

Physical and Symbolic Geography: Constructions of Space and Early Christian Identities*

David G. Horrell

Centre for Biblical Studies, Department of Theology and Religion, University of
Exeter, UK.

D.G.Horrell@exeter.ac.uk

Abstract:

A link with a homeland, whether physical or symbolic, is often seen as characteristic of ethnic groups, and a contrast is therefore commonly drawn between Jewish ethnic particularism, tied to a particular land, and Christian universalism, that has no such territorial connections. After briefly outlining some examples, particularly from Philo and Josephus, that illustrate the diversity of Jewish perspectives on homeland, the focus turns to the construction of space and geographical ideology in two New Testament authors: Paul and Hebrews. Here we find topocentric constructions of space that give Jerusalem a central place, and indicate ongoing “symbolic attachment” to this “homeland.”

Among the features commonly found in ethnic groups, according to the sociologist Anthony Smith, is some kind of “*link with a homeland*, not necessarily its physical occupation by the *ethnie*, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples.”¹ Many of the names assigned to ethnic groups, in antiquity as well as the present day, reflect a (perceived) connection with a land of origin or homeland.²

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¹ John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, “Introduction,” in *Ethnicity*, Oxford Readers (ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 7, italics original.

² See, e.g., Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 63. A number of *ἔθνη* are famously depicted in the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, on which see R. R. R. Smith, “Simulacra Gentium: The Ethne from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias,” *JRS* 78 (1988): 50-77. For one literary example, see Strabo, *Geog.* 2.5.33.

This, then, is an initially important and obvious difference between the group-names and group-identities of Ἰουδαῖοι and Χριστιανοί: the former label encodes a link with a land — the Ἰουδαῖοι are connected with Ἰουδαία — while the latter expresses adherence to a person, as do other names of the (Latin-derived) -ιανός formation.³ Does this basic distinction indicate, as has often been asserted, that ancient Judaism — and ancient Jewish (or Judean) identity — is inextricably bound to a particular land, while early Christian identity is essentially detached from territorial claims and allegiance, “deterritorialized,” in the words of W.D. Davies, since “Jesus becomes ‘the place’ which replaces all holy places”?⁴ Such claims form part of a wider tendency to contrast Jewish ethnic particularism with early Christian trans-ethnic or universal inclusion.⁵

In this essay I wish to explore how far this contrast seems to hold, in particular through a consideration of the kinds of orientation to place and homeland we find in two New Testament examples: Paul and Hebrews. Other examples could of course have been added. These two New Testament examples are preceded by a briefer consideration of some examples, particularly from Philo and Josephus, that illustrate the diversity of Jewish perspectives on homeland in the same period.

Before we turn to specific evidence and textual examples, we may briefly note some initial reasons why a straightforward contrast between Jewish connections to a specific homeland and Christian “deterritorialized” perspectives might be open to

³ On the etymology of the name Χριστιανός, see David G. Horrell, “The Label Χριστιανός: 1 Pet 4:16 and the Formation of Christian Identity,” *JBL* 126 (2007): 361-81 (362-67); revised and expanded in David G. Horrell, *Becoming Christian: Essays on 1 Peter and the Making of Christian Identity*, LNTS/ECC 394 (London and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 164-210.

⁴ The phrases are taken from W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), 173 n. 19 (on Paul) and 318 (on John’s Gospel) and are cited by Georg Strecker, “Das Land Israel in frühchristlicher Zeit,” in *Das Land Israel in biblischer Zeit*, Göttinger Theologische Arbeiten 25 (ed. Georg Strecker; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 189-90. See further Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, 179, 219-20, 366-75, and the overview of Davies’ work in Strecker, “Das Land Israel,” 188-92.

⁵ For critical discussion of this tendency, see, e.g., Gudrun Holtz, *Damit Gott sei alles in allem. Studien zum paulinischen und frühjüdischen Universalismus*, BZNW 149 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007); Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 10-13, 25-29; Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 2007), 3-7; Cavin W. Concannon, “When You Were Gentiles”: *Specters of Ethnicity in Roman Corinth and Paul’s Corinthian Correspondence*, *Synkrisis: Comparative Approaches to Early Christianity in Greco-Roman Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 1-7; David G. Horrell, “Ethnicisation, Marriage, and Early Christian Identity: Critical Reflections on 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Peter 3, and Modern New Testament Scholarship,” *NTS* 62 (2016): 439-60.

question. For a start, even if we contrast Jewish (or Judean) ethnic identity with a Christian identity deemed to be non-ethnic – a contrast that has recently been questioned in various ways⁶ – then ethnic identity itself is a multi-faceted and complex category, in which no single factor, including territory or homeland, is essential or ubiquitous. The links between the name of a “people” and their territory may be further complicated by the connections with eponymous ancestors, from whom both are believed to derive their name. Furthermore, Smith’s sociological emphasis is on “symbolic attachment” to land, rather than necessarily physical occupation. Indeed, one key difference he suggests between “ethnie” and “nation” as concepts is that the latter occupies homeland, while the former may have only a symbolic attachment to it.⁷

A sharp dichotomy between Jewish territoriality and a “deterritorialized” early Christianity may not, then, fully do justice to the various kinds of significance attributed to space and place. This is especially so in light of recent theoretical approaches to space and place, which have stressed that “space” is not simply an objective, “geometrical,” physical category, but rather something that is constructed, experienced, and imagined.⁸ Indeed, one of the key contributions of such critical spatial theory is to challenge and disrupt the distinction between physical space on the one hand and symbolic, imagined or represented space on the other. The two are always intertwined in complex and significant ways. Claims to physical space are intrinsically bound up with perceptions about the significance of space, about its meaning and symbolic power.

⁶ Particularly influential here is the work of Buell, *Why This New Race*. See also the recent exchanges on this point and the wider issues in Steve Mason and Philip. F. Esler, “Judaean and Christ-Follower Identities: Grounds for a Distinction,” *NTS* 63 (2017): 493-515; David G. Horrell, “Judaean Ethnicity and Christ-Following Voluntarism? A Reply to Steve Mason and Philip Esler,” *NTS* 65 (2019): 1-20.

⁷ See, e.g., Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London/Reno, Las Vegas: Penguin/University of Nevada Press, 1991), 40; Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, Key Concepts (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2010), 12-15.

⁸ See further David G. Horrell, “Re-Placing 1 Peter: From Place of Origin to Constructions of Space,” in *The Urban World and the First Christians* (ed. Steve Walton, Paul Trebilco, and David Gill; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 278–80. For a recent overview, see Eric C. Stewart, “New Testament Space/Spatiality,” *BTB* 42, no. 3 (2012): 139-50. On the theoretical developments, see Matthew Sleeman, “Critical Spacial Theory 2.0,” in *Constructions of Space V: Place, Space and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 576 (ed. Gert T. M. Prinsloo and Christl M. Maier; New York and London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 49-66; Matthew Sleeman, *Geography and the Ascension Narrative in Acts*, SNTSMS 146 (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), esp. 22-56.

1. Physical and Symbolic Geography in Early Jewish Texts

Space does not permit even a cursory survey of the variety of land ideologies and constructions of space in the Jewish scriptures or subsequent Jewish texts.⁹ But in order to contextualise our examination of two New Testament examples, some brief observations are important.

We may note, for example, the ways in which, unsurprisingly, symbolic representation and imaginary constructions of space are woven into the depictions of — and claims over — the land. Just as literary and cartographic descriptions in other contexts, ancient and modern, have placed their own focal point at the centre of the world — Rome, London, or wherever — so it is no surprise to find depictions of Israel, or more specifically Jerusalem and its temple, as the centre of the earth, its navel (ὀμφαλός, Ezek 38:12; cf. 5:5; *Jub.* 8.12, 19).¹⁰ This orientation to Jerusalem and the Temple is a kind of symbolic (and topocentric) construction of space.

This sort of orientation – and the intersection of physical and symbolic constructions of space – finds interesting expression in the diasporic perspectives of writers such as Philo and Josephus. Philo, for example, draws a distinction between the “motherland” (μητρόπολις) to which the Ἰουδαῖοι look — with its centre in Jerusalem — and their own homeland or πατρίς, which is the place of their origin or residence. For example, in his treatise on Flaccus, criticising Flaccus’ part in provoking hostility against the Jews of Alexandria, he comments concerning the Ἰουδαῖοι that,

⁹ On this broad subject, see, e.g., Norman C. Habel, *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies*, OBT (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995); David Frankel, *The Land of Canaan and the Destiny of Israel: Theologies of Territory in the Hebrew Bible*, Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims*, LHBOTS 473 (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010); Marie-Theres Wacker and Ralf Koerrenz, eds., *Heiliges Land*, Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie 23 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2009); Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed., Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002).

¹⁰ See W. D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 1–3; Philip S. Alexander, “Jerusalem as the *Omphalos* of the World: On the History of a Geographical Concept,” in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (ed. Lee I. Levine; New York: Continuum, 1999), 104–19, who argues that this image of Jerusalem as the navel of the world originates in the Hasmonean period with Jubilees, whose implied map of the world reflects and supports “the political propaganda of the Hasmonean state” (110). On the influence of the geographical construction of Jubilees 8–9, seen as stemming from the “table of nations” in Genesis 10, see James M. Scott, *Geography in Early Judaism and Christianity: The Book of Jubilees*, SNTSMS 113 (Cambridge: CUP, 2002).

while they hold the Holy City where stands the sacred Temple of the most high God to be their mother city (μητρόπολιν), yet those [lands/countries] which are theirs by inheritance from their fathers, grandfathers, and ancestors even farther back, are in each case accounted by them to be their fatherland (πατρίδας) in which they were born and reared, while to some of them [sc. these lands] they have come at the time of their foundation as immigrants to the satisfaction of their founders (*Flacc.* 46 [ET Colson, LCL]; cf. also *Conf.* 78; *Contempl.* 18; *Legat.* 281).

Sarah Pearce argues that in this text Philo “does not portray Jerusalem as having greater or less significance than the fatherlands or colonies” which Philo and his fellow Jews inhabit; “there is,” she suggests, “no tension between the notion of Jerusalem as mother-city and Alexandria as home.”¹¹ The significance of the two places, we might suggest, is different, but clearly Alexandria, like other diaspora places, can become πατρίς. As Berndt Schaller comments: “Jerusalem, die Heilige Stadt, gilt ihnen [sc., Juden] nach wie vor als Mutterstadt (μητρόπολις), weil sie die Stätte des Tempels, den allen Juden gemeinsamen Kultort, beherbergt. Das Vaterland, die πατρίς, aber liegt nicht mehr im Land, das die Vorväter einst verließen; Vaterland (πατρίς) ist der Ort, in dem man aufgewachsen ist und die Familie seit Generationen lebt.”¹² Moreover, Pearce stresses, Philo displays “fierce loyalty to Alexandria as home, fatherland, for himself and for other Alexandrian Jews.”¹³ Indeed, part of Flaccus’ crime against the Jews, according to Philo, was precisely to attempt to deny their true Alexandrian citizenship, to cut away their

¹¹ Sarah Pearce, “Jerusalem as ‘Mother-City’ in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria,” in *Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire*, Library of Second Temple Studies 45 (ed. John M. G. Barclay; London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 32 and 36 respectively.

¹² Berndt Schaller, “Philon von Alexandria und das ‘Heilige Land,’” in *Das Land Israel in biblischer Zeit*, Göttinger Theologische Arbeiten 25 (ed. Georg Strecker; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 174–75. By contrast, reiterating this distinction, Philo does have Agrippa describe Jerusalem as his πατρίς (*Legat.* 278).

¹³ Pearce, “Jerusalem as ‘Mother-City,’” 23. See further Sarah Pearce, “Belonging and Not Belonging: Local Perspectives in Philo of Alexandria,” in *Jewish Local Patriotism and Self-Identification in the Graeco-Roman Period*, JSPSup 31 (ed. Siân Jones and Sarah Pearce; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 97–105; Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 243: “Diaspora Jews, in Philo’s formulation at least, held an intense attachment to the adopted lands of their ancestors.”

“ancestral customs” (πατριῶν) and political rights, and to denounce them as “foreigners and aliens (ξένους καὶ ἐπήλυδας)” (*Flacc.* 53-54). One of the results of this was that Jews were driven out from the neighbourhoods they inhabited. This racializing, as we might call it, of the Jewish population of Alexandria — an attempt to insist that they were not genuinely compatriots of their Alexandrian neighbours and to deny their ancestral roots there — bears ominous comparison with much later efforts to identify, isolate and eliminate Jews from within a population.

Likewise, Josephus is explicit about the fact that Jews living in various places are rightly referred to by the names of those places – as Alexandrians, Antiochenes, Ephesians, Romans, and so on (*C. Ap.* 2.38-42). With regard to Josephus’ broader perspectives on the Jewish homeland, Betsy Halpern Amaru suggests that, in the *Antiquities*, in his presentation of the biblical sources, Josephus reshapes and relatively neglects the topic of land, “down-playing acquisition of the land from gift to providential assistance, and replacing the land stress with a law stress.”¹⁴ Amaru concludes that Josephus’ vision is one of “a glorious people whose eternal existence is assured by divine blessing and promise; a people who have a motherland, but whose population is so great that they overflow into every island and continent.”¹⁵

While Josephus and Philo retain a sense of the focal importance of “the holy land”¹⁶ — and of Jerusalem in particular — they both depict life in diaspora in positive ways that hardly suggest that this existence is to be characterised by a yearning to return to the homeland “from exile.”¹⁷ The prophet Jeremiah is recorded as having urged the

¹⁴ Betsy Halpern Amaru, “Land Theology in Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities*,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 71, no. 4 (1981): 201-29 (216), commenting on the depiction in *A.J.* 3.86-87 in comparison with Deut 9:6. Cf. also *C. Ap.* 2.160.

¹⁵ Amaru, “Land Theology,” 228. Josephus regularly refers to Jerusalem as the μητρόπολις (e.g., *B.J.* 2.400, 421; 4.239, 267-68; 7.375; *A.J.* 7.289; 11.160), though this is a standard term he uses of other capital cities too (e.g., *B.J.* 3.29; *A.J.* 10.269; 11.340).

¹⁶ For the phrase (ἡ ἱερὰ χώρα) see Philo, *Legat.* 202, 205. For further references and comparable phrases in Philo, see J. Cornelis de Vos, “Die Bedeutung des Landes Israel in den jüdischen Schriften der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit,” in *Heliges Land*, Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie 23 (ed. Marie-Theres Wacker and Ralf Koerrenz; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2009), 90 n. 76. De Vos also notes that the phrase is absent from Josephus (“Bedeutung,” 92 with n. 84). For Josephus’ focus on the land of Israel, referred to as “our land” (using χώρα) see, e.g., *C. Ap.* 1.60, 103, 174; and further John M.G. Barclay, “Ἰουδαῖος: Ethnicity and Translation,” in *Ethnicity, Race, Religion: Identities and Ideologies in Early Jewish and Christian Texts and in Modern Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Katherine M. Hockey and David G. Horrell; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 46-54.

¹⁷ Cf. further Gruen, *Diaspora*, 232-52.

Babylonian exiles to pursue a mode of positive engagement in their exilic land, since time there could be quite extensive (Jer 29:4-14); for Josephus and Philo the diaspora may be characterised as an enduring indication of the flourishing of the Jewish people and the appeal of their customs (*Flacc.* 45; *Legat.* 281-84; *C. Ap.* 2.282; *B.J.* 2.399; *A.J.* 4.115-16). Such references suggest that an orientation to the land of Judea, and specifically to Jerusalem, remained significant for Ἰουδαῖοι living in the diaspora, but that this could coexist indefinitely with a sense that life and homeland were (permanently) elsewhere.¹⁸

In Philo we also find examples of a kind of spiritualised or metaphorical depiction of the notion of the land.¹⁹ With his focus on the philosophically defined notion of the virtuous life, Philo can depict “entrance to the land” as “entrance into philosophy.” This is “a good land and fertile in the production of fruits, which the divine plants, the virtues, bear” (*QE* 2.13 [ET Marcus, LCL]). Elsewhere, as Robert Wilken remarks, “Abraham’s migration” from his kinfolk and homeland is interpreted as “an allegory of a soul that loves virtue in search of the true God” (*Abr.* 60-68).²⁰ As Berndt Schaller comments: “Das verheißene Land erscheint als Symbol der Weisheit, der Tugend oder der Philosophie.”²¹

These brief and selected examples can scarcely serve to convey the richness and variety of ancient Jewish perspectives on the land. But they should at least serve to illustrate, from diaspora writers roughly contemporary with the early Christian texts, some of the ways in which physical and symbolic space are inextricably woven together in the various ways in which the land is constructed, imagined, and represented. The prominent focus on Jerusalem and its temple as holy city or holy mountain, for example, represents a mode of spatial imagination, a construction of space which configures the

¹⁸ Cf. Schaller, “Philon,” 175, who comments (in relation to texts such as *Flacc.* 45): “Das Leben in der Diaspora... erscheint hier als eine zumindest ebensogute Lebensmöglichkeit wie das Leben im angestammten Land, wie im ‘Heiligen Land’.” See also Gruen, *Diaspora*, 252; Cynthia M. Baker, “From Every Nation under Heaven’: Jewish Ethnicities in the Greco-Roman World,” in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies* (ed. Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 86–89.

¹⁹ On this general theme, see Davies, *Territorial Dimension*, 78–91; Doron Mendels, *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 255–56.

²⁰ Robert L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 35.

²¹ Schaller, “Philon,” 173.

world around a central core, a physical “navel,” a sacred site of divine habitation and encounter. Seeing this as a “real-and-imagined” space — to use Edward Soja’s phrase²² — helps us to understand how this “holy land” can become the subject of eschatological vision, through what Wilken calls “a new cartography of hope,” notably in Second and Third Isaiah (e.g., Isa 52:1-9; 60:11-22; 66:10-20; cf. also Isa 2:1-4; Mic 4:1-3).²³ Here depictions range beyond the realms of human experience and imagine a future of glorious flourishing and bliss. It also helps us understand how Jews living in diaspora, for whom the “holy land” was not homeland or ancestral land (πατρίς), could retain and reiterate — especially at times when it became politically relevant — an orientation towards Jerusalem and the land as motherland, a significant point of reference in their construction of the world, even if they held no hope, nor even desire, to relocate there. But equally important to stress is their insistence, as we saw especially in Philo, that they were genuinely rooted as residents, citizens, and members of the (other) places they now called home(land).²⁴

2. Physical and Symbolic Geography in New Testament Texts

When we turn to the earliest Christian writings it is important to emphasise that these texts and their authors cannot neatly be distinguished from those of other Jews, particularly in light of the recent efforts to resituate the earliest Christian writings firmly “within Judaism.”²⁵ Nonetheless, some distinctions can be drawn: historically, we may distinguish those writings and authors that represent an allegiance to Jesus as the Christ; and with reference to scholarly interpretation it is the early “Christian” texts specifically that have often been seen to represent particular kinds of achievement and universality. Just as with the Jewish sources considered above, so too my treatment of New Testament perspectives on land can only be selective and illustrative. I will consider examples from Paul and from Hebrews.

²² Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford & Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

²³ Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 17.

²⁴ See further Baker, “From Every Nation.”

²⁵ E.g., Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, eds., *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015).

2.1 Paul

According to W. D. Davies, Paul's "Christological logic" means that "the land, like the Law, particular and provisional, had become irrelevant ... Theologically he [sc. Paul] had no longer any need of it."²⁶ Davies does note Paul's continued focus on Jerusalem, but sees this as something of a relic of his "geography of eschatology," now "otiose" in the light of the pan-ethnic and universal reality of life "in Christ."²⁷ For Mark Strom, Paul's lack of interest in the land is due to his transposition of the story of God's saving deeds to a "worldstory," freed from its geographical context: "The hope of a renewed land had been absorbed and eclipsed in the reconciliation of the cosmos." Paul's legacy is, for Strom, "[t]he transposition of land to cosmos."²⁸ Yet we may wonder whether Jerusalem, the focal point of much early Jewish land-ideology, continues to hold a rather more important physical-and-symbolic significance in Paul's construction of space. We might also wonder whether these positively framed (Christian) claims about Paul's universal and cosmic vision are more troubling than their proponents intend.

In Romans, one of his later letters, Paul gives a concise geographical overview of his missionary career as one in which he has accomplished (*πεπληρωκέμαι*) the good news of Christ from Jerusalem around to Illyricum (*ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ κύκλῳ μέχρι τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ*) (Rom 15:19).²⁹ Despite Paul's earlier reticence to associate himself too strongly with Jerusalem, in a context where he needs to stress his own independent authority (Gal 1:16-24), here he construes the spatial pattern of his apostolic activity as something that finds its point of orientation from Jerusalem. Furthermore, he is now planning to return to Jerusalem with the offering "for the poor among the saints" he has raised from his largely gentile churches (Rom 15:25-27). As many authors have pointed out, this offering is more than a sharing of material aid between congregations, meeting

²⁶ Davies, *Gospel and the Land*, 179, 220.

²⁷ Davies, *Gospel and the Land*, 220; on Jerusalem in Paul's thought and writing, see 195–208; on salvation in Paul as "pan-ethnic," see 176–77.

²⁸ Mark Strom, "From Promised Land to Reconciled Cosmos: Paul's Translation of 'Worldview,' 'Worldstory,' and 'Worldperson,'" in *The Gospel and the Land of Promise: Christian Approaches to the Land of the Bible* (ed. Philip Church, et al.; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 23 and 27 respectively.

²⁹ See further James M. Scott, *Paul and the Nations: The Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul's Mission to the Nations with Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians*, WUNT 84 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 136–62.

a need for those most impoverished at the time — though it is certainly that.³⁰ It also symbolises the central significance of Jerusalem as the origin of the “spiritual blessings” that have emanated from there to the Gentiles (Rom 15:27). Whether this planned journey is envisaged by Paul as initiating a final, eschatological pilgrimage of the nations to Zion, as has sometimes been suggested, is at least open to doubt, not least since he is preparing to travel from Jerusalem to Rome, and thence on to Spain (Rom 15:23-24).³¹ Yet a comparable eschatological focus is evident elsewhere: citing scripture, Paul brings his complex discussion of Israel’s place in God’s mysterious saving plans to a climax with the affirmation that the “deliverer will come from Zion (ἐκ Σιών)” (Rom 11:26). Paul’s choice of preposition here is striking, given that the original of Isaiah 59:20, which is quoted here, has ἕνεκεν Σιων/לְצִיּוֹן (“for, to, or on account of Zion”).³² Sze-kar Wan sees this as Paul’s “declaration that Jerusalem shall be the Messiah-king’s new seat of power. Jerusalem is not the redeemer’s final destination, but his starting point, the center of his authority, indeed his capital.”³³ Without denying Paul’s heavy “Christ-focus” – perhaps inviting a study of Paul’s construction of space along the lines of Matthew Sleeman’s “ascension geography” in Acts³⁴ – such references indicate how far Paul’s geographical construction of the world continues to place Jerusalem at its centre, just as earlier Jewish

³⁰ For an overview of the collection project and scholarship on it, see David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics*, 2nd ed., Cornerstones (London and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 254–65. For the argument that the Collection forms part of a broader Pauline commitment to meeting the material needs of the poor, and that Gal 2:10 may refer to this broader concern and not – contrary to established opinion – to the Collection specifically, see Fern K. T. Clarke, “God’s Concern for the Poor in the New Testament. A Discussion of the Role of the Poor in the Foundation of Christian Belief (Early to Mid First Century CE)” (PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2000), 188–93; Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

³¹ See, e.g., Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London: SCM, 1959), 303-4, and the criticisms of Davies, *Gospel and The Land*, 201-208. More recently, on Paul’s focus on the eschatological incoming of gentiles, see Paula Fredriksen, *Paul: The Pagans’ Apostle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 73-77, 159-66.

³² The specific phrasing may echo Ps 14:7 (LXX 13:7), or perhaps Ps 53:6 (LXX 52:7) or Isa 2:3, but the main source of Paul’s quotation is clearly Isaiah 59:20-21 so the reformulation remains significant as an indication of Paul’s perspective. See further James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (WBC 38B. Dallas, TX and Milton Keynes: Word, 1988), 682; Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Hermeneia. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 703-704.

³³ Sze-kar Wan, “To the Jew First and Also to the Greek’: Reading Romans as Ethnic Construction,” in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies* (ed. Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 141.

³⁴ Sleeman, *Geography*.

writers described it in similar terms, even as the navel of the earth (see above).³⁵ A potentially worldwide mission to the nations finds its orientation from this point outwards, and the return of gratitude embodied in the collection comes back to this centre. This seems clearly to reflect a topocentric worldview.

A rather different perspective on Jerusalem is expressed in Paul's infamous allegory in Gal 4:21-31. Here Paul contrasts "two covenants" (δύο διαθήκαι), represented by the two women, the slave-girl (παιδίσκη)³⁶ Hagar and the free woman Sarah, and the two children to whom they gave birth, Ishmael and Isaac (4:22-24; cf. Gen 16:1-4; 21:1-18). Both are children of Abraham, but one is a child "born according to the flesh" (κατὰ σάρκα γεγέννηται), the other "through a promise" (δι' ἐπαγγελίας). Strikingly and scandalously, Paul identifies the line of Hagar and her children as corresponding (συστοιχεῖ) to "the present Jerusalem" (τῆ νῦν Ἱερουσαλήμ), "for she is in slavery with her children" (δουλεύει γὰρ μετὰ τῶν τέκνων αὐτῆς) (4:25). By contrast, Paul insists, "the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother" (ἡ δὲ ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ ἐλευθέρα ἐστίν, ἥτις ἐστὶν μήτηρ ἡμῶν) (4:26). After quoting from Isaiah's vision of a restored Jerusalem, to which we shall return, Paul explicitly identifies the recipients of his letter — the gentile converts in Galatia whom he is warning against adopting the Jewish law, particularly the requirement of circumcision — as "children of promise" (ἐπαγγελίας τέκνα ἐστέ), like Isaac (4:28), an identification he reiterates in contrast to the "children of the slave-girl" (4:31). Thus the (superior) "freedom" which is the possession of these converts to Christ is what Paul urges them to hold on to, refusing circumcision in particular (Gal 5:1-4).

Space does not permit an attempt to resolve the many difficult exegetical and interpretative issues concerning this passage.³⁷ In any case, my particular interest is in Paul's striking references to Jerusalem and what these indicate about his geographical ideology and constructions of space. It is clear that, in invoking a contrast between two

³⁵ See further Scott, *Paul and the Nations*, who sees the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 and the appropriation of this in early Judaism as a key influence on Paul's Jerusalem-centred construction of space.

³⁶ Most modern English translations render παιδίσκη "slave woman" (e.g., ESV, NIV, NRSV) yet this rendering, while slightly less objectionable to modern ears, does not do justice to the likelihood that the diminutive term indicates a young female, one who would in modern categorisations be a girl rather than a woman.

³⁷ For a recent argument that Paul's particular target here is the notion that gentiles can benefit from circumcision, see Matthew Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (Oxford & New York: OUP, 2016), 73-101.

covenants, one of flesh and slavery, the other of promise and freedom, Paul relates these to two Jerusalems, one “the present” (ἡ νῦν) Jerusalem, enslaved with her children, the other “above” (ἄνω) and free. In drawing this contrast, he invokes the Isaianic vision of a renewed Jerusalem liberated from barrenness and freed to flourish and rejoice, thus picking up the prophetic tradition of eschatological visions of the city and the land that move above and beyond the earthly realities. Paul thus offers another example of the kind of spiritualising and eschatologising tendencies we noted above in some Jewish perspectives on the land. Moreover, just as Josephus and Philo can refer to Jerusalem as the mother-city, so too for Paul, the city is “our mother,” a depiction that gives Jerusalem a fundamental role in birthing the people whose identity takes its orientation from her — another evocation of Isaiah’s imagery of the city.

Thus, Paul’s converts in Christ are a people whose identity is spatially configured around Jerusalem. Paul’s polemical contrast between the two covenants – one of slavery represented by being ὑπὸ νόμον (4:21) and accepting circumcision (5:2), the other of freedom brought by Christ (5:1-4) – leads him to the stark contrast between the two Jerusalems, the present earthly one and the eschatological one above. But this contrast does not indicate that Paul’s eschatological geography is simply “otiose” (Davies) in light of the Christ-event. The theoretical perspectives on the construction of space mentioned briefly above provide a better way of approaching this issue: Paul’s spatial imagination is centred on Jerusalem, and his evocation of a “Jerusalem above” as mother of the free represents a particular kind of construction of space, a sort of third-space, in Soja’s terms.³⁸ This constructed space constitutes both a positive (maternal) source of shared identity and a space of polemical resistance to the “present Jerusalem,” which in this text at least represents a covenant of slavery Paul is desperate to dissuade his converts from adopting.

Paul does not, as Davies notes, make any significant use of the promise of the land to the people of Israel, except perhaps indirectly in his references to the promises to Abraham and the patriarchs (e.g., Rom 4:13; 9:4).³⁹ But this does not mean, as Martin

³⁸ Soja, *Thirdspace*.

³⁹ Davies, *Gospel and the Land*, 166–79. See also the discussion in Richard James Vair, “The Old Testament Promise of the Land as Reinterpreted in First and Second Century Christian Literature” (PhD thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 1979) 45–51. As Martin Vahrenhorst points out, Paul’s use of the

Vahrenhorst rightly notes, that the land of Israel had lost its particular significance for Paul.⁴⁰ In the conceptualising of his apostolic activity — his travel plans, his collection project, his depiction of his converts as birthed by mother Jerusalem — he reveals a physical-and-symbolic construction of the world in which Jerusalem remains a place of central significance, a place that is represented and imagined in eschatological terms; as such it has an identity-defining role not only for Paul himself but also for his predominantly gentile converts.

2.2 Hebrews

Among the writings of the New Testament, the letter to the Hebrews is, as Wilken remarks, the only one to give a prominent place to the promise of the land.⁴¹ Indeed, Wilken suggests that it “is the first systematic effort by a Christian to interpret the land tradition in light of the new circumstances that came into being after the death and resurrection of Christ.”⁴² In making sense of these “new circumstances”, scholars again draw a contrast between Jewish ethnocentric particularism and Christian universalism, as, for example, in Knut Backhaus’s remark on the “Heilsuniversalismus” of Hebrews:

Die in Hebr soteriologisch begründete universal Perspektive schließt eine topologie auch eine ethnozentrische Engführung des Heils “ein für allemal” (ἐφάπαξ) aus. Das Verheißungsland, im Sinne des *Auctor ad Hebraeos* verstanden, läßt

word κόσμος in Rom 4:13 indicates a certain “Universalisierung der Landverheißung” (“Land und Landverheißung im Neuen Testament,” in *Heiliges Land*, Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie 23 (ed. Marie-Theres Wacker and Ralf Koerrenz; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2009), 139.

⁴⁰ Vahrenhorst, “Land und Landverheißung,” 140. See also the remarks of Brueggemann, *Land*, 166–67, who gives various reasons to question Davies’ assertion.

⁴¹ Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 52. Cf. also Vahrenhorst, “Land und Landverheißung,” 136–39. Whether Hebrews is properly or originally a letter is open to question, since it lacks any epistolary opening; and it has often been seen as more homiletic in character, perhaps originally a sermon, but the closing greetings (13:22-25) give the current text an epistolary character. I retain the traditional description of it as a “letter” for convenience. Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 6–7, insists that it is genuinely a letter, while Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 14, finds “homily” a more specific and useful identification of its genre, since the epistolary genre can encompass so much. Erich Grässer prefers to consider Hebrews in quite general terms as a “theologische Meditation” in which the style is more than of speech (*Redestil*) than of writing (*Schreibstil*). Erich Grässer, *An die Hebräer (Hebr 1–6)*, EKKNT 17.1 (Zürich: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 16.

⁴² Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 52.

damit alle irdischen Landverheißungen als heilsgeschichtlichen Anachronismus verstehen.⁴³

Thus, Philip Church suggests, Hebrews may be seen to mention the “promised land” only “to negate it in favour of the eschatological goal of the whole people of God”.⁴⁴ To what extent are these characterisations valid? It is indeed in Hebrews that we first encounter the precise phrase “promised land” (Heb 11:9) and there are two key passages within Hebrews where the biblical traditions about the promise and possession of the land are explicitly discussed: 3:7–4:11 and 11:8–16.

In the first of these, the author comments in particular on the depiction of the Israelites’ rebellion in the wilderness in Ps 95:7–11 (LXX 94:7–11), which itself encapsulates traditions from the narratives in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Of especial significance for Hebrews is the depiction of entering the land as an entry into “rest” (*κατάπαυσις*; cf. Deut 12:9–10; Ps 95:11).⁴⁵ After a lengthy quotation of this passage from the LXX Psalm (Heb 3:7–11), the author proceeds to apply the lessons of this paradigmatic story to his contemporary addressees, urging them in particular not to lose their initial confidence in and commitment to Christ (3:12–15) — a concern evident elsewhere in the letter (6:4–8). The Israelites’ failure to enter into the land of God’s promise — “into his rest” (*εἰς τὴν κατάπαυσιν αὐτοῦ*, 3:18) — is seen as an instance of sinful disobedience (3:17–18; 4:11), attributed specifically to infidelity, or a lack of faith(fulness) (*ἀπιστία*, 3:19).⁴⁶

⁴³ Knut Backhaus, “Das Land der Verheißung: die Heimat der Glaubenden im Hebräerbrief,” *NTS* 47 (2001): 171–88 (187).

⁴⁴ Philip Church, “‘Here We Have No Lasting City’ (Heb 13:14): The Promised Land in the Letter to the Hebrews,” in *The Gospel and the Land of Promise: Christian Approaches to the Land of the Bible* (ed. Philip Church, et al.; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 57.

⁴⁵ The noun occurs 8 times in this passage (Heb 3:11, 18; 4:1, 3 [*bis*], 5, 10, 11) and only once elsewhere in the NT (Acts 7:49).

⁴⁶ It is probably better to think of this in terms of a lack of faithfulness rather than “unbelief,” as most modern translations render *ἀπιστία*, since the lexicon of *πίστις*, as Teresa Morgan has recently shown, is, in the NT as well as in other Greek and Roman texts, centrally to do with trust and faithfulness, more than with propositional belief. See Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

The promise of entering this rest is depicted as something still unfulfilled, yet a promise that remains open (4:1).⁴⁷ The disobedient Israelites were prevented by God from entering (4:2-5); indeed the idea of a promised and attainable rest is seen as deferred to the future, even on the Jewish scriptures' own terms. Quoting the appeal of Ps 95:7-8 not to harden hearts against God's voice — seen as spoken through David (ἐν Δαυὶδ λέγων), much later (μετὰ τοσοῦτον χρόνον) than the time of the wilderness wanderings (4:7) — the author argues that the people cannot therefore yet have attained their promised rest: “For if Joshua had given them rest (κατέπαυσεν), he [that is, God, speaking through David] would not speak about another day afterwards (μετὰ ταῦτα)” (4:8). Having linked the idea of “rest” with God's rest on the seventh day of creation (Gen 2:2; Heb 4:4), the author therefore concludes that a “sabbath rest” (σαββατισμός)⁴⁸ “for the people (τῷ λαῷ) of God” still remains (4:9), a rest that brings an end to one's labours (4:10). The exhortation to the recipients of Hebrews is to “make every effort (σπουδάσωμεν) to enter that rest (εἰσελθεῖν εἰς ἐκείνην τὴν κατάπαυσιν)” (4:11).⁴⁹

The second passage to deal with the promised land comes in the lengthy catalogue of paradigms of faith in Hebrews 11.⁵⁰ Following the sequence from Abel, through Enoch and Noah, we reach Abraham, “who obeyed when he was called to depart for a place (ἐξελθεῖν εἰς τόπον) he was about to receive as an inheritance (εἰς κληρονομίαν)” (11:8). Echoing the description of Abraham from Gen 23:4, the author describes him as having “lived as a stranger (παρόκησεν... ὡς ἀλλοτρίαν) in the land of promise (εἰς γῆν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας)” (11:9). Echoing again the spiritualising of this notion of temporary residence found in the Jewish scriptures (e.g., 1 Chr 29.15; Ps 39.12 [38.13 LXX]; cf. Philo, *Conf.* 78-82), the author explains (γάρ...) the character of Abraham's sojourn in the land on the basis that he was “anticipating (ἐξεδέχετο) a city with

⁴⁷ On the depictions of “heavenly access” in Hebrews, and the (near) future (rather than present) realisation of this hope, see Nicholas J. Moore, “In’ or ‘Near’? Heavenly Access and Christian Identity in Hebrews,” in *Muted Voices of the New Testament: Readings in the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews*, LNTS 565 (ed. Katherine M. Hockey, Madison N. Pierce, and Francis Watson; London and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 185-98.

⁴⁸ This word occurs only here in the LXX and NT; and this is its first occurrence in Greek literature (so Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 131 with n. 103).

⁴⁹ Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 126-28, offers an overview of the “rest” image in Hebrews, seeing it as “a complex symbol for the whole soteriological process that Hebrews never fully articulates, but which involves both personal and corporate dimensions” (128).

⁵⁰ For an overview of this text on the subject of the “promised land,” see Backhaus, “Das Land der Verheißung,” 172-76.

foundations (τὴν τοὺς θεμελίους ἔχουσαν πόλιν),” built by God (11:10). The eschatological, heavenly focus of this deferred hope is made clear in 11:13-16, where all the paragons of faith are seen as having died without seeing God’s promises fulfilled. Abraham’s identity as a stranger and an alien is generalised to all these characters: “they declared that they were strangers and temporary residents on the earth (ὁμολογήσαντες ὅτι ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοί εἰσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς)” (11:13). What this self-identification indicates, the author continues, is that they were seeking a “homeland” (πατρίς, 11:14). The word γῆ can refer to the earth in general or to the land (of Israel) in particular, but here (as in 1 Chr 29:15) it clearly refers generically to the character of life on earth, since the author goes on to make clear that their identity as “strangers” indicates that this πατρίς they were seeking is not any other land to which they could have returned, but rather a “better,” “heavenly” (ἐπουράνιος) homeland, a “city” (πόλις) prepared by God (11:15-16).

Just as these ancestors in faith looked forward, on the author’s interpretation, to a homeland, a place of rest (to recall the language of Heb 3–4) that is an object of eschatological hope, so too the recipients of this letter — or the hearers of the original homily⁵¹ — have no abiding residence here and now, but are “looking for the city (πόλιν) that is to come (τὴν μέλλουσαν)” (13:14). Such language in 11:16 may already have called to mind the city of Jerusalem but this identification is made explicit in 12:22 where the author, building on the catalogue of the exemplars of faith (12:1), encourages the addressees with the assurance that they “have come (προσεληλύθατε) to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Ἱερουσαλήμ ἐπουρανίω).” The formulation here might almost suggest that the recipients of this affirmation have already arrived at this heavenly home, but the closing exhortations include the unambiguous statement that they, with the author, are “looking forward (ἐπιζητοῦμεν)” to it (13:14). Not unusually for the New Testament, the eschatological hope is presented as already close, or in process of realisation (cf. 1 Pet 1:6-9). Visions of an eschatological new Jerusalem, rooted in the visions of the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, briefly articulated in Hebrews, culminate in Revelation’s final depiction of the city coming down from heaven to earth (Rev 21:1–22:5).

⁵¹ See n. 41 above, on the genre of Hebrews.

Long ago, Ernst Käsemann drew attention to the importance of the theme of “the wandering people of God” in Hebrews; certainly in the passages that feature the themes of rest, promised land, and abiding city there is a clear sense that the followers of Christ are called to be faithful and obedient during their time as exiles and strangers on earth, so as to arrive in the end at their heavenly homeland, the city of Jerusalem.⁵² Once again, themes from the Jewish scriptures are fundamental to the author’s presentation: the notion of a land of promise, a place of (final) rest, the sense of an alien, estranged existence on the earth, and the eschatological hope for a new Jerusalem, flourishing and glorious beyond anything yet seen. Given the extent to which such themes are already spiritualised and eschatologised in some Jewish texts and traditions, we should be wary of drawing a sharp distinction, at least in Hebrews’ presentation, between a territorial Judaism and a deterritorialised Christianity, as is often done. It is clear enough that the letter to the Hebrews orientates its recipients not towards renewed possession of or dominion over an ancestral or divinely promised portion of the earth but rather towards an eschatological homeland that is explicitly described as heavenly.⁵³ Yet, as in Gal 4:21-31, the orientation of the readers’ identity towards a Jerusalem above represents a symbolic construction of space that continues to place Jerusalem at its heart (and, as such, imbues the earthly Jerusalem with ongoing significance).

This remains a topocentric perspective, albeit one in which the symbolic and spiritual construction of place is more prominent than the physical. The orientation towards Jerusalem may be towards an eschatological heavenly Jerusalem, but that does not mean that this “symbolic attachment” to a homeland — to use Anthony Smith’s phrase — is without consequence for the construction and perception of existence in the physical spaces of the here and now. Indeed, as Lorenzo Perrone, following Stefan Heid, remarks, “the widespread presence of chiliastic ideas from the second to the fourth centuries shows that early Christianity had, in fact, much more interest in Jerusalem and

⁵² Ernst Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1984 [German original 1939]). Cf. also Backhaus, “Das Land der Verheißung,” 182.

⁵³ Nonetheless, Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 52–55, pushes back against an over-spiritualising of Hebrews and its land-theology in particular, suggesting that the author may, for example, envisage a city (Heb 11:16) that “would majestically come down from the heavens to its resting place in the promised land” (55).

the Holy Land than the *communis opinio* would allow us to think.”⁵⁴ Justin Martyr, for example, later declares his conviction that “I and every other completely orthodox Christian feel certain that there will be a resurrection of the flesh, followed by a thousand years in the rebuilt, embellished, and enlarged city of Jerusalem, as was announced by the Prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the others” (*Dial.* 80.5; see further *Dial.* 80.1-5; 81.4; 113.3-5).⁵⁵ Indeed, when after Constantine’s adoption of Christianity as the religion of the Roman empire, Christians came to hold imperial power in Judea, the “earthly” Jerusalem continued to have special significance, “venerated,” Andrew Jacobs remarks, “as the earthly manifestation of ‘Jerusalem above’.”⁵⁶

3. Conclusions

Discussions of land, territory, and geographical space often draw a sharp contrast between Jewish particularism — ethnic, earthy, tied to territory — and Christian universalism, which has moved beyond such limitations to a vision of heavenly salvation that transcends all specific territorial and ethnocentric boundaries. Yet the examples we have examined, albeit briefly and selectively, suggest that such a stark and straightforward contrast should be questioned, even if there remains a difference of focus in terms of Jewish attachment to the land of Judea/Israel and a more eschatological and spiritualised Christian emphasis – though this is also found in some Jewish sources. The distinction between physical territoriality and symbolic homeland becomes even

⁵⁴ Lorenzo Perrone, “‘The Mystery of Judaea’ (Jerome, *Ep.* 46) The Holy City of Jerusalem between History and Symbol in Early Christian Thought,” in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (ed. Lee I. Levine; New York: Continuum, 1999), 226; see further 223-28, building on the work of Norbert Brox, “Das ‘irdische Jerusalem’ in der altchristlichen Theologie,” *Kairos* 28 (1986): 152-73 and Stefan Heid, *Chiliasmus und Antichrist-Mythos: Eine frühchristliche Kontroverse um das Heilige Land*, Hereditas: Studien zur Alten Kirchengeschichte 6 (Bonn: Borengässer, 1993).

⁵⁵ ἐγὼ δέ, καὶ εἴ τινές εἰσιν ὀρθογνώμονες κατὰ πάντα Χριστιανοί, καὶ σαρκὸς ἀνάστασιν γενήσεσθαι ἐπιστάμεθα καὶ χίλια ἔτη ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ οἰκοδομηθεῖσιν καὶ κοσμηθεῖσιν καὶ πλατυνθεῖσιν, ὡς οἱ προφῆται Ἰεζεκιὴλ καὶ Ἡσαίας καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι ὁμολογοῦσιν. ET (slightly altered) from Thomas B. Falls, *Writings of Saint Justin Martyr* (The Fathers of the Church 6; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1948). On Justin’s beliefs in this regard, see Brox, “Das ‘irdische Jerusalem’,” 156–57; Heid, *Chiliasmus und Antichrist-Mythos*, 31–51; Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 56–59. More broadly, on the diverse perspectives in early Christian literature, Vair, “Promise of the Land”; Heid, *Chiliasmus und Antichrist-Mythos*; Perrone, “‘The Mystery of Judaea’.”

⁵⁶ Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity*, Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 105. See also Andrew S. Jacobs, “The Remains of the Jew: Imperial Christian Identity in the Late Ancient Holy Land,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33, no. 1 (2003): 23-45; Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 82–100.

more questionable in light of contemporary theories of space, which emphasise the intrinsic connections between physical and symbolic geographies, between “real-and-imagined” space, and stress the socially constructed character of space as lived experience.

In the New Testament texts we have considered, there is, in a variety of ways, a clear spatial orientation towards Jerusalem, a topocentric geography, which can encompass both physical and spiritual or eschatological dimensions, as in the letters of Paul. Visions of an eschatological new Jerusalem, rooted in the visions of the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, are briefly articulated in Hebrews, finding fuller expression in Revelation’s final depiction of the city coming down from heaven to earth (Rev 21:1–22:5). These early Christian constructions of space are clearly (and unsurprisingly) imbued with Jewish geography, reflective of ongoing modes of symbolic attachment and orientation to Judea and Jerusalem.

As we have seen, the idea is often expressed in Christian scholarship that Jewish attachment to a physical land has been replaced — transcended — in early Christianity by a universal, cosmic or heavenly hope. In such scholarship Jewish attachment to land is sometimes described in rather reductive terms, referring to the promised land as a piece of “real estate,” for example — an expression Wilken criticises as “vulgar.”⁵⁷ More troubling still is when such a perspective is linked with an interpretation of the early Christian vision as aiming for the whole world. In Philip Church’s view, for example:

Paul has evidently interpreted the land promise to Abraham not as a promise that his descendants would inherit a slice of real estate at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, but rather a promise that Abraham’s descendants (both Jew and Gentile) would inherit the entire world.⁵⁸

While such comments may be intended to present the Christian perspective as a critique of Israel’s land policies and of Christian Zionism in particular,⁵⁹ they suggest an

⁵⁷ Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, 272 n. 50.

⁵⁸ Church, “No Lasting City,” 50.

⁵⁹ See the wider context of the essays collected in Philip Church et al., eds., *The Gospel and the Land of Promise: Christian Approaches to the Land of the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011) and in

uncomfortable correlation between such biblical interpretation and Christian imperialism, which has indeed laid claim to the whole world.⁶⁰ Rather than aiming for a mere “slice” of “real estate,” the Christian gospel apparently legitimates a claim to it all: Brueggemann comments, for example, on the connections between “land entitlement” and “earth occupation”, suggesting that such a biblical ideology played a clear part in European/Western colonialism.⁶¹ At the very least, the exploration of constructions of space in this essay should indicate that, like Jewish perspectives, their differences notwithstanding, early Christian perspectives, despite their tendency to spiritualise or eschatologise orientation to the promised land, and to Jerusalem in particular, assume this kind of topocentric geography and are thereby implicated in shaping concrete attitudes to land and territory.⁶²

particular the comments of Tim Meadowcroft, “The Gospel and the Land of Promise: A Response,” in *The Gospel and the Land of Promise* (ed. Church, et al.), 162-63.

⁶⁰ Cf. Church, “A Response,” 157: “it is the worldwide expansion of Christianity rather than the rise of Zionist nationalism that continues to fulfill the purposes of God.”

⁶¹ Brueggemann, *Land*, xv.

⁶² I would like to thank Simon Buttica and Andreas Dettwiler for the opportunity to present this paper at the Lausanne symposium on “Universality, Ethnicity, and Spaces: Identity-Construction in Early Christianity”, Priscille Marschall for her assistance with all the practical arrangements, and all the participants for their helpful questions and suggestions. I would also like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the UK for their support of the research project on which this essay is based (grant reference AH-M009149/1).