



*Figure 1: God owns it! But you can be his manager!*

## 8. The Kingdom of God, Land and Ownership

We now turn to developing a Biblical theology around

principle 10, ownership – with particular focus on land.<sup>i</sup> This is the foundation of Capitalism. Those societies that have clear land rights and simple processes of adjudication most rapidly utilise the wealth base of society. Capital formation described in the last chapter is not easily done unless one can buy their own home and land.

1.4 billion people in global mega-cities are illegal, living on land not their own - they are known as squatters, landless people, dispossessed twice. First, they have become landless through increased exploitation by the rural rich. For in the process of growing world urbanisation, a growing income differential has been increased between the land-owning wealthy, and the poor. Losing even the little land they have in the rural areas, many flock to the cities where they seek another foothold, a small piece of land on which to build a little shack, a little piece of security. But since the processes of gaining title can take many years, for a second time they are dispossessed of rights, and identified as illegal. In some countries they are thus non-persons.

These are the people among whom, along with some amazing saints, I have lived for long seasons and worked for 40 years. In our struggles for land for squatters, I began to understand my Maori brothers' and my Pakeha ancestors' struggle for land.<sup>ii</sup>

### A Crucial Pastoral Issue

Land rights is the fundamental pastoral issue for millions in these cities. Without it they have little hope of ever moving out of their squalor and destitution. With it comes the possibilities of home ownership and the dignity this brings to a man and his wife; of jobs created by such housing development and of children growing up in dignity and health.

*I see the splatter of blood on the walls of a community of squatters in which I once lived. Madame Imelda Marcos sent in the marines to move the people off her son-in-law's land. Two were murdered, seventeen wounded. This tragedy could have been prevented by reasonable talk, responsible consultation, and wise planning for development in this city.*

As a spiritual leader, had I been wiser, perhaps I could have had a role to play in laying a long term web of relationships that would have precluded such bloodshed. Sometimes there are sins of omission that cost lives, making us as guilty as those whose sin leads them to commit murder. This issue of land is one of life and death, and it is one where a faulty theology has led to our non-involvement as Christians. That has led to the countless suffering and poverty and death of millions we could have rescued had we but studied the word of God.

## ***A Crucial Issue for Cultural-Spiritual Revival***

Our nation of New Zealand has as one cornerstone in its formation a treaty drafted between the leaders of two peoples, freely entered into by its signatories. Central to the issues of the treaty were a mutually advantageous agreement trading overall sovereignty to the land for protection of land rights.

The identity and *mana* of the Maori people is related to the land and hence to this treaty. To the Maori, this treaty was essentially a covenant with spiritual significance, signed in the context of encouragement from spiritual leaders.

The failure of successive *Pakeha* governments to effectively uphold and honour this treaty in letter and spirit has been perhaps the most significant factor in a sense of lost dignity and caused a long turning away from the gospel by the Maori people after 90% had come Christians in two people movements – an amazing story that Tippett relates in *People Movements in Southern Polynesia*.<sup>iii</sup>

The wounded soul of that people echoes the words made to Captain Hobson in April 1840:

*Our hearts are dark and gloomy from what the Pakeha have told us, they say that the missionaries first came to pave the way for the English who have sent the Governor here, that soldiers will follow and then he will take away our lands.*

The battle for the soul of the Maori people is occurring today. And central to it is reconciliation and restitution over injustices about land rights. If the church fails to be central in this process it fails in its duty as the religious leadership of the nation and leaves options open for a return to the old worship of the demonic and to extreme activists. If the church is central in the process of redressing injustice, it may have the privilege of both strengthening the image of God within the soul of the Maori people and of laying the groundwork for the return of the Maori people to serving the living God.

## **The Treaty of Waitangi and the Land**

The second article of the English text which is attached to the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975 and which was the version signed at Waikato is as follows:

*Her Majesty the Queen of England confirms and guarantees to the Chiefs and Tribes of New Zealand and to the respective families and individuals thereof the full exclusive and undisturbed possession of their Lands and Estates Forests Fisheries and other properties which they may collectively or individually possess so long as it is their wish and desire to retain the same in their possession; but the Chiefs of the United Tribes and the individual Chiefs yield to Her Majesty the exclusive right of Preemption over such lands as the proprietors thereof may be disposed to alienate at such prices as may be agreed upon between the respective Proprietors and persons appointed by Her Majesty to treat with them in that behalf.*

## **The Theological Context**

What are the issues? The right to stay. The right to own. The right to sell The rights of landowners in mega-urban contexts.

In seeking to understand these issues we must oscillate from the realities and traumas of terrible oppression and murder over the land of the poor, to biblical perspectives on the land, the law and the rights of the poor. We can touch on the legal issues involved but will focus on biblical factors related to land.

Land issues are never non- emotive issues of right and wrong. Land is never just dirt but is always dirt in the context of meanings inherited from historical experience.

LAND=DIRT + HISTORY + EMOTION

Land issues can best be studied in the context of five movements in the scriptures related to the land. Each movement has a motif of movement towards a promised land. The first is one of dispossession. The next three

movements are followed by possession. The fifth is a movement yet to be fulfilled, a pilgrim people looking forward to a holy city.<sup>iv</sup>

We can track from the loss of a garden to the hard work of farming; to Abraham wandering in search of promised land; from slavery in Egypt to the exodus with its promise of land; to its possession and management, and mismanagement resulting in its loss. The story repeats itself finding a promise in the midst of exile, then moves to subsequent repossession of the gifted land. Yet the promise remains unfulfilled, and a Messiah lifts our eyes yet higher to another land to possess. Meanwhile we walk as strangers and pilgrims and exiles on the earth awaiting this blessed hope.

Within these movements there is some puzzlement for pilgrim Christians as to how to identify with the Old Testament attitudes to the land. This is surprising since land is the fourth most frequent noun in the Old Testament (it occurs 2,504 times).<sup>v</sup> The difficulty is because of the lack of focus on land in the New Testament. A development of these themes based on a Kingdom of God perspective, beginning in Genesis, is helpful to clarify the unity of land themes in both testaments.

Brueggemann has integrated his study around themes of landlessness/ landedness, gifted land/grasped land, crucifixion/ resurrection. New Testament studies owe a debt to two excellent studies: Davies, *The Gospel and the Land* primarily related to the question of Jewish land (which I have no intention of addressing here), and Hengel's work, *Property and Riches in the Early Church*. Chris Wright's explorations are currently popular.<sup>vi</sup>

These Biblical themes require relating to the global and national conversations and major literature about ecology and some related to developmental issues particularly agricultural land reform. In New Zealand, issues of agricultural and forestry productivity feature high on our success as a nation. As an aside, my father developed national processes in soil science research with the Ministry of Agriculture that upgraded New Zealand's productivity. I remember him reflecting in his later life on his Christian commitment and how he saw that in his facilitating the increase of land productivity in New Zealand by about two billion dollars, he had served God and country well. As a humble Christian scientist without accolade, likely he had never mentioned this to anyone else.

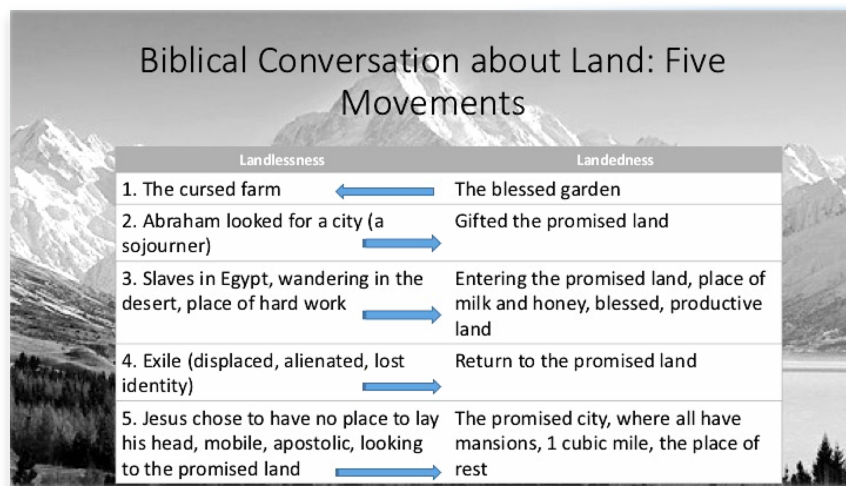


Figure 2: Five movements between landedness and landlessness.

We also face particular issues related to Maori – Pakeha land issues. And over the last two decades has come a *tsunami* of complexities as New Zealand lands have been sold to foreign owners, many with no linkage to the land except for exploitation and profit. How do we interlink the Biblical conversations with these complex issues?

## The Nature of Land

Genesis 1-3 contains the seeds of most of the themes of the scriptures, the philosophical perspectives around which the rest of the scriptures expand. Its first verse begins with both the Kingship of God and the relationship of that Kingdom to the land. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...* By virtue of God's creating the land he owns it. Thus in the first verse in the scriptures we have a fundamental statement as to land rights.

The land was created *good*.<sup>vii</sup> It was also created *fruitful*.<sup>viii</sup> It is through this fruitfulness that real wealth is created, and continues to grow. The total amount of wealth in the world is not static. Nor is it created by increasing paper money. It has a definite growth rate in proportion to the use of natural resources and their replenishment.

But this fruitfulness is directly related to the blessing of God. And that blessing is in some mysterious way related to humanity's obedience to God. Creation was not made independent of humanity. When Adam fell into sin the land was cursed.<sup>ix</sup>

Similarly, all of God's covenants with humanity are generally in relationship to the land. The implication is that ministry among the urban poor cannot be effected without attention to the issue of rights to their land - that their knowledge of God is intimately connected with their relationship to the land.

### Monetary Realism

The total amount of wealth in the world is not static. Nor is it created by increasing paper money. It has a definite growth rate in proportion to the use of natural resources and their replenishment.

I have seen how, almost overnight, as a community received rights to its land the spiritual environment has been transformed. Men cease gambling and drinking and start investing money into their houses. Women and families gain security and there is a positive thankfulness to God that emerges in the midst of the sound of hammer and concrete mixing.

*While God is our final environment, we can only know him in the spatial and temporal forms of his creation.<sup>x</sup>*

The Maori relationship to land in New Zealand, as with the relationship of other tribal societies is far more closely akin to this biblical theme than the Pakeha or other Westernised cultures. To the Maori, this land was not just a commercial asset, but had a spiritual dimension. It was *turangawaenae*, a place to stand, and acknowledgment of identity and status.

These are good things and part of God's mandate to mankind to manage the earth as his vice-regents. The management of these resources through agriculture and manufacturing also results in industry and banking. We may become rich through the wise use of these resources as God's managers, but it is God who made them fruitful. This relationship is not one purely of cause and effect but of a personal creator with his creation. Such thinking denies a core value of the materialistic society. Leviticus 26 is a beautiful chapter showing this interrelationship of God's blessing, mankind's work, and the fruitfulness of the land. Elsewhere we are commanded to:

*Beware lest you say in your heart 'my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth. You shall remember the Lord your God for it is he who gives you power to get wealth.'<sup>xi</sup>*

The mystery remains. It was gifted to satisfy, as a good land, a land of bread and honey, of vineyards and trees, cities and houses, and cisterns of water.<sup>xii</sup> This was in contrast with the demanding land of Egypt, the land of effort with no reward, the land of coercion and slavery. The difference was the blessing and grace of God.

This fruitfulness of the land, and its inherent goodness is disordered as a result of the rebellion and fall but there is no evidence that this essential goodness is destroyed. Moreover, creation is not created to stand still, but to develop and grow. In fact, one could say that though creation is good, part of its goodness lies in what it can become, in the process that God has initiated.<sup>xiii</sup>

Mankind then, is to manage this land and its fruitfulness on God's behalf for the well-being of their brothers and sisters, for from the outset the cry of "Am I my brother's keeper?" refuses to remain silent as it echoes from the hills and valleys of history. The land is not independent from issues of social responsibility. It is from the land that his brother's blood cries out its reply.

## Promised Land

When we meet Israel, it is a nation without land on the way to a promised land. A landless folk and a land of promise. The patriarchs are known as sojourners who are looking for a land. This is the focus of their faith.

*Sojourner* is a technical word usually described as a *resident alien*. It means to be in a place, perhaps for an extended time, to live there and take some roots, but always to be an outsider, never belonging, always without rights, title or voice in decisions that matter.<sup>xiv</sup>

Abraham, renowned because of always looking for a city yet only seeing it afar off, finds a land, sojourns in it, but dwells content that he has an heir to bring about the fulfilment of the promise of possession. Abraham could be called the first squatter. For the fulfilment took place by degrees. We find Jacob his son, as he is about to die, asking that his body be carried to the promised land<sup>xv</sup> recognizing a promise given yet unfulfilled.

So too, for the one billion migrants to the cities of the third world these last thirty years, possession has been by degrees. They too look for a city as a centre of hope, and little by little find their foothold, often content to know that though they themselves dwell in miserable poverty, their children will possess the land of promise.

In their case, the promise is not a covenant from God. Or is it? Is there inherent within the nature of the God-man-land relationship a fundamental law that all men are entitled to a plot of land for a house? Is it inherent within the nature of man's relationship to man, woman's relationship to woman, that some land be apportioned for every person and their basic needs be catered for?

It is generally recognised by governments as a basic right for a family to own his own piece of land for a home and be able to obtain the basic necessities of life. As such, might we not say it is promised by God? Not promised with exact boundaries and area and geographical precision, nor with a now time frame. But then neither was Abraham's hope fixed with clear boundaries and his time frame was determined through the dark brooding of a prophetic dream about four hundred years of slavery.

The hope of Abraham was not based on any right he had to the land. Other tribes already had laid claim to it. The land would be his because it was gifted by God to him. Thirty-nine times in Deuteronomy assertions about the land as gift occur.<sup>xvi</sup>

So too for the squatters. Due to colonial policies of land exploitation in most countries, a few families own the land in each city. Any change in this legalised oppression will only appear to the poor that the Lord has given them the land as a gift.

The initiative is with God, so we need to encourage our people to fall on their knees before God and seek this blessing. For this they can freely ask since the goodness of such a gift is inherent in his being, in his own creative relationship to mankind and creation, in his purposes for the dignity of man and woman.

Yet such prayer does not mean a passive inactivity concerning obtaining legal rights. There are many factors to be considered as a basis for land rights. These occur in many societies, urban and rural.

The land is beyond Israel's power to acquire. The defeats of Kadesh-Barnea and Ai are sufficient evidence of this. This does not mean they sit back and do nothing. Preparations are made, battles are engaged. But it is God who directs and who gives victory. So too the squatters need leadership developed, and need to learn the techniques required for success in the struggles for land rights. But it is God who is the giver of the land.

## Ownership and Management of the Land

Israel was not only sojourner, there were long periods where they were landed people. The sojourners become possessors.

### Graced Economics

We are to manage on God's behalf, but that management is not sufficient for fruitfulness. There is an element of grace, an element of giftedness, an element of undeserved blessing. Similarly, we find the land gifted to Israel.

### **Which Basis for Ownership Claims?**

*Paptipu* - right of discovery

*Take tuku* - a gift

*Rapatu* - right of conquest

*Abi-ka roa* - long occupation

*Take tupuna* - kinship ties.

### **God Owns the Land**

Before their entrance into the land, Moses pauses and gives instructions about the land. Many of the principles related to the land are given in the teaching on the Jubilee in Lev 25:8-34.

In the midst of it we find that God owns the land. Hence men are only to be God's tenants on the land, God's stewards or managers on his behalf, free to share in the fruits of his crops but answerable to him. He is the title-holder.

### **Private, Family, Clan and Tribal Ownership**

Joshua apportions to each clan and each family of Israelites a portion of land, a family inheritance.<sup>xvii</sup> This indicates God's blessing on both private and family/clan/tribal ownership of the land (where we are using ownership in the common sense of the word, recognizing that ultimately God owns the land).

Maori tribal and clan structure is anthropologically in the same category as the Israelites of this period. The land belongs to the tribe (*iwi*) and was well defined. There was no such thing as unused, ownerless land, merely different forms of land use. The *hapu* (sub-tribe, clan), the *whanau* (extended family) and the individual might have hereditary rights to its use, but ownership was ultimately vested in the *iwi*. This differs from the tribal and clan structure of Israel where both communal and family land rights were recognised. The difference is cultural. The Biblical principles involved are an affirmation of both communal and individual ownership patterns within a tribal or rural society.

It also differs from the Maori understanding when the Pakeha arrived for the concept of land as a commodity which could be exploited through resale was new to the Maori. With the exception of the speculative purchases just before 1840, Maori land had usually been alienated to secure the benefits of the Pakeha presence... It was clear however that Maori accepted the concept of total alienation of land rights through sale only after considerable experience.<sup>xviii</sup>

The titles court of 1862 and the Maori Land Court Act of 1865 in New Zealand essentially violated these principles. The court was bound by a statute to name no more than ten owners to a piece of land, with the result that the rest were dispossessed by ten. It took away the authority of the elders so that decision-making was in the hands of the courts and lawyers.

The scriptures are consistently strong on maintenance of legal boundaries. Deut 19:14 and other passages tell us what many government officials need to learn - never to remove the ancient boundary pegs. If we do, their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their case against us.<sup>xix</sup> We need to respect private and communal property rights.

Today Pakeha believers in New Zealand are involved in redressing this situation and effecting restitution. If you read the Waitangi tribunals introduction to its report on Orakei *marae* you will find an excellent analysis of the injustices that occurred to this tribe concerning their land through the last century and adjudication of responsibility, analysis of what restitution is needed and what is practical.

Restitution in most situations in life cannot be exact, for acts of evil carry consequences that are irreversible. Time moves on. Restitution needs to be symbolic and real in terms of present economic realities which for the Orakei *marae* involved the equivalent of what the land used to mean - resources for economic life for the youth of the tribe.

### **Limitations to Private Ownership**

But God is not a capitalist, nor is he a communist. Ownership is not unlimited nor absolute. Nor is ownership to be invested in the state alone. Private ownership has validity but it is bounded by the needs of others to use the earth's resources.

In the Jubilee which occurred every fifty years this land was to be given freely back to these original owners so that the development of social classes through a few men gaining control of much property could not occur. God does not want society to be polarised into rich landowners and landless peasants, where “the rich get richer” and “the poor get poorer.”

The Bible teaches both private ownership and related social responsibility. It recognises both the need for human freedom and the controls that need to be placed on the free exercise of human evil.

The Lord gave the command that the land lie fallow every seventh year. This is an initial principle that has been interpolated into the theory of ecology. Exploitation and destruction of lands and foliage is a violation of our roles as “stewards” and “managers”. This “rest” is also talked of when they were considering entering the promised land. it was to be a land of promised rest. Rest from harassment, from enemies, from sojourning, a place called home, a place of physical security. How much the squatters need a place of such rest. The psychological stresses of living under plywood and galvanised iron, with rats nightly visiting and garbage uncollected next door cause the poor to cry out for rest. How they need the rest of freedom from harassment by landowners and politicians.

Religious priests also were to have their own home and a plot of land sufficient for family food but not fields. This was in the context of God being their possession. The implication is that pastors and missionaries today while looking to God to provide their needs are within the framework of scriptures to look to God for a modest home also.

### **Ownership Limited by Social Responsibility**

Forest lands, oil lands, mining lands among others are so critical to the needs of total societies that absolute rights to these and capitalistic exploitation is not beneficial to the good of the country as a whole. Such are contrary to the principle of social responsibility.

But are we correct to blithely apply these principles to our day? What differences in the practices outlined here are demanded today as we interpret the scriptures into a mega-urban society in secular semi-capitalist states? Certainly the fifty years of the Jubilee would not be enforceable. And yet it brings up two principles: periodic land reform in third world societies as they seek an equitable redistribution of the imbalances of colonial exploitation and the necessity for economic reform within the capitalist system. Continuous economic growth without planned periodic redistribution is not part of God’s program for society.

Related to this jubilee we may infer that cancelling of debts and liberating slaves are both insufficient acts in agrarian contexts if they are not correlated with return of land - the means of

production of wealth. Perhaps this was part of the failure of the American civil war. It appears that any revolutionary government must immediately move to land reform as its primary act of governance if justice fought for is to be seen done.

### ***Urban Land***

In the city the production of wealth is built on a different foundation. Notice Moses’ clear differentiation between agricultural lands and urban land. Houses within cities were not to be subject to redistribution. After a year during which they could be redeemed, they could then be sold in perpetuity. The meaning of land in the city is clearly different to the meaning of land in the countryside. For in the country the land is seen as representative of the fruit of that land, and measured in worth according to the number of crops before the next jubilee. The land in the city had no such relationship per se to the production of wealth.

So too for the Maori people today they cannot go back to the old times for history has urbanised. The meaning of the land has changed. And the treaty left the relationships between the races open to continual growth and development.

The question for our day thus becomes “What is the meaning of land in the city?” and “In what way can that meaning be related to just and equitable earnings and distribution of wealth?”

The answer does not necessarily coincide with legal definitions of land rights. Legality does not mean morality. We stand before a set of higher laws than the laws of nations, made often by rich elites with entrenched interests in maintaining control of land.

The question is one of justice with equity not just of legality.

The questions are necessary questions for societies other than Israel that have many migrant populations. Migration does not lend itself to the static allocation of land demonstrated in the early agrarian days of Israel. Increasing movement and ethnic interrelationships require different definitions and uses of land.

A further troublesome issue when we consider this issue of social equity in regard to use of urban land is the conflict between the clarity within the scriptures of God's commitment to relative equality between men (that we are not to lord it over each other, that kings were not a class above the people but representatives of the people and God's representative to the people), and the sociological reality that cities apparently exist by exploitation and inequality.

Even the story of the glory of the Kingdom under Solomon is an illustration of the rapid stratification of society as a correlate of urbanisation. The commitment of God against class structure (inherent in James' teaching for example), coupled with his commitment to urbanisation per se, as the direction of history would indicate that urbanisation without stratification is a possibility and a worthy goal. Social equality is not a realistic possibility in a city unless the majority of people can freely own their own homes.

Economic justice, social justice and accessible land rights are inextricably linked to godliness, to bringing righteousness into urbanisation.

The opposite is generally the case. We can go back to the scriptures to see a case study in injustice that is echoed throughout the earth. The land of promise soon became the land of problem. Guaranteed satiation dulls the memory of the voice of God that has led them to this land and gifted it to them. The covenant that is part of the gifting is soon forgotten. Kings and the upper class soon turned it into a land of oppression and slavery as predicted by the prophet Samuel. Israel tried frantically to hold on to the land against outside enemies. As the society developed into a commercial urban society under the hands of Solomon and his sons, the jubilee was evidently not maintained. The rich became richer; the poor became poorer. It became a coercive society where:

*The ones who have made it, the ones who control the machinery of governance are the ones who need not so vigorously obey. They are the ones who can fix tickets or prices as needed, the ones before whom the judge blinks and the revenue officer winks (cf. Micah 3:11). It is the landless poor and disadvantaged who are subject to exacting legal claims of careful money management, precise work performance, careful devotion to all social jots and tittles, not only the last hired, and first fired but first suspected and last acquitted.<sup>xx</sup>*

The people soon forgot that fulfilled covenantal responsibility is integral to land tenure. Harlotry and shedding of blood defile the land.<sup>xxi</sup> Blessing follows obedience, cursing and deportation follows disobedience.<sup>xxii</sup> The gift, the tenancy agreement, had conditions then and for the poor today the conditions remain.

### The Prophet's Critique of Land Owners

Into this arena step the prophets with bold denunciation of those who trample on the poor to acquire more and more property:

*Woe to those who join house to house,  
who add field to field,  
until there is no more room,  
and you are made to dwell alone  
in the midst of the land.<sup>xxiii</sup>*

*They covet fields, and seize them;*

#### Urban Stratification

As the society developed into a commercial urban society under the hands of Solomon, the rich became richer, the poor became poorer. It became a coercive society.



*and houses and take them away;  
they oppress a man and his house,  
a man and his inheritance.<sup>xxiv</sup>*

It is from these kind of prophetic statements that we find an emotive imperative for defending the squatters against the exploitation and attacks of the upper class.

The prophets both denounce such acts and cry out for men of God who would protect these poor. They denounce creditors who foreclosed mortgaged houses and fields, and high officials who confiscated more crown lands than the king had given them, exorbitant interest rates on loans which led to quick and cruel foreclosure, resulting in self-enslavement and enclosure of property.<sup>xxv</sup>

The prophets denounced those who refused to care for the poor, the widows, the orphans, the sojourner, the Levite - all of whom did not possess land. In a peasant society, a man without land is subject to poverty for it is the land that produces wealth. Thus the landless must be cared for, and the poor must be protected from those who would make them yet poorer by stealing (legally of course), their land.

Today, owing to destruction of farmlands, warfare, overpopulation, and the tentacles of urbanisation and stratification as they reach out to exploit the countryside, there is a growing class of hundreds of millions of permanently dispossessed, landless people. Though our vision may only become fulfilled in that holy city, we must struggle for a reallocation of the land to these poor.

The extent of land ownership makes for the extent of justice in a society. Though this is defined in the scriptures in the context of a peasant society and rural land holdings it is not inaccurate to restate this for the urban societies of today. In an urban context the extent of injustice within a city is proportional to the number of people who rent homes or rooms.

This statement implies something about the nature of urban land. It implies the right to housing. The effort to bring this to pass conflicts however with the utilisation of land in the city as a commodity. Land is seen to have an intrinsic value not for its fruitfulness (as in agrarian societies), nor for housing, but for its usefulness to the production of wealth.

Thus one role of leadership within a society is to make ways for equitable distribution of land and ownership. Yet that has to be done within the framework of the specialisations of production and distribution and their implication for land values that are endemic to the modern mega-city.

### **Exile: The Loss of a Land**

The Sabbath and the land are quite closely intertwined in the Old Testament covenants. The prophets denounced the breaking of the Sabbath - for a Sabbath less society reduces the nation to a smoothly functioning machine and thus its people to cogs within that machine. The machine raises a producer - consumer consciousness that denies the image of God as the core of a person's being. The Sabbath on the other hand sets limits to our most frantic efforts to manage life - it is a way of remembering that we are the creature, not the ruler.

In judgment on these sins of Sabbath-breaking, of injustice, of loss of role before him, before other men and before the land, he takes away their land, the symbol of the covenant. The great themes of the exile relate to the loss of the land. And a question of despair echoes through their songs and laments. Does loss of the land of covenant mean loss of the God of the covenant?

### ***Return from Exile***

Even in this process there is a renewed covenant that they will return to the land. And beyond the covenant are glimpses of a far greater covenant, and of a city to be seen only with the faith of their forefather Abraham.

In the return from exile the new covenant concerning the land is made.<sup>xxvi</sup> This covenant is now based on a new moral management of the land.

It is this thrill of return to the promised land that we can best relate to the task of working for squatter land rights in the two thirds world, for migrant housing, for expansion of low income housing in New Zealand. Nehemiah is perhaps the best model for mobilizing a people to action. His experience and that of Ezra and the other prophets of this period deal with the fears, the uncertainties, the group dynamics, the leadership skills needed as people dispossessed of their rural land seek to possess unused urban areas.

But even in the return to the land there is no dramatic development in the Israelites' walk with God. So finally prophecy ceases from the land. The land waits. Creation awaits the coming of the Word and in his new promise waits even longer for the fulfilment of time.

## Jesus and the Land

With Jesus' mission, a dramatic new relation to the land is evident.<sup>xxvii</sup>

A major issue for theologians is the lack of continuity of the Old Testament with issues of land in the New Testament. The Old Testament covenant regarding the land of Israel is now superseded with a new covenant which looks forward to a new land of promise that is not bounded by ethnic concerns - a land for every tribe and people and tongue. The themes of the exodus and exile are reiterated with renewed vigour. Again, believers find themselves as pilgrim people living by a promise, *looking forward to a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God*. In the process many are encouraged to follow the master who chose to have *no place to lay his head* in order that he might proclaim this far-off country.

Does this mean a loss of commitment to the principles of management and social responsibility in the Old Covenant? Not in the least. The old was not abrogated. It was fulfilled and expanded to include the nations of the earth in fuller realisation. Precisely because we are exiles and pilgrims with no possessions of our own we are able to help the dispossessed to gain their possession. In our looking towards a future Kingdom, we are eager to pray and act towards that Kingdom being manifest in every way within the societies of earth. And that future Kingdom comes replete with a promise of a home - something every squatter and migrant and dispossessed person understands.

We must go forward to that promise. And in the process we must bring to fulfilment the promises of God to the poor. Promises that wherever the kingdom flourishes they will possess the land that is their birthright stolen during colonialization. Land that can only be returned as a gift from God. In the process we may frequently fail but always because our eyes are fixed on a future Kingdom, we are free to bring hope, free to proclaim a more glorious home - one not built with hands, one that will not disappear or fade away. Let us go on to proclaim that hope in the midst of sharing in the struggles of our brother poor.

All of this conversation between scriptures and land rights was not too complicated to imagine when New Zealand was a sovereign nation. But as \$27 billion of the nation's government assets have been sold off over the last years, applying the same principles to the internationalisation process is a significantly more complex set of issues. We turn to such issues in the latter half of this book.

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<sup>i</sup> The scriptures have little to say about corporate ownership or intellectual property rights per se. Which raises the hermeneutical question as to the potential to realistically extend the Biblical ownership principles into these domains. The derivative theologies of property rights have a long history through the British legal system, and on into international law. Those principles can be confirmed. Their application requires exploring specific business ethical practices in each of these areas of ownership.

<sup>ii</sup> This chapter is a reduced and updated version of a booklet published in 1985 by the same title. A power point presentation may be accessed at: <http://www.authorstream.com/Presentation/vivgrigg-2509956-theology-land-rights/>

<sup>iii</sup> Tippett, A. (1971). *People Movements in Southern Polynesia*. Chicago: Moody Bible Institute.

<sup>iv</sup> Over thirty years of teaching on a theology of land rights, I have reworked Brueggemann's approach of three movements in his classic, *The Land* (1977).

<sup>v</sup> Martens 1981, pg. 97.

<sup>vi</sup> Wright, C. 1990.

<sup>vii</sup> Gen 1:4,10,12,18,21,24,31.

<sup>viii</sup> Gen. 1:12,22,28.

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- ix Gen 3:17-19.  
x Dyrness 1982:24.  
xi Deut 8:17,18.  
xii Deut 8:7-10.  
xiii Dyrness 1982 pg. 30.  
xiv Brueggemann, 1977, pg. 79.  
xv Gen 50:5-14.  
xvi Martens 1981, pg.102.  
xvii Josh 13-19.  
xviii Orange 1987:115.  
xix Prov 23:11.  
xx Brueggemann, 1977.  
xxi Lev 19:29; Num 35:29ff.  
xxii Deut 28.  
xxiii Isa 6:8.  
xxiv Mic 2:2.  
xxv Deut 24:6; Ex 22:25.  
xxvi Neh 9:36-38.  
xxvii The issue of the restoration of Israel and the land disputes in Palestine is outside the mandate of this study. Other New Zealanders have debated this well (McDowell et. al., 2014).