

The inheritance of Abraham? A report on the ‘promised land’

REVISED VERSION

(WITH REVISION MARKINGS – UNOFFICIAL VERSION)

May 2013



The Church of Scotland

Church and Society Council

Preface

Since the publication of the General Assembly reports in April 2013, the Church and Society Council's report *The Inheritance of Abraham? A report on the 'promised land'* has been the subject of international controversy. Whilst no stranger to controversy, working as we do on difficult issues at the interface of religion and politics, we have become aware that some of the language used in the report used to describe attitudes and beliefs held by some members of the Christian and Jewish communities have caused worry and concern in parts of the Jewish Community in Israel and beyond. This was never our intention. We can be robust in putting our point across, but in this instance we acknowledge that some of the words we have chosen may have been misunderstood, which created an anxiety in the Jewish Community. It is in this light that we are happy to offer this clarification.

The Church and Society Council welcomes dialogue with Scotland's and Britain's Jewish community for whom the land of Israel is understandably special and may be considered part of their self-identity. Talking has helped increase both our faiths' understanding, and has underlined the importance for continued dialogue. This is not about Christianity taking one side and Judaism the other. Both our faiths have a widespread and diverse membership, with a wide range of views on theological as well as political matters. What can bring us together is our commitment to understanding and engagement, and our willingness to work together, and to keep on talking.

The Council would also like to record its appreciation to Council of Christians and Jews for facilitating and supporting this recent dialogue.

Context

The Church of Scotland has an historic presence in Israel. We work closely with partner organisations in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jewish, Muslim and Christian Groups. In recent years the General Assembly has received a number of reports on the political and humanitarian situation. In our Reformed Christian tradition there is a very strong connection between theology and ethics, belief and actions. Our understanding of politics, justice, peace and human relationships is deeply rooted in our faith tradition. Paramount in this is scripture, the revealed word of God in the Bible. We also frequently explore the issue of hermeneutics – the rigorous scrutiny of a text to work out what it means and says to us today. The Church of Scotland frequently and passionately debates, internally and externally, what our belief and tradition mean in the world today. We have in the past acknowledged changes, such as the role of women in Church leadership. Debate is part and parcel of our way of being in the Church.

In considering the report *The inheritance of Abraham? A report on the 'promised land'* we encourage readers, whether they are Commissioners to the General Assembly, members of the Church of Scotland or those around the world who wish to debate our views, to understand that our previous positions and reports on the political, humanitarian and theological issues on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory are still valid and continue to form part of the Church's approach. For example, the 2003 report *Theology of Land and Covenant* is not negated or replaced by *The inheritance of Abraham?*. There may be tensions

between the two – *The inheritance of Abraham* goes further than *Theology of Land and Covenant*. Some may say that the two are not compatible. We believe that over the intervening 10 years a whole new range of conversations and developments warranted a fresh approach. We deliberately included a reference to *Theology and Land and Covenant* in the first sentence of *Inheritance of Abraham?* to underline that this is not a new topic of conversation and that the insights of this report complement and grow out of the understanding reached in 2003.

The key conclusions of this report are that the Church of Scotland does not agree with a premise that scripture offers any peoples a divine right to territory, and that the current situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory is characterised by an inequality in power.

These key points should be read in the light of what we already believe:

- That the country of Israel is a recognised State and has the right to exist in peace and security
- That there should be a Palestinian State, recognised by the United Nations, that should have the right to exist in peace and security.
- We reject racism and religious hatred. We condemn anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. We support initiatives to make Scotland, and the Church of Scotland, a place of welcome and hospitality.
- We will always condemn acts of terrorism, violence and intimidation.
- We are committed to dialogue and conversation. We are particularly concerned to make sure that those who are on the margins and whose voices are rarely heard get the opportunity to be listened to. We specifically stand in solidarity with Christians who live in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

We have been reminded of some important issues in preparing for this Assembly, especially given that what is brought to the Assembly is also in the public square:

- How we talk about one another is important. We recognise that there is a range of opinions on politics and theology in Christianity, Judaism and in other faiths. We need to take care not to put labels on groups or inadvertently misrepresent diverse opinion.
- When we are discussing sensitive issues we should be careful how we define words and take care to unpack ideas fully, to avoid confusion or misunderstanding.

The Church of Scotland is increasingly disappointed at the current situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. We are especially concerned at the recent actions of the Government of Israel in its support for settlements, for the construction of the security barrier or “the Wall” within Occupied Territory, for the blockade of Gaza and for the anti-Boycott law. We assert our sincere belief that to be critical of the policies of the Israeli Government is a legitimate part of our witness and we strongly reject accusations of anti-Semitic bias. We regularly engage with and critique policies of all Governments, where we deem them to be contrary to our understanding of God’s wish for humanity.

Introduction

Ten years ago the General Assembly received the report *Theology of Land and Covenant*, from the Board of World Mission, Church and Nation Committee and the Panel on Doctrine.¹ This report concluded with encouragement for us to listen more to others, “enriched by new insights through continuing questions that need to be faced”. Since 2003, two new insights have been noted by the General Assembly: in 2007, in the report *What Hope for the Middle East*.² the Church of Scotland responded to a declaration from Church leaders in Jerusalem, and endorsed their criticism of Christian Zionism and encouraged members of the Church of Scotland to reject it, and in 2009 Christians in the Holy Land came together and produced *Kairos Palestine: a moment of truth*, offered as a word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian Suffering³ (information at www.kairospalestine.ps).

With the co-operation and support of the World Mission Council, we present this report in 2013 as our latest reflection on the ‘questions that need to be faced’, as the political and humanitarian situation in the Holy Land continues to be a source of pain and concern for us all.

Land and the Bible: three different understandings~~The Bible and the land of Israel~~

There has been a widespread assumption by many Christians as well as many Jewish people that the Bible supports an essentially Jewish state of Israel. This raises an increasing number of difficulties and current Israeli policies regarding the Palestinians have sharpened this questioning.

~~This assumption of biblical support is based on views of promises about land in the Hebrew Bible.⁴ These views are disputed. The guidance in the Bible, notably the interpretation in the New Testament, provides more help in responding to questions about land and covenant. It also provides insight (discussed later in the report) into how Christians might understand the occupation of Palestinian land by the state of Israel, threats to Middle East peace and security, human rights, and racial intolerance, especially in the forms of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.~~

The phrase “the land of Israel” has a range of understandings amongst the three world faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. ~~The city of Jerusalem, which is a holy place for all three religions, is the most contentious religious and political issue.~~

Our knowledge and understanding of the world is rooted in scripture. However, we acknowledge that there can be diverse, and sometimes contradictory interpretations of what scripture means. With regards to the Holy Land and the Bible, we outline three different understandings: In general terms there have been three main ways of understanding the

¹ The 2003 report *Theology of Land and Covenant* is available at http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/13230/Theology_of_Land_and_Covenant.pdf

² The 2007 report *What Hope for the Middle East* is available at: http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/3776/middle_east_07.pdf

³ Information about Kairos Palestine is at www.kairospalestine.ps

⁴ ~~The Hebrew Bible corresponds with the Christian Old Testament.~~

~~promises about land in the Bible:~~

1. A territorial guarantee
2. A land held in trust
3. A land with a universal mission.

~~1. A territorial guarantee~~

This idea presents scripture as making unconditional, literal promises referring to a specific, identifiable territorial area for the Israelites. Such texts as the following have been cited to support this view:

- Genesis 12:7 “To your offspring I will give this land.” (All translations are from the New Revised Standard Version.)
- Genesis 13:15-17 “For all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring for ever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth ... walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.”
- Genesis 15:18-21 “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates ...”
- Genesis 17:7-8 “I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you ... for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give ... the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding.”

These verses contain the promise of God to give the land to Abraham and his descendants. There are no ‘so long as...’ or ‘until...’ clauses in them. Alone, they can be read to show that God promises the land to the Israelites unconditionally. ~~This interpretation reflects some of key aspects of contemporary Zionist positions.~~

~~This is the position of Zionism. “The Bible is our mandate”, declared David Ben-Gurion, the 20th-Century’s most famous Zionist politician, to Lord Peel’s Royal Commission in 1936. The visionary geographic concept *Eretz Yisrael Ha’Shlema* (from the Nile to the Euphrates) was fundamental to Ben-Gurion’s ideology.~~

~~From early in the early 19th century, some influential Christians encouraged these ideas. By the mores of the colonial and imperial age which pervaded all aspects of life, including the Church of Scotland led to the development of a political idea to create a new homeland for Jewish people in Palestine.~~ It may well have been a Kirk minister, the Rev Alexander Keith, who coined the phrase “a land without people, for a people without land.” This view of the land of Palestine was linked from the 1840s to a literalistic view of Hebrew Bible prophecy being fulfilled and the widely held attitude that European colonialism meant that a land was ‘empty’ if western power and culture was not present. This attitude, repugnant to our thinking today ~~and that of many others of all three of the monotheistic faiths~~, was widely accepted. It was taken up by the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury’s evangelical circle with dreams of restoring the Jewish people to the Holy Land. This in turn led to the Balfour Declaration of 1917, when the British Government agreed to a policy of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Interestingly, some Jewish leaders, like Ahad Ha’Am (active at the end of the 19th and the

beginning of the 20th centuries) resisted this literalist view, and recognised the need for Zionist Jews moving to Palestine to treat the indigenous Palestinians with respect and good judgement.

Kairos Palestine (2.3.1):

Our land is God's land, as is the case with all countries in the world. It is holy inasmuch as God is present in it, for God alone is holy and sanctifier. It is the duty of those of us who live here, to respect the will of God for this land. It is our duty to liberate it from the evil of injustice and war. It is God's land and therefore it must be a land of reconciliation, peace and love. This is indeed possible. God has put us here as two peoples, and God gives us the capacity, if we have the will, to live together and establish in it justice and peace, making it in reality God's land: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (Psalm 24:1).

Naim Ateek⁵ a contemporary Christian thinker in Israel has written that: "the sole ambition of Zionists, Christians and Jews alike, has been the acquisition of the land for the Jewish people." He characterises Christian Zionism as: "a movement within Protestant fundamentalism that understands the modern state of Israel as the fulfilment of biblical prophecy and thus deserving of political, financial and religious support."

Politically powerful in the USA, it has enjoyed the backing of Presidents Reagan and Clinton, as well as tele-evangelists and novelists like Jerry Falwell and Hal Lindsay. Clarence Wagner is a representative voice. He sees the modern State of Israel as the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham, as well as the fulfilment of biblical prophets such as Ezekiel who spoke about 'the barren mountains of Israel' becoming fruitful and 'the ruined towns' being rebuilt as the people returned from Exile. The following extract is taken from his *12 Keys to Understanding Israel in the Bible*⁶:

"Truly, the return of the Jews from over a hundred nations of the world is a modern-day miracle. Large waves of immigrants began to come in the 1880s. Since those early days, the deserts have been reforested, the rocky fields made fertile, the swamps drained and planted, the ancient terraces rebuilt, and the ruined cities of old re-established. Israel is now a nation of over six million people, that is a food exporting nation, that boasts high levels of literacy, health, education and welfare, high technology and agricultural development... We, who believe the Bible is God's Word and every promise of God will come to pass, must stand and support Israel's right to its land. It is a Divine right. We cannot say on the one hand that we believe there is a God who has revealed His perfect will in His Holy Scriptures, and on the other hand, deny Israel its right to the land God promised her."

This statement gives rise to questions and observations, among them:

- i) How do we understand biblical texts that tell us that occupation of the land must go hand in hand with obedience to God's law and God's concern for justice?

⁵ Ateek is a former Canon of St George's Anglican Cathedral in Jerusalem and head of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre.

⁶ *12 Keys to Understanding Israel in the Bible* by Clarence Wagner is published by *Bridges for Peace* (2003)

~~(See section 2, below.)~~

- ii) Did the prophets not warn that pursuit of power and wealth would lead to inequality, injustice and the loss of land, as it did in the Exile?
- iii) What land is being discussed? Is it ~~the land claimed by Joshua, or~~ the land of David and Solomon, or Judah, or the Northern Kingdom of Israel? ~~(See section 3, below.)~~
- iv) ~~How do we view the narratives on the occupation of the 'promised land' in Joshua and Judges? (Violent ethnic cleansing was apparently condoned by God in some passages, while others suggest assimilation.)~~
- v)iv) Do any of the Hebrew Bible accounts really sanction future occupation of the land and the driving out of the people already there? ~~For example, the occupation of the land by Jewish immigration in recent times and the violence used to deprive some 750,000 Palestinian people from their homes at the time the State of Israel was established in 1948? (This is known by the Palestinian people as Al Nakba—the catastrophe.)~~
- vi)v) ~~Clarence Wagner describes the creation of the modern state of Israel as a 'miracle'. What is meant by 'miracle'? Was Al Nakba a 'miracle'—driving people from their ancestral land and property with no right of reclaim; the creation of the Gaza Strip; all the refugee camps; the occupied Palestinian territory with the destruction of community life; and the impoverishment of the Palestinian people?~~
- vii)vi) Justice is a major theme in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. For example “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8) and “Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness...”(Matthew 6:33). Are these not a challenge to the policies of the ~~State current Government~~ of Israel?⁷
- viii)vii) How can Christians support the violation of human rights in the name of alleged divinely conferred exclusive rights to a specific area of land?

This understanding of Scripture and contemporary social and political relations in Israel raises several issues. Those who hold to it, both Christian and Jewish, seem to ignore those texts which say that the occupation of the land must go hand in hand with obedience to Gods law and Gods concern for Justice. Did the Hebrew Bible (The Christian Old Testament) really sanction future occupation of land which involved the displacement of some 750,000 people already living there, and the present injustices and humanitarian issues we see today.

2. A land held in trust

A second still literalistic view is that the land is granted to God's chosen people as a gift~~the promise of land is literal~~, but that it is given conditionally to the Jewish people; on this understanding the land is God's, given in trust to be cared for and lived in according to God's instruction. Walter Brueggemann⁸ says in *Reverberations of Faith*⁹:

⁷ For instance, in the building of illegal settlements; the continuing policy of driving out of Palestinians from East Jerusalem; disregard of UN resolutions and violation of international law; and the daily provocation and humiliation of the Palestinian people.

⁸ Brueggemann is a Christian scholar of the Hebrew Bible in the United States and a minister in the United Church of Christ.

“The great articulation of land theology in the Old Testament is found in the book of Deuteronomy. The importance of the collection of sermonic addresses and commandments is to assert the non-negotiable conditions of land possession, conditions that are worked out in policy and public action but are understood theologically as the commandments of [Jehovah]. At the centre of the land-ethic is the ‘year of release’ in Deuteronomy 15:1-18 which provides cancelling debts among the poor in community so that they may participate viably and with dignity in public. The same legal provision is writ large in the provision of the jubilee year in Leviticus 25. These laws on the year of release and jubilee year have the intention of curbing an unfettered economy by subordinating economic transactions to the needs and requirements of the civic community...The covenantal tradition of Moses and the prophets knows that no community can hope to occupy land peaceably and justly unless the claim of the neighbour is honoured in the face of exploitative possibility. Israel’s own sad experience is taken to attest to the truth of that advocacy.”

Munib Younan¹⁰ has pointed to the widely accepted view of scholars that the idealised biblical conquest narratives were put into their present form only centuries later, with the writers "intent on justifying their own status in the land on the basis of nationalistic perspectives." In his book *Witnessing for Peace: In Jerusalem and the World*¹¹ he urges us to read the Pentateuch in the light of the prophets. The land is a gift, not a right, and one which brings with it obligations, most particularly to practice justice and to dwell equitably with the stranger. The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s 2012 General Assembly reached a similar conclusion: “For neither ancient nomadic peoples nor modern corporations is the land a free gift without the responsibility.”¹²

~~Possession of any land is clearly conditional. The question that arises is this: Would the Jewish people today have a fairer claim to the land if they dealt justly with the Palestinians?~~

According to the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel of 14 May 1948, the intention was to create a just society:

“The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure the complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race, or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United

⁹ Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes by Walter Bruggemann is published by Westminster / John Knox Press (2002)

¹⁰ Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

¹¹ *Witnessing for Peace: In Jerusalem and the World* by Munib Younan is published by Augsburg Books (2003)

¹² (See the report of the International Affairs Committee, General Assembly 2012 Acts and Proceedings, page 275, www.presbyterian.ca/download/aand)

Nations.”

This formal acceptance of the equality of all its citizens potentially created a tension from the start with some who held to an ethno-nationalist understanding of Zionism~~the state of Israel's ethno-national, Zionist goals~~. There is a direct conflict of interest between wanting human rights and justice for all and retaining the right to the land. This has, in some cases, The decision not to adopt a formal constitution led to the limiting of civil liberties, for example, in relation to land expropriation and the imposition of military government on Palestinians in Israel until 1966. Despite an independent judiciary, liberal-democratic values were have been violated in immigration, citizenship, education, economic, and most of all in land policies. The state of Israel has always been an ethnic democracy. Under Ben-Gurion, the first Prime-Minister and Minister of Defence, the Arab minority had to live separately under Jewish rule.

It has to be recognized that the enormity of the Holocaust has often reinforced the belief, at least in certain circles in the West, that Israel is entitled to the land unconditionally. There is guilt among Western Christianity about centuries of anti-Semitism that led to discrimination against the Jews, culminating in the total evil of the Holocaust. There is also a belief among some Jewish people that they have a right to the land of Israel as compensation for the suffering of the Holocaust.

One contemporary commentator who faces these two issues is Mark Braverman, an American Jew who grew up sharing the beliefs of some in his community. In his book *Fatal Embrace*¹³ he writes:

“As a Jew born into a religiously observant family in post-World War II America, I was raised in a potent combination of Rabbinic Judaism and political Zionism. I grew up immersed in the Zionist narrative of return to the Jewish homeland. I was taught that a miracle – born of heroism and bravery – had blessed my generation. The State of Israel was not a mere historical event – it was redemption from millennia of marginalisation, demonisation and murderous violence. The legacy of this history was a sense of separateness – a collective identity of brittle superiority for having survived, despite the effort ‘in every age’ – so reads the Passover liturgy – to eradicate us. The ideology and mythology of the birth of the State of Israel partook of this legacy of separateness, vulnerability and specialness. I embraced it.”

His attitude was radically changed by visiting Palestine in 2006 and seeing the reality, the range and the reach of the injustices on the ground and his horror that these were being done by the State of Israel which, at the time, he equated as therefore being done in his name. He is clear about the fact that Christian people have to repent of the wrongs done to the Jewish people, but this does not mean that the church cannot criticise the policies of the Israeli Government in the Occupied Palestinian Territory Zionism today: “Christian people must not sell out the Palestinian people because of repentance for the Holocaust, ‘sensitivity’ to Jewish feelings, and fear of being labelled anti-Semitic.”

To be critical of Zionism is not anti-Semitic. Braverman is adamant that Christians must not

¹³ Fatal Embrace: Christians, Jews, and the Search for Peace in the Holy Land by Mark Braverman is published by Synergy Books (2010)

~~sacrifice the universalist, inclusive dimension of Christianity and revert to the particular exclusivism of the Jewish faith because we feel guilty about the Holocaust. He is equally clear that the Jewish people have to repent of the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians between 1947 and 1949. They must be challenged, too, to stop thinking of themselves as victims and special, and recognise that the present immoral, unjust treatment of Palestinian people is unsustainable.~~

~~Braverman challenges, too, what he calls 'revisionist Christian theology', more widely known as Western post-Holocaust theology, i.e. theology which takes away Jesus' radical critique of Jewish theology and practice in order to provide no excuse for Christian anti-Semitism. In this approach, he claims, the Jewish people are and remain God's chosen. This gives them the right to land, to triumph over enemies and a sense of specialness. Other people's part in this is limited to being pushed aside to make way for occupation, being agents of God's punishment of the Jews for their disobedience and witnessing to God's glory through Jewish survival and prosperity.~~

~~As long as Zionists think that Jewish people are serving God's special purpose and that abuses by the state of Israel, however wrong and regrettable, don't invalidate the Zionist project, they will believe themselves more entitled to the land than the Palestinian people. A final difficulty is Jewish 'exceptionalism', with its interpretation of the covenant in Exodus 19:3-6:~~

~~"Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, 'This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I have carried you on eagles' wings and brought you here to me. If only you will now listen to me and keep my covenant, then out of all peoples you will become my special possession; for the whole earth is mine. You will be to me a kingdom of priests, my holy nation. Those are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.'"~~

~~This view of the problem facing those wishing to speak out but fearing being seen as anti-Semitic is echoed in the words of Mark Ellis, retired University Professor of Jewish Studies at Baylor University, where he was the Director of the Centre for Jewish Studies who said;.~~

~~"It seems late in the Israel/Palestine political game – and it is late indeed – but the mainstream Churches are breaking what I have called the interfaith ecumenical deal. That deal is usually referred to as the interfaith ecumenical dialogue, the post-Holocaust place where Jews and Christians have mended their relationship. Israel was huge in this dialogue. Christians supported Israel as repentance for anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Then as Israel became more controversial with their abuse of Palestinians, Christians remained silent. Non-support and, worse, criticism of Israeli policies, was seen by the Jewish dialoguers as backtracking to anti-Semitism. That's where the dialogue became a deal: Silence on the Christian side brings no criticism of anti-Semitism from the Jewish side"¹⁴.~~

¹⁴ <http://mondoweiss.net/2012/11/exile-and-the-prophetic-the-interfaith-ecumenical-deal-is-dead.html>

3. A land with a universal mission

We believe that an adequate Christian understanding of the 'promised land' must take into account two further points, in addition to the conditional nature of promises in the Hebrew Bible:

- i. There are different meanings attached to "land" in different contexts and in the theological and political agendas of the various authors of the Hebrew Bible.
- ii. The New Testament contains a radical re-interpretation of the concepts of "Israel", "temple", "Jerusalem", and "land".

i. The Hebrew Bible

The boundaries of the land are described in different ways in different situations. Abraham's descendants, "numerous as the stars in the sky", will receive "all these lands", and through them "all nations on earth will be blessed" (Genesis 26:4). This suggests a more inclusive picture than "the land of Canaan" (Genesis 12:5) or even "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18). The lack of detailed archaeological evidence supports the view that the range of scriptural material makes it inappropriate to try to use the Hebrew scriptures to determine an area of land meant exclusively for the Jewish people.

The prophetic writings especially were developing a different understanding.¹⁵ In Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, force is used to achieve Israel's nationalistic goals. This is continued by the Maccabees in the 2nd century BCE and the Zealots in AD-CE 1st century. That exclusivist tradition implied Jews had a special, privileged position in relation to God. But the prophetic tradition stood against this. Narrative of the Babylonian captivity demonstrated that God was not confined to 'their'one land, or was concerned only for 'them'one people.

The-For Christians the book of Jonah is a key text for understanding the Hebrew Bible's promise of the land to Abraham and his descendants. Written at a time when Jewish people were turning inwards, the book presents Jonah as a Jewish nationalist to drive home the point: God's universal, inclusive love is for all. For Christians, God in Jonah is merciful, gracious, a liberator of the oppressed and sinful who looks for just living. The people of God even included the hated Assyrians. So to Christians, Jonah suggests a new theology of the land, because God was not confined within the land of Israel, but also embraced the land of Assyria. In saying this, we recognise that a Jewish Theological interpretation of Jonah may not go as far as a Christian one, perhaps being more contextualised in time terms.

Kairos Palestine (2.3):

We believe that our land has a universal mission. In this universality, the meaning of the promises, of the land, of the election, of the people of God, open up to include all of humanity, starting from all the peoples of this land.

ii. New Testament

¹⁵ Naim Ateek explores this matter in his book *Justice and Only Justice*, arguing that from Amos in the 8th century BC, God's purposes begin to be thought of as inclusive and universal.

The For Christians, the New Testament is even clearer about a process in the unfolding of God's purposes of good for humanity, Hebrews 1:1-2: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a son whom he appointed heir to all things."

Previous experiences of land, including the peaceful returns from exile, were stages towards a wider future. This is the Christian understanding throughout our reading and interpretation of the New Testament. The Christians believe that Good News of Jesus is inclusive. The incident that follows the 'Nazareth Manifesto' in Luke 4 (verses 25-30) makes the point clearly:

~~"But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian. When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way."~~

~~Jesus offered a radical critique of Jewish specialness and exclusivism, but the people of Nazareth were not ready for it. John's gospel speaks of Jesus being lifted up and drawing all people to himself (John 12:32). Jesus' cleansing of the Temple means not just that the Temple needs to be reformed, but that the Temple which by its order, kept some people separate from others is finished. Stephen's speech in Acts 7 makes it clear that God is no longer confined to the place of the Temple. God is in all places and for all people. Temple and land give way to a new understanding so Paul can say that all the barriers that separated people one from another Jews from the rest are down – "there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male or female in Christ Jesus." The new 'place' where God is found is wherever people gather in the name of Jesus.~~

If Jesus is indeed the Yes to all God's promises¹⁶ then for Christians the promise to Abraham about land is fulfilled through the impact of Jesus, ~~not by restoration of land to the Jewish people.~~ Jesus gave a new direction and message for the people of God to his followers, one which did not feature nor was it confined to a special area of land for them. From the day of Pentecost his followers were sent to work for a different kind of kingdom. ~~When the apostle Paul spelt it out for the emerging church in Rome he began to answer the question about the Jewish people who were not following Jesus. His conclusions that "all Israel will be saved", and that "God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all" (Romans 11:26, 32) have tested all subsequent interpreters, but most recent ones see a vision of a reconciliation beyond this age. No part of the New Testament gives any support to a political state of Israel beyond that to any other state. All are challenged to the same requirements for justice and the protection of human rights for all their inhabitants.~~

The challenge of a new kingdom?

To Christians in the 21st century, promises about the land of Israel ~~were never~~ shouldn't be

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 1:20 "For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes'..."

intended to be taken literally, or as applying to a defined geographical territory-; They they are a way of speaking about how to live under God so that justice and peace reign, the weak and poor are protected, the stranger is included, and all have a share in the community and a contribution to make to it. The 'promised land' in the Bible is not a place, so much as a metaphor of how things ought to be among the people of God. This 'promised land' can be found – or built – anywhere.

Jesus' vision of the kingdom is not for one limited area of territory, it is a way of anticipating how things can be if people are obedient to God. Metaphor and symbol are often used by the Biblical writers. Words such as 'widow', 'stranger', 'orphan', 'wilderness,' 'neighbour,' 'Egypt,' 'exodus' and 'exile' have profound symbolic reference. So Walter Brueggeman comments on the poetry of Isaiah 2:

“Exile is a sense of not belonging, of being in an environment hostile to the values of the community and its vocation. Babylon refers to a concentration of power and value which is dominant and which is finally hostile to the covenant faith of this community. The empire regularly seeks to domesticate such a community and characteristically ends in oppression. Homecoming is a dramatic decision to break with imperial rationality and to embrace a place called home where covenantal values have currency and credibility. The juxtaposition of exile, Babylon and homecoming means that this poetry of Isaiah 2 is not aimed simply at geographical, spatial possibility but at relational covenant reality.”

Bethlehem Bible College, from an historic Baptist and evangelical stance, has recently been hosting *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences (see www.christatthecheckpoint.com). At the most recent, participants were challenged to move away from seeing the Middle East through the lens of “end times” prophecy and instead look to follow Jesus in the prophetic pursuit of justice, peace and reconciliation. The evangelical leaders in the Palestinian Baptist community are engaging with *Kairos Palestine*, and the non-geographic nature of God's promises.]

Kairos Palestine (3.4.3):

Our Church points to the Kingdom, which cannot be tied to any earthly kingdom. Jesus said before Pilate that he was indeed a king but “my kingdom is not from this world”. St Paul says: “The Kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:7). Therefore religion cannot favour or support any unjust political regime, but must rather promote justice, truth and human dignity.

From this last perspective, the desire of those who seek to acquire the land of the Palestinians many in the state of Israel to acquire the land of Palestine for the Jewish people is wrong. The fact that the land is currently being taken by settlement expansion, the separation barrier, house clearance, theft and force makes it doubly wrong to seek biblical sanction for this.

Church leaders from South Africa, following a visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories in the autumn of 2012, observed similarities to the concluding years of the

apartheid regime in South Africa.¹⁷ There are many members of the Jewish community in Israel and abroad concerned with injustice in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory who would fundamentally disagree with that description¹⁸ but it is challenging that those who remember the reality of apartheid first hand and the consequences of international campaigns on their own nation They concur with proposals to consider economic and political measures involving boycotts, disinvestment and sanctions against the state of Israel focused on illegal settlements, as the best way of convincing Israeli politicians and voters that what is happening is wrong, ~~and that~~. They argue that Christians around the world should not contribute in any way to the viability of illegal settlements. This raises particular questions for the Church of Scotland as we seek to respond to the question: "What does the Lord require of you...?"

Conclusion

From this examination of the various views in the Bible about the relation of land to the people of God, it can be concluded that Christians should not be supporting any claims by ~~Jewish or any other people, any people~~ to an exclusive or even privileged divine right to possess particular territory. We believe ~~it that~~ is a misuse of the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament) and the New Testament Bible to use it as a topographic guide to settle contemporary conflicts over land. In the Bible, God's promises extend in hope to all land and people. ~~Focussed as they are on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, these promises call for a commitment in every place to justice in a spirit of reconciliation.~~

This theological approach is what we bring from our Christian perspective to the place of dialogue with people of other faith communities grappling with the issues of land in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It does not judge the faith of others nor suggest that one perspective supersedes another but it does challenge the manifestations of faith expressed by some on the question of land in these troubled places.

In the context of the present situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory we remain committed to the following principles, previously set out and agreed by the General Assembly ~~(the years indicate Deliverances passed which back up these points):~~

- That the current situation is characterised by an inequality in power and therefore reconciliation can only be possible if the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the blockade of Gaza, are ended. ~~(2001, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2011, 2012)~~
- The Church of Scotland condemns violence, terrorism and intimidation no matter the perpetrator

¹⁷ <http://www.kairopalestine.ps/sites/default/Documents/South%20African%20church%20delegation%20to%20the%20Occupied%20territories%20of%20Palestine.pdf>

¹⁸ <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/week-s-end/an-israeli-and-a-palestinian-scathed-by-south-africa-apartheid-rhetoric-1.428234>

- The Church of Scotland affirms the right of Israelis and Palestinians to live within secure and fixed boundaries in states of their own
- The Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank are illegal under International Law. The Church of Scotland, individuals and civil organisations should urge the UK government and the international communityEuropean Union as a matter of urgency to put pressure on Israel to cease from the expansion of these settlements. ~~(2003, 2006, 2011)~~
- The Church of Scotland must remain in dialogue and fellowship with ecumenical partners and the UK Jewish, Muslim and other faith communities to support concerns for justice and peace. ~~(2002, 2006, 2011, 2012)~~
- ~~That~~The Church of Scotland should do nothing to promote the viability of the illegal settlements on Palestinian land. ~~(2006, 2011, 2012)~~
- The Church of Scotland should support projects which prioritise peace-building, poverty alleviation and the Palestinian economy. ~~(2006, 2011, 2012)~~
- The Church of Scotland rejects racism and religious hatred. We condemn anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. We support initiatives to make Scotland, and the Church of Scotland, a place of welcome and hospitality.
- That human rights of all peoples should be respected but this should include the right of return and / or compensation for Palestinian refugees. ~~(2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2012)~~
- That negotiations between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority about peace with justice must resume at the earliest opportunity and the Church of Scotland should continue to put political pressure on all parties to commence such negotiations, and asking all parties to recognise the inequality in power which characterises this situation. ~~(2007, 2009, 2012)~~
- That there are safe rights of access to the sacred sites for the main religions in the area. ~~(2006, 2007)~~

Proposed Deliverance:

- Refute claims that scripture offers any peoples a privileged claim for possession of a particular territory.
- Note that the current situation is characterised by an inequality in power and therefore reconciliation can only be possible if the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank

and East Jerusalem, and the blockade of Gaza, are ended, and on that basis encourage all parties and the international community to renew peace negotiations.

- Condemn acts of terrorism, violence and intimidation whether committed by individuals, organisations or governments.
- Reaffirm the historic position of the Church of Scotland that Israel is a country which is recognised within the international community of States, with all the rights and responsibilities attendant on that status.
- Reaffirm the historic commitment of the Church of Scotland to a State of Palestine with the same rights and responsibilities, recognised within the international community of States, with all the rights and responsibilities attendant on that status.
- Reject racism and religious hatred and condemn anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.
- Support ongoing commitment to dialogue and conversation, with particular concern to make sure that those who are on the margins and whose voices are rarely heard get the opportunity to be listened to, especially Christians who live in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.
- Instruct the C&S Church & Society Council to publicise resources to encourage wide discussion of the report *The Inheritance of Abraham* and its concluding principles.
- Encourage the appropriate committees in Presbyteries to consider the report *The Inheritance of Abraham* and bring it to the notice of their Presbytery.
- Urge the UK Government and the European Union to do all that is within their power to ensure that human rights are respected in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- Urge the UK Government and the European Union to do all that is within their power to ensure that international law is upheld in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- Urge the UK Government and the European Union to use pressure to stop further expansion of Israeli settlements and remove existing illegal settlements in the Occupied West Bank.