

LAND AND JUDGMENT: TOWARD A CLEARER UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S  
WRATH ON OTHER NATIONS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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One of the greatest obstacles to readers of the Old Testament is the seemingly arbitrary way in which God deals with the nations surrounding Israel. God's commands to Israel to slaughter entire nations give the reader a sense of uneasiness, wondering how such a loving God could act in such a ruthless way. Christians often wonder how they can connect the loving figure of Jesus in the New Testament to such a wrathful God in the Old. Non-Christians also see great inconsistency in God's behaviour in the Old Testament and often cite this as a barrier to their trust in such a God.

This essay seeks to shed some light on this problem in an attempt to clarify the loving character of God in such stories of judgment and destruction. Beginning with the creation story, the discussion centres on the promise of God to all humanity of space and time to live out life that God has given. The evidence of land given to all people as a gift by God, so that all men and women can live out their God-given purpose in peace and harmony, is clearly indicated in the Old Testament story. God's determination that all people have a space leads to God's intervention when others infringe upon or take away this divinely-given right. The hope is that a renewed appreciation for our present gift of space and time will clearly translate into an honouring of the space and time of others in our world.

*The Original Gift of Space, Time and Purpose*

First, it is important to read the Old Testament carefully in terms of the author's intent. We tend to approach the creation story with our twenty-first century scientific and analytical mentality, and forget that the mental

environment that received this story was pre-modern. The intent of the creation story was to set Israel and its relationship to God in the context of ancient stories of origins circulating in the surrounding nations, especially Egypt. The Egyptian story of origins was well known to the Hebrews. That story told of Pharaoh's connection to the gods and his status as a deity on earth. The Hebrew creation story turns the Egyptian story on its head. The image in the world that represents God in the Hebrew story is the image of man and woman, rather than the images of Egyptian gods to whom people were subject, and with whom Pharaoh was proud to identify.<sup>1</sup>

People, not gods, are the keepers of the earth in the Hebrew story. They live in relationship to God, who is their King, and to whom they give honour by living out life as God has given it. As his vice-regents, man and woman receive from God the promise of space and time to be fruitful and multiply. Unlike the stories in other ancient religions, which are full of power struggles between humanity and the gods, the Hebrew story, as Colin Gunton puts it, is "above all that."<sup>2</sup> Gunton sees a difference in how the Hebrew God creates:

God does not say: 'Be', but 'let there be'. This is distinctive in maintaining a balance between the command and the being of that which is established. There is a greater stress on what we might call the giving of space to be to a reality that is other than God. The world is not simply a function of God's action, though that remains in the centre, but that action creates something that has its own unique and particular freedom to be.<sup>3</sup>

The Hebrew God cares for the well-being of his human creatures. He acknowledges their significance in his creation by giving them a definite space to be what he made them to be. Again, this is very unlike the stories from other ancient religions, which depict humans as the lowest of beings, who do the bidding of the gods. Rather, in this sense of space given to

1. See Rikk Watts, "Making Sense of Genesis 1," *Stimulus* 2/4 (2004), pp. 2-12, for a compelling review of the Genesis story of origins and its significance within the context of Mesopotamian civilizations in the ancient world.

2. Colin Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 4.

3. Gunton, *The Christian Faith*, p. 4.

humanity is also a sense of purpose where the Hebrew concept of “shalom” is experienced by those who are in right relationship with God.<sup>4</sup>

*Everyone Given the Gift of Place*

The Exodus story depicts the desire of God to restore to the Israelites a sense of place where they can have space to live out their purpose. This has been missing in the land of Egypt, but now in the wilderness, it is promised once again by God. God promises a land “flowing with milk and honey”—an ancient expression for a land that will give them the opportunity to be fruitful and multiply and so continue to live out God’s gift of life and purpose.<sup>5</sup>

In the midst of their wanderings, on their way to God’s Promised Land, Israel passes through the lands of other nations. At the beginning of Deuteronomy, the story indicates that these other nations also have promises of land from God. This is quite clear from the parts indicated in italics below:

You will be passing through the country belonging to your relatives the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. The Edomites will feel threatened, so be careful. Don’t bother them, *for I have given them all the hill*

4. W. Sibley Towner, “Clones of God: Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible,” *Interpretation* 59 (2005), pp. 341-56 (355), says, “Genesis tells us that we have a high, God-given vocation, to exercise dominion in the earth the way God would do it. We are the prime ministers of the King of the universe. We play Joseph to God’s Pharaoh. We recognize the limitations on our power, including the denial of any right to ‘play God’ (i.e., making arrogant claims of autonomy, engaging in genocide and specie-cide, introducing pathogens and pollutants, proceeding without restraint and humility in such technologies as cloning or genetic engineering of foods, ruling with ruthless autocracy, and the like). We are free to administer the creation for the general good, but not to violate the orders put in place by the Creator. *Right relationships imply space and freedom for the alligator and the ostrich, and shalom, that state of mutual help and respect, between us and the forests and minerals of the earth.*” [Italics original].

5. See Etan Levine, “The Land of Milk and Honey,” *JSOT* 87 (2000), pp. 43-57, especially p. 57, where Levine acknowledges the common scholarly view of this phrase as “a hyperbolic expression of lush fertility.” He, however, argues for a view more in keeping with a “meliorative expression of uncultivated land.”

*country around Mount Seir as their property, and I will not give you any of their land* (Deut. 2:4-5).

Do not bother the Moabites, the descendants of Lot, or start a war with them. *I have given them Ar as their property, and I will not give you any of their land* (Deut. 2:9).

Do not bother the Ammonites, the descendants of Lot, or start a war with them. I have given the land of Ammon to them as their property, and *I will not give you any of their land* (Deut. 2:19).

The warnings to the Israelites not to infringe on the land that God gave to the other nations, who would be their hosts as they passed through toward their Promised Land, give an expanded view of God's relationship with humanity. Land is not just a gift God gives to Israel. The gift of place is significant for God in that every nation has a place to live out its gift of time and purpose. The story gives a sense of consistency in terms of God's character and the fulfillment of his promise that originates in the creation story. Although God calls Israel out as his people, it is not a calling that sets her apart from other nations with privileges that come at the expense of other people groups, but rather her calling out is representative of God's relationship with the rest of humanity.<sup>6</sup>

This exodus story is consistent with the Abrahamic story in Genesis, which shows the leaders of the Canaanite, Philistine and Egyptian nations receiving the warnings, visions and wisdom from the God that accompanied Abraham and Isaac in their travels through these nations.<sup>7</sup> This evidence in Genesis shows God relating positively to the leaders of Canaanite territories, which prompts protection of both natives in Canaan and the patriarchs in their space in Canaanite lands.<sup>8</sup>

6. Israel in particular holds a special place in history with a particular relationship with God—not over against other people but always in tandem with God's relationship with others. Evidence of this is the Abrahamic promise of God's blessing on Israel resulting in blessing for all nations (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:1-8).

7. Robert L. Cohn, "Negotiating (with) the Natives: Ancestors and Identity in Genesis," *Harvard Theological Review* 96 (2003), pp.147-66 (154), says, "it is the patriarch who relies on schemes rather than God, while the foreign king responds immediately to divine prompting."

8. Cohn, "Negotiating (with) the Natives," p. 151, where he points out that the term "Canaanite" in Genesis is a collective term. "Genesis remembers the natives

Gary W. Burge, in his book, *Whose Land? Whose Promise?*, stresses that what stands out in the Abraham story is that the native residents of Canaan “are not displaced. They are not ejected from their homes. Instead, Abraham becomes a neighbour (not a conqueror) who enters into trade relations with the indigenous people of the land.”<sup>9</sup> The goal on God’s part, evidently consistent with the exodus story as well, is to apportion land to each nation and encourage a relationship of mutual respect and harmony so that everyone might enjoy his or her gift of place.

### *Gift versus Control*

This greater significance of humanity in the Hebrew story, compared to the stories of other nations, becomes a very significant issue as the history of humanity plays itself out in the Old Testament. The fall of humanity in Gen. 2 quickly removes the sense of “shalom” in the space and time that God has given humanity to live out its purpose. This is reflected in particular in Deut. 2, in that some nations lose land to other nations and God is instrumental in making this happen.<sup>10</sup>

This is where readers begin to question the intentions of God. Yet one needs to keep in mind that behind the story of a Promised Land for Israel is the story that God has given space and time to every human being in his gift to Adam and Eve as representatives of the race. The important conclusion to make in light of what has been reviewed is that God has

[Egyptians, Hittites, Hivites] by different names but one single guise.” This gives evidence of a sense of respect for space for nations that is divinely bestowed.

9. Gary W. Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise?: What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), p. 71. Burge goes on to emphasize that for Abraham, the land is linked to a covenant which stipulates, among other things, that the blessing of God to Abraham will enrich not only his own people but the people of other nations that surround him.

10. Deut. 2:12 states: “In earlier times the Horites had lived at Mount Seir, but they were driven out and displaced by the descendants of Esau. In a similar way the peoples in Canaan were driven from the land that the LORD had assigned to Israel.” Deut. 2:20-22 reports, “That area, too, was once considered the land of the Rephaites,” but the Lord destroyed them so the Ammonites could occupy their land. He had similarly helped the descendants of Esau. A similar thing happened when the Caphtorites from Crete invaded and destroyed the Avvites.

promised space and time to every human being and every people group. His intention is that every human being have space and time to live out his or her God-given purpose.

There is evidence that God's action of taking land away from nations is in direct response to the greed of nations and their rulers. This makes them try to acquire more space than was given, by infringing on the space of other nations. In God's creation, those who are greedy for more than their portion pay a heavy penalty. This penalty comes in the form of banishment in the story of Cain and Abel.<sup>11</sup> Cain's murder of his brother Abel is an indication of the relationship between greed and land. God makes it clear to Cain that he is banished from the ground where Cain shed Abel's blood. This banishment is God's acknowledgement that, although Abel is no longer present, his space in this world is something God desires. Cain will be reminded his entire life that the ground with Abel's blood belonged to Abel; a response to Cain's envy of the fact that Abel was accepted before God.

Jacques Ellul, in his book *The Meaning of the City*, sees this event as Cain upsetting the delicate balance God has placed between man and the world:

The condemnation which Cain is to bear is being a fugitive and a vagabond. Until now, only God's protection has enabled life to go on, and this protection is seen in a certain stability, a certain familiarity, between man and nature. Cain has shattered this serenity. He has introduced insecurity, the taste for blood, for vengeance. And the condemnation pronounced by God is only the inevitable result of Cain's act. Cain has broken the relationship between man and the world, and so he will necessarily be a fugitive and a wanderer.<sup>12</sup>

This "broken relationship between man and the world" in Cain's act of murder is an infringement on Abel's space and time to live out his purpose in the world. This infringement can be described as turning what was a gift

11. "But the LORD said, 'What have you done? Listen—your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground! You are hereby banished from the ground you have defiled with your brother's blood. No longer will it yield abundant crops for you, no matter how hard you work! From now on you will be a homeless fugitive on the earth, constantly wandering from place to place'" (Gen. 4:10-12 NLT).

12. Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 2.

into something that is desired to be controlled. Walter Brueggemann describes it as “an attempt to shift the grounds for security. It is an attempt to replace precarious trust with control, to substitute self-possession for covenantal assurance.”<sup>13</sup>

The result of Cain’s action is the introduction of greed, whereby people displace others to satisfy their desire to control their environment. It is this behaviour that is contrary to the delicate balance that God placed in his creation. What Cain initiates is a movement away from the nurture and security of a relationship with God toward creating his own place of security, demonstrated in the building of cities that were created in stark contradiction to God’s gift.<sup>14</sup>

As history in the Old Testament unfolds, we see that God reacts against nations that infringe on the land of other people, subjugate others through slavery and therefore deny them freedom to fill space and time as God wills. The Exodus story is a prime example of God intervening in the injustice of one people group toward another.

The command to “destroy” the residents of Canaan in Deuteronomy is most sobering, as the language seems to indicate genocide. But as the story continues, it is significant how Joshua interprets such a command as he leads Israel under God’s initiative to acquire the apportioned land. Gary Burge points out that before one interprets God’s command as “cavalier” and a “sweeping disposal of an entire people,”<sup>15</sup> three observations are necessary:

1. Joshua fights and destroys urban areas that exhibit military resistance to his arrival. The book offers no suggestion that Joshua ever massacres or depopulates large regions.
2. Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 7:5 underscore the obliteration of Canaanite religion.

13. Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*. (Overtures in Biblical Theology; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 55.

14. For a full review of this line of reasoning see Ellul’s account of the story of Nimrod in *The Meaning of the City*, pp. 10-23.

15. Burge, *Whose Land?*, p. 83.

3. Joshua treats many of the Canaanites with respect. In Jericho, Rahab was not an Israelite, yet because she aided the spies and feared their God, she was protected and her life preserved (Josh. 2).<sup>16</sup>

Joshua's behaviour is then in keeping with the nature of what was discussed above in terms of God's goal that all have a place and space to live out their lives with purpose. This is more in keeping with the overall story being told in the Old Testament historical books.<sup>17</sup>

As the story continues, there is evidence later on, in the monarchical period, of God's intervention, as several of the nations surrounding Israel seek to subjugate Israel by conquering their land and obtaining slaves to do their bidding. One such story is found in 2 Sam. 10:2-5. King David, in an effort to confirm his respect for Hanun, the heir of Nahash, the Ammonite king, sends ambassadors of good will to express sympathy to Hanun for his father's death. Rather than receive the good wishes by honouring David's ambassadors, Hanun embarrasses them:

When David's ambassadors arrived in the land of Ammon, Hanun's advisers said to their master, "Do you really think these men are coming here to honour your father? No! David has sent them to spy out the city so that they can come in and conquer it!" So Hanun seized David's ambassadors and shaved off half of each man's beard, cut off their robes at the buttocks, and sent them back to David in shame (2 Sam. 10:2-4 NLT).

What is significant about what Hanun does to David's ambassadors is that the cutting off of the beard and the robe to expose the buttocks is a sign of enslavement.<sup>18</sup> The message that this act conveys to David is that

16. Burge, *Whose Land?*, p. 83.

17. See Niels Peter Lemche, *The Canaanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), pp. 158-59, who says, "if we characterize Old Testament history writing as novelistic... The history writer may... also choose to tell the audience what is going to happen, and adopt a method of describing the past in such a way that the description of the historical development will at the same time promote a programme for the future direction of the society."

18. The cutting off of the beard by someone else was an act of great indignity. In Isa. 7:20, "the people of God are spoken of as 'beard' or 'hair' which he [God] will shave with the 'razor, the king of Assyria.' See "Jerusalem," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, n.d.), 4:357-58. On p. 357 it says, "To humiliate a man, it was the practice to forcibly shave half the beard." Semites wore thick beards to identify



the only relationship that King Hanun desires is one in which David and his people are slaves to the Ammonites. As the story unfolds, David takes this as a sign of war and amasses his army to attack the Ammonites.

Control is the common behaviour of rulers like Hanun throughout Old Testament history, who seek safety and security for their nations by subduing surrounding people and nations. What is highly significant in the behaviour of David, in contrast to that of kings like Hanun, is that once war is over, his treatment of the remaining natives is in keeping with God's covenant to respect and honour the alien in the land.<sup>19</sup>

### *God's Intended Relationship with Rulers and Nations*

When Israel enters its period of "landedness,"<sup>20</sup> God communicates the true relationship of a ruler to land and people by giving regulations for the king and use of the land. In his book, *The Land: Overtures in Biblical Theology*, Walter Brueggemann emphasizes that land is held in trust and is recognized as the fruit of relationship with God. It is given as gift and held on to in remembrance of God and in keeping with the three emphases in the Torah that govern land keeping.<sup>21</sup>

themselves over against the "clean shaven" Egyptians and Hittites. Hanun shaved the men as a subjugating act over them as Hebrews.

19. See Burge, *Whose Land?*, pp. 87-88, where he comments on the efforts of King David to integrate non-Israelites not only into the Israelite community but also into positions of leadership in Israel.

20. The term is borrowed from Brueggemann, *The Land*.

21. Brueggemann, *The Land*, pp. 58-61. Brueggemann outlines the three emphases in the Torah that govern land keeping as: 1) Do not have images in the land. The issue is that images disconnect Israel from the past landlessness when God led them and promised them land. Images will disconnect Israel from their previous experience and so create a disconnection (a lack of remembrance) by focusing from now on, on the images rather than on the God who brought them to land. 2) Keep the Sabbath. Sabbath implies rest, forgiveness of debts and restitution of land. Sabbath is a reminder that land is a gift from God. Sabbath is also for honouring the land that God has given—that our job is not to devour it but to benefit from it. 3) Care for people, specifically, care for those who are poor and marginalized. There will be those in the land who do not have land and so God calls on Israel to make sure these people are not neglected but rather cared for by the landed community.

He goes on to explain that the king was to be one from among the people, one who ruled in partnership with them, keeping the land in relationship to God who gave it. The tragedy of the later kings of Israel was that they deviated from this ideal. Instead, they posed as land owners, who placed themselves above the people and put themselves in the place of God. Land was lost when the king assumed that the land belonged to him and disregarded the emphases of keeping land in relationship to the Torah, and land as gift from God.<sup>22</sup> Pharaoh made the same mistake when Israel lived in Egypt, and Israel's own rulers repeated it.

Jeffrey Fager, in *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee*, points out that the pattern in ancient Near Eastern nations was a system of land tenure whereby the rulers were required by law to ensure fair distribution of land to every citizen. Fager emphasizes that these traditions, including that of Israel, took on

theological warrants, claiming divine authority for the equitable distribution of the land that was presupposed by early Israel. The development culminated during the exile when the priests were forced to recreate a society that would conform to the will of Yahweh and thus prosper in the restored homeland.<sup>23</sup>

If God also promised land to other nations, as indicated in Deut. 2, then in God's sight, the rulers of these nations were also required to ensure that land remained in the hands of families, and that the buying and selling of land did not infringe on familial rights to that land. Rulers were to be God's stewards on earth who ensured that such a system would be

22. See Brueggemann, *The Land*, pp. 67-83, regarding the implications for rulers who disregarded these three emphases.

23. Jeffrey Fager, *Land Tenure and Biblical Jubilee* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 119; cf. Gunter H. Wittenberg, "The Significance of Land in the Old Testament," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 77 (2004), pp. 58-60 (59), who writes, "In the early period after the Israelites had settled in Palestine, the whole population had equal access to land. With the advent of the monarchy and the shift from a rural agricultural economy to an urban money economy, however, a movement of dispossession and disruption of ancient Israelite society occurred which undermined the old social order. This called forth the counter-reaction by the great prophets Amos, Micah and Isaiah in the eighth century."

upheld.<sup>24</sup> It is possible, then, that when God cut a covenant with Abram in Gen. 15, God's reference to the "sin of the Amorites" (Gen. 15:16b) was a reference to their lack of proper stewardship of the land.<sup>25</sup> God would take the land of the Amorites away from them when Israel came back to Canaan, probably because they had continually infringed on the freedom of other people and distorted their place and purpose in the world.

### *Balance in Creation*

The maintenance of the delicate balance of people and land comes by way of remaining in faithful relationship with God. In the Hebrew story, faithfulness to Yahweh results in a fruitful relationship with both God and his creation.<sup>26</sup> When such faith is broken and replaced by idolatry, the land reacts by not being productive. Persistent idolatry results in expulsion and banishment from the land.

One of many Old Testament expressions of this principle is in Jer. 3:2-3. The prophet writes:

Look all around you [Judah]. Is there anywhere in the entire land where you have not been defiled by your adulteries? You sit like a prostitute beside the road waiting for a client. You sit alone like a nomad in the desert. You have polluted the land with your prostitution and wickedness. That is why even the spring rains have failed. For you are a prostitute and are completely ashamed.<sup>27</sup>

24. Towner, "Clones," p. 354. This is the intended role of humanity in God's creation: "primacy is no cause for arrogance... Rather it is an ascent to the position of God's steward. It is to serve as a mediator and a conduit of goodness and health between the Source of goodness and the good creation. It is the kind of tender, sensitive care for the world..."

25. Gen 15:16b NLT reads, "After four generations your descendants will return here to this land, when the sin of the Amorites has run its course."

26. See David A. Glatt-Gilad, "The Re-interpretation of the Edomite-Israelite Encounter in Deuteronomy II," *VT* 47 (2004), pp. 441-55 (442), who writes, "the integral connection between observance of God's commands and possession of the land is highlighted over and over again ([Deut.] viii 19-20, xi 22-5, xix 8-9).

27. Jer. 3:2-3 NLT. The imagery of adultery in Israel is used as a metaphor for the act of idolatry.

This is a clear warning by God that the people of Judah and their ‘gods’ have defiled the land. It will translate into exile from the land and enslavement by other people (a message of the inevitable that Judah’s leaders refused to accept). Practising idolatry is saying that someone other than God is owner of the land. When people say this, immorality and destructive human behaviour undermine their freedom to live out their lives in the way God intended in the beginning. This in turn upsets the balance of creation and results in disharmony between land and human beings.

Although landlessness is the result of God’s wrath on nations and people who upset the balance of creation, it is not a permanent state. In the story of Israel, landlessness is the place where recovery of relationship with God takes place.<sup>28</sup> The exodus story is the governing story that places a value on redemption in the wilderness. In Deut. 2, we find Israel in its fortieth year of wandering. Israel will not be denied the Promised Land forever. The wilderness becomes a place of recovery for Israel as God now calls the nation to travel north toward the Promised Land once again.

The command “You have been skirting this hill country long enough; now turn north,” clearly echoes God’s original exhortation, spoken almost forty years earlier at Horeb, to move forward toward Canaan: “The Lord our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying; You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Now turn and make your way to the hill country of the Amorites (Deut. 1:6-7). The period of punishment has drawn to a close and a new period is dawning. The Israelites are set to march forward once again and nothing will stand in their way.<sup>29</sup>

What is evident in this story is the desire of God to restore people to a place where they can live and have space to be fruitful. As the Israelites travel north through the lands of those who will be their neighbours, the admonition of God to refrain from hurting them solidifies for Israel the importance of a place for everyone in God’s creation. Such admonition is

28. See Brueggemann, *The Land*, chapter 7, “The Push toward Landedness and Beyond,” pp. 101-22. God’s love for humanity is primary, and his wrath is his love’s penultimate expression on those that would hinder God’s love from being realized in his created order.

29. Glatt-Gilad, “Edomite–Israelite Encounter,” p. 450.

clear in the theme found in the commandments given at Sinai: “You shall not covet.”<sup>30</sup>

In order to maintain the balance of all human beings possessing a place, greed or covetousness needs to be dealt with. The commandments given at Sinai require distinct boundaries that lead to harmony between humanity and creation, the boundaries God placed in the creation in the beginning.

Miroslav Volf expands this argument by including the necessity of considering the space and time of another as an integral part of being in relationship in this world. He points out:

If I’m crushed in the process of embracing the other, this is no longer an embrace but an act of aggression. Whereas the will to embrace the other is unconditional, the embrace itself is not. It is conditioned first on the preservation of the integrity of the self. Boundaries are good because discreet identities themselves are good. And because both are good, they have to be protected. The protection of the identity of oneself is done by appealing to creation. To have anything distinct at all and to have a world, you must have and maintain boundaries. Hence when God creates, he separates and also binds together.<sup>31</sup>

The act of God separating in the creation story is the act of setting boundaries so that everything and everyone in the creation can enjoy the space given to them without one threatening the other. It is God’s affirmation of his creation as “good” that ensures this. It is the entrance of evil into the garden and the undermining of Adam and Eve’s faith in God that puts the creation off balance. Yet, as was seen above, God does not leave creation off balance. He works toward restoring and recovering the balance so that everyone and everything can enjoy once again the space given to them.

30. Gen. 20:17, “Do not covet your neighbour’s house. Do not covet your neighbour’s wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else your neighbour owns” NLT. See also Wittenberg, “Significance,” p. 58: “This commandment does not only mean the physical building, but it refers equally to the land on which the house is situated.”

31. Miroslav Volf, “Struggles in Religious Identity: Living with the Other,” public lecture at Regent College in the University of British Columbia, March 2003.

*Conclusion: Judgment and Wrath, a Function of God's Love*

This essay seeks only to introduce what seems to be a definite reaction on God's part to the greed of human beings who exercise control over others in order to maintain autonomy and thereby determine their own existence. By this behaviour, human beings create destructive environments that take away the dignity of others.

T.F. Torrance emphasizes:

The doctrine of creation out of nothing meant that God does not stand in a spatial or temporal relation to the universe but that spatial and temporal relations are produced through His creation of the universe and maintained through His interaction with what He has made.<sup>32</sup>

The Hebrew God is one who desires to be involved in his creation and so ensure that what was intended for humanity and the world will be sustained throughout its existence. This desire of God leads him to take action upon individuals and nations who infringe on others' right to space in this world to live out the gift of life. This is not a capricious reaction on God's part. Rather it demonstrates the love of the Creator who desires that his creation enjoy the existence of which he purposed before hand.

Israel learns of their God possessing this character in their history of relationship with God. In fact, it is in their historical relationship that Israel understands what God's intentions were in creating humanity and the world. Borman Thorlief emphasizes that in their understanding of God, the Israelites "saw creation and preservation pass imperceptibly into one another"<sup>33</sup> so that creation is not something they viewed at the beginning of time but something revealed to them in the midst of their relationship with God.

Out of this relationship was the understanding that God had promised land to other people and nations so that they might enjoy space to be fruitful in life. The promise to Adam and Eve in the creation story does not simply look for fulfillment in the garden but continues to be fulfilled as the

32. T.F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969), p. 23.

33. Boman Thorlief, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (London: W.W. Norton, 1960), p. 173.

story of God and humanity unfolds through the Hebrew story in the Old Testament.

*Jesus and the Recovery of Space and Time for All Humanity*

Could it be that Jesus' life on earth, as a person with no fixed address, communicated what was symptomatic of where Israel was in relationship to God during Jesus' days? As Jesus wandered through Judea, Samaria and Syria, he was representatively wandering in the wilderness of the human condition.<sup>34</sup> The New Testament writers depict Jesus as the one who comes to restore space and time to humanity to live out the gift of life that God gave representatively to Adam and Eve.<sup>35</sup>

Followers of Christ can be confident that the present injustice of displacement of people and nations in our world warrants a response of mercy, as we follow Jesus in reaching out to those who are displaced and dispossessed. We can help them establish and regain space so that they can live productively and fruitfully as God desires, in what continues to be God's creation.<sup>36</sup>

34. The notion of Israel as representative of the entire human race is a theme that re-appears in the person of Jesus after a long historical period of dispossession for Israel and an attempt to regain her significance by trying to rid herself of her oppressors.

35. The length of this paper does not permit a review of this concept. Suffice it to say that in the Lord's Prayer there is the anticipation that God's will be "done on earth as it is in heaven."

36. See Torrance, *Space*, pp. 23-24. Space and time is what God uses to make himself known: "Thus the miraculous activity of God in the Incarnation is not to be thought of as an intrusion into the creation or as an abrogation of its space-time structure, but as the chosen form of God's interaction with nature in which He establishes an intimate relation between creaturely human being and Himself. Here space and time provide the rational medium within which God makes Himself present and known to us, and our knowledge of Him may be grounded objectively in God's own transcendent rationality."