---

A table of contents for *Anvil* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_anvil_01.php

# *The Jews, the Land, and the Kingdom*[1]

JOHN GOLDINGAY

## I The Jews

It will be helpful to consider 'the Jews, the land, and the kingdom' in that order, if we are to understand the relationship between them. In order to handle questions about the land of Israel and the State of Israel, we need to have some understanding of the theological significance of Israel itself, not as a political entity but as a theological entity. What place do the Jews have in the ongoing purpose of God?

Christians in fact have a variety of views on that question. The one with most far-reaching implications for an attitude to the relation between the Jews and the land today is the conviction that the Jewish people have no special theological significance, no more significance than the Chinese or the British or the Arabs. Some Christians argue this view believing that the idea of God attaching special significance to the Jews was always a myth – after all, many nations bolster their self-esteem in such a way as that. Believing in Jesus, however, makes that position difficult; for Jesus is presented to us as a Jew whose story constitutes the climax of the history of God's purpose with Israel. Further, finding that we hear God's word out of the Jewish scriptures (the New Testament, of course, being a Jewish book as essentially as the Old Testament is), out of writings which emerged from the life and history of the Jewish people, carries implications regarding the specialness of Israel in the purpose of God.

Suppose we grant that the Jews were once of special significance in God's purpose: are they still so? Jesus spoke of his contemporary fellow-Jews killing the vineyard-owner's son and having the kingdom of God taken away from them and given to others (Matt. 21:43). Ephesians describes the people of God as now a single new humanity in which the distinction between Jew and Gentile has been abolished (Eph. 2:15). So has God severed his special relationship with Israel, in response to their final rejection of him expressed in their spurning of their Messiah?

---

1 An address given to the Spurgeon's College Conference in June 1986. The last paragraph is adapted from a paper on 'The Christian Church and Israel' in *Theological Renewal* 23, 1983, pp 4-19, which also includes a fuller treatment of some of the theological questions handled here. I have also taken into account Andrew Kirk's 'The Middle East Dilemma', *Anvil* 3, 1986, pp 231-58.

Apparently not, to judge from the way the story continues after the crucifixion. Acts emphasizes that the Jews are the first to be invited to renew their place in the kingdom.[1] Jesus had prayed 'Father, forgive them . . .' (Luke 23:34), and the prayer has been answered. The warnings of Jesus, later taken up by Paul, need to be understood by analogy with those of the prophets, who warned their contemporaries that they were in imminent danger of forfeiting their destiny as the people of God without implying that the ultimate destiny of that Israel to which God had committed himself in Abraham was endangered. God had, after all, pledged himself in permanent covenant to Israel. Paul recognizes that there would be severe theological and spiritual difficulties with the view that God has now terminated that commitment, even in response to acts on Israel's part which could quite justify such a response, and in the New Testament's most systematic consideration of the place of the Jews in God's purpose, Romans 9-11, he affirms that it is still God's purpose that 'all Israel will be saved' (11:26).

Calvin believed that when Paul spoke of the salvation of all Israel in this way, he was referring to the new Israel, the Church, but exegetically this is difficult to hold. It takes Paul's whole argument to a limp conclusion, and it presupposes that the word 'Israel' has a different meaning at this point from the one it has elsewhere in these chapters. It is used ten times elsewhere in them, and every time it refers to the Jewish people; it would be extremely odd if at this one point it denoted the Church. A very broad consensus of commentators agrees that in Romans 9-11 Paul does come to the conclusion that God is still committed to the salvation of the Jewish people.

There is, actually, no point in the New Testament where 'Israel' denotes the Church. Although the New Testament uses terms to describe the Church which the Hebrew Bible uses to describe Israel, it does not describe the Church as 'Israel' or the 'New Israel' or the 'true Israel.' The transference of such terms from Israel to the Church begins with Justin Martyr, when the tension over Israel's position which is maintained in the New Testament is lost and the Church is distancing itself over against Judaism.[2] In the New Testament, 'Israel' means 'Israel.' The Jewish-Gentile Church comes to share in Israel's privileges and so is described by means of the images that the Old Testament uses to describe Israel, but this does not in itself mean that the Church has replaced Israel.

---

1 Cf. J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God* Augsburg, Minneapolis 1972, pp 44-46.

2 On this process, see P. Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, CUP, London/New York, 1969; the book includes a useful treatment of Gal. 6:16, presenting the most plausible understanding of the verse as – in keeping with Rom. 9-11 – seeking God's mercy on Israel as well as on believers in Christ: cf. AV, NEB, GNB, rather than RSV, NIV, JB.

Alongside the one new humanity of which Ephesians speaks, then, the original embodiment of God's covenant people continues to exist, as something of an anomaly indeed, pending its finding Jesus and finding its rightful place in that new humanity which is so truncated without it (though we tend not to recognize the fact).

What are the implications of God still being committed to the Jews? In the context of Jewish-Christian dialogue, the view is often held that this continuing commitment to the Jews on God's part implies that they are 'all right' without recognizing Jesus. Their salvation is not imperilled by their not acknowledging him. One way to put it is to suggest that God has two covenants, one with the Jews which goes back to Abraham, then one with Gentiles which depends on Jesus.

This view seems to compromise the universal significance that Christian faith attaches to Jesus; further, the idea that Jews are perfectly all right without acknowledging the Jewish Messiah seems an odd one. Nor can it be reconciled with the argument of Romans 9-11, as some of those who expound the 'two covenants' idea recognize. Paul assumes that God's commitment to the Jews means that they will indeed come to recognize Jesus, not that they have no need to do so. In heaven I expect to meet Jews who have not recognized Jesus: not only Jews from Old Testament times, but Jews who have lived since Jesus's day, people who have perhaps been prevented from recognizing him by the Church's failure to reflect him. They will be there by God's electing grace, as I will be, and they will be there because Jesus lived, died, and rose for them, as he did for me (even if they only then recognize that this was so). There is only one covenant. All God's promises find their 'Yes' in Jesus (2 Cor. 1:20).

Of the variety of current views concerning the continuing theological significance of the Jewish people, then, it is difficult to allow that they have no particular significance now, nor that they have no need or calling to recognize Jesus. The traditional mainstream Christian view of the matter seems right: against the first of those two views, God is still committed to the Jews; against the second, they do need to come to recognize Jesus as their Messiah, and God's promise is that they will.

Holding the second of these two views will have an obvious effect on one's approach to Jewish evangelism, which will be seen as unnecessary and wrong. Though logically it need not do so, the second view in practice tends to go along with a positive view of the relationship between Jews and the land and a positive view of the establishment of the State of Israel. Holding the first view will naturally be accompanied by the conviction that opinions on the Jews' claim to land in Palestine (or anywhere else) and on the theological and moral significance of the State of Israel should be reached on the same basis as would apply in the case of any other people or state. People who hold the second view will generally bring an extra set of theological and moral considerations to bear on these questions.

## II The Land

What, then, of Christian attitudes to the *land* of Israel and its theological significance? As is the case with the significance of the *people* of Israel, the question is commonly ignored or treated as insignificant. This has certainly been so in Christian theological study of the Old Testament. Indeed, examining how the theme of the land is handled provides one useful litmus test for evaluating works on Old Testament theology. It is astonishing to discover that Brevard Childs's recent book *Old Testament Theology in Canonical Context* for instance, ignores it.[1] If a work on the Old Testament's theological significance fails to handle the theme of the land, whatever the value of its treatment of other individual themes, one may infer that the work as a whole cannot be expected to offer a guide to the Old Testament's theological implications as a whole. The land is one of the handful of key themes in the entire Old Testament; so that any claim to be doing justice to its theological concerns, any attempt to write 'Old Testament theology,' has to give this theme considerable prominence.

If the land is so prominent in the Old Testament, why is it often ignored by works on Old Testament theology? The obvious explanation is that this is entirely because of the narrowing influence of the New Testament on Christian theological study, including Old Testament theology as undertaken by Christians. In the New Testament there is very little allusion to the theme of the land. The aspects of the story of Israel to which it makes most appeal are ones which concern Israel's experience before becoming a landed people: Abraham and the exodus come into greater focus than Joshua and the conquest.

One reason for this is that the New Testament emphasizes salvation as an other-worldly matter to a much greater extent than the Old Testament does. It urges Christians not to be attached to the things of this world. It even has Abraham seeking a better country than his earthly one – seeking a heavenly country (Heb. 11:13-16).

The meek will possess the land, Psalm 37:11 had promised; and Matthew pictures Jesus as affirming this promise (Matt. 5:5). But when he takes up the words of the psalm, do they have the same meaning, constituting an undertaking concerning the land of Israel: the meek will inherit this land, this kingdom? The English translations, at least, assume that Jesus here destines his followers to inherit the *world*, not merely the land. And that coheres with the world focus which appears elsewhere in the New Testament writers. They want to assert the lordship of Jesus over the whole world and to spread the gospel through the whole world. This would naturally make them relatively uninterested theologically in the land of Israel in particular. When most Jews rejected the gospel, this encouraged the development of a worldwide perspective.

---

1 B. S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in Canonical Context*, SCM, London 1985.

Judaism's rejection of the gospel also transformed expectations regarding how God's rule would be manifested in the world. The means of this manifestation turn out to be not Israel with gentiles holding onto its coat sleeves, but a gentile Christian Church fulfilling what was supposed to be Israel's role. We have noted already, however, that the significance of this largely gentile Church could only be expounded by means of the stories and symbols of Old Testament Israel (see eg 1 Cor 10:1-13). It is in this connection that the land comes to be referred to in the New Testament. Where it appears as a theologically significant theme there, it is usually as metaphor rather than as material reality. Jesus is the 'inheritance' of the community of faith; it is in him that it finds its 'rest'; the 'blessing' which counts is the blessing in the heavenly places which it receives in Christ (1 Pet. 1:4; Heb. 3-4; Eph. 1:3).

The New Testament's concern with land, with space, is thus broadened to embrace the world, narrowed to centre on Jesus, and refocused to work via the largely gentile church. Theologically, the New Testatment does not have room for the notion of sacred space (as it does not have room for other aspects of the sacred) or of a holy land, because of its emphasis on the whole world being God's and because Jesus takes the place of this central image in Judaism (partly because he takes the central place once occupied by the people of Israel – the notion of land being tied to that of people). 'To be "in Christ" . . . has replaced being "in the land" as the ideal life'[1] as Christ is also the locus of that rule of God which the Old Testament associates with the land of Israel.

Davies's study is the most magisterial Christian investigation into the biblical theme of the land. As far as Christianity is concerned, Davies implies, the theme of the land itself is dispensible. Davies has also raised the question whether the theme is dispensible to Judaism.[2] The promise, the covenant, and the law, after all, had their origins outside the land, and the experience of exile arguably affected the faith expressed in the Old Testament more profoundly than the experience of the land itself did, as diaspora experience has decisively shaped Judaism. Judaism could survive without the land; it transcends the land. Davies's study raises the question, how important is the land to Jews or to Christians?

The other systematic Christian treatment of this theme is Walter Bruggemann's *The Land*.[3] Bruggemann represents a strand of Christian study of the Bible which is determined on a materialist faith and praxis, and he offers a pioneering treatment (that seems the right image!) of the theme

1 W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, University of California, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1974, p 217.

2 See his 'Reflections on the Territorial Dimension of Judaism' in *Jewish and Pauline Studies*, Fortress/SPCK, Philadelphia/London 1984, pp 49-71; his *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1982 is an expansion of this article.

3 W. Bruggemann, *The Land*, Fortress/SPCK, Philadelphia 1977, London 1978.

of the land in the Old Testament. Bruggemann is appreciative of Davies's work on the theme of the land in the New Testament, but attempts to maximize indications that the New Testament is concerned with this theme in the literal sense, yet he is less convincing than Davies, who suggests that in the New Testament land is not an overt interest.

In Davies's work on Judaism and in Bruggemann's on the New Testament we seem to have examples of penetrating scholars trying honestly to work at exegetical study but finding that their own theological agenda is affecting their study: it happens to us all, of course! While it is true that the land can function for Jews as a metaphor for hope, I doubt whether Judaism can be de-territorialized, as Davies believes.[1] Neither is Bruggemann's attempt to territorialize the New Testament persuasive. Further, for Bruggemann the particularity of the land of *Israel* rather disappears. He is aware of his study's significance for Jewish-Christian dialogue.[2] Nevertheless, it is land as an important theme for all peoples from which he starts and which the theme of land in the Old Testament seems especially to suggest to him.

Bruggemann does, however, thus draw our attention to an important feature of the Hebrew Bible, its materialism. A faith based on the New Testament alone risks a false other-worldliness, because this-worldly concerns are less prominent in the New Testament. Yet even the New Testament is concerned not to free people from living their lives in this world, but to free them to live this life in the light of the age to come. Further, New Testament faith itself bars the way to other-worldliness by its belief in incarnation, its conviction that in Jesus God himself becomes material reality. In this sense the Old Testament's stress on the land is actually in keeping with the New Testament's beliefs about Jesus, and the theme of the land is of importance to Christian theology partly because it affirms parallel theological convictions to those of the doctrine of the incarnation. It bars the way to docetism.

Indeed, if Jesus and Paul see God as still committed to Israel, do they not imply a concern with the *land* of Israel? It is at least arguable that they would have needed to make it explicit if they had not assumed that God's promise of land to Israel still held, for the notion of land is intrinsic to the notion of peoplehood. Any people's identity is rooted in land (the metaphor of 'roots' is a telling one). Taking seriously God's commitment regarding the land is involved in taking seriously God's commitment to Israel at all. It is an aspect of having a real, rather than a docetic, view of

---

1 Contrast, for instance, A. Hertzberg's essay 'Judaism and the Land of Israel' in *Judaism* 19, 1970, pp 423-34 and in J. Neusner, ed., *Understanding Jewish Theology*, KTAV, New York 1973 pp 75-88.

2 'Christians cannot speak seriously to Jews unless we acknowledge land to be the central agenda', op. cit., p 190.

Israel.[1] The New Testament's silence on the theme of the land of Israel may thus imply that this theme should be taken for granted, not that it should be rejected. Israel's being a people of the land, even in a world context like our own where very many Jews lived in dispersion, would be an uncontroversial question. The New Testament makes it explicit that in Christ the temple and the sacrificial system lose their literal significance. If it had meant to suggest that this happens with the promise of the land, it would have had to make this explicit, too.

That the promise of the land stands is presupposed by the right-wing Christian attitude to the question of Israel and the land, expressed in dozens of paperbacks which assume that as a matter of fact God gave this land to Abraham, that he promised it to the Jewish people for ever, that he revealed to the prophets his intention to restore the land to them, and that the events of the late nineteenth century and of the period since the second world war are his fulfilment of these undertakings. This view appears in a more sophisticated form in Torrance's words:

> The intense actualisation, once again, of God's covenanted communion with the people of Israel within the land of promise, now called Israel, brings home to us in a new way not only the fact that the people and the land are woven indivisibly together in the fabric of Israel's vicarious mission and destiny among the peoples and nations of the earth, but also the fact that in this unitary spiritual and physical form Israel constitutes God's sign-post in the history of world-events, pointing ahead to a culmination in his saving interaction with mankind in space and time . . . When God acts, he always takes us by surprise in breathtaking events. The startling reintegration of Jerusalem and Israel in our day, after nearly two millennia, is just one of these events . . .[2]

A sharp contrast with this view appears in what might be seen as a left-wing Christian attitude to Israel and the land, one which tends to be hostile to Zionism. It appears white-hot in Lucas Grollenberg's *Palestine Comes First*,[3] and in more moderate form in Colin Chapman's *Whose Promised Land?*[4] and in the British Council of Churches report *Towards Understanding the Arab/Israeli Conflict*.[5] Grollenberg and Chapman both worked for some years in Arab areas, but they would want their work to be considered on theological grounds, not to be dismissed as merely expressive of a partic-

---

1 See T. F. Torrance's 'The Divine Vocation and Destiny of Israel in World History' in D. W. Torrance, ed., *The Witness of the Jews to God*, Handsel Press, Edinburgh 1982, p 103; H. Siegman, 'A Decade of Catholic-Jewish Relations: A Re-Assessment', in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (hereafter *JES*) 15, 1978, pp 252-53.

2 Op. cit., p 104.

3 L. Grollenberg, *Palestine Comes First*, SCM, London, 1980.

4 C. Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?* Lion, Tring, 1983.

5 *Towards Understanding the Arab/Israeli Conflict*, BCC, London, 1982.

ular political stance. Both emphasize a different side to prophecy from the one dominant in the paperbacks just referred to: prophecy's 'remorseless condemnation of religion, temple and state when they are used wrongly',[1] its 'passionate concern for justice' which calls us to a concern for every individual and community in the Middle East.[2] The promise of the land did not override questions of justice for those who were already inhabiting it (see Gen. 15:6). The land was to be the place where the just judgment of the God of Israel became incarnate. It was not merely a possession, but a vocation and a moral destiny. 'According to Deuteronomy no self-sufficient and self-glorifying possession of the land is possible . . . According to the prophets [the] future relationship between the people of Israel and [the land of] Palestine must serve the nations.'[3] If the land is viewed otherwise, whether by Jews or by Christians who identify themselves with Israel, it becomes an idol.[4]

**III Parenthesis**

In our consideration of the land, a number of issues concerning biblical interpretation have been underlying (and sometimes poking their head through) the surface of the discussion. At least three assumptions should be made explicit.

First, when we are seeking to learn theologically from what the Old Testament says about the land, as about any other topic, we should take what it says in its literal sense.

We have noted above that the New Testament often makes a typological use of an Old Testament motif such as the land. It does that in order to be able to utilize the material in the Old Testament to give it answers to the theological questions which it is itself asking, questions such as 'What is the significance of Jesus and what is the Church about?' The New Testament is thus not trying to handle the Old in the light of the theological concerns which are intrinsic to the Old itself. It is not focusing on the meaning that those texts had as exercises in communication between God and his people before Christ came. It is using them to find answers to its own questions about the significance of Jesus and the Church, as other Jews of its day would use them (utilizing the same methods of interpretation) to find answers to other questions.

If we are to learn theologically from the Old Testament itself, however, and not merely from the way it was reused in the context of new theological questions in the New then this will involve learning from the Old in that literal sense which it had when God inspired it as a means of com-

1 Grollenberg, op. cit., p 139.
2 Chapman, op. cit., pp 175 and 221.
3 Hans-Ruedi Weber, 'The Promise of the Land' in *Study Encounter* vii/4, 1971, pp 3 and 11.
4 Cf. B. Krasner with P. Chapman, 'Relationship Dynamics and Our View of The Middle East', *JES* 9, 1972, p 109.

munication with his people in the time before Christ. We will not be interested in a theme such as the land merely as a symbol for helping Christians to think through the significance of Jesus.

In practice, the Old Testament has commonly been emasculated by Christians using a typological approach. It is not that there is never a place for typological exposition; the New Testament does use it. The problem comes when a non-literal approach such as typology becomes a chief key to our interpreting the Old. We are then not actually interpreting the Old Testament. We are not listening to what God was actually saying to his people before Christ. We have silenced the Old Testament's own word.

This principle applies to the task of understanding Old Testament prophecy in particular. When we read prophecies which make statements about the future, including statements about the land, then we have to take such predictive prophecies in the sense that they had for people such as Ezekiel through whom they were given, and for the people to whom they were addressed, to whom they came as God's good news. A failure to do so is a fundamental problem about books such as Hal Lindsey's *The Late, Great Planet Earth*.[1]

As the word of God, those prophecies have things to say to us about contemporary world events and contemporary church life. They reveal God's will to us by revealing God's will embodied in particular contexts. But when Ezekiel declared that such and such a return to the land or such and such a battle was to take place, he was not announcing events scheduled for two and a half millennia after his day. He was addressing and bringing God's word to people in his own day, warning them of calamities and promising them blessings that could come about in their day. He was not revealing a timetable or fixture list of events that had to unfold over thousands of years; he was bringing a specific message to a particular context. A fulfilment in 1948 of a prophecy given by Ezekiel to people who lived in the 580s BC is thus nonsense: it is not a fulfilment of promises and warnings that were part of God's relationship with *those* people. Prophets did sometimes speak about the End of all things, but there are relatively few of these prophecies. The ones applied to the recent history of the Jews are prophecies that relate to the circumstances of the Jews in particular contexts.

When we seek to understand the significance of Old Testament prophecy, then, we must treat this, too, as an act of communication between God and his people in the contexts in which they lived. We have to work out its implications for us from that, not by treating it as a coded preview of things to take place in in the far future which were not in any direct sense God's good news to the people to whom they were announced.

---

1 H. Lindsey, *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, Zondervan/Lakeland, Grand Rapids 1970, London 1971.

A third assumption about biblical interpretation that underlay the earlier part of this paper was that if we are to be biblical people, the agenda for Christian theology, ethics, and preaching is to be set by Old and New Testament jointly and not by the New alone.

In his paper Weber noted that for Christians much depends on whether the Old Testament has 'revelatory significance' in its own right, and in what sense we have to read it in the light of the New.[1] Bruggemann, for instance, seems to assume that Christians' theological agenda is rightly set by the New Testament, so that if it is not concerned about the land, then biblical theology cannot be.

The New Testament itself, however, does not imply the view that it is an adequate guide for an understanding of Christian faith. Its own assumption was that the Old must contribute very significantly to the agenda for Christian theology, ethics, and preaching; in any case, the New Testament did not exist yet! The 'Old Testament' was *the* Bible for people of New Testament times. The New presupposes an understanding of God and his concerns which comes from the Old, and frequently refers the reader back to it as its own source of authoritative teaching. What the New Testament says cannot be taken as a complete exposition of the contents of the Christian faith. It assumes people also need the Old for that. So whatever we find in the Old has to be taken seriously theologically. Where we find that the Old and the New Testaments take a different view (eg over the land, in the sense that the subject is not explicitly handled in the New), we view their different perspectives as complementary; we do not look at one through the other and emasculate it.

Thus Christians have to take the materialism of the Old Testament seriously (I am sympathetic to Bruggemann's theological agenda, even though I think we cannot reach his goal by the route he attempts – that is, by proving that the New Testament *is* concerned about land). This will draw us not into a wholly materialistic and this-worldly faith, but into combining the conviction that God really is concerned with this world along with the conviction that God really is concerned with the new age and with the other world, with resurrection life, and with spiritual life.

Actually both are there in both testaments, but it is easy to simplify the Old Testament down to the one and the New Testament down to the other, to let the latter have theological priority over the former, and thereby to end up with an oversimplified and an unbiblical faith.

## IV The Kingdom

To affirm that the land of Israel is still the destiny of the Jewish people is not in itself to imply a theological judgment about the present (or any other) State of Israel. Being able to enjoy the land and possessing independent sovereign statehood might be quite separable questions (for most of

---

1 Op. cit.

history they have been). A commitment to and a longing for Zion as an essential symbol of God's covenant with Israel and Israel's relationship with God need not imply a commitment to Israel's possessing this land as a nation-state.

In the Old Testament, at the beginning, Abraham's nomadic clan had some freedom to enjoy life in the land of promise, though they had no independent statehood there at all. From Joshua to Samuel the descendants of Abraham enjoyed something like independent statehood in the land of Israel, but without the kind of government that other peoples had. Yahweh was their king; their earthly rulers had none of the permanent institutional authority possessed by other peoples' kings. That might look like God's ideal arrangement; but its result seemed to be that Israel found it increasingly difficult to live a viable national life, to live in politics, and a time came when the Israelites insisted on having the kind of government that other nations had. Although he recognized this as an act of rebellion against his own kingship, Yahweh acceded to their plea, and involved himself in the choice of a human king who would have a kingdom in Israel. Henceforth the kingship of Yahweh is exercised from the throne of David. That is obviously so within Israel. It is also so in relation to the world as a whole: God's purpose was to realize his rule of the world through the same Davidic king who ruled over Israel (see Ps. 2). The story of Israel's experience of statehood, however, which lasted only four or five centuries from Saul to the exile, is a discouraging one. By and large, Israel's governments by no means implement Yahweh's government. God's kingdom and Israel's kingdom look two quite different things, and Israel begins to wonder whether an ordinary earthly king will ever lead Israel that way. Her hopes of a king who will do so begin to attach themselves to a future king who will have to be a special gift from God, not merely the next young Davidide to accede to the throne of Jerusalem.

The exile brings the end of the Davidic monarchy, and the post-exilic period brings no constitutional revival of it. This experience encourages hopes of an anointed one, a Messiah, to come, but it also brings the emergence of other attitudes to statehood and monarchy, to kingship and kingdom. Daniel talks about the kingdom of God being given by God to Nebuchadnezzar, though Daniel also sees the successive middle eastern empires as no more worthy vice-regents of the God of Israel than David and his successors had been, so that in due course the kingship is given to the enigmatic man-like figure of chapter 7. Even if he in some way represents Israel as a whole, he is not simply a messianic figure. In the chapters of Isaiah which relate to the exile, the anointed king, the Messiah, through whom God's worldwide purpose is to be put into effect is the Persian Cyrus (Isa. 45:1).

To questions about the kingdom of God, about statehood, and about the relationship between the two, the Old Testament thus gives mixed answers, but not very encouraging ones. In the New Testament, the question of statehood is raised more explicitly than that of land, especially in

Luke and Acts.[1] Jesus' birth will mean that Israel is delivered from the power of her enemies (Luke 2:68-79). Jerusalem is to be trodden down by the gentiles until the times of the gentiles are fulfilled (21:24). The disciples ask about whether sovereignty (the kingdom) is about to be restored to Israel; Jesus will not answer the question, but he does not reject the idea itself (Acts 1:6-8). So Luke-Acts leaves the ends untied in its treatment of this issue. It is not quite clear whether or not the New Testament sees the restoration of Israel's sovereign independence as within the purpose of God. Nor is it clear how the sovereign independence of Israel relates to that rule of God which Jesus comes to proclaim and to inaugurate.

If we are to consider the contemporary State of Israel in the light of the treatment of Israel in the Old and New Testaments, then we need to bear in mind some key aspects of the context in which we do so. 'The Jews, the land, and the kingdom' is a question that could be handled, and has been handled, in any age. But theology is always done in relation to the historical contexts in which issues arise, and we will be advised to take account of that or we will be caught out by it, because it is a fact which affects this topic at least as much as any.

There are fifteen million Jews in the world today: seven million in America, five million spread through countries such as Russia, France, Argentina, and Britain, three million in Israel. Theologically, our main concern is this Jewish people as a whole, not the State of Israel in whom only a small minority of them live.

There is a famous controversy about how to define a Jew, but perhaps we can say about the Jews corporately that they are a people, with an ethnic awareness, and a common sense of history and tradition. We must see them as a people in this sense before we see them as a religious community; in this connection, 'Jews' is a word more like 'blacks' or 'Arabs' than a word like 'Christians' or 'Muslims'. Thus a person does not have to believe anything or to take on any particular practices in order to count as a Jew, or to live in Israel. The average Israeli is hardly more likely to have religious convictions or to attend religious services than the average Britisher. In the dispersion, where most Jews live, in the long run the pressure of assimilation may have a more devastating effect on the Jewish community than the holocaust did: so I hear Jews saying. There are naturally differences of opinion over whether this situation is made worse or better by the fact that large numbers of Jews have come to believe in Jesus over the past fifteen years, mostly in America.

The return of Jews of Palestine over the last hundred years, which made the foundation of the State of Israel possible, is part of the story of the development of the modern world, and it can only be understood when it is seen as part of that story. Many of the instincts that led to it and the factors that made it possible are identical to or parallel to ones which lay behind

1 See E. Franklin, *Christ the Lord: A Study of the Purpose and Theology of Luke-Acts*, SPCK, London 1975, pp 13, 95-96, 102 and 130.

the formation of the other European, Asian, and African states, most of which did not exist a century ago in the form that we know them. That Israel as a nation had a right to exist which was parallel to that which other nations had was first argued by Rabbi Liva ben Bezalel in the sixteenth century.[1]

When Jews began to migrate to Palestine a century ago, it was not an empty land. It was occupied by the people we now call the Palestinian Arabs, who had lived there for centuries. They were people who had a historical, moral, and legal claim to the land into which Jews began to migrate. Most have now lost their homeland. It is not surprising that they feel a sense of grief and anger at the suffering that Zionism has brought to Palestine. This suffering has taken Arabs and Jews from coexistence to a history of mutual terrorist attacks and wars which independent parties have condemned.

The actual foundation of the State of Israel was causally connected with the killing of six million European Jews during the Second World War. It reflected a determination on the part of its founders that Jews should possess somewhere where they had as much national security and were in as much control of their destiny as any other people. Ironically, in present circumstances Israel's national viability depends crucially on American support.

Zionism, that love for Palestine that led to Jews wanting to return there at the end of the last century, was based on high ideals. It was concerned for justice, for equality, for the development of the land (often neglected) and for a right use of it. Israel has been immensely courageous in caring for Jewish people all over the world. At the same time, Israel is a state like any other. It has profound political, social, and economic problems. Becoming a state like other states risks a collective assimilation to the ways of the gentiles as dangerous as the individual assimilation of the diaspora.[2] We must not have a romanticized picture of it.

In this paper I have suggested, regarding the Jews, that they are still the people of God; he is still committed to them, and they are destined one day to recognize their Messiah. Regarding the land, as long as the Jews are an ethnic unit (as well as a people called to live by faith in God and in obedience to God), it is natural for them to have a land; that seems to be bound up in God's commitment to them as a people, and it seems inevitable for that land to be the one God originally promised them and the one where the great salvation story was played out (rather than, for instance, Uganda, which Britain once offered to the Jews). Regarding the kingdom, the rule of God is destined to be exercised in this world, but how that can be remains an unpredictable mystery, and it can only be with the bringing in of a new age by God himself.

1 So Martin Buber, *On Zion: The History of An Idea*, reprinted T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1985, pp 77-89.

2 D. Marmur, *Beyond Survival: Reflections on the Future of Judaism*, DLT, London 1982, pp 170-71.

It is a plausible view that the return of many Jews to the land in our day is part of God's fulfilment of his purpose for the world, for the Jews, and for the Church. As long as the Jews exist as a people, it is natural for their focus to be there. Thus the fact that this return has happened is, for Christians, reason for praise and for hope. At the same time, an invariable accompaniment of our thinking about the Jews has to be penitence before our God for the history of crusades, inquisition, pogroms, and holocaust over the centuries; and not least for the toll for the Jewish people and for other Middle Eastern peoples of twentieth century political decisions (or lack of decisions) taken by Britain and, more recently, by America with regard to the Middle East. Further, it often seems to Jews that Christians describe the superiority of their Christian faith in such a way as to encourage antisemitism; phrases such as 'the Jews crucified Christ' have especially had this effect. If we believe that God loves the Jews only as much as he loves gentiles, we need to be wary of that.

A stance such as this does not imply a commitment to uncritical support for the modern State of Israel; indeed, there is no clear reason for viewing the actual State of Israel as any more significant theologically than Zimbabwe or the USA or Egypt or Great Britain or Pakistan. Further, it is hardly the case that God could have purposed to give Palestine to the modern Jews in a way that overrode the natural rights of Palestinian Arabs, and in their loss (even though it may have been in part caused and then aggravated by mistaken policies on their part) Christians should be weeping and grieving with them – many of them being our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We are thus called, in fact, to stand with both Israelis and Palestinians in prayer, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep, seeking to share and to bring before God their suffering, their fear, their insecurity, their needs, and their temptations. 'What does it mean, Lord, when now two people pray, "next year in Jerusalem!" . . .?', asks Barbara Krasner, a Jewish poet.[1] We pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Ps. 122:6), aware that this is a prayer for peace for all those who love Jerusalem, including both Jew and Arab, and that with this prayer more than most I have to expect (and rejoice) that the manner of its answering will probably be quite different from what any of us who pray it quite envisage.

**The Revd Dr John Goldingay** is Vice-Principal of St. John's College, Nottingham.

---

1 B. Krasner with M. Roache, 'Relationship Dynamics and Our View of the Middle East', *JES* 12, 1975, p 260. Compare Kenneth Cragg's deep portrait of the tragedy of both Jews and Palestinians in *This Year in Jerusalem*, DLT, London 1982.