all things (Eph 1:22; cf. Ps 110:1), and to the notion that all things are reconciled to God through Christ – whether on earth or in heaven (Col 1:20). In this regard, Davies (1974) states that the:

> logic of Paul's Christology and missionary practice, then, seems to demand that the people of Israel living in the land had been replaced as the people of God by a universal community, which had no special territorial attachment. (p. 182)

A noteworthy example of this concept is Ephesians 6:2–3, which repeats the promise of Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 that involves the promised land, but applies it in a Christ-believing context that cannot be confined to the land of Israel (cf. Robertson 2000:28; Walker 2000:87). As Hoehner (2002:793) notes, the clause 'which the Lord God gives you' is omitted, 'because the church is not the continuation of Israel and has not received the promise of a specific land'. The promise is thus universalised (O'Brien 1999:444). Therefore, many translations translate *gē* (v. 3) by 'earth' (e.g. American Standard Version; International Standard Version; King James Version; New International Version; New King James Version; New Revised Standard Version – NRSV; Revised Version).

In Old Testament times the land was considered the centre of the earth (Ezk 38:12; 5:5; *1 En* 26:1; *Jub* 8:19), Jerusalem the centre of the land and the temple the centre of Jerusalem (Holwerda 1995:106–112; Robertson 2000:7; Burge 2013:184). Even though Jerusalem was a central part of Paul's 'world' (*kosmos*), that world and all its aspirations had been crucified to him (Gl 6:14; Walker 1996:153).[7] Yet, considering the general concept of the land, Jerusalem and the temple, Paul's portrayal of Jerusalem and the temple in light of the dawn of the 'end of the ages' (1 Cor 10:11) should cohere with his theological thought around the promised land. The notion behind Paul's referral to the 'Jerusalem above', which he contrasts to the 'current Jerusalem' (Gl 4:25–26), is that a 'spiritual Jerusalem', the mother of believers in Christ, is juxtaposed against an 'earthly Jerusalem' (Fung 1988:210; Meyer 2009:137).[8] While the earthly Jerusalem would represent a fleshly, worldly existence (see *kata sarka* [according to flesh] in Gl 4:23, 29), the 'Jerusalem above' is a present spiritual reality (see *kata pneuma* [according to Spirit] in v. 29) for believers (cf. Meyer 2009:137). Christ-believers' citizenship is already in heaven (Phlp 3:20; cf. Gl 2:19–21). This citizenship transcends a visible city on earth (Davies 1974:197).

Even Paul's portrayal of his connection to the Jerusalem church seems to emphasise his independence of the Jerusalem leaders (Davies 1974:198). Paul almost anxiously points out to the Galatians that, after he received the gospel by revelation (Gl 1:12), he did not consult anyone and especially that he did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before him, but that he went away into Arabia (Gl 1:16–17). Even Paul's reference to the elders in Jerusalem as 'pillars' (Gl 2:9) could imply that, in some ways, Paul considered them as weak, for he does not directly speak of them as pillars, but

6.The Hebrew text to which Paul alludes (Gn 2:7), underscores the inextricable link between humans and the earth (*adam* [human being]; *adamah* [ground/land/earth]) (Collins 1999:571).

7.Although *kosmos* in the Pauline corpus often refers to the world and everything that belongs to it as being opposed to God (e.g. 1 Cor 11:32; 2 Cor 2:12; Gl 4:3; Bauer *et al.* 2000, s.v. *kosmos* §7b) in the context of Galatians 6:12–15, *kosmos* stands in connection with circumcision being a part of Paul's 'world', which, in turn, stands in connection with Paul's pedigree or identity in the flesh (Phlp 3:4–11). Yet, Paul's former identity 'has disappeared altogether … (Gal 2:19–20)' (Hays 2000:344). Paul entered a new eschatological world (Hays 2000:344) that transcended Paul's former identity and the world that constituted such an identity (cf. Moo 2013:396). Being rooted in the land of Israel, with the temple in its centre, was an integral constitutive element in the identity of Israel. By implication, Paul's crucifixion to the 'world' and his change of identity would thus involve the fulfilment of the land in Christ.

8.Most scholars agree that Paul's allegory of the two women (Gl 4:24) is 'fundamentally tempered by typology' (Martyn 1997:436; cf. Hays 2000:301; Moo 2013:295). Longenecker (1990:209–211) correctly notices that the manner in which Paul applies allegory is more Palestinian than Alexandrian (e.g. Philo). Paul is not emancipating the meaning of the passage from its historical content in order to transmute it into a moral sentiment or philosophical truth (Alexandrian). Paul rather refers to the original historical content and interprets it typologically. Paul's allegory is thus an aid to typology and regards history as meaningful.

writes that they 'were considered to be', 'were reputed to be' or even 'seemed to be' (*dokeō*) pillars (Longenecker 2015:207, cf. Bauer *et al*. 2000, s.v. *dokeō*).

Paul's portrayal of the temple is along similar lines. He portrays the believing community as God's temple. For Paul, believers constitute God's temple (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; cf. Eph 2:21–22). A pertinent example is 2 Corinthians 6:16 where he incorporates Leviticus 26:11–12. He writes: 'For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people"' (NRSV). It is noteworthy that in Leviticus 26, God's promise to dwell and walk among his people, to be their God and that they will be his people (vv. 11–12), is set within his people's obedient, fruitful and peaceful living in the *land* (vv. 1–10), God's deliverance from Egypt (v. 13), and God's warning to curse their *land* and make them flee from it if they did not adhere to his commandments (vv. 14–20). Similarly, the promise in Ezekiel 37:27 that closely resembles that of Leviticus 26:11–12, is also set within references to the establishment of the people in the *land* (Ezk 37:12, 14, 21, 22, 25). In Paul's appropriation of the promise, God's dwelling and walking among his people is fulfilled in the believing community (Barnett 1997:351–352; Seifrid 2014:296). Such a fulfilment, unlike the context of Leviticus 26 and Ezekiel 37, is, however, not confined to the land or the tabernacle. As Harris (2005:506) notes, in light of the new age that has dawned (2 Cor 6:2), such a fulfilment includes the notion of the restoration of his people from exile (Ezk 37:11–14, 21), yet involves all people groups in Christ: 'God's people had been reconstituted for a final time'. They now consist of both Judaean and gentile as God's temple.

Hebrews and Revelation

One of God's main intentions with the promised land in the Old Testament was that it would provide his people with a place of rest (e.g. Ex 33:14; Lv 26:6; Dt 3:20; 12:10; 25:19; Jos 1:13, 15; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1). Yet, in the letter to the Hebrews, the divine rest, which originally referred to entrance into the promised land, is now understood as a reference to a greater heavenly reality: 'For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God' (4:8–9, ESV). The implication is that the historical entrance into the land did not give the people rest at all. Although the author does not develop the idea in full, the underlying notion is that 'the whole concept of the promised land was really an advance metaphor for the heavenly rest enjoyed by God's people' (Walker 2000:89). Walker (2000) argues that it is reasonable to derive from the pattern of thinking behind the writer's exposition of the shadows and fulfilment of the temple in chapters 7–10 that it:

> would cause him to view the land in the same way. Just as the temple was now eclipsed by the revelation of the 'heavenly sanctuary', so the land was eclipsed by the new focus on the heavenly rest. (p. 89)

Or as Johnson (2006:129) states, 'the promise offered to God's people now is no longer that of a material possession, but of a participation in the divine life'.

In Hebrews 11, the author specifically mentions the 'place' that Abraham 'was to receive as an inheritance' (v. 8) and the 'land of promise' (v. 9), but such an expectation in a physical land is eclipsed by looking forward to a 'city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God' (v. 10, ESV) and by the eschatological vision where the patriarchs 'desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one' that includes the heavenly city (v. 16, NRSV). Similarly, Hebrews 12:22 reports of 'Mount Zion', 'the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem', and of 'the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven' (v. 23, ESV) to which believers have come already (v. 22). The concept of the promised land has thus now been caught up into a new understanding that includes, but fulfils and eclipses its former role within God's purposes (Walker 2000:91). Thompson (2008:267) remarks that the believing community has approached this heavenly world, because Christ, the forerunner, opened up the way to enter the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 6:20; 10:19). The author of Hebrews ends off this eschatological vision with a reference to the receiving of 'a kingdom that cannot be shaken' (12:28), a kingdom that clearly supersedes one that is confined to the land of Israel.

In Revelation, one finds a shift of focus from the land to the world. The frequent references to 'the kings of the earth' (e.g. Rv 1:5; 6:15; 16:14; 17:2; 18:3, 9; 19:19) and 'the four corners of the earth' (7:1; etc.) strongly suggest that the seer is envisioning the whole world (cf. the references to the inhabited world: 3:10; 12:9; 16:14). The focus of Revelation is thus cosmic and not confined to the land of Israel (Walker 2000:97). Further, it is telling that the new heaven, the new *gē* and the new Jerusalem from heaven (Rv 21:1–2), is set in 21:3 within the same promise that Paul quotes in 2 Corinthians 6:16 (see above), namely, the one in Leviticus 26:11–12 and Ezekiel 37:27. As indicated above, this promise is set within the restoration of God's people in the promised land in both Leviticus 26 and Ezekiel 37. It is thus reasonable to conclude that the new heaven and the new 'earth' (*gē*) incorporate, fulfil and supersede the original promised land in this passage. Neither is God's divine presence (Rv 21:3) limited by the physical boundaries of an Israelite temple (see esp. 22:22), for all 'peoples' (*laoi*, v. 3) experience God's intimate tabernacling presence (Beale 1999:1047).

The land of Israel and unbelievers

In light of the above, the question can be asked whether the New Testament supports the continued claim on the land of Israel for descendants of historical Israel who do not believe in Christ. If it can be derived from the above discussion that the promised land has been fulfilled and superseded in a cosmic and spiritual way within the Christ-believing community, it can be asked if the New Testament creates a precedent for descendants from historical Israel who do not believe in Christ to continue to lay claim on the

physical land of Israel. At a basic level the New Testament nowhere reaffirms the promised land in a way that the descendants from historical Israel could lay claim to it apart from belief in Christ. Also, since the New Testament portrays the promise to Abraham as being fulfilled, transferred and transcended in or for those who believe in Christ as discussed, it would logically follow that the New Testament does not leave any room for non-believing descendants of historical Israel to lay claim to the land of Israel. There is one passage, however, that is often mentioned as proof that God still has salvific plans for contemporary Jews, which Christian Zionists presuppose includes their return to the land of Israel, and that is Romans 11:25–27 (e.g. Blaising 1999; Ladd 1972:61, 113, 150; Thomas 1992:282–283). That is in spite of the fact that there is no reference to the land in Romans 11. In terms of the notion that God would still have salvific plans for contemporary Jews, it is worthy of note that even Burge (2013:201), who rejects Christian Zionism, holds that contemporary Jews still have 'a unique future' and 'a place of honor even in their unbelief' on the basis of Romans 11:25–27.[9] The deeper question behind such a notion is a question of identity that consists of two aspects:

- Should contemporary Jews be *equated with* Israel of the Old Testament?
- Does the New Testament leave room for the continued existence of historical Israel as God's people or as a group of people who can *continue to lay claim* on God's Old Testament promises or His *salvific purposes* apart from belief in Christ?

These are the questions which will now be dealt with.

Should contemporary Jews be equated with Israel of the Old Testament?

In the time of the Second Temple, the designations *Israēl* ['Israel]' and *Israēlitēs* ['Israelite]' mainly denoted God's ancient, historical people who lived before the time of the second temple. At the same time the term *Ioudaios* ['Jew' or 'Judaean'] leaned more toward denoting the ethnic people who descended from historical Israel, without necessarily carrying connotations of being God's people. This tendency can especially be noted with Josephus who speaks of *Israēlitai* [Israelites] 188 times in *Antiquities* 2–6 when he describes the ancient time, but predominantly employs *Ioudaioi* [Jews or Judaeans] from *Antiquities* 6.6 onward and exclusively from 6.317 right up to the end (see also *Ant* 11.169–173; Jewett 2006:561–562; Kuhli 1991b:205; Kuhn 1965:360, 372). In the Pauline corpus, the term *Ioudaios* generally leans toward being an ethnical or social designation[10] of people in his *present* and, apart from most prevalent interpretations of Romans 11:26 (see below), the designation *Israēl* also seems to carry more of a theological quality denoting God's elect people (Kuhli 1991a:204; Kuhn 1965:357, 359–360) in Paul's *past*.[11]

Even the term *Israēlitēs*, although Paul applies it twice as a self-designation (2 Cor 11:22; Rm 11:1), leans toward the historical side in that it denotes Paul's historical line of descent. In Romans 9:4 the term can be understood as primarily pointing to historical Israelites – although unbelieving *Ioudaioi* in Paul's present would stand in continuity with them – especially in view of the content of the privileges listed in verses 4–5 and the subsequent retelling of salvation history in verses 9–17 (Du Toit 2013, 60–64, 69–74, 290; cf. Jewett 2006:562). As argued elsewhere (Du Toit 2015), even the salvation of 'all Israel' in Romans 11:26 can be interpreted as pointing to the *salvation of inner-elect Israel* (in distinction from outer-elect, national Israel) *of the Old Testament that lived before the first Christ* advent, for the future tense *sōthēsetai* ['will be saved'] can function as a *logical future* that logically follows the prophetic material in 11:26b–27, but has been fulfilled in Christ's first advent. I argue for building such a conclusion on an underlying motif in the letter to the Romans that begs the question of historical Israel's salvation. The basic question is, if it was required for someone under the Law (under the Old Covenant) to perfectly observe the Law in order to be justified (Rm 2:13; 10:5), but no one could perfectly observe the Law as a result of being under sin (3:19–20), including Old Testament Israel (by implication), and if the only way one can be justified is through faith in Christ (Rm 3:22–26; 4:12, 16, 24;[12] 5:1; 10:9–13), what happens to historical Israel? Are they saved? Such an underlying question would then be answered in Romans 11:26.[13]

Part of the hermeneutical tension that exists between the concepts *Israēl*, *Israēlitēs* and *Ioudaios* in Paul's time, on the one hand, and contemporary Judaism, on the other, is the fact that Judaism as a full-scale religion only started to develop after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE (Langer 2003:258; Mason 2007:502). Therefore, the *Ioudaioi* constitute for Paul more of an *ethnos* than a religion in the strict sense (see Du Toit 2015:421–422).[14] If today's Judaism as a religion (commencing after 70 CE) is anachronistic to and, to a large

9.Even Sizer (2007:171), who is also against Christian Zionism, seems to work in this direction, although in a somewhat more restrained fashion.

10.The most notable exception is probably Romans 2:29 where Paul alludes to the inherent meaning of *Ioudaios* ['give thanks' or 'praise'] (Gn 29:35).

11.See Campbell (1993:441–442) who also reads Galatians 6:16 as pointing to historical Israel. *Israēl* in both Romans 9:6 (first occurrence) and Phillipians 3:5 is likely to point to the patriarch Israel, denoting Paul's line of descent from the historical nation (Bauer *et al.* 2000, s.v. *Israēl*).

12.Christ can be understood as the object of faith throughout Romans 4 in that 3:27–4:1 can be understood as previewing Paul's narration of the Abraham account in 4:2–25 (Du Toit 2015:423; Jipp 2009).

13.In this reading, the 'coming in' (a subjunctive) of the gentiles (Rm 11:25) is interpreted as the *generic* inclusion of the gentiles in God's salvific economy in Christ, similar to the notion(s) in 9:24–26, 30 and 11:11, and not as the future salvation of each individual gentile. It is noteworthy that 'Jacob' is passive in God's actions in Romans 11:26b–27, excluding an act of conversion on Jacob's part. Apart from my own interpretation of Romans 11:25–27, other interpretations that do not envision a specific end time event where Israel would be converted somewhere in the future, include, in the first place, the *ecclesiological* interpretation ('all Israel' is understood to include the church, e.g. Maljaars 2015:138–238; Wright 2002:687–693) and, in the second place, the *total national elect* view (the salvation of 'all Israel' consists of the salvation of all elect Israelites in the OT – not national Israel – together with all their descendants in the NT that come to belief in Christ, e.g. Merkle 2000:711–721; Zoccali 2010:104–116).

14.In distinction from a 'religion', Mason (2007:481–488) defines an *ethnos* as having its own distinctive nature or character, which was expressed in a unique ancestral tradition and reflected a shared ancestry or genealogy with its own charter stories, customs, et cetera. In other words, a 'religion' is strictly a Western category with no counterpart in ancient culture.

extent, in discontinuity with the faith of Old Testament Israel and even with the *Ioudaioi* in Paul's time, it is thus problematic that interpreters of Paul can see contemporary Jews as the same *Israēl* that Paul would have envisioned in Romans 11:26. The way in which the terms *Israēl*, *Israēlitēs* and *Ioudaios* were used in the time of the Second Temple and the hermeneutical distance between contemporary Judaism and the faith of the *Ioudaioi* in Paul's time, thus argue against the continuation of Israel as God's people beyond the first Christ advent.

Are contemporary Jews God's people?

The question that flows from the above is if contemporary Jews can still be considered as God's people or if they can still lay claim on God's promises apart from Christ. Apart from the hermeneutical distance between contemporary Judaism and the *Ioudaioi* in Paul's time that was discussed above, the only criteria that Paul lays down for being God's people in the new era in Christ are firstly, faith in Christ, and secondly, partaking in the Spirit.

Regarding the first-mentioned in Galatians 3, Abraham's offspring are identified as believers in Christ only (vv. 7, 9; cf. Rm 4), for Christ himself is seen as the single 'seed' of Abraham in which believers share through faith. That is why faith is portrayed as something that 'came' (Gl 3:23) or 'has come' (v. 25). In Galatians 3:29, Paul concludes that those who 'belong to Christ' are heirs of the promise to Abraham (cf. Rm 4). He leaves no room for natural descendants to inherit Abraham's inheritance apart from being in Christ.

Concerning the second-mentioned in Romans 8:16, Paul states that it is God's Spirit that bears witness with the human spirit that they are God's children. The Spirit is therefore the 'guarantee' or 'first instalment' of believers' inheritance in Christ (*arrabōn*, 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14). In light of these criteria for identity (first and second), the cut-off point for Israel being God's people by default is strictly the death and resurrection of Christ himself and the new identity that follows as a result of it (e.g. Rm 6:4–6; Gl 2:19–20; 2 Cor 5:14–17), and not the destruction of the temple in 70 CE.

Further, the criteria in the Pauline corpus that constitute identity in the new era in Christ are set in contrast with the criteria for identity in the age before the first Christ event. This contrast is essentially an *eschatological* contrast that coheres with *two salvation-historical epochs* before and after the Christ event. In this contrast, Christ's death and resurrection is an innately eschatological event that inaugurated 'the end of the ages' (1 Cor 10:11). As argued in some length elsewhere (Du Toit 2013:219–287; cf. Fee 1994:469–470, 553, 816–822; Jewett 2006:436–437, 486; Moo 1996:49–50; Silva 2001:183), the contrast of identity in the old age before (or outside of) Christ and the new age in Christ, is especially recognisable in Paul's contrast between 'flesh' and 'Spirit or spirit' in their extended application. Regarding 'flesh' at the deepest level, it stands for a *way of existence* and a *mode of identity* before (or outside of) Christ that is defined by and under the control of the Law, sin and death. This identity coheres with the age before Christ was revealed, when people's status before God was marked off by natural, external and observable markers of identity (e.g. the keeping of the Law, including feasts and Sabbaths, dietary restrictions, circumcision and ethnicity). Concerning 'Spirit or spirit' at the deepest level, it stands for a *way of existence* and a *mode of identity* in Christ and the Spirit that is defined by and under the control of the indwelling Spirit, which is a consequence of the new creation. This identity coheres with the new, eschatological age in Christ where identity is marked off by the internal work of the Spirit that constitutes adoption as God's children. This kind of contrast between 'flesh' and 'Spirit or spirit' is especially portrayed in passages such as Romans 7:5–6; 8:4, 5, 8–9 and Galatians 4:4–6; 5:16–17, 25.[15]

While the contrast between 'flesh' and 'Spirit or spirit' in the Gospel of John is not exactly the same as in the Pauline corpus, two mutually exclusive ways of existence or sources of origin can be identified, where 'flesh' pertains to that which is natural or human, and 'Spirit or spirit' pertains to that which comes from God (Ridderbos 1997:131; cf. Carson 1991:196–197). Christ who was not born of the will of the 'flesh' or the will of a 'man', but of God (Jn 1:13), has to be understood in this way. According to John 3:3 someone must be born 'from above' or 'again' (*anōthen*) in order to enter the kingdom, for 'what is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit' (3:6). Birth 'of the flesh' points to natural birth and the mode of existence of the natural person (Carson 1991:196; Ridderbos 1997:128). By implication, any claim on God's kingdom on the basis of things such as nationality, ethnicity or even religious tradition (all pertaining to natural existence) cannot assure entrance into God's kingdom: every person, including either *Ioudaios* or gentile, has to receive the Spirit as 'eschatological gift' (Ridderbos 1997:127; cf. Carson 1991:224–225). Similarly, in 1 Peter the 'chosen race', the 'royal priesthood', the 'holy nation', which are God's 'own possession', and the people who were once not 'God's people', but who are now (2:9–10; cf. Rm 9:25–26), are those who have been 'born again' through 'the resurrection of Jesus Christ' (1:3) and through 'the living and abiding word of God' (1:23).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the answer to the question whether the New Testament supports Christian Zionism has to be negative. The way in which the New Testament writers incorporate the concept of the promised land, which includes Jerusalem and the temple, transcends the original promise to Abraham and its significance in the Old Testament. God's kingdom is portrayed as showing that the inheritance of the land has been incorporated, fulfilled but transferred to believers in Christ, not as an earthly territory, but as an inheritance of eternal rest in Christ (esp. Heb and Jn), as inheriting the whole cosmos under Christ's lordship (esp. Paul and the

15. Some of the specific textual markers that indicate the eschatological and salvation-historical dimension of the contrast between flesh and Spirit or spirit in Paul is the 'but now' (*nuni de*) in Romans 7:6, the 'now' (*nun*) in 8:1, the indication that believers are not in the flesh in 8:9, the clause 'when the fullness of time had come' in Galatians 4:4, and the notion that believers 'have crucified the flesh' in 5:24.

synoptic Gospels), and as inheriting the new heaven and 'earth' (*gē* – the same term that the Septuagint (LXX) uses for the promised 'land') in the consummation (esp. Heb and Rv). There is thus some variation in the New Testament in terms of how the promised land has been fulfilled in Christ: the land has been spiritualised, universalised and eschatologised, even though not all of these notions are simultaneously present in all of the New Testament.

If the promised land has been transferred to believers in Christ, it means that, apart from belief in Christ, there is no precedent in the New Testament for the continued existence of historical Israel in the time of the New Testament or for the inclusion in God's salvific economy of people descending from historical Israel on the basis of ethnicity, Law or anything external or natural. While some interpret Romans 11:25–27 as creating such a precedent, such an interpretation firstly goes against the grain of the way in which the terms *Israēl*, *Israēlitēs* and *Ioudaios* were understood in the time of the second temple, and secondly, it is in conflict with the criteria for being God's people laid down by the New Testament writers. If contemporary Jews were to lay claim to the land of Israel, they would be an 'Israel according to the flesh' (1 Cor 10:18), a mode of identity that essentially belongs to the old age before the first Christ advent that was fulfilled and superseded by the new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:16–17). The idea of 'Christian Zionism' thus has to be understood as an oxymoron on two counts: In the first place it bypasses the underlying teaching of the New Testament in respect of the way in which the promised land (including Jerusalem and the temple) is fulfilled in Christ-believers; and in the second place, it disregards the criteria for being God's people in the New Testament, which implies that a claim on God's promises apart from Christ and the Spirit is invalid.

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