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THE LAND AS COVENANT BACKDROP: A MODEST RESPONSE TO BURGE AND WALTKE

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I. INTRODUCTION

A few months ago, I wrote a review of Gary Burge's *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to 'Holy Land' Theology*¹ for the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. It is a thought-provoking slender volume,² worthy of consideration by evangelical readers. However, I must admit I was somewhat shocked by Burge's ongoing pattern of (1) assuming that Jesus' *apparent* failure to refer to the land promises made to the Jewish people in the Old Testament in the Gospels somehow demonstrates *clearly* that He Himself fulfilled and replaced those promises; then, (2) in rapid fire order, lumping all the later New Testament books into that same perspective, simply because there is no *obvious* textual refutation to his previous assumption (i.e. that Jesus fulfilled and replaced the land promises to Israel).

For the purposes of this article, I am responding to one specific example of the kind of "sweep of the hand" eisegesis³ Burge employs: his treatment of the Book of Revelation.⁴ Regarding whether or not the Apocalypse

¹(Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010). My *JETS* review is forthcoming.

²Just over 130 pages of text, plus a selective annotated bibliography, notes and an index.

³According to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th Ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster) 369, *eisegesis* is "the interpretation of a text (as of the Bible) by reading into it one's own ideas." This, of course, is antithetical to the pursuit of biblical *exegesis*, the reading out of the meaning in the text.

⁴Burge, *Jesus and the Land*, 102–07.

reflects a “territorial theology” for Israel, he concludes, “Revelation does not look to the land as an object of hope and promise.”⁵

Burge’s overall claim that there are no NT passages which provide a biblical basis for either a present or end-times presence of Israel in the land brings to mind a similar claim and challenge made almost 20 years ago by Bruce Waltke, my esteemed former professor. In expressing his disagreement with progressive dispensationalism’s continued affirmation of land promises for Israel, Waltke stated, “If revised dispensationalism produced one passage in the entire New Testament that clearly presents the resettlement of national Israel in the land, I would join them. But I know of none!”⁶

Before proceeding further, I admit that, in a sense, I have little business taking on these “challenges.” After all, though I firmly believe in a future for Israel in the promised land, I am not a “Christian Zionist”—the viewpoint which Burge is criticizing.⁷ Also, though several leading progressive dispensationalists are respected former classmates or colleagues, I am not (at least, not yet) fully persuaded by all of the viewpoint’s biblical argumentation.⁸ And, it was specifically in the context of his critique of emerging progressive dispensationalism that Waltke threw down the gauntlet.⁹

However, I am accepting the common challenge offered by Burge and Waltke but in a purposely limited (i.e. “modest”) manner. Because of space limitations, first, I am only going to set forth one passage—Revelation 11—which according to Waltke, “clearly presents the resettlement of national Israel in the land. . . .” However, at that stage, all I will do is to clarify that the passage is most likely talking about the *land* of Israel. Next, I will bring the *people* aspect into play, arguing that at least a significant portion of those in view in Rev 11:1–13 are Jewish and, more significantly, that 11:13 is the

⁵Ibid., 108.

⁶B. K. Waltke, “A Response,” in C. A. Blaising and D. L. Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 357.

⁷By “Christian Zionism,” Burge means those who not only see a biblical basis for Israel being in the land today, but also, among other things, those who believe, effectively, that Israel can do no wrong and that this is the “terminal generation” before Jesus raptures the church (Burge, *Jesus and the Land*, 112–25).

⁸I am in essential agreement with, for example, most of the views expressed in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, as well as in Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Colorado Springs: Bridgepoint, 1993) and R. L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993). However, I have problems with much of Marvin Pate’s understanding of the Apocalypse laid out in C. M. Pate, ed., *Four Views of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

⁹Waltke, “A Response,” 347–59. Though Waltke had numerous positive things to say about the then fairly new theological position of progressive dispensationalism, he obviously was confident that his challenge in regard to the land would not be taken up—at least not successfully. Though it is highly possible others have responded directly to Waltke, I am not aware of it.

point of the conversion of “all Israel” promised in Rom 11:25–26. Third, I will succinctly explain how Rom 11:25–27 assumes the land promise as part of the background of its fulfillment in Rev 11:13. Fourth, I will also briefly develop how Rev 1:7b, which I also hold is fulfilled in Rev 11:13, echoes Zech 12:10, which also assumes the land promise. Fifth, I will summarize how the previous aspects of this study underscore the point that the land functions as a sort of “backdrop” to the more central features of God’s ongoing promise to Israel. Finally, I will close by asking and answering the question of whether Israel being in the land today has biblical significance by briefly probing the OT segment, which has the most direct bearing on the subject.

II. REVELATION 11:1–2, 8—THE LAND

The first two verses of Revelation 11 read,

Then I was given a measuring reed like a rod, with these words, “Go and measure God’s sanctuary and the altar, and count those who worship there. But, exclude the courtyard outside the sanctuary. Don’t measure it, because it is given to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for 42 months” (HCSB).

Since the Greek word translated “sanctuary” here (*naos*) is the standard term for “temple,” or the “sanctuary” within the Jewish temple,¹⁰ there are only two questions that must be answered to determine whether this passage is a NT example of the ongoing land promise to Israel: (1) Is this passage referring to an earthly or a heavenly temple? (2) If an earthly temple is in view, is Revelation 11 referring to a past time frame (i.e. before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70) or a future one (i.e. related to end-times events)?

The first question can be answered easily. There are 16 inclusions of *naos*, the normal Greek word in the Gospels for the Jerusalem temple (e.g. Matt 23:35; Mark 15:38; Luke 1:9; and, notably, the Johannine usage in John 2:20) in Revelation (3:12; 7:15; 11:1, 2, 19 [twice]; 14:15, 17; 15:5, 6, 8 [twice]; 16:1, 17; 21:22 [twice]). Eleven of the 16 include the additional descriptors “before” or “from [God’s] throne” or “in heaven” in the immediate context. Three of the remaining five uses point beyond the Second Coming to a temple either during Christ’s earthly kingdom (3:12) and to the eternal state, when no temple will be needed (21:22).

The only other uses in the Apocalypse are those cited above, in 11:1, 2. The *naos* of 11:1, 2 is described as being located in “the holy city” (11:2),

¹⁰W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich and F. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. “*naos*,” 533–34.

where the two witnesses of 11:3–7 are killed. The “holy city” here must mean Jerusalem, given that the same city in 11:8 is described as “where also their Lord was crucified” (HCSB), i.e. Jerusalem.

In regard to the second question, with but the scantiest attempt at proof, Burge asserts, “*Most interpreters* see genuine allusions to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.”¹¹ However, his sweeping claim is drastically overstated. Had Burge stated something like “Since the publication of John A. T. Robinson’s amazingly influential *Redating the New Testament*,¹² there has been an increase in the number of commentaries and other studies championing a pre-AD 70 dating for the Apocalypse,” I would have had no problem. But, that’s not what he wrote. His claim is that the bulk of (presumably) contemporary scholars of the Apocalypse date its writing before AD 70, which allows for the temple in Revelation 11 to be the one destroyed in AD 70.

That, however, is not what “most interpreters” who have published in the post-*Redating the New Testament* era actually hold. For example, writing in 1989, the venerable evangelical NT scholar and editor Walter Elwell wrote,

The traditional view for the date of the composition of Revelation is during the reign of Domitian (AD 81–96). The early church fathers affirmed this and most scholars since then have accepted this. . . . For those who want precision in such matters, there is a virtual consensus that Revelation was written between AD 94 and 96.¹³

Similarly, in 1997, G. R. Beasley-Murray, in the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, stated,

The majority opinion as to the date of Revelation is that of Irenaeus, who wrote concerning the book, “There has been no very long time since, but almost in our own day, toward the end of Domitian’s reign” (Irenaeus *Haer.* 5.30.3).¹⁴

¹¹Burge, *Jesus and the Land*, 105. Italics mine.

¹²(Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976). Yarbro Collins makes precisely the same point (“Revelation,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman [New York: Doubleday, 1992] V: 701). In actuality, Robinson’s work is thought-provoking, but largely amounts to a 350-plus page extended argument from silence, developing questionable implications of this ultimately unanswerable question: “If the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 had already happened, why isn’t it recorded in the New Testament?”

¹³W. A. Elwell, “Revelation,” in W. A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 1199.

¹⁴R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids, eds. (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997) 1028.

Since then, noted writers on the Apocalypse as diverse theologically as Raymond Brown (1997),¹⁵ Grant Osborne (2002),¹⁶ Ian Boxall (2006),¹⁷ and Marvin Pate (2007)¹⁸ all concur that the dating of the book during the latter years of the reign of Domitian is the clear majority view.

Let me be clear as to what has been concluded so far: (1) Based on the usage of the term in Revelation, it is far and away the most likely understanding that the *naos* in 11:1–2 is an earthly temple in Jerusalem (i.e. in the promised land); and (2) In spite of Burge's contention that the Apocalypse was written before the Second Temple was destroyed in AD 70, it is the considered view of *more scholars with an acknowledged specialty in regard to Revelation* that it was written in the 90s, well after the temple was destroyed by the Romans.

Since there has been no temple that has stood in Jerusalem in the nearly two millennia since, the logical conclusion is that what is pictured in Rev 11:1–2 is still future from our day. And, if there will be a Jewish temple in Jerusalem, it follows that there will also be Jewish people.

III. REVELATION 11:8–13, 14:6–7—THE PEOPLE AND A FULFILLED PROMISE

By the time the reader arrives at 11:13, the scene is surprisingly parallel to Pentecost in Acts 2. For example: (1) At Pentecost, there were Jews “from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5, HCSB) in Jerusalem, while in Rev 11:9 “representatives from the peoples, tribes, languages, and nations” (HCSB) came to Jerusalem (v. 8) to see the dead bodies of the two witnesses; (2) The theological turning point in both passages is resurrection and ascension: in the case of the Day of Pentecost, Jesus’ (see Peter’s reference in Acts 2:24, 32–33); in Revelation 11, the two witnesses (vv. 11–12); and (3) In Acts 2, the response to Peter’s preaching of the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus was that many of his hearers were “pierced to the heart” (v. 37), resulting in the repentant faith of 3,000 people (vv. 38, 41). In Revelation 11, the reader is told that the survivors of the great earthquake following the ascension of the two witnesses to heaven (v. 13a) “were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven” (v. 13b).

How does that parallel the faith of the throng in Acts 2? That’s where Rev 14:6–7 is very helpful. Among many common misconceptions about the

¹⁵ *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997) 805.

¹⁶ *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) 9.

¹⁷ *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006) 8.

¹⁸ “Revelation” in J. D. Hays, J. S. Duvall and C. M. Pate, *Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007) 375.

Apocalypse is that the gospel is not present. However, in 14:6, we find the lone use of *euangelion* (“good news, gospel”) in Revelation:

Then I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having the eternal gospel to announce to the inhabitants of the earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people (HCSB).

In 11:8, those present at the time of the resurrection and ascension of the two witnesses were “representatives of the peoples, tribes, languages and nations,” the same four groupings who are stated to be the target audience of the “eternal gospel” in 14:6.

Further, Rev 14:7a gives the expected response to the announcing of the “eternal gospel” as “Fear God and give Him glory” (HCSB). But, is the wording here intended to get across the idea that responding to this “gospel” message will actually save a person and get them to heaven? Apparently so, given that, in the very next chapter, the overcomers standing on a sea of glass in heaven wonder out loud why anyone would not “fear and glorify [God’s] name,” as they had done, before being martyred (15:2, 4; see also 12:11).

With 14:6–7 in mind, is there any reason—other than preconceived theological bias—why the wording in 11:13 (“the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven”) should not be taken as descriptive of repentance/saving faith?¹⁹ After all, that was the exact response referred to in wonder and praise by the overcomers *now in heaven* in 15:2, 4.

If this reasoning is correct, the question raised at this point is, “Who are the people who will be saved in Rev 11:13?” The answer would seem to be: 1) at least some Gentiles; and 2) at least a very large group of Jews.

In regard to the first group, Rev 11:9 speaks of “representatives” from all “nations” being in Jerusalem (v. 8) when the great earthquake hit (v. 13a). Since only “7,000” people were killed, it must be presumed that a number of these Gentile representatives would have made it through the devastation. It is just such “survivors” (Gk. *hoi loipoi*, lit., “the rest, the others, the remaining ones”), as we saw above, who feared God and glorified him, the expected response to the “eternal gospel.” Thus, this group of converted Gentiles in chapter 11 is very likely the overcomers seen standing on the sea of glass in heaven in chapter 15.

But, these Gentiles are hardly the only group in evidence in the context of Rev 11:13. After all, this earthquake will be in Jerusalem (11:8). And, there apparently will be many Jews there at that time, “worshipping” (Gk. *proskuneo*, the term for temple worship used, e.g. in Acts 24:11) in the

¹⁹Among major commentaries of the past decade, this same general reasoning is followed by, e.g. Osborne (*Revelation*, 433–35) and Boxall (*The Revelation of Saint John*, 167). For my argumentation concerning the relationship between repentance and faith in the NT, see A. B. Luter, Jr., “Repentance (NT),” in *ABD*, V: 642–44.

temple that will be standing in that day (Rev 11:1).²⁰ That strongly implies that the remainder of the survivors of the earthquake in 11:13a beyond the representatives of the nations (i.e. Gentiles) will be Jewish. Thus, it is hard to get around that what appears to be in view in 11:13b is a mass conversion of Jews.

When this thought registers with a person who knows biblical prophecy much at all, what immediately comes to mind is Rom 11:25b–26a: “A partial hardening has come to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved . . .” (HCSB).

What must be carefully noted in Romans 11, though, is that the phrase “all Israel” (v. 26a) is used in parallel to the wording “the full number of the Gentiles” (v. 25b). If that is a legitimate observation, it implies that, just as not every Gentile has been saved while Israel has been hardened, so not every Jew will be saved when the Lord dispels that hardening (though the actual number will, obviously, be *dramatically more* than was previously being saved!).

Such an understanding of Rom 11:25–26 fits with an ultimately unanswerable question related to Rev 11:13b: “Do other people beyond the earthquake survivors *in Jerusalem* get saved, also?” There is no way to know biblically. Having said this, though, it still seems that the best candidate passage in the Apocalypse for the location of the fulfillment of Paul’s prophecy/promise in Rom 11:25–26 is Rev 11:13: a very large number of Jews in Jerusalem repenting.

IV. THE LAND AS COVENANT BACKDROP TO ROMANS 11:25–27

Finally, the reason why ‘covenant backdrop’ is included in the title of this article comes into view. That part of the overall picture clarifies in considering the next verse and a half of Romans 11.

Verses 26b–27 contains OT citations that are Paul’s scriptural basis for his prophecy/promise in verses 25b–26a. The best understanding of where they are found in the Hebrew Bible seems to be that verses 26b–27a is quoting Isa 59:20–21a and verse 27b is echoing concepts in Jer 31:31–34.²¹

Without delving into the range of exegetical issues related to these quotations, it is helpful to focus on why Paul cuts off his quotation of Isaiah 59 with verse 21a, then adds in certain ideas prominent in Jer 31:31–34. The most obvious reason would seem to be to tie the conversion of “all Israel” to:

²⁰There is absolutely no other information given on other Jewish residents of the city or area. This is puzzling to current readers who have been to Israel, given the secular lifestyle of many—if not most—Jews in Israel today. However, perhaps the miraculous nature of the three and a half year ministry and prophesying of the two witnesses in Jerusalem (Rev 11:3–7) will have made a major impact on many previously hardened hearts of the Jewish onlookers.

²¹E.g. J. Lanier Burns, “The Future of Ethnic Israel in Romans 11,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 213–14.

1) "Zion" (Rom 11:26b), another name for Jerusalem (or the temple complex within it) through the quote from Isaiah 59 (which includes wording about the taking away of sins, much like Jer 31:34); and 2) fulfillment of the New Covenant (Rom 11:27), through the shifted reference to Jeremiah 31.

The first of these two, the use of "Zion," is difficult. The only occurrence of "Zion" in the Apocalypse is in 14:1, where Jesus, the Lamb, is seen standing "on Mount Zion" with the 144,000. However, this appears to be referring to the heavenly Zion, in a usage parallel to the frequent references to the temple in heaven mentioned above. However, this understanding does not necessarily undermine what has been concluded about the land of Israel to this point in Revelation 11. The wording in Romans 11 ("*from* Zion"), as opposed to the wording in Isaiah 59 ("*to* Zion") may help here, as does the elegant chiasmic structuring of Revelation 14–15.

a (14:1–5) The Lamb, preparing to return to earth, and the 144,000 on Mount Zion in heaven

b (14:6–7) The announcing of "the eternal gospel": fear, glorify and worship God!

c (14:8–11) God's wrath on Babylon the Great and the beast-worshippers

d (14:12–13) The perseverance of the saints and the blessed deaths of the martyrs

d' (14:14–16) Previewing the coming of the Son of Man (see v. 14; I): the "fields white unto harvest"

c' (14:17–20) Previewing the coming of the Son of Man (II): the grapes of wrath

b' (15:1–4) The overcomers now in heaven: singing about fearing, glorifying and worshipping the Lord!

a' (15:5–8) The heavenly sanctuary (Gk. *naos*) as the climactic judgment of the bowls of wrath are about to be poured out on the earth²²

If, as argued earlier, Rev 14:6–7 is a later explanation of what happened in 11:13, then the above structure helps us put things in chapter 11 in a wider context. For example, 14:1–5 gets across to us that Jesus is preparing to

²²My initial development of this structuring was presented as A. Boyd Luter, "Twin Peaks: The Inverted Parallel Structures in Revelation 13–15," Unpublished E.T.S. Far West regional paper, 1995.

come to earth “from Zion,” as in Rom 11:26. Revelation 14:6–7 tells the reader *how* the people of Israel have their “godlessness” and “sins” taken away (Rom 11:26, 27): through their response to “the eternal gospel” (Rev 11:13). All of this is in preparation for the final coming of the Son of Man (14:14–16; 19:11 ff.; see Rev 1:7).

The original wording in Isaiah 59 (“to Zion”) is also significant here. After all, the events in Revelation 11 occur in Jerusalem, the location of the temple (vv. 1–2) and where Jesus was crucified (v. 8). So, it is not inaccurate to say that, in fulfilling the Scripture we have been considering: Jesus will come *from Zion* (in heaven) *to Zion* (earthly Jerusalem).

However, the use of Jeremiah 31 in Rom 11:27 is also important. After all, Jer 31:31–34 is the only passage in the Hebrew Bible that uses the wording “new covenant.” To be noted here is the fact that most of the focus of the context of Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant focuses on the people of Israel. However, the same wording that begins that wondrous passage in verse 31 (“Look, the days are coming...” [HCSB]) shortly thereafter brings directly into play the land aspect of the new promise (vv. 38–40; note especially the end of v. 40). Here we begin to get the sense as to how the ongoing land promise functions in regard to the new covenant: as what I call a “covenant backdrop.”

V. THE LAND AS COVENANT BACKDROP TO REVELATION 1:7b

In our continuing exploration of Revelation 11, it should be noted that the passage is also the most likely point in the book for the fulfillment of the echo of Zech 12:10 in Rev 1:7b: “. . . [E]very eye will see Him, including those who pierced Him. And all the families of the earth will mourn over Him” (HCSB).

In my opinion, this brief citation in Rev 1:7b, along with how it relates to the original wording in Zech 12:10 are among the most often misunderstood aspects of the interpretation of the Apocalypse. Too often, it is (wrongly) assumed that the mourning referred to in Rev 1:7 is a “too little, too late” part of the judgment related to Jesus’ return.²³ However, that perspective completely ignores how the wording is used in Zechariah 12. There, that God pours out his “spirit of grace” (Heb. *ruach hen*; LXX *pneuma charitos*) upon those looking at the One “whom they pierced” makes it clear he is directly involved with this mourning (i.e. that it is true repentance of a saving nature [see, e.g. 2 Pet 3:9]).

However, there is more to see here than just that the mourning of Rev 1:7b is salvific. It must also be taken into account that Zech 12:10 describes the mourners as “the house of David” (i.e. the Jews), but also as “the residents of Jerusalem” (HCSB). Either phrase would have been clearly

²³E.g. Alan F. Johnson, “Revelation,” in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. F. E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 12:422–23.

sufficient to make the point that the repentant group here is Jewish. However, “the residents of Jerusalem” focuses on the precise physical location of where Zech 12:10 will be fulfilled: in Jerusalem, precisely where it was seen in the last section that the great promise of Rom 11:25–26 will be fulfilled, in Rev 11:13.

The wording “the residents of Jerusalem” also allows for the way John words Rev 1:7b: “And all the families of the earth will mourn over Him” (HCSB). “Residents” is a word general enough to apply to those living—or possibly even visiting—in Jerusalem at that time who are not Jews. Also, “families” (Gk. *phulai*) is found in 11:9, as part of the description of those present to celebrate the deaths of the two witnesses. Further, 11:2 refers to “the nations” (Gk. *tois ethnesin*, “the Gentiles”) as in control of “the holy city” (i.e. Jerusalem) at that point. Thus, the understanding that the revival in Jerusalem in 11:13 includes both Jews and Gentiles argued above is seen to fit nicely with a careful consideration of the immediate context in Zech 12:10 of the citation in Rev 1:7b.

Before proceeding, there is an additional apparent “loose ends” question in regard to how Zech 12:10/Rev 1:7b is fulfilled in Revelation 11 that requires careful explanation: “How can the wording of Rev 1:7 fit with chapter 11, given that Jesus does not actually appear visibly at that point in time?” The best answer comes from the collage effect of the way Dan 7:13 and Zech 12:10 are merged in Rev 1:7, (apparently with some of John’s own wording included).

In 1:7, the only wording from Dan 7:13 is about Jesus (the Son of Man in Daniel 7 and in Rev 1:13ff.) “coming with the clouds.” That part of Rev 1:7 is fulfilled in the Apocalypse in preview in 14:14 ff., then, in final outworking, in 19:11ff.

The next part of Rev 1:7 (“... and every eye will see Him, including those who pierced Him” [HCSB]) is played off Zech 12:10, which says “... they will look at Me whom they pierced” [HCSB]. But, by the use of the “and” (Gk. *kai*) here, this part of Zech 12:10 is connected to the previous brief Daniel 7 citation.

What difference does that make? A great deal! With the two OT citations merged together—not unlike what was discussed above in Rom 11:26–27—the wording “He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see Him, including those who pierced Him” refers to when Christ actually comes back, when he will apparently somehow be seen by all people alive at that point.

The pivot to wording from Zech 12:10 in this collage citation in Rev 1:7 is “including those who pierced Him.” But, because, as discussed above, the wording of Zech 12:10 supports the sense that the Jews’ (i.e. the then alive descendants of those who crucified Jesus) mourning will be repentance in keeping with the Lord’s “spirit of grace” upon them, their response to Christ coming back will be heartfelt recognition and appreciation of his redemptive death, not because it is too late to be saved.

The remaining relevant wording in Rev 1:7 ("And all the families of the earth will mourn over Him") has already been dealt with as part of the discussion of the great revival of Jews and Gentiles in 11:13. However, there are actually numerous details about the lead-in context of 11:13 that make it eerily parallel to looking on Jesus, the One who was pierced: (1) Both Jesus and the two figures in 11:3ff. are called *martus* ("witness") in Revelation (3:14; 11:3); (2) The length of Jesus' ministry was probably roughly three years, while that of the two witnesses was about three and a half years (11:3); (3) Both Jesus and the two witnesses are killed in Jerusalem, "the holy city" (11:8); (4) Jesus was resurrected on the third day (1 Cor 15:4) and the two witnesses came to life after three and a half days (Rev 11:11); (5) Both wider narratives include strong earthquakes in Jerusalem (Matt 27:51); (6) Both wider narratives include descriptions of ascension to heaven (Acts 1:9–11; Rev 11:12),²⁴ and (7) In the wake of the earthquakes, both wider narratives describe reactions of God-focused fear and apparent faith (Matt 27:54; Rev 11:13).

Are these seven parallels mere coincidence? That is very doubtful. Though the crowds in Revelation 11 will actually be looking at the two witnesses, the sense of *déjà vu* in regard to the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ will be present virtually everywhere they look. It will be almost like they will be living through a real life re-run of "The Passion of the Christ." It will certainly feel about as close to looking on the one who was pierced as could possibly happen!

VI. THE LAND: COVENANT "BACKDROP," YES, BUT PART OF THE PICTURE

For the purposes of this article, it should be underscored that the land was again seen in the last section to function as a sort of "backdrop" to the fulfillment of Zech 12:10/Rev 1:7b in Revelation 11. Without question, the central aspect of what is taking place in Zech 12:10 is that the Lord's "spirit of grace" comes upon "the house of David" (i.e. the Jews). However, it is still very much part of the overall picture that this amazing God-directed repentant mourning happens *in Jerusalem* (i.e. in the promised land).

To come full circle: I believe that a reasonable exegetical probability has been established above for Rev 11:1–13 being "one NT passage that pictures the resettlement of national Israel in the land," to restate Waltke's challenge. I should point out, however, that, though he may have assumed it, Dr. Waltke did not state that the Jews had to be in complete control of the land. In my studied opinion, Revelation 11 does not depict that to be the case, only that a significant proportion of the Jewish people will be *in the land* when

²⁴Several of these parallels have also been noted by Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 85.

the long-awaited prophecies concerning Israel discussed above in Isaiah 59, Jeremiah 31, Zechariah 12, Romans 11 and Rev 1:7b are fulfilled in Rev 11:13.

In regard to Burge's wider perspective in *Jesus and the Land*, it is heartening that, in regard to Romans 11, he understands that "Paul thus anticipates a future redemption in the plan of God that will include the Jewish people who originally rejected Christ."²⁵ His inability to perceive in the NT the ongoing assuming of the land aspect of the Lord's promise to Israel appears to reflect more his passionate bias²⁶ in favor of the Palestinian Christian community than the most careful exegesis of key NT passages and the OT texts/contexts cited there. In other words, though his eyes are open to the most important part of the portrait—the people framed there (i.e. the future salvation of Israel), he effectively chooses to ignore the existence of the pictorial backdrop (i.e. the land).

VII. EPILOGUE: THE THEOLOGICAL ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Before closing, I feel it would be evasive if I did not briefly address the always looming question in this area of study: "Is there a legitimate biblical basis for Israel currently being in the land of Palestine?" Allow me to initially say, "The case I've made to this point argues that Israel will be in the land at the end of the age. Also, I do believe there is a legitimate scriptural basis for their possession of the land in the early twenty-first century, but the issue deserves more of an explanation than a Yes or No answer."

In an effort to be concise,²⁷ I will cut to the chase and say that it seems to me that Ezekiel 36–37 contain the most directly relevant passages to this issue in the entire Bible. Though not including the wording "new covenant," Ezekiel 36 is, without question, a highly significant complementary revelation of the new covenant,²⁸ written around a decade after Jer 31:31–34.²⁹ The first half of Ezekiel 37, the well-known "Valley of Dry Bones" apocalyptic vision, actually explains in more depth how the new covenant promises of chapter 36 would play out in the future.

²⁵Burge, *Jesus and the Land*, 89.

²⁶I elaborate on my basis for this concern in my forthcoming *JETS* review of *Jesus and the Land*.

²⁷Numerous tomes have been written on whether or not the modern state of Israel has a divinely-given right to the land. Frankly, it is easier to be lengthy than succinct when addressing this subject.

²⁸S. B. Cowan, "Covenant," in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, eds. Chad Brand, Charles Draper and Archie England (Nashville: Holman, 2003) 358.

²⁹I concur with Charles Dyer, who dates Jeremiah 31 in 597 BC (C. H. Dyer, "Jeremiah," in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck [Colorado Springs: Victor, 1985] 1126) and Ezekiel 36–37 in 585 BC (Dyer, "Ezekiel," *BKC: OT*, 1293).

One of the major ways Jeremiah 31 contrasts the new covenant with the previous one the Lord made with Israel coming out of Egypt (v. 32) is by his declaration “I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts” (v. 33, HCSB). Ezekiel 36:26–27 makes it clear that the agency by which this internalization takes place is the Holy Spirit:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow My statutes and carefully observe my ordinances (HCSB).

The role of the Holy Spirit in regard to the new covenant is critically important to understand. Paul refers to the Spirit as that which “produces life” (Gk. *zoopoieo*, a word which also refers to resurrection in the NT [see, e.g. John 5:21; Rom 4:17; 1 Cor 15:22]) related to the ministry of the new covenant in 2 Cor 3:6. The strong imagery Paul employs there is less surprising,³⁰ though, when it is recalled that is exactly what is pictured in the Valley of Dry Bones vision in Ezekiel 37: *new life!*

For the purposes of this article, it must be noted that the vision in Ezekiel 37 does not allow the reader to think of this spiritual rebirth for Israel without bringing the land into play. In 36:24, the Lord promises, “I will take you from *the nations* and gather you from *all the countries*, and will bring you into your own land” (HCSB, italics mine). The wording in verse 24 is quite unusual, given that what was being immediately envisioned was Judah’s return from an exile to *one* nation: Babylon.³¹ Then, using resurrection imagery, 37:12 echoes: “. . . I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them, My people, and lead you into the land of Israel” (HCSB).

In carefully considering the message of the vision in Ezek 37:1–14, there appears to be two sequential steps³² pictured:

Step 1—The nation is raised from the grave (i.e. made to have a hope for a future as a nation) and returned to the land

³⁰Another thing that makes Paul’s usage less surprising is that Ezek 37:1–14 is the most likely candidate for the passage Jesus had in mind when he asked Nicodemus, “Are you a teacher of Israel and don’t know these things?” (John 3:10, HCSB). The new birth by the Holy Spirit (vv. 5–6) is simply another analogy Jesus employs to make the point of new life through the Spirit that is the focus of the vision in Ezekiel 37. Jesus was telling Nicodemus that he should have recognized that description of a centerpiece aspect of the new covenant, according to Ezekiel.

³¹This is very close to the implication drawn—correctly, in my view—by Lamar E. Cooper, Sr., *Ezekiel*, NAC 17 (Nashville: Broadman, 1994) 316.

³²The following is essentially the same view as that of Ralph H. Alexander, “Ezekiel,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. F. E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 925–26.

Step 2— The nation, now in the land and portrayed as “a vast army” (v. 10, HCSB), has the *ruach* (LXX *pneuma*) of God, which verse 14 identifies as the Holy Spirit, breathed into it and they are finally able to “settle” in “[their] own land” (v. 14).

The main point I am driving at from Ezekiel 36–37 is: The first step (i.e. a renewed national hope and a return to the land) has occurred twice since Ezekiel’s prophecies of the new covenant were revealed. The first time was after 70 years in Babylon, as Jeremiah predicted in 25:11–12 and 29:10. The second time, “from all the countries,” as the wording in Ezek 36:24 reads, happened in AD 1948.

However, the second step is a very different matter. Yes, the Holy Spirit, promised in connection with the new covenant in Ezekiel 36–37, indeed came into the lives of many individual Jews who became believers, especially in the early chapters of Acts. However, that is nowhere close to “the whole house of Israel,” the predicted recipients in Ezek 37:11. Thus, Step 2 has not happened in the corporate sense yet.

In looking to the Apocalypse for a likely location of when the Valley of Dry Bones vision might be fulfilled at the end of the age, the closest thing to a picture of “a vast army” (Ezek 37:10) of Jews is Rev 7:1–8. There, the 144,000 “from every tribe of the sons of Israel” (see Ezek 37:11, 15 ff.) are pictured in what appears to be a military formation, much like the 12 tribes camped in the wilderness (Numbers 2).

Such an understanding is strengthened by the wording that the 144,000 “slaves of God” (HCSB) —clearly believers at this point, if not before—are “sealed” (Rev 7:3–4). While the meaning of “seal” (Gk. *sphragizo*) infers the Lord’s ownership, as well as serving as protection from at least some of the onslaught of the trumpet judgments (see 9:4), that does not exclude the idea of the sealing of the Holy Spirit, a key aspect of the Spirit’s new covenant ministry (see Eph 1:14; 4:30),³³ being in play here.

Is it, then, merely coincidental that the 144,000 of Rev 7:1–8 are later referred to as “redeemed from the human race as the *firstfruits* for God and the Lamb” (14:4, HCSB, italics mine)? That is unlikely. Certainly, the godly quality of their lives reflects one aspect of the meaning of the concept of “first fruits.” However, the first fruits (i.e. that which is initially brought in) of a harvest also assume the larger proportion of the harvest still to be gathered.³⁴ And, since 14:14–16 describes just such a salvific “harvest of the earth” (v. 15) by Christ, the Son of Man (vv. 14, 16),³⁵ only a few verses

³³See my discussion of this possibility in A. Boyd Luter, “Seal,” in the *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John Barry (Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, forthcoming).

³⁴See my development of this implication in Luter, “Firstfruits,” *Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

³⁵Bauckham, *Theology*, 94–98, makes a strong case that Rev 14:14–16 pictures a grain harvest of salvation and 14:17–20 depicts “the grapes of wrath” of divine judgment.

after 14:4, this second meaning is most surely in play. That harvest may well be what was focused on in this article in 11:13: a massive revival in Jerusalem that includes both Jews and Gentiles.

All this is to say that, since Step 1 (see above) has happened twice, but Step 2 has not yet taken place in the predicted corporate sense (i.e. “the whole house of Israel,” “a vast army”), two possibilities could occur in the time ahead: 1) the Jewish people now in the land could, by whatever means, in the Lord’s sovereign timing, enter the circumstances in which the massive conversion of Rev 11:13 (see above) takes place; or 2) because of their ongoing unbelief and disobedience to the Lord, as has happened twice before, they could be removed from the land, only to return yet again at some later point.

Because the Lord has promised, we can be totally confident that Ezekiel 37 will eventually be fulfilled completely, though there is no way to know when. That temporal uncertainty should not be considered problematic by us as believers, though, as Peter wisely counsels:

Dear friends, don’t let this one thing escape you: With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance (2 Pet 3:8–9, HCSB).

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