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THEME

*Exile and
Restoration*



THEME

Exile and Restoration

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Your allotted Inheritance

Psalm 105:1-11

REV. JAAP DE VREUGD

*“To you I will give the land of Canaan
as the portion of your inheritance.”*

(Psalm 105:11)

*“For all the land that you see
I will give to you and
to your offspring for ever.”*

(Genesis 13:15)



This is what Scripture is saying. It can't be any clearer than that: Canaan is given to the children of Abraham as an allotted inheritance. It is interesting to see that the entire psalm is focused on the promise of the land (verse 11) and, seeing that the Everlasting One has never changed His mind about that, it is still valid today!

SOLUTION

The politicians of the world are wrestling with this, and the wrestling is not limited to the political sphere; even in our churches, discussions about the Promised Land regularly flare up. The solution to all the problems in the Middle East, according to the churches and the world (generally speaking), is the creation of a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel in the so-called occupied areas. You can even go further, if you believe the reports of the Arab organisations for example, to say that it would also solve many more problems, like the problems of tension between the Arabs and the western world.

IDEOLOGY

In this vision, Israel is the cause of all the big problems in the world. Who wouldn't be happy with a final solution? If Israel could only compromise, the earth will become like paradise. Those who oppose the solution of the creation of two states, are soon blamed by their counterparts to be opposed to peace, and what is worse, supporters of the 'Greater Israel Ideology' which seems to be something horrifying. The word 'ideology' speaks volumes. It is what you like to call thoughts that are not your own, to portray them as negative and dangerous. You have to watch out for ideologies. I won't hide the fact that I have great difficulty with the two-state solution. I just can't see why, in addition to a large number of Arab states with an immense territory, there is a need to form another small Arab (mini) state, right in the middle of the land that was promised to the tribes of Israel. There has never before in all of history been a Palestin-

ian state; there has only been talk about a Palestinian people from about fifty years ago, and there is much to say historically and definitely biblically about the 'Greater Israel Idea'.

'GREATER ISRAEL IDEA'

Historically, the Balfour Declaration issued by the British war cabinet in November 1917, favouring the establishment of a national home in Palestine for the dispersed Jewish nation, was incorporated by the Allied Powers into their official San Remo Resolution in April 1920. As for the indigenous people themselves, on 3rd January 1919, Dr Chaim Weizmann, as the leader of the Zionists, and Emir Feisal of Hejaz representing the Arabs, signed an agreement determining that Palestine, west of the Jordan, would be a Jewish state, next to an Arab state east of the Jordan. In fact, the Mandate for Palestine that was entrusted to Great Britain by the League of Nations from 1920 onwards, originally had all of Palestine – meaning both sides of the river Jordan – in mind for the formation of the Jewish national home. The 'Greater Israel Idea' therefore is nothing other than remembering past agreements, which have excellent documentary evidence politically, historically and geographically. But what happened?

The land is the land of hope and fulfilment

DIVISION

Two times in recent history, the Promised Land has been carved into pieces, despite former agreements and commitments. The first time was in 1922, when a decision was made to

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TOBIAS KRÄMER



Paul says something entirely normal: the children are the heirs of their parents. That is the case all over the world. Christians are children of God. They have God as their Father. So, they are heirs of God. And since Christ is their “big Brother”, they are at the same time fellow heirs with Christ. Together with Jesus, they inherit what God the Father has to pass. That is expressed in Romans 8:17. What is meant by that, though? What do you, dear reader, imagine this inheritance to be?

THE INHERITANCE OF THE COMMUNITY OF JESUS

In the New Testament, there is much to inherit of God: eternal life, the Holy Spirit, redemption, several different blessings. The inheritance is manifold. The real inheritance in fact is the Kingdom of God². God has prepared it for the righteous, but they will receive it only in the end of days: “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!” (Matthew 25:34) We still have to wait for this. But God is already paying out one part of the inheritance. For, as a ‘down payment’ for the inheritance, God has given his children the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, God is already establishing His rule – and He will complete it in the end of days. So, Christians already have a foretaste how it will be one day in God’s kingdom.

ISRAEL’S INHERITANCE – GOD’S INHERITANCE

Now, if we were Jews and deeply rooted in the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament, we would think differently. For the word inheritance (Greek: *klēros*/kleronomia, Hebrew: *nah^aalāh/gōrāl*) appears there in differing contexts. Two aspects should be highlighted:

1. **God promised the land of Israel (Canaan/Palestine) to the people of Israel.** That is the land, which is today again the homeland of

the State of Israel. This land is Israel’s inheritance. Behind this is the thought that God is Israel’s “Father”, who gives His child an inheritance (Jeremiah 3:19). This is clearly stated in Numbers 26:52-56: “Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Among these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names. To the larger group you shall increase their inheritance, and to the smaller group you shall diminish their inheritance; each shall be given their inheritance according to those who were numbered of them.” That is not to say that the other nations are not important to God. On the contrary. While God *limits* the land for His people Israel, this leaves room for other nations, who also receive their inheritance. In this way, all nations can live together in peace.⁵

**It is only natural
to think that
the land of
Israel is the
'better country'**

2. **God sees Israel – nation and land (!) – as His personal inheritance.** Jeremiah 10:16 says: “For the Maker of all is He, And Israel is the tribe of His inheritance.” Israel is God’s possession anyway. Israel belongs to God personally. In other places, sometimes the people, and sometimes the land is presented as God’s ‘inher-

itance'. That is why the nations of the world are punished, when they attack Israel, God's inheritance: "For behold, in those days [...], I will gather all the nations [...]. Then I will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; and they have divided up My land" (Joel 4:1-3). So you can say: the nation Israel is God's inheritance, His possession, therefore (Deuteronomy 32:8-9!). Nobody should dare touch it!

Now, who is right? The Christians, who appeal to their inheritance that is promised to them in the New Testament? Or the Jews, to whom in the Old Testament a different inheritance is promised? Or even both? Before I answer this question, it should be checked whether the inheritance of Israel can also be found in the New Testament.

ISRAEL'S INHERITANCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Hebrews 9:15 says: "Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." Here, the author builds on the Old Testament covenant theology, that is well-known in Israel circles. Let us recall:

1. God promises Abraham a nation and a land, to bless the world through them. That is the covenant of Abraham (Genesis 12). This promise contains the destiny and the spiritual task of the nation Israel.
2. God wants His nation to be a holy nation. Therefore, He gives Israel the Torah. If Israel keeps the Torah, then it will be God's possession and receive His blessing. That is the covenant of Moses or Sinai (Exodus 19). Israel, however, often breaks the covenant. The

For Israel, the eternal inheritance promised is the land

consequence is judgment, even the loss of the land. Has God's plan with Israel failed?

3. Not at all! God promises his people a new covenant. The new covenant implies, that God one day will forgive the sins of His people, and will inscribe the Torah in the heart of Israel. The judgment will end, Israel will return to its land and forever be God's nation (Jeremiah 30-33). Israel reaches its destiny!

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews builds on this verse, stressing that the new covenant has come into existence through Jesus, the Messiah of Israel: "Christ, the mediator of a new covenant". What for? That "those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance". What is meant by this? For Israel, the eternal inheritance promised is the land. The land, that God had promised already to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That means: through Jesus, Israel enters the new covenant and is restored as a nation to the promised land. That is Israel's inheritance, as the prophets have always told.

Another important verse is **Galatians 3:15-18**. Paul says here: "God has granted to Abraham [the inheritance] by means of a promise" (verse 18). Even the law, which was

given later, does not change anything to that. For once given is given. The promises given to Abraham are valid. However, what was it that was promised to Abraham? The answer is found in Genesis 12:1-3: “Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and 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 will be blessed.

- Jews will point at verses 1-2: the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must receive a land and become the nation of God – as a blessing to the world. That is their inheritance. Messianic Jews will say that this promise will be fulfilled through Jesus. Jesus is the Messiah, who will restore his people. They are right.
- Christians will point at verse 3: through Abraham, all humankind must be blessed. That is the inheritance of all who believe. Christians will say, that this promise was fulfilled by Jesus Christ. For through Jesus, the blessing of Abraham came to the nations (Galatians 3:14; Ephesians 1:3). They are right.

Stemming from Abraham, Israel has the promise to become God’s people, and the nations have the prospect of inheriting blessing. In my view, both promises are contained in Galatians 3:15-18. Both of them belong together,

complement each other and are realized through Messiah Jesus.

In Romans 15:8, Paul has affirmed the connection between Israel’s inheritance and her Messiah: “Christ has become a servant to Israel to make God’s promises true. This proves, that God is faithful to the promises that He has given to the fathers” (translation T.K.). This means: Jesus is the way for Israel to finally take the land (the inheritance of Israel) in possession. This thought is not new. Because every child in Judaism knows that the Messiah has the task to gather and restore Israel. Paul

only says here what is obvious.

Summarizing one can say: as God’s firstborn Son, Jesus is the first heir, who distributes the inheritance to His fellow heirs (Hebrews 1:2; Romans 8:17). In this, everyone receives the portion that is intended for him.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS HERITAGE OF MESSIAH: GLOBAL DIMENSIONS

The Messiah Jesus, however, is not only the king of Israel, but also the king of the world. His inheritance is not just Israel, but all nations of this earth. This universal understanding of the inheritance is already in the Old Testament in view. In Psalm 2, God says to His Messiah: “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession” (verse 8). The Messiah will establish his rule not only in Israel, but extend it over all the earth. For the world is his inheritance (cf. Daniel 2 and 7). This thought is obvious for the authors of the New Testament.

Messiah Jesus is not only the king of Israel, but also the king of the world

THEME EXILE AND RESTORATION

KEES DE VREUGD



*The
letter to
the Hebrews
and the future
of the Land*

**“But as it is, they desire a better country, that is,
a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed
to be called their God;
for He has prepared a city for them.”
(Hebrews 11:16)**

**“For here we do not have a lasting city,
but we are seeking the city which is to come.”
(Hebrews 13:14)**

The letter to the Hebrews seems to be one of the most “spiritual” and elevated documents of the New Testament, as if all attention is shifted from this earthly reality to the heavenly hope. Moreover, it would seem as if the Old Testament has become obsolete and with this, the role of Israel. Yet, even in the verses cited above, we might discern a hint of the opposite, even a firm hope for the establishment of God’s kingdom on a renewed earth, in the city of the Great King.

CITY

In both verses, the word “city” is notable. Is the “city which is to come” (13:14) the same as the city which God has prepared for the fathers (11:16), who died in hope? In Hebrews 11, a remarkable feature of Abraham is the fact that he is living in the promised land, while expecting the city which has foundations. Though he was actually living in the land, he sojourned there as a stranger, and he was still expecting the fulfilment of the promises.

Earlier, in Hebrews 4, the author portrays the people of Israel as having entered into the

land, but not into the promised “rest” of God. The writer concludes: “So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Hebrews 4: 9). Is that because the land does not provide this rest, or because the people were not yet qualified to receive the rest?

ABRAHAM

There seems to be a parallel and a contrast between Abraham in chapter 11 and the people of Israel in chapter 4. Both Abraham and the Israelites did not receive the full fulfilment of the promise of the land, even though they both actually lived in it. But while Abraham is hailed for his faith, the Israelites under Joshua are rebuked for their disobedience. Nevertheless, even their disobedience prompts God to fix “a certain day, that is, “Today,” for those who hear the preaching of the Gospel and come to believe.

Abraham is an example of those who received the promise and lived by their faith. Yet, he did not receive the fulfilment of the promise. Does that mean that the promise has become obsolete? Or that the promise is

not to be taken literally? What, then, did God promise? Only the sabbath rest (chapter 4), or even the land as the firm ground for the fulfilment of the promise?

AS AN ALIEN

Let us have a closer look to how the letter to the Hebrews describes Abraham's situation. First of all, it is said that Abraham obeyed in faith when he was called to go away to the place he would receive for an inheritance. It is by the same faith, that he lived as an alien in the land of promise. He lived there, but he did not possess it. The implication of these two facts together would be that his descendants would inherit and possess the land, while Abraham only lived there in tents. However, it is remarkable that the promise itself is said to be the content of the inheritance. Isaac and Jacob were fellow heirs of the same promise. They inherited the promise that they, or their descendants, would possess the land. They, too, lived there in tents. And Jacob eventually went to live in Egypt. Only his descendants would return to the land to inherit it.

Again, would this imply that the promise is not to be understood in a literal sense? In other words, that it is not about actually living in the actual land, but about a different way of living in a metaphoric land, in a heavenly one? What is meant by a heavenly land, and why is this land called so?

FAITH AND HOPE

An analysis of the passages Hebrews 11:8-10 and 13-16 might throw light on these questions. Let us take verses 8-10 first. As in the sequence of the entire chapter 11, these verses

speak about the faith, that inspired Abraham's acts. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for" (Hebrews 11:1). The Greek word *pistis* (faith) first and foremost means trust and faithfulness. Verse 8 states that Abraham went to a place that he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, though he did not know where he was going. He went in faith, i.e. he trusted God.

Verse 9 then states that he has actually lived in the land of promise. This verse also explains his mode of living there. He lived there as an alien. Why? Because the land was still possessed and ruled by the Canaanites (Genesis 12:6) and the Amorites (Genesis 15:16).

The land of promise was still a foreign land to him. And Abraham lived there in tents, together with Isaac and Jacob. The patriarchs could only live there as nomads, just as Abraham had been his whole lifetime. He could not yet build a city in the promised land. Living in tents suggests a temporary dwelling, as opposed

to living in a firm house in a city 'with foundations'.

Abraham's faith is further qualified in verse 10 as his expectation that God will build a city for him. So Abraham's life is characterized both by being underway, living in tents, and the expectation that this is only temporary, and that he will live in a city in the promised land. But it is God who will build that city, just as it was God, who called him to go out. So we see Abraham going and living in the land in a temporary way, namely in tents, as a sojourner, trusting that God will change his temporary condition by building a city, in the land that He promised. The land is the con-

The land is the land of hope and fulfilment

stant factor, whereas the conditions of living in the land are subject to change. Moreover, the fact that Abraham was actually living in the land, was the ground for his expectation that God would build him a city. The land is the land of hope and fulfilment.

Obviously, Abraham's conditions reflect the situation the first hearers of the letter found themselves in. Regardless whether the letter is to be dated before or after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, they faced Roman oppression in the land, and had not yet seen the full deployment of the reign of Messiah. Just as Abraham, they were living by faith and expectation.

We may conclude, then, that in verses 8-10 the promised land and the expected city are concrete realities on earth. Is that also the case in verses 13-16?

HEAVEN AND THE EARTHLY REALITY

Verses 13-16 of Hebrews 11 portray the patriarchs and patriarchs as strangers and exiles on the earth, in search for a country for their own. That is not the country from where they had departed on their way to the promised land. They could have returned to their native land, but they did not (verse 15). That already implies, that they were waiting for the promise to be fulfilled in the land in which they were living as strangers and exiles (verse 13). Note, that the Greek word *gē*, like the Hebrew *'erets*, can mean both 'land' and 'earth'. So we should keep in mind the possibility of translating "that they were strangers and exiles in the land".

Since they were actually living in the land of Israel and did not think of returning to their land of origin, it is only natural to think that the land of Israel is the "better country" of verse 16. This is the heavenly country they were desiring. There are a lot of parallels in Jewish tradition that describe the land of Israel as a heavenly country. But let us confine ourselves to a Scripture, that is closely re-



lated to the other great theme of the letter to the Hebrews, the tabernacle. Moses was told by God to make the tabernacle after the model God had showed him on the mountain (cf. Exodus 25:40). Apparently, there is a heavenly original, that finds its counterpart on earth.

The other parallel line of thought concerns Jerusalem. In Judaism, the thought is widespread that there is a Jerusalem on earth, and a Jerusalem above (cf. Galatians 4:26; Revelation 21). The Jerusalem above is both the origin and the destiny of the earthly Jerusalem. We are 'only' waiting for the present Jerusalem to answer to its heavenly destiny.

Third, it might be relevant that in Second Temple Judaism, it was common, in order to avoid mentioning the Name of God, to speak of Heaven instead. In the Gospel of Matthew, the expression 'Kingdom of Heaven' means 'Kingdom of God'. In Revelation 21:2, we see it side by side: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."

These concepts might provide a background for understanding Hebrews 11:16. Taken together, they imply that there is a heavenly reality, that corresponds to the reality on earth as its origin and pattern. While this correspondence may be obstructed through the reality of sin, in time it will be restored again. Abraham and the other patriarchs desired for the present situation of the land to change into the divinely promised reality. God will build the city He has prepared for them in the land He has promised them. But it is in this concrete land, on this concrete earth.

TIME OF TRANSITION

Meanwhile, the present time of sojourning is really a transition period. And through the heavenly sacrifice of Jesus as the high priest in heaven, followers of Jesus already experience the reality of the heavenly things to come.

It is only natural to think that the land of Israel is the 'better country'

"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem..." (Hebrews 12:22). In the end, there will be a "Yet once more" (Hebrews 12:26-27). It is a time, that God "will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven," so that the things that cannot be shaken remain. Creation will be freed from decay. And God will establish His unshakable kingdom. This is the city which is to come (Hebrews 13:14). The present city, in its conditions of foreign occupation and rebellion against God, will not last. But Jerusalem will be a city that continually offers up a sacrifice of praise to God.

Kees de Vreugd is a theologian and editor of Israel and the Church.

THEME **EXILE AND RESTORATION**

REV. EDJAN WESTERMAN

*For Better
and For
Worse^I*

*The Faithfulness of God
and the Exile and Return of the Shekhina*





This article deals with the given that our understanding of the faithfulness of God (toward Israel) confronts us with our understanding of God Himself. The measure in which we have learned to understand God's self-revelation - as given to us in Scripture - enables us or hinders us in our understanding of God's faithfulness toward His people, and per consequence also in the understanding of God's faithfulness toward the whole of His creation, including ourselves.

Focusing in this article on the exile and return of the Shekhina² gives us an opportunity to understand the interrelatedness of our view of God and our understanding of His faithfulness.

This again has a bearing on the manner we look at the actual history of His people Israel.

ACTUALITY AND THEOLOGY

■ write this article in May 2019³, in the center of Jerusalem, on the sixth floor, with our balcony overlooking the city, with a view on the Mount of Olives.

There, I experienced together with the whole of Israel sorrow, remembering both the *Shoah*, and all fallen soldiers and terror victims. Here, I followed the news about the many hundreds of rockets hitting Israel anew from Gaza. Here I am sharing in the Jewish life of this city. And here I also meet on a daily basis men, women and children, whose lives have been seriously affected by the brokenness of this world - also an uttermost painful experience of Israel and the world not yet being fully redeemed.

The reason of mentioning the above is that it all is in some way connected to the exile of the *Shekhina*, which is the theme of this article. It also could be said that this all is in some way related to the Mount of Olives - visible from here - as a place of Divine 'movement activity,' - in going and coming⁴ - although this might seem strange to us because of our limited Christian perception of that specific place.

Let's start with this last point: in Christian theology the Mount of Olives is above all the mountain from which Jesus gloriously entered Jerusalem, and later was taken up in heaven, and the mountain also where He will

triumphantly return. These aspects have to do with 'victory' and carry associations of a more or less triumphant nature. The mountain then is or will be a place of victorious Divine acting. And it is this line of interpretation that has overshadowed all other aspects that there are to this place.

For yes, there is a totally different side to this mountain also, bringing with it a different line of theological evaluation of history, bearing even on our experience of the actuality of day-to-day life, here in Jerusalem, and elsewhere.

THE MOUNT OF LEAVE-TAKING AND PARTING IN SORROW

Lying eastward of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives formed the threshold to the desert, situated between Jerusalem and the Jordan River. This mount so 'saw' sorrowful partings happen. David, fleeing Jerusalem for his rebellious son Absalom, made there his first stop.

Ezekiel saw in his visions how the Presence of the LORD - the *Shekhina* - left the Temple, with all that this implied, and sat itself on the Mount of Olives. Looking back, as it were, to His House that He just had abandoned and which would suffer destruction. Later, the people would follow into exile, passing this mountain.⁵

He somehow, also then, be present 'for better and for worse'? The measure of our understanding of God's self-revelation is crucial here. Will He somehow, also then, be present 'for better and for worse'? The measure of our understanding of God's self-revelation is crucial here.

TOGETHER IN EXILE

Jacob, fleeing into exile, met the LORD on his way, and was told that God would accompany Jacob on his self-inflicted exile, and would not leave him, but promised His abiding Presence that would accompany him also in his return to the land.¹⁹ And Joseph was seen and cared for when exiled to Egypt.²⁰ In the same manner, the Presence of the LORD would not forsake His people when their exile to Babylon was at hand.²¹

The vision of Ezekiel, received while he was already in exile, showed that although the Presence of God would leave the Temple, the people itself would not be left alone. The LORD Himself speaks about His Presence among the exiled people, albeit in a 'diminished' manner.²² He is present and shares all pain of His people.²³ Also the other visions granted to Ezekiel and Daniel as such make clear that exile does not equate with Absence of God.²⁴

It could be said that the vision of Ezekiel shows that also in that special situation the LORD led the way. His parting with, His taking leave from the Temple, would be followed by the people having to leave the God-given land. But like Hosea²⁵, God too shared the pain of 'for better and for worse,' irrespective of the fact that the exile constituted His punishment. This thought might be strange to us. It confronts us with our God-view. It shows us how deep God's love is, how far He will go in His faithfulness. He will not even depart from His people when judgment is coming, with all that this entails.

This also makes us understand that God also can be, and in fact is, Rest-less. He longs for His final Rest, His Resting place, in the physical-geographical midst of His earth, in His land.²⁶ We must therefore also learn to think, and pray, from this perspective of a longtime suffering and wait-

happening when Jesus enters the (deepest form of) exile, followed by His followers. The 'not-yet' of His kingship - implying also a physical-geographical exile from Jerusalem, and a reaching out to both His own people and the nations - brings the good tidings about Him to all nations. It is clear from the New Testament, however, that this reaching out to the nations is limited in time.³⁶ When it will end there will be a healing restoration of the people of God.

GOD FAITHFULLY SHARING THE PAINFUL REALITY OF EXILE

Whether it was caused by certain theological-philosophical preferences, or by some form of triumph-theology, or by supersessionist inclinations, mainline Christian theology has not recognized the reality of God and His Messiah sharing in the (pain of) exile of His people.

Texts that speak of Divine judgment have been read and incorporated in our theological thought, as have been texts about future mercy and faithfulness of God. But faithfulness and togetherness as a *present* reality all through the history of the Jewish people, this has not been recognized by mainline Christian theology. And this in its turn has affected (as it also has been caused by) our view of God, our reading of Scripture and our interpretation of history.

DIVINE TOGETHERNESS 'FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE'

The loving Presence of God shares the ways of His people also in exile. This implies that there has been, and always will be, a loving togetherness of God with His people.

God indeed embraces His people with two 'arms.'³⁷ The arm of the message and Presence of the Risen Messiah and the arm of God's faithfulness sharing the life of exile and beginning of restoration, that coincides with 'the arm' of the unrecognized Messiah, sharing the ways of His people in exile and in the beginnings of returning.

Christian thinking has very often only recognized 'the arm' of the resurrected and enthroned Messiah, thereby in an essential manner limiting the togetherness of God with His people. This contributed to a derogatory, sometimes derisive, and distancing view of the Jewish people as a whole, with exception perhaps (and that not even always) of the Jewish followers of the Messiah. It caused us to not have a theological category, or 'instrument', that could have enabled us to relate the actual history of the whole of the Jewish people to God's ways and heart in a more positive way.

When we, however, also recognize the other 'arm' with which God holds, embraces, cares for, guards, and reaches out to His people, the 'arm' of His togetherness in exile, and thus also the togetherness of His Messiah even in exile, even in this time of waiting for the final redemption and the unification of the whole of the people in the 'Jerusalem-kingship' of the Messiah, then we also learn to look differently on (the history of) His people as a whole.

Then we also start to really believe in, recognize, and expect very concretely God's watching over Israel, His Guardian activity, in which He neither slumbers nor sleeps.³⁸ We have to reckon with the reality of His togetherness (during all ages) toward the whole of His people. And this togetherness is not something from a distance, but it is from within, through the sharing of the *Shekhina* in the reality of exile.

'FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE': WHAT IT MEANS TODAY

Looking to the Mount of Olives, I realize that the feet of the Messiah did not return there yet. Final redemption has not come yet. Many Jews have returned home, so that many of God's people live now again in His land, but the actual remembering of the *Shoah*, and the actual threat of rockets, and the real suffering that I witness, together with so much reverence for God and longing for His reign,

ing from within. A reality that is hard to grasp, when one thinks of all that Israel has befallen, including the sinister reality of the *Shoah*.

This togetherness at the Throne is the heavenly expression of the togetherness that God and His Messiah grant to all Israel on earth, either in the land or still in the diaspora. It is a togetherness that we - believers from the nations - may share in also. In Messiah we may share in God's love for His people, in Him we learn also to be attuned to His prayers as an expression of the longings of God Himself. At the Throne the longings of God, the prayerful longings of Israel and our prayers in Messiah come together. There the Spirit of God brings news about what is going on, on the earth,⁴⁹ there the groaning of the Spirit for both Israel and the whole of creation is being uttered and shared with us on earth.⁵⁰

Heaven also awaits 'the sons to be revealed.'⁵¹ When God's Presence will return to Zion, then Israel will be restored to the fullest by this renewed togetherness. When the Messiah, being the embodiment of God's Presence, will be revealed, that is when He - the Son as no one else - will be revealed, then also His Body, his *kehillah* will be revealed to the world for what it really is, and then also all Israel will become His perfected *kehillah*,

In some way, the Almighty God Himself stands beside His people on Yom HaShoah, still suffering

and be revealed to the world as such.⁵³ When this all will take place, restoration will flow from Zion to all nations and all of creation. Therefore, I keep looking, so to speak, to the Mount of Olives - from nearby or from far away - expecting to see ultimately God's faithfulness 'for better and for worse' to become visible there.

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www.messiasleren.nl

www.learningmessiah.com

NOTES

- ¹ A Dutch version of this article was published in *Israël en de Kerk* 18/3, September 2019. An extended version will shortly appear in *Kesher: a Journal for Messianic Judaism*. www.kesherjournal.com.
- ² *Shekhina* means 'dwelling', and is in Judaism the accepted Hebrew word for the Presence of God (ed. I&theC). The theme of exile (both of the *Shekhina* and of Messiah Yeshua/Jesus) and the related theme of the Hebron-kingship and the Jerusalem-kingship of the Messiah are elaborated upon in Edjan Westerman, *Learning Messiah, Israel and the Nations: Learning to read God's way Anew*, Eugene, OR, Wipf and Stock, 2018, especially chapters 18 and 19. Also other elements within this article are elaborated upon in this book. Also visit www.learningmessiah.com.
- ³ This article is meant to briefly present some lines of interpretation. The format of the article left room for only limited biblical substantiation.
- ⁴ Cf. Psalm 121:8
- ⁵ Cf. 2 Kings 25:4
- ⁶ Matthew 24; Mark 13 and Luke 21
- ⁷ For this expression see *Learning Messiah*, 15.2, p.164. This literal translation of 'incarnation' expresses the Indwelling of God's Son in the flesh of Israel in a more bodily manner.

REV. HENK POOT

*Rereading
the
Gospel
of John*



Without doubt, the Gospel of John is one of the most beloved books of the Bible. You could summarize her content with the famous John 3:16 : 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. It is the universal message of God's love for all people.'

THE ACCURACY OF JOHN

What happens when we realize that John had a special ministry for the Jewish people (Galatians 2:9) and that the world of John 3:16 has not a geographical but a moral significance? Do the familiar and famous words of the gospel perhaps take on a different sound and meaning? The Gospel of John is very different from the other three gospels. John is the only one to write about a three-year ministry of his Master. Accurate to the day, he tells about the events of the first week in which Jesus appears in public, starts His work and calls the first disciples.

The same accuracy can be found in the description of the events in the last week. He knows exactly when Jesus returns to Jerusalem in the days before Easter, and when the meetings take place after His resurrection. He follows it all closely. The places Jesus visits are described in great detail, especially in comparison with the Gospel of Luke. Many places are mentioned: the Sea of Galilee, Tiberias, Bethsaida, Capernaum, Nazareth, Cana, Ephraim, Sychar, Aenon. Luke describes many details in Acts, but he is not very familiar with the topography of Israel. When he tells that Jesus goes to visit Martha and Mary, we read: 'He came to a certain village', while John mentions Bethany and even knows the distance

from the village to Jerusalem. Moreover, he also knows about another Bethany, the place across the Jordan where John the Baptist was baptizing (Luke 10:38-40; John 11:18 and John 1:28). In chapter 4, he describes with a certain detail the place where Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman took place: Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. In other words: the writer of this Gospel travels through the land he knows. John also knows the characters of the various people who pass by up close and personal. He knows who Pilate is and knows the character of his fellow disciple Thomas, who is not only a physical part of twins, but also has an inner duality. The image of Mary and Martha is also much more nuanced. In John 11, you notice that Martha is not just busy in the kitchen, but has a devote spiritual life.

A JEWISH GOSPEL FOR JEWS

Tradition tells that after the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70, John and Mary, the mother of Jesus, fled to Ephesus, where there was a large Jewish community. Presumably, he wrote down his gospel there. And the question is with what message he wants to reach his fellow people in the promised land and in the diaspora. There are indications in the gospel that he might be addressing the Jews in the diaspora in the first place. To give an example: in one of the discussions with the Jews, Jesus says to his opponents: "You will

of light, both images from the desert journey. In John 10, the person of Joshua is recalled, who, as successor of Moses, tends the flock of Israel and brings the people into the land.

The coming redemption of Israel is in many ways a repetition of the first redemption

Moses was also a shepherd, as the Bible tells us. The ending of Psalm 77 says that God led his people as a flock through the hand of Moses and Aaron. According to ancient Jewish tradition, Moses was a very good shepherd. Isaiah 63 recounts in a wonderful way how God placed His Holy Spirit in the heart of Israel and at the side of Moses led His flock through the Red Sea (Isaiah 63:11-14). Also the Jewish tradition dwells on the shepherdship of Moses. For example, it is told that God tried the herdsmanship of Moses and David before He gave them the lead over His people. When Moses was with Jethro, so the story goes, he watched over the flocks with love and care. In this way, he let the lambs graze first, so that they got the best grass. It happened once that a lamb wandered away from the flock and when Moses followed it, he saw how it stopped at the flowing water. Poor little lamb,' he said, 'I didn't know you were so thirsty and looking for water. I also see how tired you are. Moses carried it on his shoulder back to the

herd. During the forty years that Moses herded his father-in-law's sheep, not a single sheep was attacked by a wild beast and the flocks grew into an incredible crowd. Likewise, the Messiah was expected to pasture his people as a wise and gentle shepherd.

The following is said of Joshua in Numbers 27:15-20:

"Moses spoke to the Lord, saying, "Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep that have no shepherd." So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. You shall invest him with some of your authority, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey."

Eleazar is the Hebrew name of Lazarus, the friend of Jesus mentioned in John 11.

A NEW EXODUS

The setup of the Gospel runs from Easter to Easter, with in the middle (Chapter 7-10), the great chapters that take place during the Feast of Tabernacles, the feast of the passage through the desert and the coming of the end time.

All in all, the gospel depicts the image of a new Exodus.

Jewish expectation in the days of Jesus also counted on the fact that the coming redemption of Israel would in many ways be a repetition of the events from the time of the first redemption. Signs would happen and miracles would repeat themselves. The Midrash Rabba declares in Ecclesiastes 1:9: *"What was there will be there again": 'R. Berekiyah spoke in the name of R. Isaac: As the first Redeemer was, the last Redeemer will be. And Moses took his wife and his sons and put them on a donkey (Exodus 4:20). Likewise shall it be with the last Redeemer, as it is said: 'Humble and riding a donkey' (Zechariah 9:9). As the first Redeemer caused manna to*

can the Jewish leaders reject Him with an appeal to the Torah if He is the incarnate Torah in person?

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS DEATH

The return was made possible by the death of Christ on the cross of Calvary. The prophets spoke about the scattered Jews as about prisoners in the power of the world (Isaiah 49:9, 61:1, Jeremiah 31:11). Jesus broke the power of the prince of the world, Satan, on the cross by dying with the sins of Israel. This is also what the apostle Paul writes in Col.2:15: He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him. Jesus says on the threshold of his dying that there is a judgment going through the world and that the ruler of the world is thrown out (John.12:31). In complete peace Jesus goes to the cross with royal dignity. There is no shouting, there are no mockers, no betrayal with a kiss, He Himself carries the cross, the struggle in Gethsemane is not found in this gospel. Not that it is denied, but the light falls on something different: For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father (John 10: 17,18).

On Calvary, the men next to him are not mentioned as mockers or criminals, they are just two men and thus the dying of Jesus with outstretched hands between two others takes on much more the meaning of Moses' spiritual battle on the hill during the fight with

the archenemy of Israel, Amalek. And what is more, John alone mentions that the bones of Jesus were not broken, a reference to the Paschal Lamb of the Lord, that once was the beginning of the Exodus.

Suddenly a completely different light falls on the death of Jesus. He is the gift of God to lead Israel out of the diaspora and prepare for the coming of the Kingdom. It is striking that Caiaphas, when saying to the Sanhedrin: Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish," spoke prophetic words that say that Jesus would die to bring the dispersed children of God home.

REREADING THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

So, the gospel of John is not at all as universal as is thought. It is a call to Israel.

With Paul we have now understood that the times have been postponed and that an interlude has come until the fullness of the nations has entered. But John's message remains and is perhaps more actual than ever in this day and age. And what about me? I may also read John 3: 16. But in a different way. Much more with the question of whether I perhaps have a tendency to wander off and become equal to this world. And when it comes to the return of the Jewish people, the prophetic word is clear: We are the ones to help the tribes of Israel come home, and in this way serve the Messiah (Isaiah 14:2 and 60:4).

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