

A New Testament perspective on Israel

Steve Thomas
January 2000



Salt & Light Ministries
www.saltlight.org/resources

Introduction

I offer the following hastily compiled and somewhat disjointed thoughts as a contribution to the discussion on questions surrounding God's ongoing commitment to the people of Israel.

We do have to ask how Christians are to understand the divine promise that the land of Israel would belong to Abraham and his descendants as an everlasting possession. We do have to make something of the predictions in the prophets of a return of Jewish exiles to the land, but we, more importantly, have to ask what difference did the coming of Jesus make to Jewish ideas about the land and the people.

For me, the issue is largely a hermeneutical issue, and it is in this context that I wish to place my discussion quite firmly. In developing my thoughts I am very largely indebted to a book by Colin Chapman entitled "Whose promised land?" that was published by Lion Publishing in 1983, but I believe is now out of print. I acknowledge heavy dependence here.

On a number of issues which are focused on in the Old Testament and the themes taken up in the New Testament, we have to be aware of fundamental questions. There is obviously great continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jesus is the climax and fulfilment of much of the Old, especially the sacrificial system, for example, but he also brings it to a close. He is the pinnacle and fulfilment of the Jewish legal system in himself, but he removes its tyranny in our lives. If there is both continuity and discontinuity we need to be very sure that we are not trying to continue what God has discontinued.

It is my conviction that the Old Testament has to be looked at through New Testament eyes. The New Testament is the right pair of spectacles through which we examine the Old. The New Testament gives us all the hermeneutical keys that we need. This is, of course, a fairly orthodox position. Christians generally believe that the New Testament writers give us an authoritative interpretation of the Old Testament, indeed what would be called rightly 'the normative' interpretation of the Old Testament. This means, for example, that if we want to know what the sacrificial system in the temple was all about, we look to the writings of the apostles, since, as it tells us in Luke 24:45, "the risen Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures". We can look to their writings to find out how Jesus himself interpreted the Old Testament.

We today do not have the liberty to interpret the Old Testament in any other way than the apostles interpreted the Old Testament. Everything in the Old Testament has to be read through their eyes. This is what I want to try to do in this short consideration of the promises given to Abraham concerning the land and the people, and I intend to go through the main promises and main points of fulfilment step by step.

Steve Thomas

January 2000

(Paper prepared for Salt & Light International Council meeting)

1. The Promise

The trigger for Abraham leaving his home in Haran and starting the journey to Canaan came in God's clear words to him,

"The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.' " (Genesis 12:1-3)

Shortly after entering the land, the promise of land was made even more specific in Genesis 15:18:

"On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates ... ' ",

and again later in Genesis 17:1,8:

"When Abram was ninety nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.' Abram fell face down, and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you and kings will come from. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.' "

Abraham is then commanded to practise circumcision as a sign that he has accepted the terms of this everlasting covenant which is summarised in Genesis 17:13 when it says:

"My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant."

The covenant, therefore, was a kind of package deal which included four basic promises with no conditions attached, at least at this point. These promises were:

- i) I will give you the land as an everlasting possession.
- ii) I will greatly increase your numbers and I will make you into a great nation.
- iii) I will make an everlasting covenant to be your God and the God of your descendants.
- iv) I will bless those who bless you and all people on earth will be blessed through you.

The rest of the book of Genesis is a description of how God begins to fulfil his side of the covenant, in particular, the promises about the land and the nation. It is worth just making two or three points about each of these.

First, Abraham did not actually own any piece of land until his wife Sarah died many years later. Then there is a very detailed account of Abram purchasing land – not being willing to accept land as a gift as a burial place for Sarah but wanting to pay the full price. In chapter 3 we have a legal contract being drawn up for it, and the simple point I am making is, it may be a gift from God, but it has to be acquired legally.

Secondly, the promises of the land are repeated both to Abraham's son Isaac and his grandson Jacob. In Genesis 26:2-4 we have God speaking to Isaac:

"The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, 'Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept by requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.' "

Likewise, in Genesis 28:13-15 God speaks to Jacob in his well known dream at Bethel. Above the ladder which angels were ascending and descending stood the Lord and he said,

"I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised for you."

The promise concerning the land therefore is very clearly repeated to Isaac and Jacob.

Thirdly, as far as the nation is concerned we obviously have the account of Abraham and Sarah and their desire to have a son. Abraham trying to short-circuit the promise of God and have the son through Hagar but God resisting that, and, of course, God having to teach Abraham to continue to trust him for his promise, even though he has to offer his son as a sacrifice to the Lord.

2. Conquest

At the end of the book of Genesis we are obviously left wondering how God is ever going to fulfil the promise to Abraham and his descendants. All the twelve sons of Jacob have gone to settle in Egypt, obviously mainly because Joseph has ended up as virtual Prime Minister there. But the future does not look very good in terms of the promise and, of course, the next few books of the Bible give us the account of how God brings his people out of Egypt in order to possess the land that he is determined to give them.

I simply want to make four points about the occupation of the land by the Israelites over the period of this process.

- i) The land is always seen as a gift from God. Throughout the accounts, the land is described with almost monotonous regularity as "the land which the Lord your God is giving you" or "the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance" or "the land which the Lord your God has given you". These phrases are repeated so often that it is easy to miss the point. The land did not always belong to them and did come to them at this particular time as a gift from God. They had done nothing to deserve it; it is a sign of the incredible generosity of God.
- ii) God gave the land to fulfil his promise to Abraham. The gift of the land is actually not an end in itself; it is merely part of God's unfolding plan for human history, or at least for Israelite history, which is to lead to blessing for all the nations of the earth.
- iii) Conquest of the land was seen as God's way of judging the inhabitants of that land. God's determination to give the land to the people of Israel and to raise up a people for himself is to set them in contrast to a people whose abominations were clear to all, but it had a bigger purpose to it altogether. Interestingly enough, the four hundred years of Israelite bondage in Egypt are foretold to Abraham in Genesis 15:16 when God says to him,

"In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

In other words, only when this sin is seen to have grown to full measure will the judgement of God fall by Abraham's descendants taking over the land. This sense of God judging the people of the land comes out clearly, for example, in Leviticus 18:24-27:

"Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you."

This is surely an exceedingly clear statement that Israel will have no special favour from God. If they fail to fulfil his word and walk in obedience they will also be vomited out.

- iv) The conquest of this land promised by God as a gift is closely linked with an appeal to obey God's law. There must be a clean break with the religious practices of their neighbours and the people they have come to live amongst. Lev 18:30:

"Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practised before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the Lord your God."

These themes of the conquest are brought together by Moses' instructions to the people before they enter the promised land in the book of Deuteronomy. For example, Deut 8:19:

"If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God."

3. Exile

If the land was a gift which carried with it an obligation to obey the law of God, it follows naturally that when this obligation is not honoured the gift can be taken away. The Israelites were not to assume that they could live in the land forever regardless of the way they lived. It was perfectly possible for them to forfeit the right to live in the land. This has already been made clear by our reference to the words of Moses before they even occupied the land. It is repeated, for example, at the dedication of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 9:6-7:

"If you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name."

These warnings were no idle threats. They were fulfilled in the case of the northern kingdom of Israel when its capital Samaria was captured in 721 BC, as recounted in 2 Kings 17:5-8:

"The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes. All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God who had brought them out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshipped other gods and followed the practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before them, as well as the practices which the kings of Israel had introduced."

The whole thing is summarised in 2 Kings 17:18:

"So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left, and even Judah did not keep the commands of the Lord their God."

So a hundred years later the Lord warns Judah that the same fate is coming their way. For example, through the prophet Jeremiah he says,

"The Lord said, 'It is because they have forsaken my law which I set before them. They have not obeyed me or followed my law. Instead they followed the stubbornness of their hearts, they have followed the Baals as their fathers taught them.' Therefore this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says: 'See I will make this people eat bitter food and drink poisoned water. I will scatter them among nations that neither they nor their fathers have known and I will pursue them with the sword until I have destroyed them.' " (Jer 9:13-16)

And again in chapter 12 verses 7,8,11:

"I will forsake my house, abandon my inheritance; I will give the one I love into the hands of her enemies. My inheritance has become to me like a lion in the forest. She roars at me; therefore I hate her ... It will be made a wasteland, parched and desolate before me; the whole land will be laid waste because there is no-one who cares."

These warnings of destruction were obviously fulfilled in 597 BC when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon captured Jerusalem, spoiled the temple and carried off the leaders of the nation to exile, as recounted in 2 Kings 24:13-14. At that time the king's uncle, Zedekiah, was installed by the Babylonians as a puppet king, but when he tried to lead an insurrection against Babylon some years later, in 586 BC, Jerusalem was largely destroyed and many more layers of the population actually taken off into captivity.

So 135 years beforehand Israel had gone into captivity; now it is Judah's turn. This captivity was a complete catastrophe for the people of Judah. Their leaders are banished from the land, the king was deported and stripped of all his powers, the temple was in ruins and the priests were no longer able to offer their sacrifices. It must certainly have looked as though God had broken every promise he had ever made to Abraham or to David, and the pain, despair and bitterness of the people is perhaps summed up best in that well known Psalm 137:

"By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?"

But the pain and bitterness is designed in a sense to help the people understand why they are in this situation. Those who understood the Law and the Prophets realised that God had not broken his covenant with his people; he was simply applying the sanctions that had been written into the covenant long ago. The gift of the land was conditional, and their continued possession of the land depended on their loyalty and obedience to God who had given it to them as a gift.

4. The Return

One reason why the Jews survived the exile was that the Babylonians kept them together as a community instead of scattering them in different places as the Assyrians had previously done with the Israelites. Another reason was that their prophets were able to interpret what had happened and give them hope for the future. I suppose the most powerful offer or promise of hope for the Israelites would be found in words, like that of Moses in Deuteronomy 30:1-5:

"When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart, wherever the Lord your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers and you will take possession of it."

In one way or another each of the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, held out a promise of return of the people back to their land, and, of course, this was fulfilled once Cyrus had captured Babylon in 539 BC. He allowed the exiles peacefully to return to their own land. Nonetheless the Jews after the exile were no more than a small remnant of the former southern kingdom of Judah and, of course, an even smaller remnant of the twelve tribes which had occupied the land under Joshua. They had limited amount of territory around Jerusalem and only a fraction of the land ruled by David and Solomon. They had no king and they constantly lived under the shadow of foreign powers. It was probably around this time that great attachment began to be held by the people of Israel for their land and even for a future action of God, when God would establish his kingdom in the land for all the world to see.

This led to the development between 200 BC and 100 AD of a particular type of writing called 'apocalyptic', which was often to do with why this manifest kingdom of God had not yet come and what the powers of darkness were that were frustrating this arrival of the kingdom.

5. Hopes

The truth is that the promises of the prophets appeared to be far bigger than anything that was realised through the return of the exiles back to their own land. There seems to be, throughout many of the prophets, a sense of God doing something far bigger than anything that had already been seen, whether we see this in the splendour of the prophecy of, for instance, Isaiah 35, with the desert and the parched land being glad, the wilderness blossoming like a rose, the glory of the Lord being seen by all, and finally the sense of a way back for God's people in verses 8-10:

"And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away."

Likewise, Jeremiah seems to indicate a whole new work of God that has to take place in the heart of the nation, recognising that the previous covenant has been unable to keep the people of God in a strong relationship with him. He promises a new covenant established by God which will touch the hearts of God's people and bring them to repentance and knowledge of God – but also a sense of national security. For example, in Jeremiah 24:5-7:

"This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Like these good figs, I regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I sent away from this place to the land of the Babylonians. My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.'

Likewise, the book of Ezekiel talks about God restoring his people, not only in relationship with him but in terms of gathering them as one people etc. Chapters 36 and 37 are possibly amongst the most significant of Ezekiel about this new work that God will do:

- I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land (36:24; 37:12,14,21)
- I will sprinkle clean water on you and I will cleanse you from all your impurities (36:25, 29, 33; 37:23)
- I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will give you a heart of flesh (36:26)
- I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (36:27; 37:14,24)
- You will live in the land I gave your forefathers (36:28; 37:25)
- You will be my people and I will be your God (36:28; 37:23,27)
- I will call for the grain and make it plentiful; the desolate land will be cultivated (36:29,34)
- Then the nations will know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt what was destroyed (36:36; 37:28)
- I will make their people, the house of Israel, as numerous as sheep (36:37; 37:26)
- Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord (37:13-14; 36:38)
- I will make them one nation in the land (37:22)
- There will be one king over all of them; my servant David will be king over them forever (37:22,24,25)
- They will all have one shepherd (37:24)
- I will make a covenant of peace with them, an everlasting covenant (37:26)
- I will put my sanctuary among them forever, my dwelling place will be with them (37:26,27).

Obviously the prophecy ends up with the glory of God filling the temple and a river flowing down from the temple to the Dead Sea – a whole new restored city of God – and the book ends with the words,

"And the name of the city from that time on will be 'Jehovah Shammah, the Lord is There' ".

Zechariah also indicates a whole new work of redemption amongst the people of God. He lived in the period immediately following the return from exile, and his prophecies date from around 520-518 BC. He looks forward to yet another return of exiles from the countries of the east and the west. First of all, Zechariah 8:1-8:

"Again the word of the Lord Almighty came to me. This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.' This is what the Lord says: 'I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called The City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called The Holy Mountain.' This is what the Lord Almighty says, 'Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.' This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'It may seem marvellous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvellous to me?' declares the Lord Almighty. This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.' "

And likewise, in Zechariah 10:6-10, the return of the exiles of the northern kingdom of Israel is prophesied alongside the exiles of the southern kingdom of Jerusalem:

"I will strengthen the house of Judah and save the house of Joseph. I will restore them because I have compassion on them. They will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the Lord their God and I will answer them. The Ephraimites will become like mighty men, and their hearts will be glad as with wine ... I will signal for them and gather them in. Surely I will redeem them; they will be as numerous as before. Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return. I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there will not be room enough for them."

There is indeed a glorious future still being looked forward to. A time, maybe it could be summarised, when God would fulfil the promises he has made to Abraham, and the message is simply again that the people would live in the land forever, that they will become a great nation, that God would be their God and that through them all people on the earth would be blessed. The question is, what is the fulfilment of these promises?

6. The Coming of the Messiah

The birth of Jesus, especially as recounted in Luke's gospel, contains many important indications as to who he was and what he was going to do for his people; all of them fascinatingly related to promises and hopes of Old Testament times.

The words of the angel announcing the birth of Jesus to Mary contain a very clear echo of the original promise concerning the line of David.

Luke 1:31-33: "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

2 Samuel 7:11-14,16: "The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you. When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father and he shall be my son ... Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever."

Whereas David was told that his kingdom would last forever through an unbroken line of his descendants, Mary is told that Jesus himself will reign forever. What is more, Jesus is going to reign over the house of Jacob which means the whole house of Israel, not the house of Judah, as the kingdom after Solomon was divided in two. He is going to reign over the whole nation united into one.

In her song of praise to God, which we normally call the Magnificat, Mary speaks of the great things that God has done for her personally and relates them to what was promised to Abraham:

"My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name ... He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants for ever, even as he said to our forefathers."

This is a fascinating song and one wonders how Mary concluded that the birth of Jesus was to be a fulfilment of promises to Abraham. It is an extraordinary leap and one has to see the inspiration of the Holy Spirit right here in the application of the birth of Jesus, as the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham.

But it is not only Mary who connects the promises to Abraham with what is happening at that time, so does Zechariah. Soon after the birth of John the Baptist, Zechariah makes the same link in his song, after his temporary period of dumbness was released:

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us – to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham; to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” (Luke 1:68-79)

The first portion of the song defines salvation as ‘salvation from our enemies’; the second part fascinatingly defines salvation in terms of the forgiveness of their sins – but again it is significant that Zechariah prophesies here that these births are connected with God’s promises to Abraham.

Another person who recognised the significance of the birth of Jesus was the elderly Simeon. Our introduction to him in Luke 2:25 is quite fascinating:

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”

Simeon takes Jesus as he is presented in the temple in fulfilment of the Jewish law and prophesies these words:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

Simeon clearly understands that what he has been waiting for has come. The consolation or restoration of Israel was about to take place in the person of Jesus.

Likewise, Anna the prophetess recognised that God was doing something special in Jesus. She was a spiritual woman who hardly ever left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. The scripture says, she came up to them at that very moment, gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. One assumes there was quite a circle of people at that time who were looking forward, like Anna, to the redemption of Jerusalem, and Anna’s message is clear: Jesus is the one who would have a vital role to play in the fulfilment of all of their hopes.

7. The Teaching of the Messiah

Here there are a number of themes that Jesus touches which pick up promises of the Old Testament.

- i) During the Sermon on the Mount there is one verse which appears to be a quote, fairly straight from the Old Testament:

“Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.” (Matt 5:5)

This seems to be a direct quote from Psalm 37:11 which says,

“but the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace”.

This psalm actually has no less than seven references either to the land or the inheritance, and we conclude that the psalmist was obviously thinking of the land of Palestine as the land which “the Lord has given you as an inheritance”. On the lips of Jesus, however, the land now begins to take on a new meaning. Those who will inherit and possess the land and dwell securely in it forever are the poor in spirit of any nation who mourn and who are meek. The Greek word translated ‘earth’ here is the word *gen* and the Hebrew word which lies behind this Greek word is *erets*. That word is the one that is used throughout the Old Testament for the land. The Kittel Theological Dictionary of the New Testament suggests that the word ‘land’ is used here in the eschatological sense, to mean ‘the land of promise’.

Chapman sums up this particular teaching this way: he says, "Abraham had been promised that the land would belong to his descendants forever but now Jesus gives his description of who those descendants are. Abraham had been promised that he would be the ancestor of a great nation, now Jesus spells out his understanding of who the true people of God are. Abraham had been promised that there would be a special relationship between God and his descendants, Jesus now describes the kind of people who will be called sons of God and will see God. Abraham had been promised that through his descendants all peoples on earth would be blessed. Now Jesus extends God's blessing to anyone who is poor in spirit and hungers and thirsts for righteousness."

- ii) Jesus himself applies an Old Testament text to his own ministry as he stands up to begin it in the synagogue at Nazareth:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

In their original context, of course, in Isaiah 61, the words that Jesus is referring to, the prisoners and the oppressed are among the people of Judah in exile in a foreign country. Jesus knew as well as his audience that Isaiah's prophecy of a return to the land and freedom for the prisoners had been fulfilled in the return of the exiles from Babylon. That is why it is all the more astonishing when Jesus stands before the congregation in Nazareth and says, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." In the mind of Jesus, therefore, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed were the people sitting in the same synagogue and walking the streets of Nazareth. The promises are fulfilled but in a much bigger way than any Jews could imagine.

- iii) When John the Baptist was in prison he sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus the question: "Are you really the one who is to come or should we look for someone else?" This obviously comes from his own disappointment that he has ended up in prison when Jesus' ministry has gone from strength to strength. In his reply, Jesus used expressions from Isaiah 35 and 61 to describe what he believed he had been called to do, in which he suggests that he is fulfilling the promises that were made:

Luke 7:21-22: "At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, 'Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.'"

Isaiah 35:5-6: "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb shout for joy."

Isaiah 61:1 "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."

Few commentators would doubt that what is being prophesied in Isaiah 35 is a poetic description of the return of exiles to the land. It speaks of the redeemed who will return and enter Zion with singing. Jesus is therefore taking this poetic imagery from an Old Testament passage about the return of Jewish exiles from Babylon, and using it to describe what he is doing in his public ministry.

R.T. France, well-known New Testament scholar and former Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, makes this comment on how Jesus uses the words of the Old Testament in this way: "The inevitable conclusion seems to be that Jesus presented his ministry as the fulfilment of the whole future hope of the Old Testament 'the day of the Lord' and 'the coming of the Messiah'. Even where the original reference seems to be focused on a political restoration of God's people (which is especially true in Isaiah 35), Jesus confirmed the fulfilment in his own ministry."

- iv) There is a wonderful interaction between Jesus and the Roman centurion who believed that Jesus could heal his servant who was sick at home simply by saying the word, without Jesus having to go to see him. Jesus was amazed at this man's faith and comments on it very clearly:

"He says, 'I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' " (Matt 8:10-12)

"I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name." (Isaiah 43:5-7)

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say this ... those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south." (Ps 107:2-3)

Now here again, Jesus takes expressions, which in their original context speak of the ingathering of Jewish exiles to the land, and uses them to speak of the future ingathering of people from all over the world into the kingdom of God. I am sure this must have been a very shocking procedure and application to Jesus' hearers. In fact, he does clearly indicate that many of the Jews will be excluded from the kingdom. R.T. France comments again: "It seems, therefore, that far from looking for some future regathering of the Jewish people to Palestine, Jesus actually took Old Testament passages which originally had that connotation and applied them instead to the ingathering of the Christian community from all nations, even in one case, to the exclusion of some Jews!"

The same ideas are reflected in other sayings of Jesus, for example, John 10:16:

"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."

And again, John 11:51-52:

"He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one."

It seems very clear that Jesus was not 'spiritualising' Old Testament prophecies and thereby leaving open the possibility that they might one day be interpreted literally – rather, according to him, the gathering of believers into the kingdom of God was the true fulfilment of these prophecies. This was the climax to which these prophecies had been looking forward.

- v) There is again a very significant encounter between the risen Jesus and his disciples described to us by Luke after Jesus' resurrection. When Jesus appears to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus they do not recognise him at first and start describing the events of the past week in Jerusalem leading up to his death. They express the extreme disappointment, even disillusionment that they have experienced:

"He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." (Luke 24:19-24)

Jesus, however, does not show a great deal of sympathy for their hopes for the nation of Israel. Instead he rebukes them for their dullness and slowness to understand the prophets:

" 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning *himself*." (Luke 24:25-27)

One of the most surprising things about this conversation is that Jesus appears to ignore the subject that they are really interested in, namely the redemption of Israel. He simply speaks of himself as 'the Christ' i.e. the Messiah, God's anointed one. And goes on to say why it was necessary for him to suffer and die. He then explains everything in the scriptures concerning himself, not concerning Israel. Was Jesus thinking only of himself, or was he at cross purposes with the disciples? No! He wanted them to understand that all that the prophets had said

about Israel and its redemption had been fulfilled in himself. It was not that he was disinterested in their hopes for the nation; rather he was trying to tell them that he had accomplished the redemption of Israel, although not in the way they had expected. The redemption of Israel had already been carried out through the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ, the Messiah.

vi) There is a fascinating record of Jesus' interaction with his disciples just prior to his ascension, Acts 1:4-8:

"On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.' So when they met together, they asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'"

It seems almost as though the disciples had a mental block on some things that Jesus was saying. He is encouraging them to look forward to the baptism of the Holy Spirit; they come back immediately on this question of whether this is the time when Jesus is going to restore the kingdom to Israel. Jesus' answer is actually very unclear to us and, in particular, the proper connection between verse 7 and verse 8 is not straightforward. And, indeed, the line you take generally on the whole Israel issue, will probably determine which interpretation of these verses one decides to adopt.

The first solution is to say that there is no vital connection between these two verses, i.e. Jesus is saying a restored, independent Jewish state is certainly part of God's plan for the coming of the kingdom, but it will not come into being now and it is not for you to know when it will be established. For the time being, you get on with laying hold of the power of God. The other possible interpretation is as though Jesus was saying, I want you to put out of your minds, once and for all, the idea that the establishment of a sovereign Jewish state has any special significance in the establishment of the kingdom of God. I want you to see the kingdom of God in a different light; a kingdom that depends on the full power of the Holy Spirit which is not territorial, and a kingdom which is international and has no connection with any national kingdom.

Either of these interpretations are equally possible. We need to decide which, and it may only be the preaching of the apostles that will show us how exactly they understood the teaching of Jesus in this regard.

8. The Apostolic Teaching of the Kingdom of God

It is obvious from the sorts of questions that have been raised already from the scriptures concerning the restoration of Israel, that there were significant issues still being discussed and raised by people of the New Testament times. The question is, did the writers of the New Testament hold on to any hopes for a national restoration for the Jewish people? On the contrary, we find a great deal of evidence which indicates that they actually sought to follow the new understanding of the kingdom of God which Jesus had taught them.

Chapman suggests that the Acts of the Apostles was intended by Luke to be something of a counterpart to the book of Joshua in the Old Testament. Whereas Joshua describes the gradual conquest of the land beginning from Jericho, Acts describes the gradual spread of the Christian church beginning from Jerusalem. The book of Joshua begins with God's command to enter and conquer the land:

"Go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own." (Joshua 1:11)

The book of Acts begins with the command of the risen Jesus to his disciples to start a different kind of conquest:

"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Joshua and the tribes were to possess their allotted inheritance by killing its inhabitants with the edge of the sword. In Acts, however, Paul speaks of the word of God as the weapon by which Christians are to occupy their inheritance:

"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." (Acts 20:32)

Probably not a lot can be built on this suggestion very clearly, but there does seem to be some kinship between these two ideas. What is clear is if Luke and the early Christian church did things in terms of conquest, they were

thinking of the conquest not of the land but of the whole world. The only sword that would be used for this conquest was the sword of the word of God which would enable those who believed it to possess the inheritance that God had promised them. The gospel of Jesus was not only for the people in the land but for all nations of the world.

When we come to Paul, we receive mixed messages with regards to God's heart for the Jewish people. On the one hand, they have been cast off because of their sin and rejection of Jesus, on the other hand, God does have a glorious future for them in Christ. But very significantly, he seems to make no mention of the land of Israel at all as having any particular future.

In Romans 9:1-5 Paul lists the privileges of the Jewish people but very notably makes no mention of the land:

"I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, for ever praised! Amen."

It is fascinating that while the covenants are mentioned and the promises are mentioned, there is no mention at all about the land. Again, although he writes in Romans 11 of the glorious future that they can look forward to as a people, there is no suggestion that this is associated with the land. The reason for this silence about the land must surely be that Paul believed that Jesus was the fulfilment of all the divine promises. In one of his earliest letters, that of Galatians, he describes all Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, as Abraham's seed and, therefore, inheritors of the promise given to Abraham:

"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:26-29)

It is clear from what Paul is saying here that he believes that all the promises given to Abraham are fulfilled in Christ Jesus, presumably in a spiritual sense, and the promise concerning the land is obviously left out. But it would be strange to interpret that literally when the others are interpreted spiritually.

In fact, Paul draws a distinction between the actual city of Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem in Galatians 4:

"These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother." (Galatians 4:24-26)

Presumably Paul describes the present city of Jerusalem as being in slavery with her children, again in a spiritual sense, because they have rejected the promised Messiah. As he says in 1 Thessalonians 2:

"The Jews ... killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last."

Physical and literal Jerusalem does not seem to have any great future as mentioned here. But again, more to the point, at the end of Galatians Paul gives another example of how the coming of Christ had transformed his formerly Jewish attitudes. He takes the name of Israel and applies it to all races who have come to recognise Jesus as God's Messiah:

"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God." (Galatians 6:14-16)

If we understand this phrase "even to the Israel of God" rightly, and, of course, elsewhere where he talks about the true Jews, the name Israel is no longer the exclusive possession of the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; it now belongs to the spiritual descendants of Abraham – those who, in faith, are following the Messiah who is Christ. [Clearly, a critical question here is: Is the church the New Israel? I answer this affirmatively, but not all do! A much more detailed study of this question is necessary, cf. Gal 3:29; Rom 9:6ff; Phil 3:3 etc.]

The testimony of the apostle Peter probably has special value because God did take pains to show him very, very clearly that the Gentiles were now included in God's plan of salvation. In his first epistle, he uses the familiar Old Testament word 'inheritance' but gives it a new meaning:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1:3-5)

There is little doubt that a first century Jew would inevitably have associated the word 'inheritance' with 'the land' because that is the main way that the word was used in the Old Testament. We wonder whether this is in the back of Peter's mind as he speaks in this way because he goes on to make an implied contrast between the inheritance of the land and the inheritance of the Christian believer. The land could perish or be spoiled whereas the spiritual inheritance of the believer cannot perish or be spoiled in any way, because it is kept in heaven for those who believe.

Likewise in 1 Peter 2, Peter reinterprets Old Testament themes very powerfully indeed, and applies them not just to Jews, but to all who believe in Christ:

"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10)

The letter to the Hebrews is surely one of the greatest witnesses in the New Testament of how Old Testament themes, hopes and pictures are fulfilled in Christ. In chapter 4 the writer to the Hebrews takes the theme of God's rest, which is to do with inheriting the land, and says in verses 1-3:

"Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest."

This is surely a very clear statement that the rest that God's people now have to enter is the rest of salvation, rather than the rest of inheriting the land.

In chapter 10, the writer speaks of Jesus as the fulfilment of the sacrificial system in the temple, again indicating that there are no more sacrifices and probably no more temple. In chapter 11, he speaks of Abraham living in the promised land but looking forward to a better country, a heavenly one. Again, a clear statement that the Jews are not now looking forward to the promised land in the old sense, because even Abraham was looking forward to something better:

"By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God ... People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own ... they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them." (Hebrews 11:9-10,14,16)

In chapter 12 of Hebrews, the writer draws a contrast between the literal Mount Sinai where Moses received the law, and Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, where he says:

"You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words, so that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them ... But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel ... Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire."

The writer to the Hebrews and most Christians with him would probably believe that the old Jewish temple and its sacrifices have now been fulfilled once and for all in Jesus. We are not now looking for another literal fulfilment of old promises of the restoration of the temple and the city because an even better vision stands ahead of us, and nowhere is this clearer than in the hopes that are offered to us through the writings of John, especially in Revelation.

9. The Book of Revelation

It is worth examining how the apostle John (assuming as I do that the apostle John is the author both of John's gospel and of the book of Revelation) deals with two restoration themes that come through from the Old Testament. These are the themes of the glory of the Lord associated with the temple, and the river of the living water.

Obviously Ezekiel prophesies the glory of God returning to the new temple towards the end of his prophetic book:

"Then the man brought me to the gate facing east, and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory ... The glory of the Lord entered the temple through the gate facing east. Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple." (Ezekiel 43:1-5)

Now John records Jesus claiming that he was actually the fulfilment of everything the temple stood for:

"Then the Jews demanded of him, 'What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.' The Jews replied, 'It's taken 46 years to build this temple and you're going to raise it in three days!' But the temple he had spoken of was his body."

John has therefore understood that the fulfilment of promises concerning the temple was in Christ, so he says, "We've seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father." But likewise, he uses some of the phrases from the book of Ezekiel about Jesus in Revelation. He has a vision of Jesus walking amongst the lampstands and, in particular, it says his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. Jesus himself now manifests the glory of God, but more importantly, at the end of the book of Revelation, John develops Ezekiel's vision of the new Jerusalem and the new temple into something far bigger and more all embracing than a literal re-establishment of the old Jerusalem and the old temple:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God ... I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple."

In the gospel, then, Ezekiel's vision of a new temple relates to the first coming of Jesus; Jesus himself is the new temple, and the glory of God is revealed through him. In Revelation he relates it to the second coming of Christ. He sees a new heaven and a new earth. Now God dwells amongst his people, now there is no temple at all, because the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them; they will be his people, and God himself will be with them, and be there God – which is a remarkable echo of the promise given to Abraham in the initial covenant with him.

We find the same sort of treatment when we look at the restoration theme of the river of living water. This picture is actually found in three different Old Testament prophets, Ezekiel, Zechariah and Joel. It occurs, first of all, in Ezekiel in the familiar passage in Ezekiel 47 which I do not need to quote at all, but it is certainly taken up by Zechariah in chapter 14:8-9 when he speaks of water flowing both to the east and to the west:

"On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. The Lord will be king over the whole earth."

At a later date again, Joel uses this picture as part of the prosperity of the new age when God establishes his people in the land:

"In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house and will water the valley of acacias ... Judah will be inhabited for ever and Jerusalem through all generations." (Joel 3:18,20)

In the gospel of John, Jesus picks up this picture in the great proclamation in John 7:

"On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified." (John 7:37-39)

It is hard to see which other scriptures Jesus is referring to as he proclaims this word about streams of living water, because there is no other saying resembling this anywhere else in the Old Testament. But, of course, the same

theme comes out again in the book of Revelation when the vision of the new heaven and the new earth are seen. In chapter 22:

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." (Rev 22:1-2)

Again, John seems to see this prophecy concerning the river in two ways. Firstly, in Jesus' giving of the Spirit to the believer, and, secondly, in the new heaven and the new earth. Any other possible references for such a prophecy like brilliant, irrigation streams in the desert in literal Israel, are surely subsumed in this much bigger picture.

Indeed if we just look back to the original promises to Abraham, we see, comparing that with the future offered us in Revelation, that:

- the promise of the land has now given way to the promise of a new heaven and a new earth
- the nation which God promised would become great and numerous has now become the 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel
- the promise of a special relationship between God and his people is fulfilled because the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them; they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God
- the promise of blessing for all peoples on earth is finally fulfilled in the vision in Revelation 7 of a multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

10. Conclusions from sections 6-9

- i) The birth of Jesus is described as the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham and of the hopes expressed by the prophets.
- ii) In the teaching of Jesus, the theme of the kingdom of God takes the place of the theme of the land and promises to the people, and everything else that is associated with it in the Old Testament. Jesus used language from the Old Testament about the ingathering of the exiles and the redemption of the nation of Israel, to describe his own ministry.
- iii) Apart from predicting the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, Jesus was silent about the future of the land.
- iv) Jesus claimed that through his life, death and resurrection, he had accomplished the redemption of Israel.
- v) The New Testament writers showed no interest in a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecies concerning restoration of the land and people of Israel. Since they were both silent about the future of the land, and, at the same time, interpreted the concept of the land in the light of Jesus and his kingdom, they must have believed that this was the only possible interpretation of the significance of the land for the Christian, whether the Christian is a Jew or a Gentile. The one and only fulfilment of all the promises and prophecies was already in front of their eyes in the person of Jesus. My submission is, that the way they interpreted the Old Testament, must be the norm for the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament today.

Postscript: What future is there for the Jews?

I have deliberately avoided this question and a detailed discussion of Romans 9-11 because I think this is well covered in the papers of Peter Wynn and Brian Watts. My own approach to these chapters would be very much in line with that of Brian. The summary of events in salvation history portrayed in chapter 11 is incredible:

- i) The Gentiles turned to Christ at the expense of the Jews, and the Jews are cast aside while the Gentiles receive salvation fully.
- ii) The blessing upon the Gentiles becomes so evident that the Jews become envious, throw down their defences and capitulate to Jesus embracing him as Messiah and Lord.
- iii) This in turn releases yet another tide of salvation and blessing across the earth to sweep even more Gentiles into the kingdom.

I do believe that we are going to see a significant move of God amongst the Jews as they turn to Christ. I personally believe that this is all part of the growing tide of people pouring into the kingdom and, as the Jews themselves capitulate to Christ, so many more of the Gentiles will also come, and we are going to see a huge harvest. This harvest surely is the precursor to the glorious coming of Christ, the renewal of all things, the purging of the old order, and the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth, and God making his dwelling with men. This, I take it, to be the glorious fulfilment of the promises spoken years back to Abraham and his successors.

[end]