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# The Continuation of Israel's Land Promise in the New Testament: A Fresh Approach<sup>1</sup>

A. Boyd Luter<sup>2</sup>

In 2010, I was awakened from a theological slumber. Even though I had been privileged to contribute a chapter to the 1998 study, *Israel, the Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God's Promises*,<sup>3</sup> I was forced to face an embarrassing reality in 2010: I had allowed myself to become disengaged in regard to, particularly, the status of the debate over the Land Promise. In fact, I even had to admit that I apparently had not even fully grasped what had been changing on that subject in some evangelical circles since at least the early 1980s.

What was my “wake-up call?” I reviewed Gary Burge’s *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to “Holy Land” Theology* for the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*.<sup>4</sup> In the process, I “went to school” on the arguments that Burge employed, as well as the works he cited that favored his view. Though I strongly disagreed with Burge’s line of thinking, I freely admit that he did me a big favor by helping me begin to think deeply in getting up to speed on the recently-changed state of the debate over the Land Promise.

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<sup>1</sup> This article originated as a paper given at the Evangelical Theological Society: National Meeting, Baltimore, MD, November 20, 2013.

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<sup>3</sup> Ed. H.W. House (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998). This volume was released in a second edition by Jews for Jesus in 2012. My chapter was entitled “Israel and the Nations in God’s Redemptive Plan” (pp. 283-97).

<sup>4</sup> Published in *JETS* 54.1 (March 2011): 217-19. Relatedly, shortly after writing the review of Burge’s book, to further answer Burge’s viewpoint, I presented a paper that reflected the developing state of my understanding at the 2011 Southwest regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, entitled “The Land as Covenant Backdrop: A Modest Response to Burge and Waltke,” which was published in the *Criswell Theological Review* (n.s. 9/1 [Fall 2011]: 59-73). Interestingly, Gary Burge requested the opportunity to publish a rejoinder to my article in *CTR* (n.s. 9/2 [Spring 2012]: 76-78), but actually focused on my *JETS* review instead of the article, though, oddly, his piece provided no substantive evidence of any kind to counter either my review or article (which I pointed out in a surrejoinder to Burge’s reply (*CTR* n.s. [Fall 2012]: 107-08).

For those who are no more aware of what had happened on the subject of the Land Promise than I was, the next section of this article will document the shift. Following that, the next section will spotlight the aspect of the issue that has emerged as the exegetical/theological “soft underbelly” of those who argue that the Land Promise that God made to Israel is still in effect: the apparent scarcity of obvious references to the Land Promise in the New Testament. The heart of the paper, however, is the final section. Three steps will be laid out which clarify that the Land Promise is not only present in the New Testament, but even provides a sort of overall theological framework for the New Testament.

### **The Land Promise to Israel: The Recent Shift in a Long-Term Standoff**

From the time I began my formal study of theology in the early 1970s, the issue of whether the Land Promise made to Abraham and his physical descendants, the people of Israel, is still in force largely turned on hermeneutics. Those who employed a consistently natural (read “literal” in a pejorative sense if opposed to this approach) approach to interpreting Scripture usually concluded that the Land Promise, as part of the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant, remains in effect. By contrast, those who utilized a “dual hermeneutic,” in which prophetic/eschatological passages are interpreted differently—spiritually—generally viewed the Abrahamic Covenant as being conditional in some sense and thus the Land Promise was forfeited by Israel through her prolonged sinfulness. In such a view, the church is the “new Israel” or the “spiritual Israel,” having taken a spiritualized version of the promises originally made to Israel, but taken away by the Lord in judgment.

Largely because of this difference in foundational hermeneutical perspective, these two views regarding the Land Promise were locked in a standoff for an extended period of time. There might be a surge of interest in one view or the other for a few years, but the other view would inevitably mount a comeback. Neither view was able to gain the clear upper hand and most of the proponents of each view more or less settled in with the idea of an ongoing deadlock on the subject.

But, something happened that scrambled the categories: a new “middle way” emerged. This new group, on the one hand, fairly consistently employs a natural/literal hermeneutic and sees a future for Israel as the Old Covenant people of God, notably in regard to Paul’s prophecy about “all Israel” being saved at the

end of the age (Romans 11:25-26). On the other hand, they reject the idea that Israel's future has anything to do with a "Promised Land."<sup>5</sup>

Where did this view begin and what is its strength versus those who defend the continuation of the Land Promise? Certain ideas may have been sparked by W.D. Davies' seminal 1974 study, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine*.<sup>6</sup> The other earliest high-profile exposition of this view that I have been able to locate is C.E.B. Cranfield's comments on the well-known "all Israel will be saved" passage in Romans 11:25-26, which were published in 1979:

... [T]he most likely explanation of 'all Israel' is that it means the nation of Israel as a whole, though not necessarily including every individual member.... It is also to be noted here that there is no trace of encouragement for any hopes entertained by Paul's Jewish contemporaries for the re-establishment of a national state in independence and political power, nor—incidentally—anything which could feasibly be interpreted as a scriptural endorsement of the modern nation-state of Israel.<sup>7</sup>

Next chronologically—at least in what I have been able to find—is an intriguing 1983 assertion by John R. W. Stott, made from the pulpit of All Souls Church, London:

... [T]he Old Testament promises about the land are nowhere repeated in the New Testament, *except possibly in Luke 21:24*. The prophecy of Romans 11 is a prophecy that many Jews will turn to Christ, but the land is not mentioned, nor is Israel mentioned as a political entity.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Reformed theologian Willem VanGemeren advocates a similar view in his massive study, *The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), but his presentation is completely lacking in smugness and the anti-Jewish attitude espoused by Burge and his counterparts.

<sup>6</sup> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

<sup>7</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 2 (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979). The quotations are taken from the abridgement of Cranfield's volume, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), 282, 283, but, in this case, are virtually identical with those in the International Critical Commentary.

<sup>8</sup> Cited by Stott himself in his Foreword to Philip Johnston and Peter Walker, eds., *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 10, 11. The italicized portion of Stott's quote will be discussed in some depth below.

In the three decades since, Cranfield and Stott have been followed by a number of the next generation of British evangelical scholars.<sup>9</sup> Also, during that time, the new view spread to the U.S. and was picked up by well-known evangelical scholar Gary Burge.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Burge's Wheaton colleagues Greg Beale (who has since moved to Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia)<sup>11</sup> and Nicholas Perrin<sup>12</sup> have written studies on the Temple which well complement the new view.

As far as I am able to tell, the two strongest points this newer view brings to bear on the topic of the Land Promise are: 1) an argument from silence in regard to the wider New Testament, which is mixed with 2) a somewhat plausible, but overstated, understanding of how a number of passages *can* (but not necessarily *should*) be interpreted, so as to undermine the presence of the Land Promise in the New Testament.

### **Is the Land Promise Present in the New Testament? The Pressing Need for a Different Approach**

Though I do not believe that this relatively new *via media* view has made its case convincingly, it is certainly the case that it has succeeded in moving the textual focus of the issue of whether the Land Promise to Israel does continue to the New Testament. Previously, since the obvious passages having to do with the Land Promise are located in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament was the primary exegetical battleground. But, whether those who defend the ongoing nature of the Land Promise are willing to admit it or not, that has now changed. More and more, the looming question that dominates the issue is "Where is the Land Promise seen clearly in the New Testament?"

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<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., several of the authors in Johnston and Walker, *The Land of Promise*, who have also written, or contributed to, other works expounding the newer view of the Land Promise. Of these, the most strident recent voice is that of Stephen Sizer (e.g., *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* [Leicester: IVP, 2004] and *Zion's Christian Soldiers: The Bible, Israel and the Church* [Downers Grove: IVP, 2007].

<sup>10</sup> Before *Jesus and the Land* (2010), Burge, who has served as president of Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding, had already published *Who Are God's People in the Middle East* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) and *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (London: SPCK/Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010)).

The significance of this textual shift is that the obvious implication of the question is, if it cannot be clearly demonstrated that the Land Promise is present in the New Testament, then such silence is presumed to be compelling proof that it is no longer in effect. And, that indeed would seem to be the case, *if—but only if*, it cannot be shown that the Land Promise is indeed present and accounted for in the New Testament.

By this time, it is becoming increasingly obvious that attempting to argue the continuation of the Land Promise almost exclusively from supposedly “tried and true” Old Testament passages, in essentially the same way it has been long been done, will no longer work. With this recent shift in textual focus in regard to whether or not the Land Promise is still in force, any defense of the Land Promise’s ongoing reality that hopes to be successful must accept the exegetical challenge to make a strong case from the New Testament.

The remainder of this paper will take up that challenge. It will not, however, primarily attempt to counter the New Testament arguments offered by those who hold the new middle-ground view.<sup>13</sup> Instead, it will attempt to make a fresh positive—but surprisingly simple—three-step exegetical/theological case for the continuation of the Land Promise in the New Testament.

### **The Land Promise: Three Exegetical/Theological Steps Demonstrating the Land Promise “Frame” around the New Testament**

Actually, the presence of the Land Promise in the New Testament can be proven in two steps. In the simplest terms, they are: 1) Jesus’ prediction that Jerusalem would be “... trampled (Gk *patoumene*) by the Gentiles (Gk *ta ethne*) until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24, HCSB); and 2) the echoing eschatological wording of Revelation 11:2<sup>14</sup>—“the nations (Gk *tois*

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<sup>13</sup> In a few cases, though, a directly opposing view of a disputed passage must be discussed, in order to demonstrate the greater likelihood of the viewpoint set forth in this paper. It should not be assumed that the various arguments of the new view cannot be answered. They most certainly can. However, the intention of this paper is to demonstrate that the positive case for the Land Promise continuing in the NT can be made in even a relatively small number of pages.

<sup>14</sup> My extensive—and varied—general background in regard to Revelation includes study notes on the book

for the *Life Recovery Bible*, gen. eds. Stephen Arterburn and David Stoop (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1992); the *Nelson Study Bible*, gen. ed. Earl Radmacher (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997); the *Apologetics Study Bible*, gen. eds. Edwin Blum and Jeremy Howard (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007); and the *Holman Christian Standard Bible Study Bible* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), as well as the chapter “Interpreting the Book of Revelation,” in *Interpreting the New*

*ethnesin*)... will trample (Gk *patesousin*) the holy city..." (HCSB). However, as will be seen below, the case becomes even stronger when two primary Great Commission passages<sup>15</sup>—Matthew 28:19-20 and Luke 24:47—are brought into play, specifically in regard to their eschatological fulfillment, spoken concerning two versions of the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24; Luke 21) and in the Apocalypse.

*"The times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24): Filling the Gap between Daniel 9:26 and 9:27*

To begin with crucial Old Testament background: Many interpreters overlook the fact that the great prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27 is closely tied to the Land Promise. That is clearly seen from its opening words in verse 24: "Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and *your holy city*" (HCSB, emphasis mine). The focus here on "your holy city" in the prophecy seems to be in direct answer to Daniel's specific concern for Jerusalem after reading Jeremiah's prophecy that the Babylonian Exile would be 70 years in length (9:2 [see Jer. 25, 29]), which is then passionately articulated to the Lord in his prayer (see Dan. 9:12, 16, 17, 18, 19). It is also very important to note that Daniel's prayer is clearly modeled after both: 1) more immediately, God's promise that He would hear His people's prayers and restore them to the Land in the part of Jeremiah Daniel had just read (29:12-13); and 2) the previous promises to the same effect at the ends of the "curses" sections of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30.

Continuing through the "seventy weeks"—which are almost certainly "weeks" of years, or 490 years [= 70 X 7]) that are prophesied to be the future for Israel ("your people" [Dan. 9:24])—reference to Jerusalem or the Temple is present

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*Testament*, eds. David Alan Black and David Dockery (B & H, 2001) and the article "The 'Earth-Dwellers' and the 'Heaven-Dwellers' in Revelation: An Overlooked Interpretive Key," with Emily Hunter, *Faith and Mission*, Fall, 2003. In recent years, I have devoted focused attention to Revelation 11 in "The Land as Covenant Backdrop: A Modest Response to Burge and Waltke," *CTR* (n.s. 9/1 [Fall 2011]: 59-73; and a follow-up unpublished 2012 ETS regional paper entitled "The Meaning and Fulfillment of the 'Preaching Texts' of the Apocalypse (Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10)."

<sup>15</sup> My 30-plus years of research/publication on the Great Commission include such works as A.B. Luter, "Discipleship and the Church," *BSac* 1980; "A New Testament Theology of the New Testament," Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1985; "Great Commission, The," in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* II: 1090-91 [1992]; *Truthful Living: What the New Testament Teaches about Recovery and Discipleship*, with Kathy McReynolds (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); "Women Disciples and the Great Commission," *Trinity Journal*, 1995; and *Women as Christ's Disciples*, with Kathy McReynolds (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997 and Fern, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2003/Crossings Book Club Hardback Ed., 2004).

in every verse: “the most holy place” (9:24); “Jerusalem” (9:25); “the city and the sanctuary” (9:26); “the temple” (9:27; all citations are from the HCSB). Thus, it logically follows to conclude in regard to Daniel 9:24-27 that, because spotlighted parts of the Land (i.e., “the holy city” and the Temple) are included alongside “your people” (Israel) throughout the prophecy, Daniel 9:24-27 effectively functions as a chronological extension revelation of the Land Promise to Israel. And, that extension has particular significance for the present paper, since *the time period it prophesies spans not only the New Testament, but all the way to the end of the age*.

To move ahead to the key point leading to Step 1 in this fresh case for the presence of the Land Promise in the New Testament, all consistent evangelicals understand Daniel 9:26 to be speaking of Jesus Christ’s death on the Cross (“... Messiah will be cut off...”), then the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (“... the city and the sanctuary...”) by the Romans in AD 70. But, the chronological tally through verses 25 and 26 is only 69 of the 70 sevens (= 483 years). And, since nothing that clearly fits the wording in verse 27 has taken place in subsequent history, it is likely that the seventieth “seven”—seven years—yet remains to be fulfilled.

It is precisely at this point that certain evangelicals have ridiculed this view of Daniel 9:27 because of the presumed free-floating “parenthesis” between verse 26, which extends until AD 70, and verse 27, which is understood to occur at the end of the age. It is the contention of this paper that the period between Daniel 9:26 and 9:27 is exactly what is described in Luke 21:24 as “the times of the Gentiles.” For whatever reasons, though this equating in Luke is done from strong textual evidence, as will now be seen, I am unaware of any previous attempts to substantially develop such a viewpoint.

So, what is the textual proof that “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24) is the undefined period between Daniel 9:26 and 9:27? First, the lead-in verses in both passages are descriptions of the destruction of Jerusalem (Dan. 9:26; Luke 21:20); Second, the wording “... days of vengeance (Gk *ekdikeseos*) to fulfill all the things that are written...” in Luke 21:22 seems to specifically refer to the fulfilling of Daniel 9:26 in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70, but also echoes God executing “the vengeance (LXX *ekdikousan*) of the covenant” in Leviticus 26:25a (HCSB), one of the curses that resulted in Israel’s defeat at the hands of an enemy force (26:25b), the end result of which would be expulsion from the Land (26:33). In that same vein, the wording “... [T]here will be great distress in the land (i.e., inferring the Land Promise) and wrath against this people” (Lk 21:23, HCSB). Third, the identification of this intertextual echo of Leviticus 26 in Luke 21 becomes doubly significant when it is realized that there is a “happy



ending” beyond the curses at the end of Leviticus 26: God keeping His Land Promise through the restoration of repentant Israel to the Land after an undefined period of time (see 26:34-45), which appears to be clearly implied in the wider wording of Luke 21:24: “... Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles *until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*” (HCSB, emphasis mine).

As John Stott observed in 1983 (see above): ... “[T]he Old Testament promises about the land are nowhere repeated in the New Testament, *except possibly in Luke 21:24.*” It should be asked here why Stott would qualify his otherwise seemingly confident overall conclusion about the New Testament with specific reference to Luke 21:24. Fairly obviously, it is because the wording “*until*<sup>16</sup> the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (emphasis mine) is most naturally taken as strongly implying that Jerusalem would be restored to the Jews as soon as the time period described as “the times of the Gentiles” in Luke 21:24 is completed.

Strong implication or not, the case for the continuation of the Land Promise in the New Testament is not made unless it can be determined from the New Testament: 1) when “the times of the Gentiles” are fulfilled; and 2) whether there is evidence that the Land Promise to the Jews is indeed also visible at that point. That is the focus of the next section of this paper.

*“They will trample the holy city”: Revelation 11:2 Fulfilling Luke 21:24*

It is quite illuminating to compare the wording of Luke 21:24 and Revelation 11:2, and their contexts and intertextual echoes, side-by-side. For example:

<b>Luke 21:24 and Context</b>	<b>Revelation 11:2 and Context</b>
Focus on Jerusalem (21:20ff.) is  Jerusalem	Focus on “the holy city” (11:2), which  “where [the] Lord was crucified =
“[T]rampled (Gk <i>pateo</i> ) by trample (Gk the Gentiles (Gk <i>ethnon</i> )” (21:24)	“[T]he nations (Gk <i>ethnesin</i> ) will  <i>pateo</i> ) the holy city” (echoing “the holy city” in Daniel 9:24)

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<sup>16</sup> BAGD, 129, states that the Gk *achri hou*, which is rendered “until” by HCSB in Lk. 21:24, is equal to *achri chronon ho* (“until the time when”) in cases like Lk. 21:24.

Inference that the Jewish people	Old Testament imagery related to the
will return to Jerusalem <i>after</i> the	two witnesses
fulfillment of “the times of the	(11:3-7) infer their Jewishness and the
Gentiles” (21:24)	stark contrast
	of “representatives of the peoples,
	tribes, languages
	and nations” (11:9) implies the
	eschatological Jerusalem (11:2, 8)
	described is a Jewish city

Two things should be noted at this point: 1) While *pateo* is used three additional times in the New Testament (Lk. 10:19; Rev. 14:20, 19:15), Luke 21:24 and Revelation 11:2 are the only obviously similar uses, strengthening the case that Revelation 11:2 and context is the point of fulfillment of Luke 21:24; and 2) The echo in Revelation 11:2 of “the holy city” from Daniel 9:24—which was connected to the Land Promise above—infers that Revelation 11 is looking back even beyond Luke 21 to the “seventy sevens” prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27, pointing the reader to the textual location where the remaining seven years in 9:27 spoken of above are fulfilled.

Of course, the case would be even stronger yet if it could be shown that there is such a seven-year period spoken of in Revelation 11, at the point which “the times of the Gentiles” in Luke 21:24 is apparently fulfilled. And, that is the case. The “42 months” (i.e., three and a half years) of Revelation 11:2 (HCSB) and the “1,260 days” (i.e., three and a half years) of 11:3 effectively equal seven years.

Nor can this point be muted by arguing these two periods speak of the same three and a half years. The description that the two witnesses (11:3) could not be harmed (11:5-7) during their three and a half years of prophetic ministry (11:3) in Jerusalem (11:8) does not square at all with the nations/Gentiles trampling Jerusalem (“the holy city”) for three and a half years (11:2). They must be two separate three and year periods, totaling seven years, with the two witnesses preceding the final “trampling” of Jerusalem for “42 months,” which makes even more sense, given that “42 months” is the exact wording used for the length of the Beast’s reign of terror in 13:5.

A compelling literary rationale for why the two three and a half year periods are presented in reverse order from their actual future chronological fulfillment is found in the inverted parallel structure of Revelation 10-11 (see Chart 1 below), the “interlude” in the Trumpet Judgments (8:6-11:19):

**Chart 1**  
**A Chiastic Structuring of Revelation 10-11<sup>17</sup>**

- a (10:1-4) Focus on the seven *thunders*
- b (10:5-7) The days of the *seventh trumpet's sounding* will complete God's hidden plan
- c (10:8-11) Eating the bittersweet (i.e., judgment and salvation) scroll and prophesying about many "*peoples, nations, languages and kings*"
- d (11:1-2) The Gentiles trample "the holy city" for "42 months" (see "42 months" in 13:5)
- e (11:3-6) Two witnesses prophesy indestructibly for "1,260 days"
- e' (11:7) The two witnesses killed by the Beast out of the abyss (ending the 1,260 days)
- d' (11:8) The dead bodies of the two witnesses are desecrated in "the great city" (beginning the 42 months of the reign of the Beast [which extends "42 months," according to 13:5])
- c' (11:9-13) The two witnesses raised and ascended "*in a cloud*"; those from among the "*peoples, families, languages and nations*" watch, as well as those who live in "the holy city," and fear and glorify God (see 14:6-7)
- b' (11:14-18) The *sounding of the seventh trumpet*
- a' (11:19) God's sanctuary in heaven opened; effects include rumblings of *thunder*

As can be seen, the centered 'e' layer of this chiasm is the focus of the structure: the "unharmable" three and a half year ministry of the two witnesses in Jerusalem—until the Lord lifts their protection, allowing them to be killed by the Beast (11:3-7). The 'd' layer, the "trampling" of Jerusalem by the Beast's forces, can only begin when—and because—the two witnesses are finally out of the way (11:2, 8-12).

At this juncture, it can be stated confidently that the presence of the Land Promise in the New Testament, extending from the "times of the Gentiles" prophecy in Luke 21:24 to that prophecy's fulfillment in Revelation 11, has been shown to be not just a possible understanding, but a high exegetical probability. However, as will be seen in the next section of the paper, the evidence for the Land Promise in the New Testament is strengthened yet more by how the Great Commission intersects with the textual data already considered.

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<sup>17</sup> Adapted from Luter, "The Meaning and Fulfillment of the 'Preaching Texts' of the Apocalypse (Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10)," Unpublished Evangelical Theological Society: Southwest Region paper, March 2012, 26-27.

*The Great Commission and the Land Promise: Hand-in-Hand until the End of the Age*

As much research and writing as I had done on the Great Commission over a twenty-five year period,<sup>18</sup> I never put 2 + 2 together to get 4 in regard to the relationship between the Matthean statement of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) and a very significant verse in the Matthean version of the Olivet Discourse (24:15). Simply put, *before* Jesus gave the command to His apostles to “Go... and make disciples of all the nations (Gk *panta ta ethne*)... to the end (Gk *sunteleias*) of the age” (28:19, 20, NKJV), He had *already* prophesied “And this gospel (Gk *euangelion*, the significance of which will be explained below) of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations (Gk *pasin tois ethnesin*), and then the end (Gk *telos*, looking back to *sunteleia*)<sup>19</sup> in the apostles’ original question to Jesus in 24:3, then playing off the prior similar uses of *telos* in 24:6, 13) will come” (24:14, NKJV). In other words, it appears that the key wording from Matthew’s version of the Great Commission cited above is related to 24:14 in the following way: *as Christ’s command that evangelism/disciple making will take place until the eschatological termination point, which is when the climatic evangelism described in 24:14 will take place.*

There is a somewhat different, but definitely complementary, angle seen in regard to Jesus’ statement of the Great Commission in Luke 24:46-48: “This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed in His name to all the nations (Gk *panta ta ethne*), beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses (Gk *martures*) of these things” (HCSB). Interestingly, much like what was just seen in Matthew, this wording also is closely related to the prior Lukan version of the Olivet Discourse (Lk 21:5-38)—though it is not as immediately obvious as the parallelism in Matthew.

For example, 21:13 speaks of “an opportunity for you to witness” (Gk *marturion* [HCSB]). Then, intriguingly, Jesus predicts that, when the Temple and Jerusalem is destroyed, the survivors would “be led captive into all the nations” (Gk *ta ethne panta* [21:24a]). To pull this together simply, in the Lukan Olivet Discourse, Jesus had already pointed His followers to the opportunity for witness that lay ahead (21:13) and that the survivors would be providentially placed in the

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<sup>18</sup> See note 12 for a selected bibliography.

<sup>19</sup> According to BAGD, 792, 811-12, for the purposes of this paper, there is no significant difference in meaning between *sunteleia* (“completion, close, end”) and *telos* (“end”).

very place (i.e., among “all the nations” [21:24a; 24:47] where Jesus’ Great Commission commanded them to be “witnesses” (24:48).

What is directly significant for this paper, though, is that the eschatological fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecies and Commission statements ties in quite closely with the Land Promise. How can this be demonstrated?

In Revelation 11,<sup>20</sup> the focus of step 2 discussed above, the early spotlight is on who the Lord who was revealing the Apocalypse to John chose to call “my two witnesses” (Gk *martusin* [11:3, HCSB]). After their death, there is celebration by representatives of “peoples, tribes, languages and nations” (11:9, HCSB), with the wording in the Apocalypse being the rough equivalent of “all the nations” in Matthew 24:14 and 28:19 and Luke 21:24a and 24:47. So, in this eschatological setting *in Jerusalem* (“the holy city” [11:2], where...[the] Lord was crucified” [11:8]), it is seen that there are “witnesses” and there are those representing “all the nations.” Thus, it would seem that all that’s lacking for there to be sufficient evidence to be able to draw a very strong conclusion that the eschatological fulfillment of the Great Commission statements in Matthew 28 and Luke 24 is a clear sense of the presence of the Gospel (and, by implication, significant conversions) in Revelation 11.

It has been claimed that the gospel is not present in the Apocalypse, but such an assertion is not even correct in regard to the usage of the Greek term for “gospel,” *euangelion*. It is found in 14:6a, along the cognate verb *euangelizo* (“to preach”). Particularly helpful in this context for the present study are the following explanations of: 1) to whom this “gospel” is to be preached (14:6b); and 2) what the specific emphases of the “gospel” message for the end times will be (14:7).

In regard to 1), this eschatological “gospel” will be preached to “every nation, tribe, language and people” (14:6b, HCSB), meaning, bottom line, the same groupings found in 11:9. In regard to 2), the “gospel” preaching at the end of the age will spotlight two things in light of God’s imminent judgment (14:7b): “*Fear God and give Him glory*” (14:7a, HCSB, emphasis mine).

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<sup>20</sup> Much of the exegetical/theological perspective presented in the latter section of the body of this article were worked out during the writing of the “Revelation” notes for the *Apologetics Study Bible* (2007) and the *Holman Christian Standard Bible Study Bible* (2010) and some of this material will be presented in regard to its practical implications in the forthcoming *New Life Study Bible* gen. ed. Steve Arterburn (Tyndale).

It should be noted here that this wording in 14:7a is the exact same message sung by the group of martyrs standing on “the sea of glass” in heaven just a few verses later (15:2): “Lord, who will not *fear* and *glorify Your name*...?” (15:4a, HCSB), strongly implying that it is this message which saved them and by which they got to heaven after their deaths. Also significant is wording that follows in the same verse: “... [F]or all the nations (Gk *panta ta ethne*) will come and worship (Gk *proskuneo*) before You” (15:4b, HCSB), which links back to the final wording in 14:7: “Worship (Gk *proskuneo*) the Maker of heaven and earth.”

If it can be reasonably concluded here that the end times “gospel” features (14:6-7) that will enable many from among “all the nations” (15:4; see 14:6) to get to heaven (15:2, 4) are: 1) fearing God; and 2) glorifying Him (14:7; 15:4), does it not follow that, when others in the Apocalypse are seen “fearing” and “glorifying” the Lord, they also are saved? Well, if that is indeed a logical conclusion, such salvation is precisely what will take place in Revelation 11:13b. When “the two witnesses” are raised from the dead by the Lord and ascend into heaven in a cloud (11:11-12), the reaction of “the peoples, tribes, languages and nations”—along with the Jews who would be expected to be there—in the streets of Jerusalem (11:2, 8) is “great fear.” However, after the following deadly earthquake (11:13a), the response of “the survivors” is now both: 1) fear and that they 2) “gave glory to the God of heaven” (11:13b, HCSB).

To draw quite a bit together at this point, it seems quite clear that John intended for readers of the Apocalypse to understand that the response of “the survivors” (i.e., apparently both Jews and Gentiles who will be in Jerusalem at that time) in Revelation 11:13b to fear and give glory to God (i.e., the two points of the “gospel” in 14:6 discussed above) means that they are saved at that point. It also means 11:13b describes at least a major aspect of the eschatological fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew 24:14 and the Great Commission commands in Matthew 28:19-20 and Luke 24:46-48. But, most significant for the present study, it all happens in end times Jerusalem (11:2, 8), in which the presence of an end times (11:2, 3) “sanctuary” (11:1-2 [see the discussion below]) and two supernaturally empowered “witnesses” who appear to be Jewish argue strongly for the continuation of the Land Promise. Given *who* they are, where they are and *when* in the future Revelation 11 will happen, what other exegetically probable explanation is readily available?

### Conclusion

The seemingly obvious conclusion to be drawn from this limited argumentation is that the purported absence of the Lord’s Land Promise to Israel from the New Testament is decidedly not the case. Exactly the opposite is true.

Even by just the three relatively brief steps explained above, it has been possible to demonstrate that: 1) “the times of the Gentiles” in Luke 21:24 ties into the great chronological prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27—which was seen to be extension of the Land Promise—as the period between verses 26 and 27; and 2) that “the times of the Gentiles” is completed in the “trampling of the holy city” in Revelation 11:2. Finally, 3) the Great Commission statements in Matthew 28 and Luke 24, growing as they do does out of Jesus’ predictions in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, are also largely fulfilled in the apparent great revival in Revelation 11:13b. In addition, Revelation 11 proves the continuing nature of Israel’s Land Promise because it depicts *Jewish people* (and Gentiles) *in Jerusalem* (11:2, 8), with a strong measure of *control over the Land* (11:3-7), *in the end times* (i.e., apparently the seven [= 3 ½ + 3 ½; see 11:2, 3] years of Daniel 9:27, which many evangelicals hold to be just before the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> An important consultation on “The People, the Land and the Future of Israel” was held in New York City October 3-5, 2013, sponsored by Chosen People Ministries. Perhaps additional fresh thinking on the Land Promise was presented in that meeting. Unfortunately, I have not yet had the opportunity to find out what was said in the various relevant sessions of that conference, so as to comment on it in this paper.