

# PARTAKERS OF THE GOD-ALLOTTED LAND

by James Fite

Most Bible readers may recognize that the entire Old Testament revolves around a particular theme—the land. Land was originally given to the created, fruitful, and multiplied man when God charged them to subdue and possess the earth (Gen. 1:26-28). Later, Jehovah identified a specific and choice portion of the earth and gave it to a particularly selected people—the descendants of Abraham. God called Abram out of the land of the Chaldeans into a land that He promised to give to him and to his seed (Acts 7:2-5; Gen. 12:1-7). Jehovah subsequently confirmed this promise through a covenant with Abram that specified the boundaries of this land (15:18-21)—a promise that was, to a certain extent, fulfilled over fourteen generations later, with Solomon, a descendant of Abraham and a seed of David (1 Kings 4:21; cf. Matt. 1:17). Despite later failures on the part of the children of Israel, during which time they were dispossessed of the land, the last two books of the Old Testament reiterate God's continued interest and determination to recover and restore the promised land to His elect (cf. Zech. 2:12; Mal. 3:12, 18).

In the New Testament, however, there is a drastic turn from the focus of the Old Testament, the physical land, to a new focus, a person—the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:1; Rev. 1:1; 22:20-21), though the relationship between the two are clearly shown. The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians illustrates this transfer of focus by first speaking of Christ being the reality and fulfillment of the allotted portion of the promised land for the mutual, eternal satisfaction of God and man. Colossians then identifies the organic process by which the church is built up to express and represent Christ as the good land.

## Christ Being the Allotted Portion of the Saints

The *Recovery Version* translates Colossians 1:12 in this way: "A share of the allotted portion of the saints in the light." Most English translations render the Greek word κλήρου (klērou, "a lot") explicitly as "the inheritance." The origin of this Greek word traces back to the common and accepted practice of using some system of randomness (e.g. "lot") in the allocation process so that it would be perceived as fair or equitable. The versions in the King James tradition translate the Greek word μερίδα (merida, "a share") as "partakers" of this inheritance, whereas the revised tradition tends to translate it "share." Young's Literal Translation translates it as "participation." The Douay-Rheims ("partakers of the lot") and Orthodox Jewish Bible ("share of the allotted nachalah") translations are among the less common, drawing on the thought of lot or allotment, which is part and parcel of the Old Testament legal framework for distributing property to heirs.

Paul's use of both κλήρου and μερίδα delineates the manner in which a larger portion of inheritance of Israel's land was distributed among beneficiaries. Matthew Poole, commenting on verse 12, highlights the clear connection of these New Testament terms to the Old Testament type of the apportionment of the land of Canaan: "*To be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; to have a part in the lot of the purchased inheritance with them that are sanctified, Acts xxvi. 18; Ephesians i. 14.* The apostle seems to allude to the

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land of Canaan, wherein a portion was assigned to every one by lot for his inheritance” (707). Alexander Maclaren makes a similar observation that Colossians 1:12 is alluding to the promised land: “The phrase ‘to be partakers’ is accurately rendered ‘for the portion,’ and carries a distinct allusion to the partition of the promised land to Israel by which each man had his lot or share in the common inheritance” (6503).

### *Walking, Being Rooted, and Being Built Up in Christ as the Believers’ Allotted Portion*

In Colossians 2:6-7 Paul seems to refer to Christ as the reality of the land. In verse 6 the believers in Christ are urged to walk in Christ, having received Him. Witness Lee, commenting on the word *walk*, notes how this is analogous to being in the good land: “As we have received Christ, we should walk in Him. Here to walk is to live, to act, to behave, and to have our being. We should walk, live, and act in Christ that we may enjoy His riches, just as the children of Israel lived in the good land, enjoying all its rich produce” (*Recovery Version*, v. 6, note 2). The believers’ receiving “Christ, Jesus the Lord” in Colossians 2:6 is consistent with what is revealed in John 1:12, which speaks of receiving Jesus Christ as the incarnated Word by believing into His name. In Colossians 2 Paul is implying that since we have “received the Christ” on “the solid basis” of our faith in Him who is our allotment of the good land, we should continue to participate in and enjoy Him, “having been...established in the faith” (vv. 5-7). In verse 7 Paul likens the believers to plants that have “been rooted” and are “being built up in Him,” thereby connecting growth with building. Concerning being rooted, Lee says,

Like plants, we are living organisms. As such, we have been rooted in Christ, our soil, our earth, that we may absorb all His riches as nourishment. These riches become the element and substance with which we grow and are built up. To be rooted is for the growth in life. This rooting has been completed already. To be built up is for the building of the Body of Christ. This is still going on. Both these matters are in Christ. (*Recovery Version*, v. 7, note 1)

Christ is the reality of the elemental nutrients in the environment and in the soil of the good land. The believers absorb and process these nutrients for growth. This growth in turn issues in an organic building up of “the church, which is His Body” (Eph. 1:22-23).

### *The Importance of Land in the Old Testament*

The first biblical mention of the earth characterizes it as “waste and empty” (Gen. 1:2, Darby) and as being submerged by water (v. 9). Notably, on the third day the dry land appeared and was clearly delineated from the sea. On this same day “the earth brought forth vegetation” (v. 12, New American Standard). The third day—which brought forth living, seed-yielding, and fruit-bearing grass, herbs, and trees—hints at Christ’s life-giving resurrection (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3).

The details describing what happened on the sixth day, during which “God created man in His own image” (Gen. 1:27), further imply a sublime divine purpose related to both man and the earth. The phrase *let Us* (v. 26) speaks of a conference of the Godhead and supports Paul’s assertion that there was a mysterious divine economy hidden in the Triune God to carry out His predetermined eternal purpose (cf. Eph. 3:9-11). The repeated divine commands for man to “subdue” the earth and “have dominion”—especially “over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth”—forebode an impending satanic resistance to the accomplishment of God’s intention for the earth, that is, for the land (Gen. 1:26, 28).

Indeed, chapters 3 through 11 describe a four-step process, instigated by a competing, evil will, during which man fell away from God and from His intention. As a result of the fall, when man was “scattered...over the surface of all the earth” (11:8-9), he bore the fallen, satanic expression of rebellion, confusion, and division rather than the image of



God and His kingdom. God was thus eventually compelled to turn away from the created and fallen Adamic race and have a new beginning with a subset of called-out persons, headed up by Abraham, the father of faith (cf. Rom. 4:16). Genesis 11 thus concludes with Terah, the father of Abraham, taking a step to bring his family out of the fallen region of the Chaldeans, with the intention “to go to the land of Canaan” (v. 31).

In 12:1 Jehovah called out Abraham a second time “to the land” that Jehovah would show him, this time further specifying that Abraham leave his relatives and his father’s house.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, Abraham began to learn how to live by faith, thereby becoming the father of all those “who are of faith” (Gal. 3:7). In Genesis 12 God first uttered His repeated promise to give the land to Abraham’s seed (v. 7; cf. 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3-4; 28:4, 13; 35:12; 48:4).

In 13:15 Jehovah said, “All the land that you see I will give to you and to your seed forever.” The apostle Paul emphasizes that this promise to Abraham was not “to the seeds, as concerning many, but as concerning one: ‘And to your seed,’ who is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). Paul then applies the seed not only to Christ but also to all the believers in Christ: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”; the many “are all one in Christ Jesus” (vv. 26, 28). Thus, Paul establishes that all the believers in Christ are one corporate seed, joint heirs: “If you are of Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise” (v. 29).

Genesis 14 describes how Abraham, through his Christ-assisted military victory, regained possession of a part of the earth on God’s behalf. Abraham testified how he lifted up his hand “to Jehovah, God the Most High,” and referred to Him as the “Possessor of heaven and earth” (v. 22). This is a word that Abraham heard from Melchizedek (v. 19), who, as the interceding priest for Abraham, is a type of Christ as the kingly High Priest (cf. Heb. 7:1-3). Afterward, Jehovah promised Abraham a seed, who would be his heir and who would in turn provide an uncountable number of descendants (Gen. 12:7; cf. 15:3-5). Jehovah also goes on to say that He would give Abraham “this land to inherit it” (v. 7). Through a God-prescribed process of offering, this promise was ratified as a covenant with Abraham and his descendants (v. 18). However, Jehovah also told Abraham that it would be four hundred years before Abraham’s seed would come out of “a land that is not theirs” to possess this portion of land (vv. 13-14). God’s word was indeed fulfilled when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the wilderness, with the intention to bring them back to this God-promised land (cf. Acts 7:6).<sup>2</sup>

**M**oses—near the end of the forty-year wilderness journey from Egypt to the God-promised land—made specific arrangements for the allocation of the land among the children of Israel. There were three groups in these arrangements. The first group comprised nine and a half tribes, who were allotted land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan and the Dead Sea.<sup>3</sup> The record is specific in stating that this portion of the land was inherited “by lot” (Num. 34:13; Josh. 14:2). The second group, consisting of two and a half tribes, received land that they had chosen for themselves by their own preference in advance of the other tribes. This land was eastward, “beyond the Jordan” (Num. 34:15).<sup>4</sup> The third group—the Levites, the tribe comprising the priests and those who served God’s house—did not receive a stand-alone apportionment of land. Instead, they were to live among the other tribes, who were to set aside within their allotment certain cities and surrounding pasture lands for them (35:1-8; Josh. 14:3).

The books of Moses contain many details both prescribing and proscribing the children of Israel’s worship, living, comportment, and interaction with one another in the land. Moses also provided many details related to the use, allocation, and inheritance of the land. Several of these statutes, when traced, can be considered as being significant to the coming of Christ.

One such ordinance applied to Ruth, who was a notable ancestor of Christ, being one of only five women explicitly mentioned in His genealogy (Matt. 1:5). In her account she is repeatedly referred to as “Ruth the Moabitess” (Ruth 1:22; 2:2, 21; 4:5, 10). Lee points out that “Deuteronomy 23:3 forbade the Moabites to enter the assembly of Jehovah, even

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member  
belongs to  
the family.

to the tenth generation" (*Recovery Version*, Matt. 1:5, note 3). However, other ordinances gave special harvest gleanings rights to the poor, the sojourners, the orphans, and the widows, regardless of their ethnic provenance (Lev. 23:22; Deut. 24:19). Ruth is illustrative of someone who benefitted from these ordinances by exercising her right as a sojourner and a widow to partake of the gleanings of the harvest, even though she was a descendant of Moab. Furthermore, Lee notes that Ruth "not only was accepted by the Lord but also became one of the most important ancestors of Christ because she sought God and God's people (Ruth 1:15-17; 2:11-12)" (*Recovery Version*, Matt. 1:5, note 3).

Leviticus 25:8-17 contains another unique legal statute concerning the land in that it established long-term and enduring ownership rights of the allotted portions. This passage refers to the fiftieth Pentecostal year, the year of jubilee, during which every person was to return to the possession of his family. The key legal premise here rests on the fact that every Hebrew family who entered the good land with Joshua was apportioned land. However, this ordinance anticipated that over time some Israelites might become debtors and, as a result, be forced to give up their possession. In so doing, they would thus lose their liberty and become servants to others. The ordinances of Moses limited their time of service to seven years, but there were ways through which such ones could be kept in servitude longer (cf. Exo. 21:2-6). However, God spoke to Moses of a special event that was to take place every fifty years: "You shall sanctify the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family. The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you" (Lev. 25:10-11). The phrases *return to his possession* and *return to his family* imply that the land is a mutual possession. On one hand, the allotted land is the possession of its occupants, its inheritors. On the other hand, it is the people who belong to the land, perhaps analogous to the way that each individual member belongs to the family. In this latter sense, the land "owns" the people. We are Christ's (cf. 1 Cor. 15:23), that is, those who belong to Him. The prodigal son in Luke 15 left the father, not vice versa; hence, he needed to return to his father.

There does not appear to be a record in the Old Testament that the jubilee was actually ever practiced by the children of Israel. However, besides the portion in Leviticus, other verses mention the jubilee; for example, the year of jubilee is called the "acceptable time" in Isaiah 49:8, and the "acceptable year" in Isaiah 61:2. Isaiah 49 connects Christ as the Servant of Jehovah and the Redeemer of Israel to the restoration of the inheritance. Verse 7 refers to Christ as the "Redeemer of Israel," "the despised One," (cf. 53:3), and the "Holy One of Israel." Verse 8 of chapter 49 continues, "In an acceptable time I have answered You, / And in a day of salvation I have helped You; / And I will preserve You and give You for a covenant of the people, / To restore the land, to apportion the desolate inheritances." These verses equate Jehovah, the Giver of the land, with Christ. They also indicate that Christ is the One given as the restored land apportioned to those who have lost their inheritance.

The Lord Jesus, reading Isaiah 61:1-2, connected the release of the captives to the acceptable year of the Lord, an implied reference to the year of jubilee:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to announce the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to send away in release those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' (Luke 4:18-19)

The Lord Jesus went on to say, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21), thereby indicating that these verses referred to Himself. As the Christ, He is the reality of the inherited land, the Giver of the land, and the Redeemer and Restorer of the inheritance.

The book of Numbers speaks repeatedly of another example of preserving the inheritance within the tribe—the case of Zelophehad of the tribe of Manasseh who "had no sons" but five daughters, who are specifically named (26:33; 27:1). These daughters were vocal



in expressing their desire to preserve the allotted possession of their father (v. 4; cf. Josh. 17:4). Lee correlates their desire to possess the inheritance with the New Testament believer's desire to inherit grace: "In typology, the desire of the daughters of Zelophehad to possess their father's inheritance signifies the desire to inherit God's grace, i.e., to inherit Christ as the grace given to us by God (Col. 1:12; John 1:17). Such a regard for the divine inheritance is pleasing to God" (*Recovery Version*, Num. 27:4, note 1). In Numbers 36 this matter is connected with the jubilee (vv. 2-4). To retain the inheritance, the daughters in such a case had to marry within their tribe (v. 8); otherwise, the inheritance would pass to another tribe and would not be returned even at the jubilee.

This case of Zelophehad's daughters is also relevant to the genealogy of Christ, as Lee suggests,<sup>5</sup> and may explain one of the seeming discrepancies between the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke concerning Joseph, the husband of Mary. This is, therefore, another connection between Christ and the type of the land.

The book of Deuteronomy, comprising Moses' re-speaking of the divine law "to all Israel" (1:1), begins with his repeated encouragement to "go in and possess the land" that God promised to give their fathers and to them as "their seed after them" (v. 8; cf. v. 21). Although Deuteronomy precedes the book of Joshua, its contents deal with how the children of Israel were to live and behave in the land after they possessed it. Moses reiterated these detailed instructions so that the children of Israel could enjoy what they were about to possess: "See, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as Jehovah my God commanded me, so that you would do them within the land which you are going in to possess" (4:5).

The book of Joshua describes how Israel occupied and possessed the good land. Lee points out that after Moses brought the children of Israel out of Egypt to the border of the good land, it was Joshua who actually "led the children of Israel to enter the God-promised land and to take it, possess it, allot it, and enjoy it" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, 1:1, note 2). Under Joshua's leadership, the children of Israel were victorious over thirty-one kings (12:9-24). Notwithstanding these victories, God considered that very much of the land remained to be possessed (13:1).<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Jehovah commanded Joshua to "divide this land as an inheritance" to the nine and one-half tribes that had not yet received their inheritance (v. 7). Two and one-half tribes had already received from Moses their allocation on the east side of the Jordan (cf. v. 8). On one hand, it was Eleazar the priest with Joshua the military leader and the heads of the fathers' houses who gave the inheritance (14:1). On the other hand, the method of allocation was "by the lot of their inheritance" (v. 2). These seemingly contradictory administrative methods reconcile man's choice with God's predetermination.

From the perspective of the land itself, each of the portions were different in topography ("a land of waterbrooks, of springs and of fountains, flowing forth in valleys and in mountains" (Deut. 8:7)), natural resources ("a land of wheat and barley and vines and fig trees and pomegranates; a land of olive trees with oil and of honey" (v. 8)), and minerals ("a land whose stones are iron, and from whose mountains you can mine copper" (v. 9)). From the perspective of the recipients of the land, each tribe had different abilities and predispositions for taking advantage of these different characteristics of the land (for example, innate and developed specialized skills in agriculture, cattle-raising, mining, and fishing). Furthermore, from the perspective of the sovereign God, the Giver of the land, there were past and future divine prophecies that needed to be fulfilled. Examples of some of these, which are specifically related to Christ, include the prophecy that Christ would come from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10; Luke 3:33) and the prophecy that Bethlehem is where He would be born (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:4, 11). Many, if not most, Bible readers miss the deeper underpinnings of the seemingly incongruent methods for allocating the land. The interaction between man's willing cooperation and God's sovereignty are hidden here. Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, / But everything it decides is from Jehovah."

In describing the ebb and flow of this period of Israel's history, it is appropriate to echo the writer of Hebrews: "What more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets" (11:32). During the

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time of the judges, the Israelites gained and lost portions of the land. However, by the time of King Solomon they conquered their enemies and gained the ground of Jerusalem. They were thus able to build the temple on the God-ordained location. At this historical high point, their control of land extended to the boundaries promised through Moses and Joshua (1 Kings 4:21; cf. Exo. 23:31; Deut. 11:24; Josh. 1:4).

From this zenith with Solomon, the children of Israel declined to the nadir of the Babylonian deportation, at which time the temple was destroyed and the land was left desolate (2 Chron. 36:17-21). This exile was later followed by several incomplete returns. Ezra speaks of the rebuilding, beginning with the altar (Ezra 3:1-6) and continuing over a lengthy span until the completion of the house after the children of Israel returned to their cities (vv. 1-2; 6:15-16). Daniel predicted that the rebuilt temple would be desolated by Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 8:9-14, 23-25; 11:21-35), who, due to his act, can be considered a type of the coming Antichrist (Matt. 24:15; 2 Thes. 2:3-4; Rev. 11:2). Zechariah 9:11-17 seems to speak concerning the later Maccabean victory over Antiochus.

This further cycle of return, restoration, and further preparation paved the way for Christ's first coming, during which time He redeemed man (Rom. 3:23-24) and brought forth an organic entity comprising Himself as the Head and the church as His Body (Eph. 1:22-23). Christ promised that He would build His church upon "this rock," referring both to Himself (Matt. 16:18) and to the revelation of Himself given to "His holy apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20; 3:4-5; cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-11). Paul indicates that the carrying out of functions by the gifted members in the church meetings is one way that this building work is carried out (14:3-5). Unlike the construction of the Old Testament physical temple, the New Testament building is an organic entity involving a process that produces a living and mature corporate person (Eph. 4:15-16).

The prophet Zechariah associates the redeeming Christ with the land. In Zechariah 3 he speaks of a stone with seven eyes, engraved so that sin will be taken away: "Upon one stone are seven eyes. I will engrave its engraving, declares Jehovah of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day" (v. 9). This stone corresponds with the description of Christ in the book of Revelation as the Lamb standing with seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God (5:6). The stone engraved through Christ's crucifixion for redemption is now the resurrected Lamb-stone standing to carry out God's administration through His eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God. The Old Testament description of one engraved stone with seven eyes anticipates redemption by promising that Jehovah "will remove the iniquity of that land" (Zech. 3:9; cf. 13:1-2).

**T**he final chapter of the Old Testament mentions the land in the context of a warning concerning "the day," "the coming day" of judgment, which will be "the great and terrible day of Jehovah" (Mal. 4:1, 5). In this chapter Jehovah provided a positive promise to those who fear His name—He will be "the Sun of righteousness" with "healing in His wings" (v. 2). Furthermore, He promised to send Elijah as a witness who would prepare the hearts of His people to receive Him when He comes (v. 5). If they would not turn their hearts, Jehovah would come in the way of judgment "and strike the land with a curse" (v. 6). These verses contain a literal prophecy concerning Elijah the prophet, who, in turn, is also a figure of John the Baptist. At the Lord's second coming, Elijah will be one of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:3, 5-6). In the Lord's first coming, John came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" as the recommender of the Lord Jesus (Luke 1:17). As such, he turned "many of the sons of Israel...to the Lord their God" (v. 16). John the Baptist would "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the prudence of the righteous, to prepare for the Lord a people made ready" (v. 17; cf. Mal. 4:6). Thus, Malachi 4:6, the concluding verse in the Old Testament, connects the land with the hearts of God's people.

### *The Importance of the Land in the Gospels and the Epistles*

The Old Testament describes the land in physical terms with a hint of a deeper figurative significance. The New Testament conveys further aspects of the intrinsic spiritual reality of



the earth.<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:13 likens the kingdom people to the “salt of the earth,” implying that they have a healing influence over the death or barrenness of the land (cf. 2 Kings 2:19-22).

Matthew 13 likens the hearts of men to different kinds of earth (vv. 3-8, 18-23), and the word of the kingdom, to seeds (vv. 4, 19; cf. Luke 8:11). The same quality “good seed” (cf. Matt. 13:24) issues in different results, based on the condition of the earth. A person’s response to the word of God proves the condition of his heart: “That which is in the good earth, these are those who in a noble and good heart hear the word and hold it fast and bear fruit with endurance” (Luke 8:15). Such a heart allows the spirit, the inner man, to operate and change its condition. Matthew 5:5 says that “the meek...shall inherit the earth,” and 1 Peter 3:4 speaks of “the hidden man of the heart in the incorruptible adornment of a meek and quiet spirit.”

In *The All-inclusive Christ*, Lee identifies a connection between the land and that which is built upon it. The land is a type of Christ as both the source and the base of the building of the church: “In this series of messages we want to see something of the land of Canaan, which is a type of the all-inclusive Christ...What we will consider is the all-inclusive Christ, out of which and upon which the fullness of Christ, the church, is built” (7). Lee goes on to emphasize the centrality of both the land and God’s building in the divine plan: “If we know the Scriptures and have light from God, we will realize that the center of God’s eternal plan, typically speaking, is the land with its temple and the city” (9). Paul urges the Colossians, since they “have received the Christ, Jesus the Lord,” to “walk in Him” (Col. 2:6). Based on this verse, Lee asserts that Christ “is a sphere...He is not just some food or water but a realm, a land within which we can walk. We must walk in Him. He is our land; He is our earth; He is our kingdom” (14). Lee concludes by applying the experiential enjoyment of the land to the worship of God and the building up of the church as the Body of Christ:

At the present we do know something about the land—how to get into it, how to take possession of it, how to enjoy it and live within it, how to labor upon it, how to worship God in it, and how to have the temple and the city built upon it. We are clear that the land is Christ Himself, and the temple and the city are the fullness of Christ. Christ is the Head, and the fullness of Christ is the Body, the church. (185)

### *The Consummation of the Land— the Church, the Kingdom, and the New Jerusalem*

Most reciters of the so-called Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6 may underestimate the significance of this portion: “Your kingdom come; Your will be done...on earth” (v. 10). This petition—taught by the One who was designated “King of the Jews” at His birth (2:2), a title that Jesus did not repudiate when mockingly called so by those who crucified Him (27:11, 29, 37)—implies that there is a struggle on the earth to recover God’s kingdom. Lee thus correlates the kingdom with the land: “The city and the temple are the result of the enjoyment of this land...The city is the center of God’s authority, God’s kingdom; and the temple is the center of God’s house, God’s dwelling place. The kingdom of God and the house of God are the result of the enjoyment of the land” (*All-inclusive Christ* 10).

During His earthly ministry, the Lord emphasized, in His status as the Son of Man, that He had “authority on earth” to both heal the sick and forgive sins (9:5-6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24). He could thus give His disciples the same authority (cf. Matt. 10:1, 8). Furthermore, the heavenly authority to bind and to loose has also been given to the church (16:19; 18:17-18).

After His resurrection Jesus breathed Himself as the life-giving Spirit into His disciples and reiterated their authority to forgive or to retain sins (John 20:21-23). As the King and the Son of Man, He could declare that all authority has been given to Him “in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). Thus, He could simultaneously be present with His disciples

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will be done...  
on earth,”  
taught by  
the One who  
was designated  
“King of  
the Jews”  
at His birth,  
implies that  
there is  
a struggle  
on the earth  
to recover  
God’s kingdom.*

*The disciples  
expected  
the imminent  
restoration  
of the kingdom.  
The Lord, however,  
redirected them  
to the imminent  
receiving of  
the Holy Spirit,  
who would  
empower them  
to be His  
witnesses “unto  
the uttermost part  
of the earth.”*

and send them to the nations with His authority to preach the gospel of the kingdom and to disciple, baptize, and teach them (vv. 19-20).

Prior to His public ascension, Jesus spent “a period of forty days...speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God” to His chosen apostles (Acts 1:2-3). John 20 indicates that on the evening of the day of His resurrection, the disciples received the indwelling Holy Spirit when Jesus appeared to them and breathed into them (vv. 19, 21-22). This was the first of three times in John’s Gospel “that Jesus was manifested to the disciples” after His resurrection (21:14). During His second appearance, He corrected Thomas, who had been unwilling to believe unless he physically saw and touched the Lord (20:25, 27-29). The third time, the Lord repeatedly charged His disciples, especially Peter, to simply follow Him (21:19, 22). The implication of these cases in John is that today the Lord we love, believe in, and follow is always with us, but invisibly so. The disciples, who had known Him visibly in the flesh, needed to be trained to live by faith and not by sight (cf. 2 Cor. 4:18; 5:7; Heb. 11:1).<sup>8</sup>

The Acts of the Apostles indicates that during this time the disciples expected the imminent restoration of the “kingdom to Israel” (1:6; 3:21; cf. Matt. 17:11; 19:28; cf. Isa. 11:1-10; 65:18-25). The Lord, however, redirected them to the imminent receiving of the Holy Spirit, who would empower them to be His witnesses “unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Thus empowered, throughout Acts the Lord’s sent ones announced “the gospel of the kingdom of God and of the name of Jesus Christ” (8:12; cf. 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31) and were “witnesses...unto the uttermost part of the earth,” proclaiming the Lord’s name in all the earth (1:8; Rom. 9:17). Their preaching of “the word of Christ” would thereby bring faith “to the ends of the inhabited earth” (10:17-18), including the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas would later apply Isaiah’s word to themselves: “I have set you as a light of the Gentiles, that you would be for salvation unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 13:47; cf. Isa. 49:6).

**T**he proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom to the whole earth, to all mankind, must be matched with persistent prayer. In Luke 18:1-8 the Lord encouraged His disciples “to pray and not lose heart,” illustrated by the parable of the widow who repeatedly came to the unrighteous judge to be avenged. The Lord concluded this parable by asking, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” *Faith* here refers to the persistent and subjective faith because of which the Lord will avenge us. Furthermore, as the blood-purchased redeemed ones, we should exercise our faith to be kings and priests in this age (Rev. 1:6); it is by prayer that the redeemed ones (5:8) can exercise God’s authority and can accomplish the divine priestly ministry. We are thus qualified to “reign on the earth” (v. 10), that is, to possess the land.

### *The Possessor of the Earth in the Age of the Kingdom*

When the Lord was on the earth in His first coming, the devil tempted Him by showing Him “all the kingdoms of the inhabited earth in a moment of time” and then offering to give Him “all this authority and their glory” on the condition that Jesus would worship him (Luke 4:5-7; cf. Matt. 4:8-9). Jesus, as a man, unambiguously rejected the offer by declaring the written word of God: “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve” (Luke 4:8). Another man, the beast Antichrist, will accept this satanic offer at the end of the present age (cf. Rev. 13:2, 4).

After the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, all authority “in heaven and on earth” was given to Him (Matt. 28:18). However, Christ will not take outward and visible possession of the earth until the time close to the seventh trumpet, when He will come out of heaven as “another strong Angel” and place “His right foot on the sea and the left on the land” (Rev. 10:1-2). About this time there will be loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever” (11:15). In chapter 18 Christ comes down out of heaven as another Angel, “having great authority” and causing the earth to be “illuminated with His glory” (v. 1).



In Psalm 2, a prophecy concerning Christ (cf. Acts 4:25-27), God promised His begotten Son: “I will give the nations as Your inheritance / And the limits of the earth as Your possession” (Psa. 2:7-8). In light of this promise, Hebrews 1:2 declares that God has appointed the firstborn Son as the “Heir of all things” (cf. vv. 5-6). In the coming age of the kingdom, the overcomers will echo Melchizedek and lift up their hands to God as “Possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen. 14:19). Consistent with their prayer in the church age that the Father’s will be done on earth (Matt. 6:10), they will, in union with the Lord Jesus, continue to extol their Father God, who is “Lord of heaven and of earth” (11:25; cf. Acts 17:24).

### *The Heavenly New Jerusalem—the Consummate Building of God as the Expression of God on the Earth*

Hebrews 1 describes how the first heavens and earth, the work of God’s hands, will become old, rolled up, and changed by the perpetual, unchanging, and unfailing God (vv. 10-12; cf. Psa. 102:25-27). Isaiah 51:6 says that “the heavens will vanish away like smoke, / And the earth will wear out like a garment.” This event correlates with the passing away of the first heaven and the first earth in Revelation 21:1, a verse that mentions the additional fact that “the sea is no more.” Revelation 20:11 speaks of the earth and heaven fleeing away as a result of the judgment of the “great white throne and Him who sat upon it.” Second Peter 3:10 adds some details to the process by which this will take place: “The heavens will pass away with a roar, and the elements, burning with intense heat, will be dissolved, and the earth and the works in it will be burned up.” Peter thereby warns God’s people as to the kind of persons we ought to be “in holy manner of life and godliness” (v. 11). Peter further emphasizes that in the “new heavens and a new earth...righteousness dwells” (v. 13).

Lee notes that “out of this change will issue the new heaven and new earth...as the universe of the new creation, which will serve as the location for the New Jerusalem in eternity” (*Recovery Version*, Rev. 20:11, note 3). God’s judgments are preparations for a new heaven and a new earth, a holy city, a tabernacle of God, a prepared bride, and many sons of God as redeemed co-inheritors with the firstborn Son (21:1-3, 7). The New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven to the earth and has the glory of God, thereby being the expression of God (vv. 10-11).<sup>9</sup>

### *The All-inclusive Spirit as the New Testament Reality of the Good Land*

The final explicit mention of the earth in the Bible refers to the nations who walk in the light of the city and whose “kings of the earth...bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it” (Rev. 21:24, 26). As we will see below, the earth, the land, comprises the “book-ends” of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, and, hence, of the entire Bible.

The Old Testament begins with an account of the creation of the earth and the restoration of the land (Gen. 1:1, 9) and concludes with a warning to the land’s inhabitants concerning the “day of Jehovah,” that is, God’s day of judgment (Mal. 4:1, 5-6). We can also say that the Old Testament begins with the land as a symbol of the resurrected Christ, who rose out of the death waters on the third day (Gen. 1:9, 13), and that it concludes with a positive expectation of Christ as the “Sun of righteousness...with healing in His wings,” an antidote to the land being struck with a curse (Mal. 4:2). Witness Lee aptly summarizes the Old Testament as repeated cycles of the loss and subsequent recovery of the land: “I tell you, this is the history of the Old Testament. How many times did the Lord recover this land? At least five or six times”<sup>10</sup> (*All-inclusive Christ*, 12).

The New Testament begins with a recap of God’s organic preparatory work—a genealogy of the coming of Jesus Christ describing His human ancestors and His status as the prophesied King-Savior—and concludes with the grace of the Lord Jesus being with all the saints (Matt. 1:1; Rev. 22:21). The good news announced by the Lord Jesus is the gospel of grace (Luke 4:18, cf. v. 22). Paul, as a sent apostle of Christ, was a steward

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God's promise  
of a seed.*

of the grace of God (Eph. 3:2). Because grace is of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:4; 3:10; 2 Cor. 8:9; 13:14), and the Spirit is of grace (Heb. 10:29; cf. Zech. 12:10), the entire Triune God is the source and Dispenser of grace. This grace is with the believer's spirit (Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; Philem. 25).

The land is not only a type of Christ but also a type of the Spirit. In Galatians Paul correlates the Gentiles' receiving the Spirit by faith (3:2, 8) with the blessing that Abraham received by believing God's promise of a seed—a seed comprising an uncountable number of heavenly descendants (cf. Gen. 15:5; 22:17). Paul then relates their receiving of that blessing to the promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14). Lee identifies this connection between the good land and the life-giving Spirit:

This verse [Galatians 3:14] indicates that the Spirit is the blessing that God promised to Abraham for all the nations and that has been received by the believers through faith in Christ...The physical aspect of the blessing that God promised to Abraham was the good land (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 17:8; 26:3-4), which was a type of the all-inclusive Christ (see Col. 1:12...). Since Christ is eventually realized as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17), the blessing of the promised Spirit corresponds with the blessing of the land promised to Abraham. Actually, the Spirit as the realization of Christ in our experience is the good land as the source of God's bountiful supply for us to enjoy. (*Recovery Version*, Gal. 3:14, note 3)

On this basis Lee notes a crucial correlation between walking according to the Spirit and walking in Christ: "The good land today is Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit (Gal. 3:14), who dwells in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22; Rom. 8:16) to be our enjoyment. To walk according to this Spirit (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16) is the central and crucial point in the New Testament" (*Recovery Version*, Col. 2:6, note 2). Christ is the land, and in this age He is realized experientially as the all-inclusive Spirit.

### **The Organic Process for the Building of the Church**

Whereas Colossians 2:6 correlates receiving Christ with walking in Him as the land, verse 7 juxtaposes a construction term, *built*, with an organic term, *rooted*. This implies that the building of the church is not a mere organizational effort; rather, it is an organic process that includes "being established in the faith" (v. 7). God's people are planted in the soil, the good land, and through life processes are reconstituted, shaped, coordinated, and built up to be a living, growing, and fruit-producing expression of the all-inclusive Christ.

God's people as the land are closely associated with God's building: "You are God's cultivated land, God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9). The land is the portion for God's corporate people to enter into and grow in during the church age, to enjoy and participate in during the age of the kingdom as a reward, and to fully represent and express the Triune God as the glorious city in the new heaven and new earth. As God's sons (Rev. 21:7), we become one with the land (Christ) in our entire tripartite being for eternity.

**T**he central feature of the New Jerusalem is a living and fruit-producing vine tree, the tree of life. The beautiful land is recognizable in this glorious city, with its river, mountain, vine, and fruits (22:1-2). The personified holy temple, God Himself and the Lamb, is seen in her cubic dimensions, which are congruent to those of the Holy of Holies (cf. 21:16, 22; 1 Kings 6:20; Exo. 26:2-8). The city's appearance is that of a living and beautiful bride who incorporates both the Old and New Testament believers, as seen in her gates and foundations (Rev. 21:9, 19-21). God and man are both there as one entity. As the constituents of this elevated city, God's redeemed, sanctified, glorified, and built-up people enjoy the land and have become the land where God is expressed and represented. They are thus corporately thankful for their personally allotted bright portion in the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love (Col. 1:12-13).



## Notes

<sup>1</sup>In Acts 7:2-4 Stephen indicated that God appeared in His glory to Abraham in Mesopotamia, calling him to come out from his land and from his relatives, to the “inheritance” in the land that He promised to give him (v. 5). However, it was Abraham’s father, Terah, who seems to have made the first move with the intention to go further. Terah and his family, including both Abraham with his wife Sarai and Abraham’s nephew Lot, then stopped and settled in Haran (Gen. 11:31). Thus, Jehovah’s word in Genesis 12:1, after Terah died (11:32), must have been a second call for Abraham.

<sup>2</sup>Genesis 15:13 and Acts 7:6 speak of four hundred years, whereas Exodus 12:40 and Galatians 3:17 speak of four hundred thirty years. Lee’s note on Galatians 3:17 explains that the four hundred years in Genesis 15 refer to the time from God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 to the giving of the law through Moses in Exodus 20:

This period was considered by God as the time of the children of Israel’s dwelling in Egypt (Exo. 12:40-41). The four hundred years mentioned in Gen. 15:13 and Acts 7:6 is counted from the time Ishmael mocked Isaac in Gen. 21 to the time the children of Israel came out of the Egyptian tyranny in Exo. 12. This is the period during which Abraham’s descendants suffered persecution from the Gentiles. (*Recovery Version*, Gal. 3:17, note 3)

Both time frames have the same end point—Israel’s coming out of Egypt and receiving the law from Moses. However, the four hundred thirty years begins with God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, whereas the four hundred years is counted from the time when Isaac was mocked by his half-brother (hence, a “Gentile”) some thirty years after the promise.

<sup>3</sup>West of the Jordan: Judah, Simeon, Benjamin, Dan, Manasseh (half-tribe), Ephraim, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, and Naphtali (Num. 34:3, 5, 19-29).

<sup>4</sup>Beyond the Jordan: Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh (half-tribe). Numbers 35:14-15 refers to this section as not being “the land of Canaan.” It was not included in the boundaries of the good land as defined in 34:1-15. This suggests that this portion of land may not have been, strictly speaking, part of the original God-promised good land.

<sup>5</sup>Commenting on Matthew 1:16, Lee notes,

Here the genealogy says that “Jacob begot Joseph,” but Luke 3:23 says, “Joseph, the son of Heli.” Luke’s record was “according to law” (a literal translation of “so it was thought” in Luke 3:23), indicating that Joseph was not actually the son of Heli but was reckoned his son according to the law. Joseph was the son-in-law of Heli, Mary’s father. This may be a case according to Num. 27:1-8 and 36:1-12, in which a regulation was made by God that if any parents had only daughters as heirs, the inheritance would go to the daughters, who would then have to marry a man of their own tribe in order to keep their inheritance within that tribe. Even such a regulation in the Old Testament is related to the genealogy of Christ, showing that all Scripture is a record of Christ. (*Recovery Version*, Matt. 1:16, note 1)

<sup>6</sup>It was not until the time of Solomon that the children of Israel fully controlled the portion that God originally promised. However, due to spiritual decline and internal divisions among Solomon’s descendants, their possession was again lost and has not yet been fully restored even to the present day.

<sup>7</sup>In the New Testament the word *land* is in most cases used to describe literal geographical locations—e.g. “land of Israel” (Matt. 2:20), “spread reports about Him in all that land” (9:31), “land at Gennesaret” (14:34), “acquired a piece of land” (Acts 1:18), etc.—and the word *earth* is often used in a more expansive and symbolic sense. Unless otherwise noted, this article attempts to use these terms interchangeably in their symbolic sense.

<sup>8</sup>The context of John 20 illustrates how the disciples were trained by the Lord to transition from formerly knowing Him as the visible Jesus according to the flesh to knowing Him as the present invisible Spirit. Thomas, who missed the meeting with Jesus and the other disciples the prior week, is an example of someone who would not believe unless he physically saw and touched the Lord (cf. vv. 24-29). Commenting on this section, Lee says,

After the Lord came in v. 19, eight days before, there is no plain word or hint in John’s record that the Lord left the disciples. Actually, He stayed with them, though they were not

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Although the dispensation of the kingdom is the dispensation of restoration, it still will take place in the old heaven and old earth, because God's perfecting and completing work in His chosen people will not be finished until the end of that dispensation.

conscious of His presence. Hence, His coming in v. 26 was actually His manifestation, His appearing...Before His death the Lord was in the flesh, and His presence was visible. After His resurrection the Lord became the Spirit, and His presence was invisible. His manifestations, or appearances, after His resurrection were to train the disciples to realize, to enjoy, and to practice His invisible presence, which is more available, prevailing, precious, rich, and real than His visible presence. In His resurrection this dear presence of His was just the Spirit, whom He had breathed into them and who would be with them all the time. (*Recovery Version*, v. 26, note 3)

<sup>9</sup>Commenting on Revelation 21:1, Lee provides dispensational context for the coming down of the heavenly city out of heaven to a new earth:

In eternity past God purposed to have a corporate expression that He might be fully expressed and glorified (Eph. 3:9-11; 1:9-12). For this, He created the heavens, the earth, and mankind. After the creation of the world, there are four dispensations: the dispensation of the patriarchs, from Adam to Moses (Rom. 5:14); the dispensation of law, from Moses to Christ (John 1:17); the dispensation of grace, from Christ's first coming to the restoration of all things at Christ's second coming (Acts 3:20-21); and the dispensation of the kingdom, from Christ's second coming to the end of the millennium (11:15; 20:4, 6). God uses these four dispensations to perfect and complete His chosen people that they may be His eternal corporate expression for the accomplishing of His purpose. All four dispensations belong to the old heaven and old earth. Although the dispensation of the kingdom is the dispensation of restoration, it still will take place in the old heaven and old earth, because God's perfecting and completing work in His chosen people will not be finished until the end of that dispensation. When God finishes this work through the dispensation of the kingdom, the old heaven and old earth will pass away through fire and be renewed to become the new heaven and new earth (2 Pet. 3:10-13), into which the New Jerusalem will come to be God's eternal expression. (*Recovery Version*, Rev. 21:1, note 1)

<sup>10</sup>Lee does not elaborate on these Old Testament cycles of loss and recovery of the land. Some possibilities include: (1) the gap between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2, in which the earth became waste and empty; (2) the flood during the days of Noah (7:17-24); (3) the scattering of people after Babel (11:5-9); (4) Israel's sojourn in Egypt, including the descent of Jacob's family with Joseph to Egypt; their later exodus out of Egypt with Moses; and their entering the land with Joshua (Gen. 47:11; 50:24-25; Exo. 12:41; Josh. 1:2); and (5) the carrying away of the children of Israel in two parts—the northern kingdom to Assyria and, later, the southern kingdom to Babylon—and their partial return (2 Chron. 36:14-23). **AFC**

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