

Christ is the Owner of Haaretz

By Yohanna Katanacho

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In the Middle East, many Muslims interpret Western actions as Christian acts. This interpretation is partly rooted in the history of Christian-Muslim relations, especially during the era of the crusaders, and partly in an Islamic ideology that joins religion and politics.¹ Consequently, whenever Muslims are troubled by Westerners, there will be Islamic voices that question the loyalty of local Christians.² The latter will be compelled to clarify their biblical beliefs, demonstrating that the God of the Bible does not despise Muslims and is not trying to take away their lands. The Islamic view of Western interest in Israel, namely, that Western support for the state of Israel indicates the standard of justice in Christianity, only intensifies the need for local Christians to clarify their Christian beliefs. An essential part of that clarification concerns the biblical theology of the land. Such a theology will continue to have a deep influence on Christian-Muslim dialogue, both in the Middle East and also in the West. In this essay, I will analyze popular doctrines concerning the ownership of Haaretz³ and then re-present the biblical teachings throughout salvation-history. By "popular doctrines," I refer specifically to theologies that promote giving Haaretz to the state of Israel.

A Theology That Promotes Giving Haaretz to Israel

Many North American Christians have come to believe that modern Israel is more theologically significant than other states. This belief is embedded in dispensational theologies, in which the distinction between Israel and the church is none-

Dialogue with Muslims requires both Middle Eastern and Western Christians to clarify their biblical theologies of the land, or more precisely of Haaretz. Thus, **Yohanna Katanacho**, a Palestinian Christian, examines in this essay popular North American beliefs concerning the ownership of Haaretz. He first challenges the insufficient attention of its territorial fluidity in the Bible to the notion that biblical Israel is a non-exclusive ethnic group and to the moral requirements for dwelling in it. Then, connecting Haaretz to salvation history, he advocates a biblical alternative in which Christ is its owner. Mr. Katanacho is Adjunct Instructor of the Old Testament at Trinity International University.

theless crucial.⁴ In fact, some see it as the essence of dispensationalism.⁵ A brief summary of the rise of dispensationalism will help us clarify the roots of such a belief.⁶

John Darby (1800-1882), the father of dispensationalism, made a clear distinction between Israel and the church and established a strict dichotomy between two peoples.⁷ He argued that Israel is an earthly people who are promised a material and worldly kingdom, while the largely gentile church is a spiritual people who are promised a heavenly kingdom.⁸ Darby's theology was popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible that first appeared in 1909 and more recently by the Ryrie Study Bible, especially its expanded edition in 1994. While contemporary dispensationalists would disagree with many of the details of Darby's argument, they also assert the need to maintain a distinction between Israel and the church.⁹ They see that many Old Testament promises that were made to ethnic Israel will be fulfilled in the future in an earthly kingdom, thus following the literal hermeneutics that Darby advocated. In short, throughout its history, dispensationalism taught an earthly/heavenly dualism between Israel and the church, promoting two different programs in God's purposes, one for the church and another for Israel. In Israel's program, Haaretz is deemed crucial. In the words of Lewis Chafer (1871-1952), the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, "Israel can never be blessed

¹It is important to note that much of the Islamic world does not separate mosque and state. Thus theology is political and politics is theological. See for example the monograph of A. L. Tibawi, *Jerusalem: Its Place in Islam and Arab History* (Beirut: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1969).

²For a detailed study of the history of Christian-Muslim relations in the Middle East, see Atallah Mansour, *Narrow Gate Churches: The Christian Presence in the Holy Land under Muslim and Jewish Rule* (Pasadena: Hope Publishing House, 2004).

³Anchor Bible Dictionary clarifies that "the two common English designations 'Promised Land' and 'Holy Land' though correctly expressing central theological concerns, are not characteristic of the Old Testament." W. Janzen, "Land," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. IV, ed. David Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 144. Thus I prefer to use the word Haaretz ("land") even though it has many limitations. At least, it is not loaded theologically and it is not anachronistic. I provide a careful study of the word's Scriptural meanings in Section 1 of this article, "What Are the Territorial Dimension's of Israel's Land?" I also discuss its theological meanings in the section titled "The Meanings of Haaretz."

⁴Sizer provides a helpful introduction for the diversity within dispensationalism in Stephen Sizer, "Dispensational Approaches to the Land," in *The Land of Promise*, eds. Philip Johnston and Peter Walker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 142-171.

⁵Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 47.

⁶Some scholars argue that dispensationalism or its roots can be traced back as early as the early church. See for example, Arnold Ehlert, *A Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), 6. However, this claim is anachronistic and ignores some of the unprecedented claims of dispensationalism, for example, the rapture theory that promotes two second-comings, a secretive Parousia followed by a public one.

⁷Dallas Kreider, "Darby, John Nelson," in *The Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (London: Routledge, 2004), 550.

⁸*Ibid.*, 550.

⁹Larry Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991), 205.

apart from her land."¹⁰ A few decades after Chafer, a more progressive dispensationalism developed, questioning its hermeneutical and theological heritage. It differed from traditional dispensationalists over the distinctions between Israel and the church, including the earthly/heavenly dualism.¹¹ Nevertheless, both branches assert that national Israel has a future role on her land because of her unconditional, divinely bestowed privileges and promises for her restored life on this earth.¹²

These dispensational beliefs gave theological support for the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and its preservation in the following decades. Popular writers like Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye influenced American public opinion about Israel in unprecedented ways. They provided a prophetic lens for interpreting the whole world in light of the political events of the state of Israel. Its establishment became for many the most important event since Christ's ascension.¹³ Some televangelists further popularized this theology to teach that to stand against Israel in this earthly history is to stand against God.¹⁴ In brief, many Western Christians assume today that God gave Israel her land, an assumption that gives religious support to the West's political stance on the Middle East. But this assumption requires further probing: (1) What do we mean by "her land" or Haaretz? (2) Who is *Israel*? (3) How did *God give* Israel Haaretz?

What Are the Territorial Dimensions of Israel's Land?

Defining modern Israel's borders based on the Bible is difficult because the Bible gives a variety of different borders. In the Pentateuch alone, we encounter at least three different borders (Genesis 15:18-20, Numbers 34:1-12, and Deuteronomy 11:24, cf. Joshua 1:3, 13-19).¹⁵ The Northern and Eastern boundaries are strikingly different. Recognizing these territorial differences, Kallai suggests three possibilities, namely, Haaretz^{Patriarchal}, Haaretz^{Canaan}, and Haaretz^{Israel}.¹⁶ He argues that Haaretz^{Patriarchal}, that is, the land between Egypt and Mesopotamia, including the

¹⁰Lewis Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4 (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 323.

¹¹For a helpful discussion, see J. Lanier Burns, "Israel and the Church of a Progressive Dispensationalist," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 263-303.

¹²See for example the doctrinal statement of Dallas Theological Seminary, article XX. Dallas has both classical and progressive dispensationalists on her faculty. All must subscribe to the pertinent statement of faith. Dallas Theological Seminary, accessed on July 28, 2004, available from <http://www.dts.edu/aboutdts/fulldoctrinalstatement.aspx>.

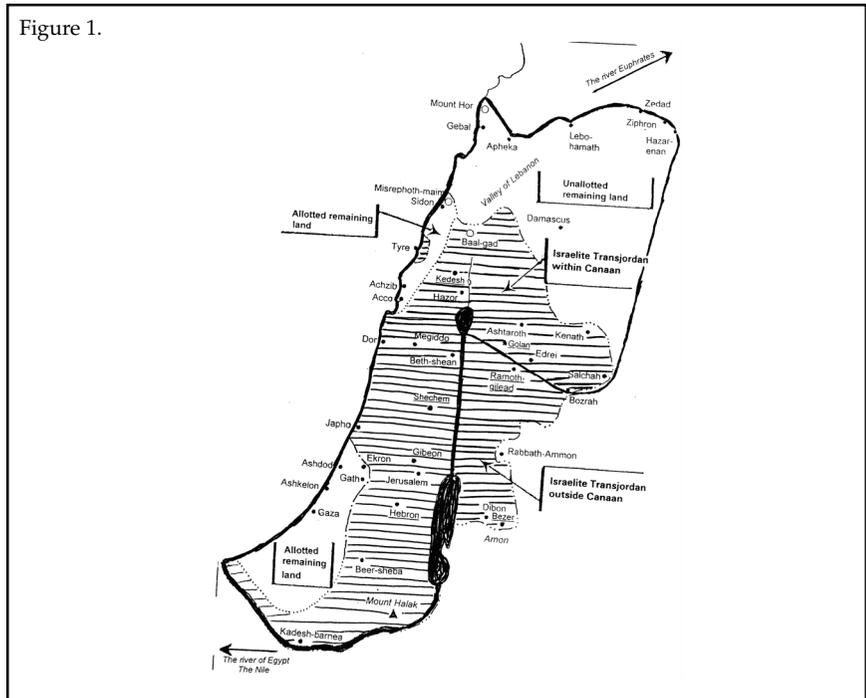
¹³Jerry Falwell, "The Twenty-First Century and the End of the World," *Fundamentalism Journal* 7 (May 1988): 10-11.

¹⁴Jerry Falwell, *Listen America* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1980), 215.

¹⁵Unless otherwise indicated, all the quotations are taken from the New International Version (NIV).

¹⁶Zecharia Kallai, "The Patriarchal Boundaries, Canaan and the Land of Israel: Patterns and Application in Biblical Historiography," *Israel Exploration Journal* 47 (1997): 70.

nomadic desert fringe, is the core of the covenantal land; Haaretz^{Canaan} is the Promised Land; and Haaretz^{Israel} is the realization of this promise. The following map visually demonstrates the territorial differences between Haaretz^{Canaan} and Haaretz^{Israel}.



Haaretz^{Canaan} (surrounded by a dark black line) includes parts of modern Lebanon and Syria, while Haaretz^{Israel} (covered by horizontal lines) has territories in Transjordan outside Haaretz^{Canaan}. It includes a bigger part of modern Jordan. Last, we observe lands with blank spaces pointing to remaining lands not occupied by ancient Israelites even though some of them were allotted to certain tribes.

Jeffrey Townsend had earlier suggested that there are general descriptions of Haaretz (Gen. 15:18; Ex. 23:31; Num. 13:21; Deut. 11:24; I Kings 8:65; II Kings 14:25) and specific descriptions (Num. 34:1-12; Josh. 15:1-12; Ezek. 47:15-20).¹⁷ He adds that these two options are not contradictory because the wider borders are only general and variable approximations. There is a distinction between Haaretz of the Israelites' residence and Haaretz where they exercise sovereignty. Moshe Weinfeld finds yet another explanation for these territorial differences, based on the docu-

¹⁷Jeffrey L. Townsend, "Fulfillment of the Land Promise in the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (1985): 320-337.

mentary hypothesis.¹⁸ He believes that the Transjordanian region is promised to Israel and cites the following evidence. Chapters 1-3 of Deuteronomy consider it a part of the land promised to Israel; the Israelites implemented the total ban or the utter destruction of every creature in Transjordan (Deut. 2:34-35; 3:6-7; 20:10), just as they did in the other parts they occupied; and God showed it to Moses as part of the promised land (Deut. 34:1-4).

In my opinion, none of these explanations is satisfactory. Kallai lacks sufficient textual support for his tripartite division of Haaretz. Townsend downplays the huge territorial differences in Haaretz, especially the Northern and Eastern dimensions; and Weinfeld ignores the present textus receptus, underestimating the intelligentsia of Ancient Israel. Having said that, it is important to assert that these scholars have rightly highlighted the territorial diversity of Haaretz in the Old Testament, challenging any notion of fixed borders. Unfortunately, they have not paid sufficient attention to the theological framework of Haaretz, namely, God's redemptive plan for the whole world, what we might call Haaretz^{Global}.

Who is Israel?

As we can see in the work of Kallai, Townsend, and Weinfeld, formulating clear criteria for the content and markers of Israel's identity is extremely difficult. This work is made more difficult still when the label "Israel" is affixed, as some prominent Christians have done, to both the state of Israel and biblical Israel. Such equivocality is not only anachronistic but also overlooks important complexities, sacrificing Israel's diachronic meanings for the sake of a fixed synchronic understanding of what gets called national Israel. The following two examples should illustrate this point.¹⁹ First, John Walvoord described the return of millions of Jews to *their ancient land*, the *restoration* of national Israel in 1948, and its expansion in 1967 as fulfillments of prophecy.²⁰ In his opinion, the establishment of the state of Israel is one of the most remarkable prophetic fulfillments since the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.²¹ And its preservation is a clear sign of divine blessing.²² Second, on Nov. 1, 1977, the *New York Times* had a full-page ad headed "Evangelicals' Concern for Israel," signed by many influential evangelicals, including Hudson

¹⁸The German scholar Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) advocated this hypothesis. He believed that the Pentateuch comes from four independent literary sources that are identified as J (Yahwist), E (Elohist), D (Deuteronomist), and P (Priestly). For further details, consult Moshe Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land: The Inheritance of Canaan by the Israelites* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1993), 52-75.

¹⁹A long list of illustrations can be found in the impressive work of Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 80-112.

²⁰Walvoord was the president of Dallas Theological Seminary from 1952-1986. John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies: 37 Crucial Prophecies That Affect You Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 70.

²¹*Ibid.*, 7; 71-72; 319.

430 Amerding, W. A. Criswell, John Walvoord, and Kenneth Kantzer. It read (in part):

We the undersigned evangelical Christians affirm our belief in the right of Israel to exist . . . we, along, with most evangelicals, understand the Jewish homeland generally to include the territory west of the Jordan River . . . [W]e would view with grave concern any effort to carve out of the historic Jewish homeland another nation or political entity, particularly one which would be governed by terrorists . . . The time has come for Evangelical Christians to affirm their belief in biblical prophecy and Israel's Divine Right to the Land by speaking now.²³

Both of these illustrations assume continuity between biblical Israel and the state of Israel. But there are better arguments for the multiple meanings of "Israel" in both Testaments. As Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad has shown, we find a plurality of meanings already in the Old Testament.²⁴ During the lifetime of Jacob, Israel denoted Jacob (Gen. 32:28), his children (Gen. 34:7), and his tribe (Gen. 47:27; 49:28). During the lifetime of Moses, it referred to the descendants of Jacob's tribe (Ex. 1:7). During the lifetime of Joshua and the period of Judges, it may refer to Jacob's descendants except the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh (Josh. 22:11), or it may point to Jacob's descendants except Benjamin (Judges 20:35). During the United Kingdom and before the fall of Samaria, it may exclude the men of Judah (I Sam. 17:52; 18:16), or may represent Absalom's men who rebelled against David (II Sam. 17:24), or may stand for the Northern Kingdom. After the fall of the Northern Kingdom, many prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel used it to refer to all the followers of Yahweh. During the period of Ezra-Nehemiah, however, this inclusive approach faced several challenges when membership in Israel was defined by lineage. In short, the Old Testament data demonstrates the accuracy of von Rad's claim. The New Testament also includes a plurality of meanings. "Israel" might designate God's people who are led by a shepherd from Bethlehem (Matt. 2:6), or a land (Matt. 2:20), or the twelve tribes judged by the twelve apostles (Matt. 19:12), or the Jews and the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Acts 2:22), or an ethnic group (Rom. 9:4), or the followers of God (Rom. 9:6; cf. Eph. 2:11-22).

Biblically, the label "Israel" has many meanings and is distinct from the label "Hebrew," or "Jew." A person could be a Hebrew but not Jewish or Israelite—for example, Abraham.²⁵ One could be a member of Israel and a Hebrew without be-

²²John F. Walvoord, "The Amazing Rise of Israel," in *Moody Monthly* (Oct 1967): 22.

²³This quotation can be found in Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes towards the State of Israel* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 167-168.

²⁴Von Rad, "Israel, Judah, and Hebrews in the Old Testament," in *TDNT*, vol. III, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 356-358.

²⁵The word "Hebrew" occurs 47 times in the Bible. It refers to a language or to a non-exclusive ethnic group and it could also refer to a social class such as strangers or foreigners. Most likely, its meaning must allow a connection to one or more of the following: (1) Eber (Gen. 10:24), (2) Abraham, and/or (3) the Habiru/Apiru. All these options broaden the identity of this group beyond the children of Jacob and their descendants, encouraging us to see "Hebrew" as a fluid term, not a rigid label. This fluidity helps us to understand that the Old Testament texts (1) call Abram a Hebrew (Gen. 14:13), (2) call the land of which Joseph was

ing Jewish—for example, Samuel.²⁶ One could be Jewish but not an Israelite or Hebrew—for example, Antiochus the Macedonian king (II Mac. 9:17). A person could be enfranchised into the household of Israel and could become Jewish but not be a Hebrew or a descendant of Jacob—for example, Achior the Ammonite (Judith 14:10). In other words, the labels “Israel,” “Jew,” and “Hebrew” are not identical, and perhaps it is unwise to assume that the promises given to the Hebrews are transferred to the Israelites and later to the Jews without providing sufficient biblical support. These distinctions between Israel, Hebrew, and Jew are important, but we are still left with the conundrum of Israel’s identity. How can we understand the markers and content of Israel’s ethnicity? What makes a person a member of Israel? Is it lineage, religion, geography, culture, a combination of these elements, or something else?

A look at Old Testament practices may be helpful. Although the descendants of Jacob preferred tribal intermarriages, they were not a closed group. In fact, we have several males from the descendants of Jacob who married foreigners. Judah married a Canaanite wife (Gen. 38; I Chr. 2:3). Joseph married an Egyptian (Gen. 41:45). Simeon married a Canaanite (Gen. 46:10). Moses married a Midianite (Ex. 2:21-22). Solomon married many foreign wives (I Kings 11:1-3). These intermarriages were not limited to the well known, for we are told in the Book of Judges that many of the descendants of Jacob had foreign wives (Judges 3:6). Are their children full members of Israel? Did these wives offer any cultural contributions to Israel’s identity?

taken as the land of the Hebrews even though the children of Jacob were only 70 people (Gen. 40:15, 46:26), (3) describe the existence of a group called Hebrews even though they were not counted with all the men of Israel (I Sam. 14:21-22), and at the same time (4) define Jonah’s identity as Hebrew (Jonah 1:9).

²⁶The term “Jew” occurs 91 times in the Old Testament. It was used for the first time in I Kings 16:6, and thus it is arguably later than the labels Hebrew or Israel. At first, it was used to denote the inhabitants of Judah and their children. This definition was broadened as more followers of Yahweh started coming to Jerusalem, especially during the reign of Hezekiah (II Chr. 30). At that time, the inhabitants of the Southern Kingdom developed an inclusive attitude centered on their religious identity. By the times of Jeremiah, the term “Jew” included groups living in Moab, Ammon, Edom, and those carried to Babylonia (Jer. 40:11; 52:28-30). By the times of Esther, it could have been radically redefined in certain circles to denote anyone, regardless of ethnicity, who joins the people of Yahweh and shares their faith. The book of Esther uses a Hithpa’el form of the pertinent term to state that many nations became Jews during the times of Esther. It reads, “וְרַבִּים מֵעַמֵּי הָרִצִּי מְרִיבֵיהֶם” (Est. 8:17). Moreover, the word “Jew” in the New Testament occurs 199 times with a spectrum of nuances even within one epistle or book. For example, it could mean: the Jews who did not accept the resurrection of Christ (Matt. 28:15); or devout followers of Judaism from many nations (Acts 2:5); or a group who belong to a certain ethnos (Acts 10:22); or Christians who were Jewish (Acts 21:39), or the followers of Christ (cf. Rom. 2:28, Rev. 2:9; 3:9). In short, it is important to explore the meanings of the term in every period of time and throughout biblical times. It is equally important to reflect on the reasons behind a wide spectrum of meanings before formulating a prophetic conclusion concerning Jews in the twenty-first century who themselves are divided on defining Jewishness.

Further, we have females from the descendants of Jacob who married foreign men. Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri the Danite married an Egyptian (Lev. 24:10-12). A Nephtalite woman married a Phoenician man, giving birth to Hiram (I Kings 7:13-14), a prominent biblical figure known for his contributions to building the first Temple during Solomon's era. To further complicate the issue, we have children who belong to a certain pedigree but are partially foreign to that lineage. This was common among several Ancient Near Eastern peoples.²⁷ However, it acquired different nuances in the Bible. We see it not only in the story of Abraham and his son Ishmael (Gen. 16), but also in the story of Judah who asked his second son to raise up a child for his dead brother, an offspring from a sperm that belongs to the living brother but legally belongs to the dead brother (Gen. 38:8-9). This concept of sonship or of legal belonging can also be seen in Exodus 21:3-4, where a fellow Israelite marries a bondwoman and produces children who belong to the household of his master (Cf. Deut. 15:12; Jer. 34:9, 14).²⁸ It also extends to foreign slaves. When a foreign slave marries an Israelite woman, their children belong to the household of her father and bear his patronym (I Chr. 2:34-35).²⁹

In short, borrowing Ezra's language, we can see that the "holy seed" has mingled with many nations (Ezra 9:2) and many cannot prove their pedigrees (Ezra 2:59; Neh. 7:61, 64). If difficult then, how today would we define the ancestral markers or content of the descendants of Jacob? Would we define a member of Israel by their patrilineal, matrilineal, or bilateral lineage? Would we look for purity or would one drop of the blood of Jacob's descendants be sufficient for accepting a person as a member of Israel? What about the foreigners who joined the membership of Israel? Would Ruth, the great grandmother of Jesus, and her descendants receive the promises—Ruth whose grandchild David became one of Israel's greatest leaders? And lest one think that Ruth is an exception, consider Rahab (Josh. 6:25) or the 32,000 Midianite virgins (Num. 31:35). These virgins became mothers in Israel.³⁰ In short, perhaps Israel's DNA is not the determining factor for choosing who inherits Haaretz. We should seriously contemplate the claim that God can raise up children of Abraham out of stones (Matt. 3:9; cf. John 8:37-39). Having a Gentile-free lineage does not mean being a true Israelite. Otherwise the identity of Jesus himself would be questioned for he had several Gentile great grandmothers (cf. Matt. 1). Moreover, would Jesus, who has a Jewish mother without a Jewish father, be considered a full member of Israel with full rights? In

²⁷Some examples could be seen in Hammurabi's Code § 146, or Nuzi or Neo-Assyrian texts. For further details, see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 444-445.

²⁸Nahum Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 119.

²⁹Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 84.

³⁰Ronald Allen, *Numbers*, Expositors Bible Commentary, vol. 2, ed. Frank Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 971.

the final analysis, could it be that not all those who claim a physical connection with Jacob are true Israelites (cf. Rom. 9:6)?

How Did God Give Israel Haaretz?

Some Christians argue that the state of Israel is the fulfillment of biblical prophecies. God gave her Haaretz. But what about many biblical passages that teach that Israel must obey God in order to dwell in Haaretz and replace the wicked peoples who provoked his holy anger (cf. Deut. 28:58-68, 30:15-20, Josh. 23:12-16, or Ezek. 33:21-29)? These passages picture a situation in which we have an obedient occupying party and a wicked dispossessed party. If the new inhabitants disobey God, then they will be scattered among the nations. Only those who repent will come back, for no one can legitimately be in Haaretz unless they are in harmony with God. Disobeying God, the Northern Kingdom lost her land in 722 B.C. The Southern Kingdom lost her land for similar reasons in 587 B.C. Only those who repented returned. To further illustrate this biblical teaching, let us consider one textual example, Ezekiel 33:21-29. In verse 24 God informs Ezekiel that some argue, "Abraham was one person and he inherited Haaretz but now we are many; surely Haaretz has been given to us."³¹ They assumed that an ancestral connection with Abraham granted them special privileges, including the inheritance of Haaretz. However, God himself challenges this assumption, informing Ezekiel that those who disobey Him will surely not inherit it. In other words, there is no inheritance without meeting the biblical requirements of justice and righteousness. In view of this teaching, any credible argument for the prophetic place of modern Israel should provide a theological justification for the moral state of Israel and for the dislocation of the 50,000 Christian Palestinian refugees who lost their homes in 1948.³² This number is huge in view of the number of exiles mentioned in Jeremiah 52:28-30, that is, 3,023 exiles in 597 B.C., 832 in 587 B.C., and 745 in 582 B.C.³³

Our discussion of the claim that God gave Israel her land shows that this claim does not pay sufficient attention to the territorial fluidity of Haaretz, to the notion that biblical Israel is a non-exclusive ethnic group, or to the moral requirements for dwelling in Haaretz. Gladly, there is a better biblical alternative that can accommodate the territorial and ethnic fluidities without overlooking the standards of holiness required to inhabit Haaretz. That alternative is this: Christ is the owner of Haaretz. It is fitting now to advance an argument for a Christological ownership. Let us start by looking at the meanings of Haaretz from this perspective.

³¹This is my own translation.

³²For further information, see Gary Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 2003). See also Elias Chacour, *Blood Brothers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

³³Even if we take the figures mentioned in II Kings 24:14, 16 (10,000 people) as the number of exiles in 597 B.C., the number of Christian Palestinian refugees is still five times more than that number.

The history of research on the theology of Haaretz demonstrates that biblical scholars have moved away from limiting the concept of Haaretz to just one meaning.³⁴ Instead, they rightly assert that the meaning of Haaretz depends on its historical, cultural, and theological contexts and requires a plurality of approaches in order to unpack it. Although we recognize the value of this plurality, due to space limitations, we will focus on the ownership of Haaretz and some of the meanings relevant to it.

The ownership of Haaretz cannot be understood without a theology that perceives God as the ultimate creator and owner of the earth (Gen. 1), the one who entrusted it to humanity. Indeed, in defining Haaretz in Scriptures we must consider the human and the divine, the anthropological and the theological. Anthropologically, the bond between Haaretz and the human race is emphasized because of culture and agriculture. Theologically, Haaretz has functional roles, such as reflecting God's blessing or curse. Like the human race, Haaretz lives out salvation history. It suffered when sin entered, and it will experience renewal through redemption. When its possessors were sinners, it experienced the curses of God, but when they followed God, it experienced rest signifying an ontological change. Thus, its meaning and nature are strongly associated with its masters. Whenever injustices dominate, it suffers and all of its inhabitants become restless; but whenever its inhabitants are godly, it flourishes and overflows with blessings.

Put differently, its legitimate owners/inheritors determine its nature for it was made for man, not the other way around. If the owners are thieves, then it is the land of thieves. On the other hand, it could be the land of righteousness and whenever its inheritors are righteous, it signifies a place of rest. Indeed, many references in wisdom literature associate Haaretz with the absence of evildoers and the inheritance of the righteous ones (Prov. 2:21; 10:30). Further, when Isaiah describes the

³⁴Four important voices illustrate this movement. First, in 1966, in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, von Rad distinguished between the historical and the cultic concepts. Consequently, he paved the way for studying the plural meanings of Haaretz in scriptures. Second, in the 1970s, W. D. Davies wrote a comprehensive monograph titled *The Gospel and the Land* in which he surveyed the data of the Old Testament, Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Rabbinic sources, and the New Testament. He concludes that there are two main strata. In one stratum, Haaretz, Jerusalem, and the Temple are negative and are even rejected on occasion. In this stratum, there is freedom from space. The opposite is true in the other stratum. Third, in the same decade, Walter Brueggemann picked up the concern with space and the multiple aspects of Haaretz. Using the social scientific method, he advances the theology of Haaretz especially in his book *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*. He develops a biblical theology highlighting landedness and landlessness as dialectical aspects and arguing that Haaretz cannot be reduced to mere physical dirt or to a spiritual metaphor. Last, in the mid-1990s, Norman Habel developed Brueggemann's work in his book *The Land is Mine*, arguing that the Bible has six ideologies of Haaretz (Royal, Theocratic, Ancestral-Household, Prophetic, Agrarian, and Immigrant). He clearly moves from a monolithic concept of Haaretz to a spectrum of land ideologies.

rest of Haaretz, he uses images of new creation where peace and security prevail (Is. 11). A survey of the inheritors/owners of Haaretz in Scriptures should open up new windows for understanding it.³⁵ At the risk of oversimplification, we will study the relevant data in three stages: before Abraham, between Abraham and Christ, and after Christ.

Before Abraham

In this era, the focus is not on Haaretz^{Canaan} but on Haaretz^{Global}, which has several nuances. For example, it could mean planet earth (Gen. 1:1), or earth without the waters (Gen. 1:24-5; 6:12), or the people of the world (Gen. 11:1). A brief study of the usages and contexts of Haaretz^{Global} in Genesis 1-11 shows us that it occurs for the first time in Genesis 1, where we are informed that God is her creator and owner. Then we see God entrusting it to the human race (Gen. 1:28-30). At that time there were only two people, and thus they were physically unable to rule over the whole earth without the help of their seed. God put them in Eden, the incubator of the human race or the center of the world entrusting Haaretz^{Global} to Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:27-30; 2:8; 3:24-25). He placed them in it and asked them to work there (Gen. 2:15) because it was the best place to fulfill His plan for Haaretz^{Global} and to live in harmony with Him. Unfortunately, this harmony did not last because humans disobeyed God and ate from the forbidden tree. The Lord expelled them from Eden (Gen. 3:23-24), and from that moment on we see that moving eastward is associated, in Gen. 1-11, with trouble (Gen. 3:24, 4:16, 10:25, 30, 11:2). Accessibility to Eden was closed not only because of the Cherubim and the flaming sword (Gen. 3:24) but also because of sin. Sin alienated the human race from God and consequently it lacked Shalom and saw the curse of Haaretz^{Global}.

After the human race multiplied, it provoked God into anger, and consequently saw the destruction of Haaretz^{Global} by the flood. Noah and his family survived and filled Haaretz^{Global} with children born in a sinful state. This demographic change influenced the identity of Haaretz and shifted the emphasis from Haaretz^{Global} to several local places. For the first time in scriptures, the singular Haaretz becomes

³⁵The Bible presents a long list of the owners of Haaretz, for example God (Gen. 1:1; Lev. 25:23; Josh. 22:19; Ps. 24:1), Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:26, 28-30), the family of Noah (Gen. 9:1-7), one or more of the children of Noah (Gen. 10:25), the Canaanites (Gen. 10:19; 12:5; 23:2; Deut 1:7; 11:30; 32:49), a list of nations that ranges from three to ten members (Ex. 23:28; Ex. 3:17; Neh. 9:8; Gen. 15:19), Abraham and his descendants along with many nations (Gen. 13:15; 15:7, 18; 17:8; 22:17), Isaac and descendants along with many nations (Gen. 26:3), Jacob and descendants along with many nations (Gen. 28:4, 13; 35:12; 48:4), the Israelites along with many other nations (cf. the books of Joshua and Judges), the United Kingdom and other nations (cf. I and II Sam. and I Kings), the Divided Kingdom and other nations (cf. I and II Kings), the Assyrian Empire and Judah (II Kings 17; Is .7-8, 36-37), the Babylonian Empire (cf. Jer.; II Kings 25), the Persian Empire (cf. Ez.; Neh.), the Greek Empire and the Hasmonians (cf. the Intertestamental literature, for example the Apocrypha), the Roman Empire (cf. the New Testament), Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; John 1:3; Phil. 2:10; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-4), Abraham (Rom. 4:13), the Meek (Matt. 5:5), and the children of God (Gal. 3:29; Rev. 21:1-9).

plural (רִצְיָת) and thus we have Haaretz^{apheth} (Gen. 10:5), Haaretz^{Ham} (Gen. 10:20), and Haaretz^{Shem} (Gen. 10:31), besides several divisions within each one of them.

The descendants of Ham deserve special attention, for their lands became the focus of many subsequent texts. First, Canaan, son of Ham, occupies the land promised to Israel. His land is the only place where we find explicit borders in primeval history apart from Eden (Gen. 10:19). Second, Nimrod, a descendant of Ham, established the first human kingdom in Eretz Shinar (Gen. 10:10). There, the whole earth participated in building the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9), provoking God's anger. Their activity was matched by a divine activity. They tried to go up but God came down and confused their tongues, scattering them. This is the biblical explanation for the existence of many languages, nations, and lands (cf. Gen. 10:5, 20, 31). In other words, the plurality of languages and lands is understood in a theological framework as the result of sin. The real problem is not the plurality of lands, but sin. The former is only a result of the latter. It is the symptom, not the disease. As a result, any effective solutions must address the root of the problem, that is, the curse of Adam when he disobeyed God. For through him Haaretz was cursed and through those who walked in his footsteps it experienced further divine judgment. Haaretz can prosper only when righteousness prevails. Its redemption and the restoration of its unity are only possible when the antidote of its curse is found.

The Bible also presents Shem and his descendants as related to the Haaretz, (11:10) and leading us to Abram (Gen. 12). Through the seed of Abram, we are told, God will redeem Haaretz and restore its unity and blessing. Neither the cursed Canaan (Gen. 9:25) nor the builders of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11) could perform this task. Instead, God chose Abram and his seed to be his instruments.

After Abram but Before Christ

This period starts with the pivotal text of Gen. 12:1-3. Structurally, the text is divided into two sets:

- I. לָךְ - (a) מְרִצְיָהּ - (b) מִמְּוֹלְדֵי־תֵיבָהּ - (c) מִבְּיַת אֲבִיךָ
 (1) וְנִגְדְּלָהּ שְׁמֵךָ (2) וְנִשְׁשָׁף לְנוֹי גְּדוֹל (3) וְנִבְרַכְךָ
- II. (וְהָיָה בְּרַכָּה)
 (1) וְנִבְרַכְוּ בְךָ כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחֹת תִּדְרֹמָה (2) וְנִבְרַכְוּ מִבְּרַכְיָהּ (3) וּמִקְלָלָהּ וְרִ"ר

Both sets have similar syntax, alliterations, and rhymes. Both have repetitions in sections (1) and (3) highlighting the concept of blessing in a symmetrical way, and both have centers, that is, section (2), pointing to Abram's blessing whether positively or negatively. In short, the emphasis of the text is on "blessing."³⁶ The text

³⁶This can also be seen in the grammatical shift of section (3) of the second set. After a list of imperfectives, we encounter a perfect verb highlighting the cosmic blessing.

does not claim an unconditional grant of land to Abram, and the focus is not on Haaretz but on divine blessing that through Abram overflows to the ends of the earth. Abram is going to be a blessing. However, even though he built altars unto the Lord (Gen. 12:7-8) there was a strong famine in Haaretz (Gen. 12:10), reminding us of its curse (Gen. 3:17-19) and of the need for God's redemption. This divine redemption will be accomplished through Abram's seed.

Put differently, in Gen. 12 God shows Abram Haaretz^{Abrahamic}. In Gen. 13 Abram sees the land that he and his seed are supposed to inherit. In Gen. 15 God gives further details about it. And in Gen. 22:17 God declares that the dominion of the seed of Abraham will extend to include all the territories of their enemies. Haaretz^{Abrahamic} is not going to be with fixed borders. It will keep on expanding, conquering the gates of the enemies, increasing in size both territorially and demographically. Haaretz^{Abrahamic} will continue to grow until it is equal to Haaretz^{Global}. Its inhabitants will be as numerous as the sand of the sea or the stars of heaven, for God's intentions were not to formulate fixed borders but to unite the ends of the world under the Abrahamic banner. The many lands will become one through Abraham's seed. This divine vision is present not only during the Abrahamic era but also during and after the Davidic period. A quick look at the book of Psalms suffices to illustrate this point. In Psalm 2 God says to his anointed one, "I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession" (Ps. 2:8). Clearly, God did not intend to isolate Abraham or his descendants from the rest of the world. On the contrary, he wanted a theocratic kingdom filled with Abraham's children.

But Israel preferred to have a human king (I Sam. 8). This ideological shift initiated a new era in which the Davidic dynasty appears. However, it did not abolish the global aspect of God's promises. Gladly, many voices contextualized the hope that Haaretz^{Abrahamic} would still turn into Haaretz^{Global}. Zion and its temple would become the center of their world. Isaiah informs us that all the nations will come to Zion to the house of the Lord (Is. 2:1-4). Psalm 87 proclaims that different nations will become citizens of Zion.³⁷ They are part of a community that values the city of God and lives in it.³⁸ They have become part of a multiethnic and

³⁷In agreement with *Encyclopaedia Judaica* and *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, I think that since the times of David, Zion acquired special importance. Geographically, it referred to the temple mount (Ps. 20:3; Joel 4:17, 21), the whole of Jerusalem (Is. 2:3, 33:14; Joel 3:5), or to Judea (Is. 10:24, 51:11). Figuratively, it is associated with the people of Judah, or the people of God (Is. 51:16; 59:20). Furthermore, the New Testament associated it with the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal. 4:21-31) and thus facilitated restoring the importance of Zion theology, utilizing eschatological imageries and reminding us of the cosmic dimension of Zion declared in the Old Testament. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 16, s.v. "Zion," 1030. S. Musholt, "Zion," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 14, second edition, 930.

³⁸The transformation of the nations is an important ingredient of Zion theology. John Strong explains that Zion theology includes five motifs: (1) Mount Zion is associated with Mount Zaphon, (2) a river flows out of Zion, (3) Yahweh conquers chaos, (4) Yahweh provides security to Jerusalem, and (5) the nations are transformed; they come to Zion to acknowledge Yahweh's sovereignty. John T. Strong, "Zion: Theology of," in *New International Dictionary of*

multicultural group whose legitimate differences in perspective are not stronger than their loyalty to the God of Zion. Zion hosts all of them, and her God grants them local citizenship without any biases. All are considered equal by birth. They could obtain permanent inheritance and enjoy the continuous support of the community of God.³⁹ According to Kenton Sparks, this vision fits an Ancient Near Eastern mentality of empires or global kingdoms, which are by nature multiethnic and not tribal or parochial. Sparks' comments on this issue are relevant to our discussion. He writes, "For the Egyptians and Assyrians, identity was political and cultural, not ethnic, and was linked with kingship, the king's relationship to the deity, and the deity's role in extending the national borders and the native empire to the 'ends of the earth.'" ⁴⁰ The identity of these empires is not controlled by ethnicity but by a linkage to a deity.⁴¹ Their main organizing principle is not consanguinity but a socio-religious identity. If this vision is also God's vision for the world, then it follows that Israel's identity and land is not fixed but should be continually expanding.

After Christ

Several authors have used the New Testament to address the issue of Haaretz. W. D. Davies argues that it has been "Christified."⁴² William Blanchard furthers Davies and von Rad's arguments—describing the nature of Christ's ministry as "christifying" space, pointing out that the focus of Jesus was Jerusalem and its worship. Peter Walker picks up this issue, and based on Paul, Hebrews, John, Luke-Acts, and Revelation, concludes that Haaretz is subsumed in the New Testament under God's purposes for the whole world. In doing so, he connects the theme of Haaretz to salvation history.⁴³

The latter is indeed a helpful framework in both Old and New Testaments. Within this framework, the New Testament has important contributions to make concerning the ownership and borders of the land.⁴⁴ The New Testament teaches

Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, vol. 4, ed. W. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1314.

³⁹R. J. D. Knauth provides a good summary of the status of aliens in ancient Israel. He informs us that generally aliens did not obtain permanent inheritance and lacked family ties. R. J. D. Knauth, "Alien, Foreign Resident," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 32.

⁴⁰Kenton L. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and Their Expression in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 91.

⁴¹We can see a similar notion of identity in the early spread of Islam.

⁴²Davies has influenced my thinking especially in his books: *The Gospel and the Land* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), and *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

⁴³Peter W. L. Walker, "The Land in the Apostles' Writings," in *The Land of Promise*, eds. Philip Johnston and Peter Walker, 81-99 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 98.

⁴⁴The New Testament authors universalized the concept of Haaretz. Instead of Haaretz^{Israel}

that Jesus is the second Adam (I Cor. 15:45) and, as with Adam, God entrusted him with Haaretz^{Global} (Gen. 1:28-30; Matt. 28:18; 11:27). This turning point in redemptive history, according to D. A. Carson, signifies that the sphere of Christ's authority includes all earth.⁴⁵ Carson labels it as "absolute authority;" Donald Hagner, in *World Biblical Commentary*, calls it "comprehensive sovereignty;" Gundry describes it as "universal authority."⁴⁶ Simply stated, Christ has ownership rights over Haaretz^{Global} including the Middle East. This ownership has been declared in the first century after Christ's birth, that is, after all the promises of the Old Testament have been given. In accordance with progressive revelation, Christ is now the owner of Haaretz even if God had entrusted it to Abraham and his descendants in the past. He owns it because he is the Abrahamic seed and the fulfillment of prophecies.

Paul supports this understanding, stating that Christ is the king of Haaretz^{Global} for every knee will bow down to Him (Phil. 2:10). All things were created by Him and for Him (Col. 1:16). He is the teleological goal and the divine means. Curtis Vaughan writes that He shaped its physical and theological identities, and it reflects some of His characteristics.⁴⁷ He is the means by which Haaretz was created. He shaped its physical and theological identities, and it reflects some of His characteristics. In short, theologically, Haaretz must be understood in a Christological framework. It is no longer defined by the Abrahamic promises, for Christ is the one whom God made as the heir of everything (Heb. 1:2). Morris asserts that "heir" means one who gains lawful possession.⁴⁸ The author of Hebrews thus is claiming that Christ is the lawful heir of everything (πάντων). He adopts an Old Testament teaching, advocating God's anointed one as the rightful heir and challenging all those who consider the emperor to be the heir of all things.⁴⁹ The simple claim is that Christ would receive the nations as his inheritance and the ends of the earth as his possession (Ps. 2:7-8; Ps. 89:27). More specifically, it is an everlasting possession, for κληρονόμος (heir), according to Elingworth, points to permanent possession, usually of land.⁵⁰

The New Testament demonstrates that Christ is the Abrahamic seed in which and through which all the promises are fulfilled. Through Him, Haaretz^{Abrahamic}

they use the whole earth that is Haaretz^{Global}.

⁴⁵D. A. Carson, *Matthew, Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 594.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 594. Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14-28, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33B, ed. Bruce Metzger (Texas: Word Books, 1995), 886. Robert Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 595.

⁴⁷Curtis Vaughan, "Colossians," in *Ephesians-Philemon, Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 182.

⁴⁸Leon Morris, *Hebrews, Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 13.

⁴⁹Graig Koester, *Hebrews, The Anchor Bible*, vol. 36, eds. William Albright and David Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 185.

⁵⁰Paul Elingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 94-95.

grows into Haaretz^{Global}. In fact, Abraham himself believed in Jesus (John 8:56) and through faith he became the heir of the whole world. Haaretz^{Abrahamic} became Haaretz^{Global} through faith in Jesus (Rom. 4:13). Commenting on Rom. 4:13, Bailey says that even though Paul knew the Septuagint well, he felt free to replace the word "ge," the Greek equivalent of Haaretz, with "cosmos" or the whole world, in order to highlight the cosmic dimension of the Abrahamic promises; Paul is clearly expanding the promises of land mentioned in Genesis 12:7 and 17:8.⁵¹ Bailey adds that in the intertestamental period the territorial promise is either universalized or spiritualized. He supports his argument by several examples, such as Jubilees 32:16-26, Ben Sirach 44:21, Enoch 40:9, and Psalms of Solomon 17:32. Bailey is right in seeing the universal dimension of Haaretz; however, it seems to us that this universality or this global vision for the children of Abraham exists since the birth of the Abrahamic promises (Gen. 12:3; 22:17).

The biblical data demonstrates that the concept of the borders of Haaretz was fluid since its inception and that God wanted to reach to the ends of the earth. This vision is only possible through Christ, for He alone is the legitimate owner of Haaretz, a place that is not made up of mere dirt but is a locale where righteousness and justice should prevail. No wonder, Christ proclaimed, "The meek shall inherit the land" (Matt. 5:5). The meek, not the strong, aggressive, harsh, or tyrannical will enter Haaretz and inherit it (cf. Deut. 4:1; 16:20; cf. Is. 57:13; 60:21).⁵² Further, according to Carson, "There is no need to interpret the land metaphorically, as having no reference to geography or space."⁵³ In other words, Haaretz is not only literal but its legitimate inhabitants are characterized by godly qualities. In Paul's words, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). Paul is here refuting the Judaizers' claim that becoming part of the physical seed of Abraham through circumcision secures becoming part of the Abrahamic promises.⁵⁴ Christ alone is the legitimate seed of Abraham in whom the promises will be fulfilled (Gal. 3:16). To be associated with Him is the only legitimate means for belonging to the seed of Abraham and consequently to the Abrahamic promises. Therefore, any theological claims that replace Christ's ownership with Israel's must deal with the difficulties of defining Israel and with the New Testament claims that Christ receives the Abrahamic inheritance of Haaretz.

Concluding Remarks

This essay provides a biblical framework for questioning any theological sys-

⁵¹Kenneth E. Bailey, "St. Paul's Understanding of the Territorial Promise of God to Abraham," *Theological Review: Near East School of Theology* XV/1 (1994): 60.

⁵²Carson, 133.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 133.

⁵⁴James Montgomery Boice, *Galatians*, Expositors Bible Commentary, vol. 10, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 469.

tem that promotes a higher status for one nation than another, hoping to persuade Muslims to revisit Christianity. This time, false theological ideologies are not hindering them from being challenged with the unique authority of Christ and his ownership of the land, a claim that challenges Islamic thinking in more than one way. For Muslims believe that Palestine belongs to Allah and the Quran is the final divine revelation. They further assert that the Quran alone preserves previous true religious understandings, arguing that righteous Jews and Christians are in fact Muslims (Quran 2:132-136), and that Islam is the true inheritor of all the divine promises. As a result, Muslims believe they must rule holy Palestine, where Jews and Christians can live only as Ahl Al-dhimmah “the people of the covenant of protection,” and not as rulers.⁵⁵ They further believe that the land of Palestine is holy mainly because of the Dome of the Rock and Al Aksa Mosque. Both of them are located in Jerusalem, the third holiest city in Islam, described in Arabic as the flower of all cities. In their theology, Palestine is an Islamic “waqf,” a sacred possession given in perpetuity to Muslims.⁵⁶

In the final analysis, dialogue with Muslims requires both local and Western Christians to clarify a biblical theology of the land. It will help Muslims to hear Christians promote Christ as owner of the land rather than suggest it is a natural Jewish inheritance. Even though Muslims do not accept Christ as Savior, they do have a high view of Christ. Christ is not only the distinguishing factor between our two religions, but he is also a crucial connection we have for a fruitful inter-religious dialogue on the theology of Haaretz. A biblical theology of the land that sees Christ as its owner pushes us closer to the truth. This truth would also be helpful for establishing meaningful dialogue.

⁵⁵Naim Ateek, “Jerusalem in Islam and for Palestinian Christians,” in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*, ed. Peter Walker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 128-129.

⁵⁶In Islam, Jerusalem is holy for several reasons: (1) it is associated with Abraham and Ishmael who are Muslims; for the Quran informs us that Abraham prays that his descendants will be Muslims (Quran 2:127-128). (2) Muhammed taught Muslims to pray towards Jerusalem (Al-Qiblah) before they started praying facing Mecca. (Quran 2: 142-149). (3) Muslims believe that in the night of Al-Isra’ wa-al-mi’raj Muhammed rode Al-buraq, Prophet Muhammed’s winged horse, and was transported from Mecca to Jerusalem and then to heaven (Quran 17:1). Later Caliph Abd el-Malik built the dome of the Rock in 691 A.D. and Caliph Waleed built Al Aksa Mosque in 709-715 A.D. Obviously, the concept of holy space in Islam is different from Christ’s proclamations (cf. John 4:20-24).

