

**MATTHEW 5:5 AND THE
OLD TESTAMENT LAND PROMISES:
AN INHERITANCE OF THE EARTH OR
THE LAND OF ISRAEL?**

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While many biblical-theological scholars claim that Matthew 5:5 is a straightforward expansion of the OT land promises to now encompass the whole earth, the original text of Matthew 5:5 (κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν) makes no clear indication that it is referring to the “earth” rather than to the “land” of Israel. It is possible to interpret Matthew 5:5 as referring to an inheritance of the land of Israel, but unfortunately, such an interpretive possibility has been obscured by English translations and ruled out by supersessionist theological assumptions regarding Israel’s future. Based on careful word study and sensitivity to the Jewish-focused literary-historical context of Matthew’s Gospel, this article will argue that Matthew 5:5 reaffirms a future Jewish inheritance of the land of Israel, an inheritance that does not exclude Gentiles but complements and fits within the worldwide inheritance for all of God’s people.

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The promised land of the Abrahamic covenant is such a major theme in the OT and Second Temple Jewish literature, but seems to fade in the New Testament. Any theologian attempting to discuss the topic must ask: Does the New Testament (NT) nullify, modify/expand, or reaffirm the Old Testament (OT) land promises?¹ The land promise is biblically and theologically complex because it touches upon issues such

¹ An additional way of phrasing the issue is possible: Does the NT clarify and reaffirm the typological trajectory regarding the land already present in the OT? That typological trajectory is as follows: the land of Canaan pointed back to creation, then the rest of the OT envisioned Canaan as pointing forward to something greater and larger: the new creation. This would be the preferred way of phrasing the question by progressive covenantalists. This way of phrasing the issue is more complex, which is why I have separated it out. For other views, however, the language of modification or expansion is appropriate since that is how they phrase Matthew’s use of Psalm 37.

as the NT use of the OT, the nature and proper use of typology, the relationship between land and temple, the relationship between land and kingdom, the nature and fulfillment of the biblical covenants (particularly the Abrahamic and New covenants), and the interpretation of specific texts, particularly Matthew 5:5; Romans 4:13; Ephesians 6:3; Hebrews 4:1–11; 11:8–16. Thus, while few NT texts *explicitly* address the OT land promises, many major NT themes have direct relevance to the OT land promises (e.g. temple, kingdom, covenant, typology), so the NT discusses land (albeit indirectly) far more than often acknowledged.²

This article will attempt to tackle one piece of this theological puzzle—a crucial yet little discussed text: Matthew 5:5. A quick glance at this verse and its allusion to Psalm 37:11 in the original languages would seem to suggest that Matthew is not changing much from Psalm 37:

Ps. 37:11 (MT):	וַעֲנוּיִם יִרְשׁוּ־אֶרֶץ
Ps. 36:11 (LXX Göttingen):	οἱ δὲ πραεῖς κληρονομήσουσιν γῆν
Matt. 5:5 (NA ²⁸):	μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν

Although Matthew’s changes seem minor, non-dispensationalists have used Matthew 5:5 to make a bold claim, to assert that the *land* in Psalm 37 has become the *earth* in Matthew 5:5,³ thus Matthew 5:5 stands alongside other NT texts, which teach that the OT land promises are “either *spiritualized* as the ultimate heavenly rest (Heb. 4:1ff.; 11:16 cf. 11:10), or *globalized* [e.g. expanded] to become a promise of inheriting the earth/world to come (e.g. Mt. 5:5; Rom. 4:13; Heb. 1:2; cf. Eph. 6:3).”⁴ These assertions imply that ethnic Israel no longer has a promise to inherit the land of Israel sometime in the future, although often this implication is unexpressed.

² This crucial point is made by Stephen Wellum in Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 713.

³ See the comments on Matthew 5:5 in G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 756–57; Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to “Holy Land” Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 33–35; Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 211–12, 281; Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 138; Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God’s Redemptive Plan*, NSBT, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 124–26; Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995), 27–28; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Israel of God: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), 26–27; Stephen R. Sizer, “An Alternative Theology of the Holy Land: A Critique of Christian Zionism,” *Churchman* 113, no. 2 (1999): 136; Mark D. Vander Hart, “Possessing the Land as Command and Promise,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 4, no. 2 (1988): 150–51; Paul R. Williamson, “Abraham, Israel, and the Church,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2000): 116–17.

⁴ Williamson, “Abraham, Israel, and the Church,” 116. Emphases added.

In contrast to such assertions, most dispensationalists have been silent on Matthew 5:5 and none have responded to the assertion that Matthew 5:5 expands the OT land promises.⁵ This paper intends to fill the gap in dispensational literature by arguing that Matthew 5:5 reaffirms the OT land promises made to Israel—yet this reaffirmation needs to be nuanced in two ways: First, this reaffirmation is not a flat reading of Scripture;⁶ the OT land promises are reaffirmed *by Christ himself* and his allusions to Psalm 37 and Isaiah 61 indicate that he is the greater David in fulfillment of Psalm 37 and he is Isaiah's servant of the LORD in fulfillment of Isaiah 61. Second, this reaffirmation should also not be understood by itself, but read together with other statements in Matthew's Gospel about the future, a future which will certainly include territorial blessings for the Gentiles (e.g. Matt 8:11; 19:28; 25:34). When read as a whole, Matthew's Gospel presents both a *particular* re-affirmed land inheritance for Israel that will fit into and be part of the *universal*, global inheritance for all.

Before moving on, I want to emphasize the theological importance of Matthew 5:5 for our understanding of Israel's future by highlighting Bruce Waltke's bold yet legitimate challenge to dispensationalists: "If revised dispensationalism produced one passage in the entire New Testament that clearly presents the resettlement of national Israel in the land, I would join them. But I know of none!"⁷ The standard dispensationalist response to this challenge has been to say that (1) since Israel was

⁵ The following dispensational works do not discuss Matthew 5:5 at all (this assertion is made on the basis of the Scripture indices in these books): Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2006); Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Bridgepoint Books, 1993); H. Wayne House, ed. *Israel, the Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God's Promises* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998); John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Christ's Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer* (Chicago: Moody, 2012); J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958); Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007); Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010); John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959); Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master, eds., *Issues in Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994).

A few dispensationalists do briefly discuss Matthew 5:5, but with no response to non-dispensational claims that Matthew 5:5 expands the OT land promises. See Darrell L. Bock, "Covenants in Progressive Dispensationalism," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 214n9; Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007), 75; Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 52; Dale S. DeWitt, *Dispensational Theology in America During the 20th Century: Theological Development & Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids: Grace Bible College Publications, 2002), 307.

⁶ Progressive covenantalists have charged dispensationalists with a "thin" or flat reading of Scripture, accusing them of simplistically upholding OT promises made to Israel without considering how the NT speaks of Christ fulfilling and reconfiguring those OT promises. In other words, they accuse dispensationalists of viewing the OT land promises as *remaining unchanged across redemptive history*, unchanged even after the coming of Christ. In their view, dispensationalists make a hermeneutical error by failing to read the OT within its larger *canonical* context. See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 85-87, 117-118.

⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, "A Response," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, eds. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 357.

still in the land when the NT was written, there was no need for the NT authors to explicitly address the issue of Israel's land; and (2) since the NT authors did not explicitly nullify the OT land promises, they probably assumed that OT land promises made to Israel were still valid. If my proposed interpretation of Matthew 5:5 is correct, then dispensationalists can respond to Waltke's challenge by saying that at least one NT text does explicitly reaffirm the OT land promises made to Israel. Matthew 5:5 would, therefore, be a significant pillar for supporting belief in a future restoration of Israel.

Arguments that Matthew 5:5 Expands the OT Abrahamic Land Promises

In contrast to some spiritualizing interpretations of the OT land promises,⁸ many now emphasize that the fulfillment of OT land promises is physical and earthly, not spiritual and non-territorial.⁹ In other words, Jesus does not spiritualize the OT land promises; He rather *expands* them to include the whole earth. This is the majority view of Matthew commentators.¹⁰ Hans K. LaRondelle summarizes this view well:

Clearly, Jesus applies Psalm 37 in a new, surprising way: (1) This "land" will be larger than David thought: the fulfillment will include the entire earth in its recreated beauty (see Isaiah 11:6–9; Revelation 21–22); (2) The renewed earth will be the inheritance of all the meek from all the nations who accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. Christ is definitely not spiritualizing away Israel's territorial promise when He includes His universal Church. On the contrary, He widened the scope of the territory until it extended to the whole world.¹¹

⁸ Those who spiritualize the land promise in Matthew 5:5 include: W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), 360–61; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 166–67; Frédéric Manns, "Blessed are the Meek for They Shall Inherit the Earth," *Liber Annuus* 50 (2000): 37–51; Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary*, trans. O. C. Dean Jr. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988), 36. I have chosen not to engage with this view in this article because it is a minority view and less persuasive than the expansion of the land view. I find it hard to view τῆν γῆν as being fulfilled in "non-territorial ways" (France, 166).

⁹ David E. Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 85. Also see comments in Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 274–76; Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 125–26; Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 132–33.

¹⁰ Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995), 127–28; Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 99; Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary, Volume 1: The Christbook (Matthew 1–12)*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 166–67; D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 9:163–64, 166; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, WBC (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), 92–93; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 167; Ulrich Luz, *A Commentary on Matthew 1–7*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 194–95; Charles H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Ethical Decision Making in Matthew 5–7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 52; Charles Quarles, *Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ's Message to the Modern Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 55–58.

¹¹ LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, 138. Emphasis added.

Others reflect a similar sentiment: Charles Quarles says, “Although Ps 37:11 is about inheriting the land of covenant promise, *Jesus was free to apply the text in new ways for His audience.*”¹² Anthony Hoekema writes, “the *land of Psalm 37* has become the *earth in Matthew 5.*”¹³ The unexpressed assumption in this view is that ethnic Israel no longer has a promise to inherit the land of Israel. The localized promise has been transcended into a more glorious promise of the entire earth. The following four arguments are given to support this view:¹⁴

(1) Lexically, the use of γῆ (‘land/earth’) elsewhere in Matthew 5–7 and Matthew’s Gospel would argue for translating τὴν γῆν as “the earth” in Matthew 5:5.¹⁵ Just a few verses after Matthew 5:5, Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth [γῆ]” (5:13), which is parallel to the next statement, “You are the light of the world [κόσμος]” (5:14). So it seems that “earth” and “world” are synonymous. It would be strange and confusing for γῆ in Matthew 5:5 to refer to the land of Israel, while γῆ in Matthew 5:13 refers to the whole earth. However, this does not mean that γῆ always refers to the whole earth. “When Matthew used [γῆ] to refer to a specific geographical location, he typically offered further qualification such as ‘land of Judah’ or ‘land of Israel’ (e.g. 2:6, 20–21).”¹⁶ Since Matthew does not add a qualifier in Matthew 5:5 (e.g., “land of *Israel*”), we can conclude on lexical grounds that he is referring to the earth, not the land of Israel.

(2) The parallelism between verse 5 (κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν) and verses 3 and 10 (“theirs is the kingdom of heaven”) would suggest that κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν is synonymous with inheriting the worldwide kingdom of heaven. Beale explains:

Earth in verse 5 is parallel with “kingdom of heaven” in verses 3, 10, so that the “earth” here [in verse 5] is wider than the promised land’s old borders and is coextensive with the “kingdom of heaven.” This is likely a way to say that the “blessed” will inherit the new heaven and new earth and not some mere ethereal heavenly realm.¹⁷

Thus, to limit Jesus’ saying in verse 5 to inheriting the land of Israel would also imply that the kingdom of heaven is limited only to the land of Israel. But surely that would be an unwarranted restriction since the extent of the future kingdom is worldwide and will include Gentiles (e.g. Ps. 2:8; 72:8). This close connection between the worldwide “kingdom of heaven” in verse 3 and the “earth” in verse 5 is confirmed

¹² Quarles, *Sermon on the Mount*, 57. Emphasis added.

¹³ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 212. Emphasis original.

¹⁴ There is no sustained argument for the expansion of the land view of Matthew 5:5. I have constructed the following four arguments based on dialogue with non-dispensationalists and through reading non-dispensational literature and thinking in accord with their view.

¹⁵ See especially the comments in Carson, “Matthew,” 166; Quarles, *Sermon on the Mount*, 58.

¹⁶ Quarles, *Sermon on the Mount*, 58. Also see Carson, “Matthew,” 166.

¹⁷ Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 757. A similar point is made in W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, AB (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 46.

by the fact that some ancient manuscripts invert the order of verses 4 and 5,¹⁸ so that verse 3 is followed by verse 5, allowing for closer comparison:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (v. 3)
 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (v. 5)

This order creates a synonymous parallelism between the “poor in spirit” and the “meek,” and an antithesis between the “kingdom of heaven” and the “earth.” The antithesis would not work if it were “kingdom of heaven” and “land.” This suggests that even some ancient scribes recognized that τῆν γῆν in Matthew 5:5 refers to the whole earth, not just to the land of Israel.¹⁹

(3) In its original OT context, Psalm 37 envisioned an eschatological fulfillment of inheriting the land—therefore, Jesus is not twisting or reinterpreting Psalm 37 but merely affirming the eschatological trajectory already present in Psalm 37.²⁰ This eschatological trajectory is clear from three perspectives: First, Psalm 37 itself has an eschatological trajectory. It may seem anachronistic to speak of the “eschatology” of Psalm 37,²¹ but clearly Psalm 37 has in mind some sort of future judgment of the wicked and future blessing of the righteous. Exactly *when* this will happen is unclear, yet there is an undeniable *finality* to this future judgment and blessing (see esp. vv. 18, 29).

Second, the LXX translation of Psalm 37 confirms the eschatological trajectory already present in the Hebrew of Psalm 37. The LXX translator embeds his interpretation of the land into Psalm 37; modern English translations of Psalm 37 (under the influence of the NT and the traditional translation of Matthew 5:5) obscure this interpretive development. The Hebrew verb used throughout Psalm 37 is יָרַשׁ, which can connote “inherit,” but its most common meaning is to “take possession” (see esp. its 47 usages in Deuteronomy). The more common Hebrew terms for “inherit” or “inheritance” are נָחַל and נַחֲלָה, neither of which are used in Psalm 37. Thus a more

¹⁸ Alexandrian—33, Δ, Clement; Western—D, Vulgate, Syr^{sup}; Caesarean—700, 28, 544, 543.

¹⁹ Guelich offers probably the best explanation for the inversion: “This variation in location most likely resulted from differing degrees of recognition of the synonymous parallelism between 5:3 and 5:5. . . . Yet this alternate order (5:3, 5, 4) may have come from the tradition. Assuming that the original Beatitude was addressed to the *poor* (πτωχοί = ἡγγμ/’*nwm*), the synonymous parallelism of 5:5 drawn from Ps 37(36):11 (’*nwm* = πραεῖς) would have formed a couplet . . . and maintained the lexical balance between the socioeconomic and the religious inherent in both Hebrew terms ἡγγμ/’*nwm* (see Note on 5:3). The two Beatitudes would then have been transmitted together in the tradition until Matthew, in his desire to align the initial Beatitudes (see Notes on 5:3, 4) more closely to the language and order of Isa 61:1–2, rearranged them” (Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount* [Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1982], 81–82). Metzger adds that inverting verses 4 and 5 produces an antithesis between heaven and earth. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1994), 10.

²⁰ This hermeneutical point is made in Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 124.

²¹ The eschatology of the LXX Psalms is discussed in Joachim Schaper, *Eschatology in the Greek Psalter* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995). General treatments of this theme are found in Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 417–24; Geerhardus Vos, “Eschatology of the Psalter,” in *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 323–65.

appropriate translation of Psalm 37:11 is, “But the meek will take possession of the land,” not “inherit the land.” The LXX, however, inserts its own interpretation when it translates שָׂרָה (“take possession”) with κληρονομέω (“inherit”), which leads Robert Brawley to conclude, “The Hebrew implicates *possession* of land . . . [the] LXX accents *inheritance* . . . [Jewish] tradition pushed the promise into an eschatological future.”²² This means that Psalm 37, in its original context, was primarily *historical* in its outlook: in the likely socio-economic context of Psalm 37, where the wicked oppress the poor, perhaps even by stealing their land, Psalm 37 envisioned a *historical* fulfillment of its land promise, where economic justice would be served when the wicked are “cut off” from the land and the meek “take possession of” or “repossess” the land.²³ However, the LXX translator gave Psalm 37 an *eschatological* outlook: the meek would not simply “take possession of” or “repossess” the land, but “inherit” it.²⁴ This shift from a historical, Israel-focused outlook to an eschatological outlook paves the way for Jesus’ use of Psalm 37 in Matthew 5:5.

Third, Jewish literature from the Second Temple period also seems to confirm the eschatological trajectory of Psalm 37 and supports reading Matthew 5:5 as referring to inheriting the whole earth. Craig Keener writes, “When Jewish people thought of the meek “inheriting the earth,” they went beyond the minimal interpretation of Psalm 37:9, 11, 29 (where those who hope in God alone will “inherit the land”; cf. 25:13) and thought of inheriting the entire world (Rom 4:13; Jub. 32:19; 4QPs 37; 2 Bar. 51:3).”²⁵ Keener also cites numerous other works from Second Temple Jewish literature to support his claim that Jewish interpreters viewed the land in Psalm 37 as being expanded to include the whole earth.²⁶ Two texts in particular seem clear: In Jubilees 32:19, God speaking to Abraham, says, “And I will give to thy seed all the earth which is under heaven, and they shall judge all the nations according to their desires, and after that they shall get possession of the whole earth and inherit it forever.”²⁷ This text is explicitly global, promising an inheritance of “all the earth which is under heaven” and “the whole earth.” The most significant text is from the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls, which include a commentary (pesher) on Psalm 37 (known as 4QpPs37 or 4Q171). 4Q171 quotes from Psalm 37, then offers brief commentary:

²² Robert L. Brawley, “Evocative Allusions in Matthew: Matthew 5:5 As a Test Case,” *Theological Studies* 59, no. 3 (2003): 609. Emphases original.

²³ This socio-economic background is suggested by John Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 518, 522–23, 534; Ellen F. Davis, *Biblical Prophecy: Perspectives for Christian Theology, Discipleship, and Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 225–26.

²⁴ This eschatological outlook is especially noted in Norbert Lohfink, “The Appeasement of the Messiah: Thoughts on Ps 37 and the Third Beatitude,” *Theology Digest* 44, no. 3 (1997): 235–36.

²⁵ Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 167.

²⁶ Keener, 167 fn 20: “Cf. also, e.g., Mek. Beshallah 7.139–40; b. Abod. Zar. 35b; Ber. 4b; Gen. Rab. 11:7; Ex. Rab. 15:31. As the Israelites “inherited” the promised land, so they expected to “inherit” that land and the coming world in the future; cf. e.g., 21:38; 25:34; Ps 25:13; 37:9, 11; Is 57:13; 60:21; 61:7; Jub. 32:19; 1 Enoch 5:7; 2 Enoch 50:2; Rom 8:17; Eph 1:14; 4 Ezra 6:59; 7:96; 2 Bar. 51:3; Mek. Beshallah 7.139–40; b. Qidd. 40b; Ex. Rab. 2:6; 20:4.”

²⁷ Quoted from the English translation of R. H. Charles, ed. *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913).

‘But those who trust in the Lord are the ones who will inherit the earth’ (Psalm 37:9b). This refers to the company of his chosen, those who do his will. ‘Very soon there will be no wicked man; look where he was, he’s not there’ (Psalm 37:10). This refers to all of the wicked at the end of the forty years. When they are completed, there will no longer be any wicked person on the earth. ‘Then the meek will inherit the earth and enjoy all the abundance that peace brings’ (Psalm 37:11). This refers to the company of the poor who endure the time of error but are delivered from all the snares of Belial. Afterwards they will enjoy all the [...] of the earth and grow fat on every human [luxury.]²⁸

The Qumran commentary is clearly eschatological, envisioning a time when “there will no longer be any wicked person on the earth” and the meek will inherit the earth, not the land of Israel. This shift from a historical, Israel-focused outlook to an eschatological, universal/global outlook paves the way for Jesus’ use of Psalm 37 in Matthew 5:5. Jesus would also view the land promise as to be fulfilled eschatologically with an inheritance of the whole earth, not just the land of Israel.

(4) In the OT itself, the land is presented as a type, a pointer to the final inheritance of the new heavens and new earth—therefore, to reaffirm a future inheritance of the land of Israel is a step backward in redemptive history, a return to OT types/shadows that have been fulfilled in Christ (see Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1).²⁹ Stephen Wellum gives a detailed definition of typology:

Typology as a New Testament hermeneutical endeavor is the study of Old Testament salvation historical realities or “types” (persons, events, institutions) which God has specifically designed to correspond to, and predictively prefigure, their intensified antitypical fulfillment aspects (inaugurated and consummated) in New Testament salvation history.³⁰

Against some dispensationalists who view typology merely as analogies,³¹ Wellum insists that types point forward and “ought to be viewed as a subset of predictive

²⁸ Quoted from the English translation of Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, and Edward Cook, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005). Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 124, references 4Q171 in support of a universal/globalized interpretation of Matt. 5:5.

²⁹ See the comments in Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel*, 112; Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 234–36; Robertson, *The Israel of God*, 4–6, 30–31; Williamson, “Abraham, Israel, and the Church,” 116–17; Robert Vasholz, “The Character of Israel’s Future in Light of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants,” *Trinity Journal* 25, no. 1 (2004): 49–51.

³⁰ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 103. In agreement with his view, Wellum cites numerous sources on page 101n44, though most important for him is Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981).

³¹ Wellum cites John Feinberg as a dispensationalist who views typology as mere analogies. See John S. Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 77–79.

prophecy, not in the sense of verbal predictions, but in the sense of predictions built on models/patterns that God himself has established.”³² Further, Wellum emphasizes that *the OT itself develops the land as a type*; progressive covenantalists like Wellum claim that they are not using the NT to reinterpret or modify the OT (as some dispensationalists allege), but are allowing the OT to speak for itself and merely allowing the NT to clarify what the OT hinted at with less clarity.³³

Greg Beale, Oren Martin, and Stephen Wellum have argued at length that the land in the OT was a type that foreshadowed the new earth.³⁴ I cannot do full justice to their view in such short space, but the following are the major lines of argument: First, the concept of land does not begin with the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12, but with creation in Genesis 1–2.³⁵ “From the covenant of creation with Adam, Eden is presented as the archetype, which the ‘land’ later on looks back to and forward to in anticipation of the recovery of the new creation.”³⁶ Eden was the ideal land of paradise, which was lost through Adam’s disobedience but will be regained through the obedience of the last Adam (Christ) in the new earth.

Second, the OT itself develops the land as a type in three ways: (a) the Abrahamic covenant has both national/international, regional/global components so that the multiplication of Abraham’s descendants to include Gentiles necessitates expanding the borders of the land to include the whole earth.³⁷ Furthermore, since the texts that depict the geographical boundaries of the land are not consistent and precise (e.g. Gen. 15:8–11; Deut. 1:7; 11:24), this seems to suggest that something greater than just Canaan was in store.³⁸ (b) Exodus to Deuteronomy portrays Israel’s entrance into the land as a return to Edenic conditions and as God’s “rest” for his people.³⁹ (c) The OT prophets envision a new exodus that will culminate in a new heavens and new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22) that will include an international community of Jews and Gentiles.⁴⁰

Third, the NT seems to confirm that the OT rightly viewed the land of Israel as a type. Specific NT texts seem to confirm that the OT land promises have been expanded to include the whole earth (e.g. Matt. 5:5; Rom. 4:13; Eph. 6:3; Heb. 11:8–16). The NT picks up the theme of “rest” and affirms in Heb. 3:7–4:11 that God’s “rest” is not found by inheriting the land of Israel but by trusting in Christ. Revelation

³² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 103.

³³ Oren Martin makes this point forcefully. See Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 166–68.

³⁴ See the arguments in Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 750–72; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 707–16; Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 61–116.

³⁵ This point is made in Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 709–11; Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 61–62; Robertson, *The Israel of God*, 4; Christopher Wright, “Biblical Reflections on Land,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 17, no. 2 (1993): 153–58.

³⁶ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 124.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 707–09; Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 62–75.

³⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 708; Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 71–74.

³⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 709–11; Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 77–86.

⁴⁰ Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 95–114.

21–22 portrays the new heavens and new earth as a renewed garden-temple-city, encompassing not just Israel, but the whole earth. In sum, when the OT land promises are traced from creation to new creation, they are seen to be global, not local.

Evaluation of the Expansion of the Land View of Matthew 5:5

This section will evaluate the expansion of the land view with six points: (1) Claims that Jesus “intentionally changes [Ps. 37:11] . . . to refer to the whole earth”⁴¹ or that “the *land* of Psalm 37 has become the *earth* in Matthew 5”⁴² are overstated. Such sweeping statements are revealed to be exaggerated and overly confident with even a casual glance at the original texts:

Ps. 37:11 (MT):	בְּרֵאשִׁית יְשׁוּעָה יִרְשׁוּ אֶת אֲדָמָה
Ps. 36:11 (LXX Göttingen):	οἱ δὲ πραεῖς κληρονομήσουσιν γῆν
Matt. 5:5 (NA ²⁸):	μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν

It is not immediately obvious or clear that Matthew 5:5 has changed the inheritance from *land* to *earth*—unless one reads with theological presuppositions or familiarity with English translations. Most of the changes are minor.⁴³ The most significant change that Matthew makes is adding the article: γῆν becomes τὴν γῆν. This addition is significant and will be discussed later.

Matthew, however, *does not* change the direct object of the verb κληρονομήσουσιν. English translations and many biblical scholars *assume* a change in meaning from *land* to *earth*, but any reader of the original languages recognizes that the same noun (γῆ) is used in both the LXX and NT. *By itself*, the retention of γῆ in Matthew 5:5 does not automatically mean that γῆ refers to the land of Israel. But it does place the burden of proof upon the interpreter who insists that γῆ now refers to the earth since such a change is not immediately obvious or clear.

(2) Carson and Quarles provide exegetical justification for rendering γῆν as earth, but it is unconvincing. Quarles points to the use of γῆν in a global sense in Matthew 5:13: Ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς (‘You are the salt of the earth’). Yes, the use of γῆν here must indeed be global; the disciples are not merely the salt of the land

⁴¹ Bruce Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 559.

⁴² Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 212. Emphasis original.

⁴³ Two changes are very minor: (1) There is a change in sentence structure: the simple sentence of Ps 37:11 (“the meek will inherit the land”) becomes a complex sentence in Matt 5:5 (“blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land/earth”). This change in sentence structure, however, does not make a major change in meaning—the idea of the meek inheriting the land/earth is retained. (2) There is a change in literary form: the proverb-like declaration in Ps 37:11 becomes a beatitude in Matt 5:5 (“blessed are...”). Ps 37 is a wisdom psalm, and beatitudes are a literary form often used in wisdom literature, so there is no change in genre (wisdom), even though there is a change in form (from proverb to beatitude).

of Israel. But Jesus' statement here is figurative, not literal: Jesus' disciples are not literal salt upon the literal physical earth. Jesus' disciples are to figuratively be like salt for those who live on the earth, for the inhabitants of the earth. The sense of γῆν in Matthew 5:13 is concerning "the inhabitants of the earth,"⁴⁴ not the physical surface of the earth. Thus, Matthew 5:13 really has no bearing on the meaning of γῆν in Matthew 5:5 since it is a figurative use of γῆ. However, there is some merit to the argument that when Matthew uses γῆ to refer to land and not earth, he uses an explicit modifier ('land of Israel,' 'land of Naphtali,' etc.). So if Matthew wanted to clarify that he was referring to an inheritance of the land of Israel, he could have made his meaning clear by adding "of Israel." This expression, "land of Israel" is used in Matt 2:20, 21. But saying "land of Israel" would destroy Matthew's allusion to Psalm 37, so because Matthew wanted to allude to Psalm 37, he cannot add "of Israel." Furthermore, Matthew's allusion to Psalm 37:11 makes it unnecessary for him to specify "land of Israel" since the context of Psalm 37 already indicates that κληρονομήσουσιν γῆν refers to inheriting the land of Israel.

(3) The expansion of the land view does not recognize that there is complexity and nuance to Second Temple Jewish texts regarding the land of Israel. The expansion of the land view has misused Jubilees and 4Q171. Regarding Jubilees, I would refer the reader to the detailed discussion of land in James Scott's work, where he concludes:

In the foregoing we have shown that the Land of Israel occupies center stage in the eschatological expectations of the *Book of Jubilees*. If, as we had previously argued, *Jubilees* regards the goal of history to be the realignment of sacred space with sacred time so that everything will become 'on earth as in heaven,' then the holy Land of Israel, with its central sanctuary, must be the focal point of that conception. The present chapter confirms this conclusion. The universalistic strains in the book are completely subordinated to its particularistic emphasis on Israel and the Temple in the Land.⁴⁵

While Jubilees may be debatable, the use of the Dead Sea Scroll 4Q171 to support a universal view of the land promise is far more serious a mistake and a clear misreading of the text. 4Q171, precisely quoting Psalm 37, says וְעַנְיִים יִרְשׁוּ אֶרֶץ and five reputable English translations render it as follows: "But the humble will/shall possess the land,"⁴⁶ "And the poor shall possess the land,"⁴⁷ "And the poor shall inherit the

⁴⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 196.

⁴⁵ James M. Scott, *On Earth as in Heaven: The Restoration of Sacred Time and Sacred Space in the Book of Jubilees*, JSJSup 91 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 208–09.

⁴⁶ Michael A. Knibb, *The Qumran Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 248; G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1962), 241.

⁴⁷ Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition, Volume One: 1Q1–4Q273* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 343.

land,”⁴⁸ “And the afflicted will take possession of (the) land.”⁴⁹ Certainly ארץ has the flexibility to refer to “land” or “earth,” but why would an ascetic, reclusive Jewish sect who retreated into the desert be inclined to universalize the OT land promises to include Gentiles? The Jews at Qumran not only separated themselves from Gentiles, but even considered their fellow Jews to have compromised the faith—it seems nearly impossible that they would reinterpret the land promise as now universalized to include the whole world. Beyond these two texts, I have addressed the complexity and diversity of Second Temple Jewish texts on the land elsewhere;⁵⁰ here I will simply reiterate W. D. Davies’ conclusion that there is “an undeniable historical diversity” and that “the term ‘Judaism’ itself cannot be understood as representing a monolithic faith in which there has been a simplistic uniformity of doctrine—whether demanded, imposed, or recognized—about the Land, as about other elements of belief.”⁵¹

(4) Typology is perhaps the bottom-level area of disagreement on the land promise, and is where further debate is necessary. This article focuses on the exegesis of Matthew 5:5, so it is beyond the scope of the article to engage extensively with the claim that the land is a type. Three points will be made here (one concession and two concerns): First, Wellum and Parker allege that, “in dispensational and covenant critiques [of progressive covenantalism], each view retreated to their theological system without engaging the arguments of *KTC* [*Kingdom through Covenant*].”⁵² If I am understanding Beale’s, Martin’s, and Wellum’s arguments correctly—that the land is a type, that the unconditionality of the Abrahamic covenant does not settle the issue, and that some NT texts seem to confirm the expansion of the land (e.g. Matt. 5:5; Rom. 4:13; Eph. 6:3; Heb. 3:1–4:13; 11:8–16)—then I would concede that dispensationalists have often overlooked these core non-dispensational arguments concerning the land. This article is an effort to change that by engaging with one NT text that has been largely ignored—Matthew 5:5. But further engagement on the nature of the Abrahamic covenant, on other NT texts mentioned above, and on the legitimacy of the land as a type is necessary.⁵³

⁴⁸ Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 203.

⁴⁹ James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations, Volume 6B* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 11.

⁵⁰ Nelson S. Hsieh, “Abraham as ‘Heir of the World’: Does Romans 4:13 Expand the Old Testament Abrahamic Land Promises?,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 26, no. 1 (2015): 102–05.

⁵¹ W. D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 54.

⁵² Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, “Introduction,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 3n7.

⁵³ Regarding the nature of the Abrahamic covenant, it is true that the Abrahamic covenant is both conditional and unconditional. It is unconditional as to its final fulfillment—God will surely bring it about. But its blessings are conditioned upon Israel’s obedience—yet Israel has continually been disobedient. How then will God remain faithful to his promises? This is where the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31–34 enters. The New Covenant is the mechanism by which the Abrahamic promises will be fulfilled. God will cause Israel to obey through the indwelling Holy Spirit—thus Israel obeys and receives the Abrahamic

Second, I do not think that Martin and Wellum have accurately portrayed the dispensational view of typology.⁵⁴ They rely too much on John Feinberg, who has actually not written much on dispensationalism and who represents one type of dispensationalism.⁵⁵ There are multiple dispensational theologies: classical, revised, and progressive, according to Bock's and Blaising's history of dispensationalism.⁵⁶ This means that there will be multiple dispensational views on typology. Darrell Bock has presented the progressive dispensational view of typology,⁵⁷ a view that Wellum and Martin would probably mostly agree with in theory, though obviously in practice Bock will disagree that the land is a type. As of yet, Martin and Wellum have not taken into account Bock's progressive dispensational view of typology.⁵⁸

Third, I wonder if the belief that the land is a type has become an overpowering presupposition that colors the way non-dispensationalists read specific texts regarding the land. In other words, certainly I agree that "grammatical-historical exegesis needs to be set in the larger context of a canonical reading of Scripture"⁵⁹ to prevent a flat, literalistic reading of Scripture. Dispensationalists have often been guilty of failing to do a canonical reading. But are non-dispensationalists moving too far to the other side? Have they allowed their typological framework to mute or even silence what individual passages say? Will they allow exegesis of texts like Matthew 5:5 to tweak or modify their typological framework? Will they even be willing to consider that Matthew 5:5 refers to the land of Israel and not the earth, or will their typological framework allow them to dismiss the very possibility of Matthew 5:5 referring to the land of Israel?

Some scholars openly admit the foundational status of their belief in an expanded land promise. In response to Boyd Luter's review of Gary Burge's *Jesus and the Land*, Burge writes:

promises, yet God was the ultimate cause. The New Covenant has just as much to say about the land as the Abrahamic covenant, and they must be read in conjunction.

Regarding specific NT texts, I have dealt with Rom 4:13 elsewhere—see Hsieh, "Abraham as 'Heir of the World,'" 95–110. I intend to deal with Ephesians 6:3 and Hebrews 11:8–16 in the future.

Regarding the land as a type, see Justin Brown, "Is Typology an Interpretive Method?" (Th.M thesis, The Master's Seminary, 2014), 64–76; Michael J. Vlach, "Have They Found a Better Way? An Analysis of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom Through Covenant*," *Master's Seminary Journal* 24, no. 1 (2013): 12–17.

⁵⁴ See esp. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 121–24.

⁵⁵ Feinberg appears to hold to revised dispensationalism.

⁵⁶ Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 9–56

⁵⁷ Darrell L. Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts and Referents: The New Testament's Legitimate, Accurate, and Multifaceted Use of the Old," in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 118–20.

⁵⁸ Wellum's doctoral student, Brent Parker, interacts at length with a wide range of dispensational views of typology (including Bock's view) in his forthcoming dissertation on typology. It was successfully defended orally, but will not be available on ProQuest in its final form until May 2017. See Brent E. Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern: A Theological Critique of Covenant and Dispensational Theologies" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017).

⁵⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 86.

Luter simply never engages the larger theological argument that the book is prosecuting. In a word, I am simply tracing the same trajectory that scholars such as N. Perrin, G. Beale and N.T. Wright have applied to the Temple. Intrinsic to the theology of the NT is the view that something has been realized in Christ that has permanently shifted the *theological importance* of the major deep structures of first century Judaism. . . . Christ brought an eschatological fulfillment to Jewish Temple practice and for the early church, there was no going back. I have simply taken this deep trajectory of the NT and applied it to the Land.⁶⁰

Burge's rejoinder to Luter is very revealing—rather than engage with the texts that Luter raises (e.g. Rev. 11:1–2, 8–13; 14:6–7; Rom. 11:25–27) or defend his own interpretation of specific biblical texts, Burge simply dismisses the texts that Luter raises and is content to reiterate his theological argument of fulfillment in Christ. In fact, Burge's rejoinder to Luter does not deal with *any* texts related to the OT land promise—only Burge's "larger theological argument" matters. From this exchange, one could easily conclude that dispensationalists could respond to *all* of Burge's interpretations of biblical texts and even raise additional biblical texts that seem to disprove Burge's position—but it would not matter to Burge because his theological argument of fulfillment in Christ is overpowering, underpinning the way he views all biblical texts related to the OT land promises. Certainly dispensationalists can be accused of having presuppositions that color the way they read biblical texts, but the presuppositions of *both sides* have to be exposed, and perhaps it is at this level of theological presuppositions that debate must focus.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Gary M. Burge, "Rejoinder to Boyd Luter—*Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to Holy Land Theology*," *Criswell Theological Review* 9, no. 2 (2012): 77. Emphasis original.

⁶¹ Burge is not alone. In response to Darrell Bock's critique of *Kingdom through Covenant*, Gentry and Wellum plainly admit that their canonical reading of Scripture determines their exegesis of individual passages: "The metanarrative we bring to these texts [Rom 9–11; Luke-Acts] *determines our exegetical outcomes*, and we are questioning [dispensationalism's] storyline" (emphasis added) Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, "'Kingdom through Covenant' Authors Respond to Bock, Moo, Horton," <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/gentry-and-wellum-respond-to-kingdom-through-covenant-reviews> (accessed May 1, 2016). Interestingly, it is almost as if the OT is given priority over the NT in their system (the opposite of what John Feinberg claims non-dispensationalists do). In explaining their omission of a significant section on the NT in *KTC*, they say: "Only when we correctly construct the OT scaffolding can we rightly understand what Paul is doing in Romans 9–11 and other NT texts."

My concern here is the same as with Burge: will specific texts be allowed to modify their understanding of the whole? Earlier in their response, Gentry and Wellum rightly explain that "we create understandings of the whole by dissecting and studying its parts, and conversely we understand the parts in light of the whole. *As we go back and forth between analysis and synthesis, we refine our understandings of both the parts and the whole*" (emphasis added). Stated again, my concern is whether or not non-dispensationalists are willing to allow the parts (such as Matt. 5:5) to modify their understanding of the whole (Scripture's metanarrative). This seems unlikely if they admit, "the metanarrative we bring to these texts [Rom 9–11; Luke-Acts] determines our exegetical outcomes."

But perhaps change is necessary on *both sides*: dispensationalists need to do a better job setting forth and arguing for their metanarrative and for their understanding of typology, while non-dispensationalists need to be willing to re-examine specific passages of Scripture and need to produce rigorous exegesis to support their position. A notable exegetical effort has been made by progressive covenantalist, P. Chase

(5) Regarding the relationship between Matthew 5:5 and Matthew 5:3, 10 (“theirs is the kingdom of heaven”), non-dispensationalists argue that since Matthew 5:5 is connected to the kingdom, Matthew 5:5 therefore must refer to the entire earth and not a specific part of the earth. But there is an alternate explanation that is also possible. I cannot argue for it in detail here, but only offer a brief sketch: The kingdom of heaven is indeed worldwide (dispensationalists do not deny this), but a worldwide kingdom does not automatically mean that Matthew 5:5 refers to the earth. A worldwide kingdom and a localized land inheritance are not mutually exclusive. It is not an either-or choice. Joel Willitts offers an alternate explanation:⁶² God’s universal kingdom (his non-territorial rule and sovereignty over all things) will be “made manifest on earth in time and space *singularly* in the establishment of the kingdom of Israel through the reign of his Davidic son whose influence, as YHWH’s viceroy, will extend far beyond the borders of Israel to encompass the whole earth.”⁶³ In other words, the extent of Messiah’s *dominion/authority* will be global, including all nations (e.g. Pss. 2:8; 72:8; Zech. 9:10; Dan. 7:14), yet this does not explain that fact that the Messiah must *reign from a specific location on the earth*. Having taken on a human body, Jesus cannot be everywhere at all times and he must physically reign from somewhere. If one is content to leave the location of Jesus’ reign unspecified, that is one possibility—but it seems that Scripture indicates that the Messiah will reign from Zion (e.g. Ps. 2:6; Zech. 14:6–7), the capitol city of the Messiah where the nations will come to worship (e.g. Isa. 60:11; Rev. 21:25–26). Thus there is both a worldwide kingdom and a localized land inheritance (i.e. a capitol city/region) that harmonize together; they do not conflict.⁶⁴

Sears, “More than a Question: Acts 1:6–11 and the Restoration of the Kingdom to Israel,” unpublished paper presented at the 2016 National Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society.

⁶² Joel Willitts, *Matthew’s Messianic Shepherd-King: In Search of ‘The Lost Sheep of the House of Israel’*, BZBW 147 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 168–73. Also see Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959), 213–15, 228–31. McClain observes that the extent of Messiah’s kingdom/authority will be universal/global, while the “world capitol” of this kingdom will be in Jerusalem.

⁶³ Willitts, *Matthew’s Messianic Shepherd-King*, 170–71. NT scholarship today far too quickly accepts George Ladd’s false dichotomy of viewing the kingdom as God’s *reign* rather than a *realm* over which God rules. The kingdom includes *both* God’s reign and the realm over which he rules, a worldwide kingdom centered in Israel. For defense of the unbreakable relationship between kingdom and land, see Sverre Aalen, “‘Reign’ and ‘House’ in the Kingdom of God in the Gospels,” *New Testament Studies* 8, no. 3 (1962): 215–40; George W. Buchanan, “The Kingdom of God,” in *The Consequences of the Covenant* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 42–90; Joel Willitts, “Jesus, the Kingdom and the Promised Land: Engaging N.T. Wright and the Question of Kingdom and Land,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 13 (2015): 347–72.

⁶⁴ This issue of a false dichotomy (either the new earth or the land of Israel) has been raised by at least one non-dispensationalist. In 2012, after reading Gentry and Wellum’s *Kingdom Through Covenant*, Andrew Naselli had four questions in his mind (the first two he said are major, the second two are minor). The first question raised in Naselli’s mind was: “Must the OT land promises be an either-or proposition (i.e., either literally Canaan or typologically the new creation)? Can they include both?” Andrew David Naselli, “Progressive Covenantalism: A Via Media between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism,” <http://andynaselli.com/progressive-covenantalism-a-via-media-between-covenant-theology-and-dispensationalism> (accessed April 30, 2016). In the comments section, Brent Parker responded by saying that the very nature of typology prevents a both-and choice here; the NT anti-type cancels out and makes

(6) Some biblical-theological scholars are interesting cases for the expansion of the land view: *exegetically*, they understand τὴν γῆν in Matthew 5:5 as referring to the land of Israel, but *theologically*, they have an impulse to explain away such a limited reference to Israel and to expand the inheritance of Matthew 5:5 to be global.⁶⁵ In other words, these scholars are not dispensationalists yet they are exegetically convinced that τὴν γῆν in Matthew 5:5 refers to the land of Israel. This provides a middle way that allows such scholars to be exegetically honest with Matthew 5:5 yet still uphold their theological conviction that the NT expands the OT land promises. Gary Burge and John Nolland first admit that exegetically Matthew 5:5 refers to the land of Israel:

Since [the use of γῆ] here in Matthew 5 springs from Psalm 37, Jesus' reference would have gained immediate notice among his listeners as a reference not to the entire *earth* but to the Land of Promise, the Holy Land. Moreover, Jesus refers to these recipients as *inheritors* of this land. This is yet another potent term for Jesus' audience. This word [*kleronomeo*, to inherit; *kleros*, inheritance] was commonly used to refer to the assignment of land in the OT promises. When "inheritance" is joined to "land" the allusion is unmistakable: this is the *land of inheritance*, the land of promise.⁶⁶

The interest in [Matt] 4:25 in the scope of historic Israel (see discussion there) and the evocation of exile and return in the opening beatitudes weigh in favour of Matthew's also intending γῆ to refer to Israel as the land of covenant promise.⁶⁷

How then do Burge and Nolland reach contradictory exegetical and theological conclusions?

Does this mean that Jesus here offered a territorial promise to his followers? This is not likely. For as we shall see (and as commentators regularly show) while the land itself had concrete application for most in Judaism [e.g. in Sec-

obsolete the OT type. Naselli responded, "I still don't know of a compelling reason or set of reasons that the land promises excludes Canaan. I don't think that the two options are incompatible."

In personal e-mail correspondence, Naselli clarified that his own position has now solidified: "After a few years of wrestling with Oren Martin's view, I'm finally convinced of it. I think that happened in fall 2015." When asked what was particularly convincing, he said, "The way typology works" (personal e-mail correspondence, April 30, 2016). Thus, it seems that a central issue, perhaps *the* central issue in the debate regarding the land promises is the nature and proper use of typology.

⁶⁵ Burge, *Jesus and the Land*, 33–35; Richard E. Menninger, *Israel and the Church in the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1994), 150–51; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 202.

⁶⁶ Gary M. Burge, "Jesus and the Land," in *The Land Cries Out: Theology of the Land in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, ed. Salim J. Munayer and Lisa Loden (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 326. Emphases original. Let me emphasize again that Burge is definitely not a dispensationalist.

⁶⁷ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 202. Nolland is also not a dispensationalist.

ond Temple Jewish literature], Jesus and his followers *reinterpreted* the promises that came to those in his kingdom. Their kingdom is in heaven (Matt. 5.3, 10), they shall see God (5.8), and their rewards will be in heaven (5.12). Still, Jesus exploited one of the most potent images of his day—the land.⁶⁸

This [τὴν γῆν in Matt. 5:5], of course, is in the first instance a judgment about imagery and not about a literal referent.⁶⁹

Unfortunately, Nolland ends his discussion after that terse sentence; Burge at least attempts some biblical justification for his reinterpretation. Both say that Jesus used the land of Israel for “imagery” purposes and not as the literal object of inheritance. Still, Nolland and Burge should be applauded for their exegetical honesty, even though ultimately, their theological systems will not allow Matthew 5:5 to re-affirm an inheritance of the land of Israel. Hopefully other non-dispensationalists will be willing to wrestle exegetically with Matthew 5:5 and consider my exegetical arguments, and if they decide to retreat to a theological argument—that is fine, so long as they openly admit what they are doing (as Burge and Nolland do). Retreating to a theological argument *after* looking honestly at Matthew 5:5 is far better than allowing a theological framework to pre-determine the exegesis of Matthew 5:5.

Arguments that Matthew 5:5 Reaffirms Jewish Inheritance of the Land of Israel

Having evaluated the expansion of the land view, now I will give four arguments for viewing Matthew 5:5 as reaffirming an eschatological Jewish inheritance of the land of Israel:⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Burge, *Jesus and the Land*, 35. Emphasis added.

⁶⁹ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 202.

⁷⁰ Although this view is in the minority, an increasing number of scholars hold it. Not all the following scholars are dispensationalists, but they do believe that Matthew 5:5 refers to an inheritance of the land of Israel: Herbert W. Bassler and Marsha B. Cohen, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 124–25, 127; Robert Horton Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel with Special Reference to the Messianic Hope* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 133n4; Christoph Heil, “‘Selig die Sanftmütigen, denn sie werden das Land Besitzen’ (Mt 5,5): Das Matthäische Verständnis der Landverheissung in seinen Frühjüdischen und Frühchristlichen Kontexten,” in *The Gospel of Matthew at the Crossroads of Early Christianity*, ed. Donald Senior (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 389–417; William Horbury, “Land, Sanctuary and Worship,” in *Early Christian Thought In Its Jewish Context: Festschrift in Honour of Morna Hooker's 65th Birthday*, ed. John Barclay and John Sweet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 217; Scot McKnight, *Sermon on the Mount*, SGBBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 42–43; David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 23–24; Martin Vahrenhorst, “Land und Landverheißung im Neuen Testament,” in *Heiliges Land*, ed. Martin Ebner (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2009), 129–33; Willitts, *Matthew's Messianic Shepherd-King*, 107n49, 160–61; Joel Willitts, “Zionism in the Gospel of Matthew: Do the People of Israel and the Land of Israel Persist as Abiding Concerns for Matthew?,” in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel & the Land*, ed. Gerald D. McDermott (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 135–38; Ben Witherington III, *Jesus, Paul and the End of the World: A Comparative Study in New Testament Eschatology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 133–36, 141, 276.

#1: Arguments Relating to Lexical Choice

An important principle relating to word study is the principle that *choice implies meaning* (also known as paradigmatic choice).⁷¹ Constantine Campbell explains:

While there are certain idiomatic and linguistic restraints that delimit lexical choice, nevertheless it is significant that an author chooses one word when another might have been chosen instead . . . Rather than simply trying to ascertain which sense of a lexeme is most likely in a particular context, it is worth asking how the use of a different lexeme in its place might have changed the meaning of the utterance. That contrast can illuminate the use of the original lexeme in question. . . .

Meaning is created through meaningful choices within a system of options. When a language user chooses a certain word, she is also ‘unchoosing’ other options that might have been chosen. . . . Whatever has been ‘unchosen’ helps to convey what is meant by what is chosen, because meaning is elucidated as much by what a word *doesn’t* mean as by what it does [mean].⁷²

This principle that choice implies meaning is why Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida created their unique lexicon that organizes words according to semantic domains (i.e. words with similar meanings) rather than alphabetically.⁷³ Louw & Nida place γῆ under five headings: (1) The Earth’s Surface; (2) Land in Contrast with the Sea; (3) Sociopolitical Areas; (4) Earth, Mud, Sand, Rock; and (5) Human Beings.⁷⁴ For our purposes, headings #1 and #3 are most important.

What other options did Matthew have if he wanted to refer to the entire earth’s surface? Three words (γῆ; οἰκουμένη; κόσμος) can refer to “the surface of the earth as the dwelling place of mankind, in contrast with the heavens above and the world

David Stern is a Messianic Jew and while it may be tempting to dismiss his work as biased, the same could be said of the works of Gentile scholars. Unfortunately, Jewish biblical scholars like Stern have been largely ignored. See the plea by David J. Rudolph, “Messianic Jews and Christian Theology: Restoring an Historical Voice to the Contemporary Discussion,” *Pro Ecclesia* 14, no. 1 (2005): 58–84.

⁷¹ Constantine R. Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 63–64, 67–68, 78–79; D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 64; M. A. K. Halliday and Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen, *Halliday’s Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2014), 20–31; Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook on the Information Structure of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2000), viii; Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 5–7; Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meanings*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 159–69.

⁷² Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 78–79, 63. Emphasis original.

⁷³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989). Louw and Nida describe how to analyze a word according to semantic domains (as I am doing here) in: Eugene A. Nida and Johannes P. Louw, “Analyzing the Related Meanings of Different Lexemes,” in *Lexical Semantics of the Greek New Testament* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1992), 81–105.

⁷⁴ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 10, 13, 15–16, 22, 106.

below.”⁷⁵ What other options did Matthew have in referring to a sociopolitical region of the earth? Four words (γῆ; χώρα; κλίμα; ὄριον) can refer to “region or regions of the earth, normally in relation to some ethnic group or geographical center.”⁷⁶

We can now ask three related questions: (1) If Matthew wanted to refer to the region of Israel, why did he not use χώρα, κλίμα, or ὄριον? The answer is simple: to have chosen another word would have destroyed his allusion to Psalm 37:11. Because Matthew chose to allude to Psalm 37:11, his word choice was constrained to only γῆ. (2) If Matthew wanted to refer to the entire earth, what other words or phrases could he have used? οἰκουμένη or κόσμος were his alternate choices, and to have picked either one would have broken his allusion to Psalm 37:11, where τὴν γῆν is restricted to the land of Israel. *Breaking the allusion to Psalm 37:11 by using οἰκουμένη or κόσμος would have made a reference to the whole earth crystal clear (thus bolstering the expansion of the land view)—but Matthew did not choose either οἰκουμένη or κόσμος.* (3) Does Matthew ever make a clear reference to the whole earth? Yes. In three places (Matt. 16:26; 24:14; 26:13), Matthew does make it crystal clear that he is referring to the entire world by adding the adjective ὅλος (‘whole, entire, complete’) and by using οἰκουμένη or κόσμος, not γῆ:

- **Matt 16:26:** τί γὰρ ὠφεληθήσεται ἄνθρωπος ἐὰν τὸν κόσμον ὅλον κερδήσῃ τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ζημιωθῆ; (‘For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?’)
- **Matt 24:14:** κηρυχθήσεται τοῦτο τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ (‘this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world’)
- **Matt 26:13:** In referring to the woman who anointed him for burial, Jesus says: ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὅπου ἐὰν κηρυχθῆ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦτο ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ, λαληθήσεται καὶ ὁ ἐποίησεν αὐτὴ εἰς μνημόσυνον αὐτῆς (‘Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her’)

So three times (Matt. 16:26; 24:14; 26:13), Matthew makes it crystal clear that he is referring to the *whole world* by not using γῆ, but rather οἰκουμένη or κόσμος, and by adding the adjective ὅλος (‘whole, entire, complete’). If we assume that Matthew was a competent communicator and if we assume he wanted to communicate an inheritance of the entire earth, then he could have said:

- μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν τὸν ὅλον κόσμον
- μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν ὅλην οἰκουμένην

⁷⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 15.

- Or Matthew could have retained γῆ and added the adjective ὅλος or πᾶς: κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν ὅλην γῆν or κληρονομήσουσιν πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν⁷⁷

Matthew had plenty of options to communicate his meaning more clearly if he wanted to indicate an inheritance of the whole earth, but he chose to allude to Psalm 37:11, he chose not to use the adjective πᾶς or ὅλος, and he chose to use the more ambiguous term γῆ rather than the clearer terms οἰκουμένη or κόσμος. γῆ is more ambiguous because it can refer to the entire earth *or to a region of the earth*. Both οἰκουμένη and κόσμος cannot refer to only a part/region of the world, thus they are more precise choices than γῆ and could have been used if Matthew had wanted to refer to the whole earth. This argument is not speculation, but based on the linguistic principle that choice implies meaning and based on the assumption that Matthew was a competent communicator. Thus, the burden of proof is upon the expansion of the land view to explain why Matthew did not say τὸν ὅλον κόσμον or τὴν ὅλην οἰκουμένην (as he did in Matt. 16:26; 24:14; 26:13), and to explain why Matthew did not say τὴν ὅλην γῆν or πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν. If Matthew were going to make a surprising and big change from inheriting the land of Israel to inheriting the whole earth, why did he not make his meaning clearer?

#2: Arguments Relating to Matthew’s Addition of the Article to the LXX

Greek scholar A. T. Robertson writes, “The article is never meaningless in Greek.”⁷⁸ The minor role of the article in English tempts English speakers to regard the article in Greek as trivial. The Greek article is important, yet we have to tread carefully, which is why this section has both a negative and positive point. Negatively, Matthew’s use of the article does not automatically mean that τὴν γῆν refers to the land of Israel. It is valid to ask why Matthew added the article. The article before a noun is used to make the noun definite, that is, “to specify one of many (the door rather than any door) . . . to mark clear boundaries for the sake of identification . . . to distinguish one person or thing from other persons or things.”⁷⁹ The article in Matthew 5:5 is probably used to point out something “well-known or familiar.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ The New Living Translation (NLT) gives a loose interpretive translation of Matthew 5:5 that imports the theological assumption that Matthew is referring to the earth by adding the adjective “whole”: “God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit *the whole earth*.” This adds what is not in the MT, LXX, or GNT.

⁷⁸ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), 756. Although perhaps overstated, Daniel Wallace writes, “In the least, we cannot treat [the article] lightly, for its presence or absence is the crucial element to unlocking the meaning of scores of passages in the NT. In short, there is no more important aspect of Greek grammar than the article to help shape our understanding of the thought and theology of the NT writers” (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 208).

⁷⁹ Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 55–56.

⁸⁰ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 225.

Hence one might conclude that τὴν γῆν refers to the well-known, specific land of Israel as opposed to a land or any land. But this is a wrong conclusion. Matthew uses γῆ 43x in his Gospel, 11x without the article and 32x with the article. Most of Matthew's usages of γῆ with the article should undoubtedly be translated as "the earth"—in fact, every other occurrence of γῆ in Matthew 5–7 (except possibly 5:5) should be translated as "earth, or the earth" (see 5:13, 18, 34–35; 6:10, 19–20). *But it is not the mere presence of the article that causes the article + γῆ to refer to the earth; contextual factors lead to such a conclusion.* Very often Matthew contrasts ὁ οὐρανός ("heaven") with ἡ γῆ (5:18, 34–35; 6:10, 19–20; 11:25; 16:19; 18:18–19; 23:9; 24:35; 28:18), thus the translation "earth" is appropriate. The article *by itself* helps neither view; the article *by itself* does not argue for τὴν γῆν as referring to the land of Israel or the earth. Contextual factors are most important.

Positively, Matthew's addition of the article is still significant. So why did Matthew add the article to the LXX? This can be explained in a number of ways:⁸¹ (1) textual corruption—Matthew used a Greek translation of the OT or a Hebrew text that included the article, but is no longer extant; (2) a memory slip—Matthew alluded to Psalm 37:11 from memory and *unintentionally* added the article since in the LXX, κληρονομέω often takes the article + γῆ as its direct object;⁸² or (3) an intentional change—Matthew consciously, intentionally modified the Greek and/or Hebrew texts available to him (or memorized by him) for his own purposes. The best explanation is probably #3 along with the relevant biblical data from #2 (in footnote 79): *The addition of the article allowed Matthew to bring his allusion to Psalm 37:11 into conformity with the overarching use of κληρονομέω + the article + γῆ in the rest of the OT, thus making clear that Matthew 5:5 refers to inheriting the land of Israel.* In other words, Matthew adds the article to build the specific combination [κληρονομέω + the article + γῆ], a combination that significantly narrows down the possible meaning of τὴν γῆν in Matthew 5:5.

⁸¹ This explanation follows Christopher Stanley, who carefully lays out possible reasons why NT citations/allusions do not match up with the MT and LXX versions we possess today. See Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 8–28. Stanley concludes that while textual corruption is always possible, memory slips would have been highly unlikely in ancient oral cultures—therefore most of the time, differences between the MT, LXX, and NT can be explained through intentional adaptations, or what Stanley calls an "interpretive rendering," which is a "contextual application in which introductory expressions, interpretive comments, explicit deductions, and (in many cases) changes in the wording of the text work together to bring the authoritative biblical text to bear on the pastoral needs of the people being addressed" (p. 360). See Stanley's further reasons that NT authors would modify the original OT texts available to them, on pp. 262–64 (point #11).

⁸² 43x κληρονομέω takes the article + γῆ as its direct object: Gen 15:7; 28:4; Exod 23:30; Num 14:31; 26:53; 33:54; 34:17; Deut 1:8; 4:1, 5, 14, 22, 26; 5:33; 6:18; 7:1; 8:1; 9:4, 6, 23; 10:11; 11:8, 10, 29, 31; 16:20; 17:14; 21:1; 23:21; 28:21, 63; 30:5, 16, 18; 31:13; 32:47; Josh 1:15; 18:3; 1 Chr 28:8; Ezra 9:11; Neh 9:15, 23; Isa 14:21; 60:21; 61:7. Interestingly, *only* in the Psalms κληρονομέω takes γῆν as its direct object without the article (24:13; 36:9, 11, 22, 29). Elsewhere, κληρονομέω *always* takes the article + γῆ as its direct object. Perhaps this was something peculiar to the LXX translator of Psalms?

#3: Arguments Relating to the Collocation of κληρονομέω + the article + γῆ

Another important principle relating to word study is the principle of context, or more specifically, the principle of collocations. The term “collocation” is attributed to British linguist J.R. Firth,⁸³ who suggested that certain words are frequently found close together in speech and writing, which was nothing particularly new since linguists have long spoken about idioms. What was unique about Firth is that he “suggested that a detailed examination of a word’s surrounding ‘company’ would aid in discerning which of the word’s different senses was being drawn upon in a specific example.”⁸⁴ NT Greek scholars have picked up Firth’s ideas and use the terminology of “syntagmatic choice” or “syntactical combinations.”⁸⁵ This means that studying the 33x Matthew uses γῆ with the article is of little value. What really matters is *analyzing the specific collocation* found in Matthew 5:5: κληρονομέω + the article + γῆ. By itself, τὴν γῆν can mean many things: soil, land, territory, earth. But the collocation κληρονομέω + the article + γῆ restricts and narrows down the meaning of τὴν γῆν.

To survey κληρονομέω + the article + γῆ in that exact word order would be too narrow. Instead, κληρονομέω + the article + γῆ (where the three words occur somewhere within the same verse) occurs 46x in the LXX Rahlfs,⁸⁶ 3x in extant Greek texts of the Pseudepigrapha (*I En.* 3:6, 7, 8), twice in Philo (*Sacr.* 57; *Her.* 96), once in the Apostolic Fathers (*Did.* 3:7), and once in the NT (Matthew 5:5). Unfortunately, there are no other occurrences in the NT beyond Matthew 5:5, which means that LXX usage becomes most important.⁸⁷

⁸³ J.R. Firth, “Modes of Meaning,” in *Papers in Linguistics 1934–1951* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 194; J.R. Firth, “A Synopsis of Linguistic Theory, 1930–55,” in *Studies in Linguistic Analysis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), 11–13, 26–27.

⁸⁴ Matthew Brook O’Donnell, “Some New Testament Words for Resurrection and the Company They Keep,” in *Resurrection*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes, and David Tombs (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 137. In this chapter, O’Donnell gives a collocational analysis of words relating to resurrection.

⁸⁵ Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 67; Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 64; Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meanings*, 141–43.

⁸⁶ I did not search the LXX Göttingen since the project is incomplete and does not cover the entire OT.

⁸⁷ It is exegetically sound to prefer LXX usage since Matthew was well acquainted with the LXX. Robert Gundry has done extensive analysis of Matthew’s citations/allusions to the OT and concludes: “First, the formal quotations in the Marcan tradition are almost purely Septuagintal. Second, a mixed textual tradition is displayed elsewhere [e.g. in allusions]” (Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 150). In the preceding quote, Gundry says “Marcan tradition” because he assumes Marcan priority and Matthean dependence on Mark, so his summary combines Matthew’s and Mark’s quotations and allusions to the OT.

What Gundry’s analysis implies is that Matthew’s “Old Testament” was primarily the Greek OT, with some tapping into the Hebrew OT. So when Matthew uses the collocation κληρονομέω + the article + γῆ (which occurs 46x in the LXX), we can be fairly sure that Matthew’s understanding of this collocation comes from the LXX. Thus to give priority to the LXX meaning of κληρονομέω + the article + γῆ has stronger exegetical foundation than to give priority to other NT texts about land and inheritance (e.g. Paul or John or Hebrews) since Matthew may not have even had access to or been aware of other NT texts

So how does the LXX understand κληρονομέω + the article + γῆ? In the Pentateuch, every instance refers to inheriting the land promised to Abraham, the land of Canaan, often taking it away from the Canaanite inhabitants.⁸⁸ In the historical books, every instance still refers to the land of Canaan.⁸⁹ In the prophets, the collocation occurs only in Isaiah,⁹⁰ where Isaiah 14:21 might refer to the earth, while the three other occurrences refer to the land of Israel in the context of restoration and in relation to the work of Yahweh's anointed Servant (Isa. 49:8; 60:21; 61:7). *Matthew's addition of the article does not destroy his allusion to Psalm 37:11 (since the meek are inheriting the land), yet adding the article allows him to conform his allusion to the use of κληρονομέω + the article + γῆ in the LXX, which almost always refers to inheriting the land of Israel (except possibly Isa. 14:21).* If Matthew's addition of the article is not explained in this way, then interpreters will need to come up with an alternate explanation. Furthermore, one may be tempted to jump to other passages in the NT on inheritance (e.g. Rom. 4:13; 8:17), but here we are concerned with determining Matthew's meaning in Matthew 5:5, not what the broader NT teaches. We must focus on original meaning in Matthew 5:5 before jumping to theological synthesis.

While it has already been established that κληρονομέω + the article + γῆ in the LXX almost always refers to the land of Israel, the most notable use of the collocation is Isaiah 61:7. Nearly all scholars have noticed the parallels between Matthew 5:3–4 and Isaiah 61:1–2 (ministry to the poor and comforting those who mourn), but some have also noted the parallels between Matthew 5:5 and LXX Isaiah 61:7 (which significantly modifies the MT).⁹¹ In fact Davies and Allison even suggest that Matthew 5:5 alludes primarily to LXX Isaiah 61:7, not Psalm 37:11: "Given the other allusions to Isa 61 in the other beatitudes [esp. vv. 3–4], perhaps 5.5 should recall Isa 61.7 even though 5.5 clearly quotes Psalm 37.11—especially since both Matthew and Isaiah agree, against the psalm, in having the definite article before γῆν."⁹² LXX Isaiah 61:7 has *the exact same phrase* as Matthew 5:5 (κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν), a phrase that has significantly modified the MT:

Isa. 61:7 (MT):

וְחֵתֶּבְךָ בְּשֵׁבֶט־בְּנֵי־יָמֶיךָ

"Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion" (ESV)

(besides maybe Mark). Again, at this stage, Matthew's intent in Matthew 5:5 is the focus, not theological integration with the rest of the NT.

⁸⁸ Gen. 15:7; 28:4; Exod. 23:30; Lev. 20:24; Num. 14:24, 31, 35; 33:54; 34:17; Deut. 1:8, 21; 2:24, 31; 3:12; 4:1, 22, 26, 38, 47; 6:18; 7:1; 8:1; 9:4, 5, 6, 23; 10:11; 11:8, 29, 31; 12:29; 16:20; 17:14; 20:16; 30:5.

⁸⁹ Josh. 1:15; 18:3; Judg. 11:21; 1 Chr. 28:8; Neh. 9:15, 22, 23.

⁹⁰ Isa. 14:21; 49:8; 60:21; 61:7.

⁹¹ Michael P. Knowles, "Scripture, History, Messiah: Scriptural Fulfillment and the Fullness of Time in Matthew's Gospel," in *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 67–68; Quarles, *Sermon on the Mount*, 56; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1988), 450–51.

⁹² Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 451.

Isa. 61:7 (LXX Göttingen): οὕτως ἐκ δευτέρας κληρονομήσουσι τὴν γῆν⁹³
 “Thus they shall inherit the land a second time”
 (NETS)

Matt. 5:5 (NA²⁸): μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν
 τὴν γῆν

The LXX translator of Isaiah is well known for some significant changes to the MT, changes that are theologically motivated.⁹⁴ LXX Isaiah 61:7 is a significant change: “Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion” has become “Thus they shall inherit the land a second time,” a clear expression of Jewish restoration hope indicating that the Jewish occupation of Israel during Isaiah’s time and even during the LXX translator’s time were not a true inheritance of the land, but Israel will “inherit the land *a second time*,” an inheritance that will take place when Isaiah’s servant comes (Isa 61:1–6). Perhaps one may reject an allusion to LXX Isaiah 61:7, but it is not only myself (as a dispensationalist) drawing this connection (see footnote 91 above). Matthew 5:5 has the exact same phrase as LXX Isaiah 61:7 (κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν), the linguistic and conceptual connections are undeniable, and the fact that Matthew 5:3–4 clearly alludes to Isaiah 61:1–2 (everyone agrees on this) strengthens the case that Matthew 5:5 alludes to (or even quotes) LXX Isaiah 61:7. Matthew 5:5 certainly satisfies the criteria for detecting allusions set out by several scholars.⁹⁵

Ultimately, the most important question here is why did Matthew allude to Psalm 37:11 and perhaps even LXX Isaiah 61:7? In what way is Matthew 5:5 using the OT?⁹⁶ Regarding the use of LXX Isaiah 61:7 in Matthew 5:5, Matthew wants to demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s servant in Isaiah 61 (similar to what Luke does in Luke 4:18–21):

⁹³ LXX Göttingen Isaiah 61:7 dropped the moveable *v* at the end of κληρονομήσουσι, but that is an insignificant textual variant. LXX Rahlfs retains the moveable *v*.

⁹⁴ Instances of theologically motivated translation in LXX Isaiah are found in Isac Leo Seeligmann, “The Translation as a Document of Jewish-Alexandrian Theology,” in *The Septuagint Version of Isaiah and Cognate Studies* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 258–94; Emanuel Tov, “Theologically Motivated Exegesis Embedded in the Septuagint,” in *Translation of Scripture: Proceedings of a Conference at the Annenberg Research Institute, May 15–16, 1989* (Philadelphia, PA: Annenberg Research Institute, 1990), 230.

⁹⁵ See the criteria for detecting allusions in G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 31–35; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 29–32; Michael Thompson, “The Meaning and Detection of Allusions,” in *Clothed with Christ: The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12.1–15.13* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 28–36. In fact, according to Stanley Porter’s criteria, Matthew 5:5 may even qualify as a direct quotation of LXX Isaiah 61:7. See Stanley E. Porter, “Further Comments on the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament,” in *The Intertextuality of the Epistles: Explorations of Theory and Practice*, ed. Thomas L. Brodie, Dennis R. MacDonald, and Stanley E. Porter (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 108.

⁹⁶ General answers about how the NT authors use the OT are found in Beale, “Primary Ways the New Testament Uses the Old Testament,” in *Handbook on the NT Use of the OT*, 55–93; Bock, “Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts and Referents,” in *Three Views on the NT Use of the OT*, 118–21.

	Matthew 5		Isaiah 61 (LXX)
v. 3	Blessed are the poor [πτωχοῖ] in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	v. 1	The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me . . . to bring good news to the poor [πτωχοῖς]
v. 4	Blessed are those who mourn [πενθοῦντες], for they will be comforted [παρακληθήσονται].	v. 2	. . . to comfort all who mourn [πενθοῦντας]
v. 5	Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land [κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν].	v. 7	. . . they shall inherit the land a second time [κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν]

Jesus proclaims good news to the poor (Isa. 61:1, alluded to in Matt. 5:3), Jesus comforts all those who mourn (Isa. 61:2, alluded to in Matt. 5:4), and Jesus promises a second eschatological inheritance of the land of Israel for the meek (Isa. 61:7, alluded to in Matt. 5:5).

Regarding the use of Psalm 37:11, it is important that David authored Psalm 37. David was Israel's greatest king yet he did not put an end to the wicked during his reign. David defeated many of Israel's enemies and expanded Israel's territory, yet he did not give Israel the full, consummate inheritance of the land. Israel was already in the land during David's time, yet David still speaks of a future inheritance of the land (vv. 9, 11, 22, 29, 34). Matthew 5:5 implies that Jesus is the greater David, the final Davidic king who will put an end to the wicked, deliver the righteous, and grant Israel their inheritance of the land. Matthew knows that Jesus did not accomplish these things in his first coming, thus in Matthew 25:31–46, Matthew describes the final judgment and inheritance of the righteous in terms of Christ returning to “sit on his glorious throne” (v. 31) and as “the King” who will pronounce judgment (vv. 34, 40, 41, 45, 46) and grant inheritance of the kingdom to all nations (v. 34).⁹⁷

In summary, Matthew 5:5 presents the land promises as fulfilled in Christ. Christ is the greater David who fulfills the promises of Psalm 37 and Christ is Isaiah's servant who fulfills the promises of Isaiah 61. The OT land promises go through Christ in Matthew 5:5 and come out as a reaffirmation of a Jewish inheritance of the land of Israel in fulfillment of Psalm 37 and Isaiah 61.

#4: Arguments Relating to the Literary and Historical Context of Matthew's Gospel

Nearly all biblical scholars will agree that when ambiguity arises in biblical interpretation, the arbiter and final determiner of meaning is *context*. But important questions arise: What *kinds* of context matter (e.g. literary, historical, canonical)? And which kind or kinds of context should be given priority?

⁹⁷ What I said in point #5 while evaluating the expansion of the land view applies here too. Matthew 25:31–46 is a judgment and inheritance for “all the nations” (v. 32), including Israel. People from all nations will enter into God's kingdom, but a worldwide kingdom does not exclude a localized land inheritance, where Jerusalem is the “world capitol” of Messiah's worldwide kingdom. It is a both-and choice, not either-or.

One of the major weaknesses of the expansion of the land view is that it does not pay careful attention to the literary-historical context of Matthew's Gospel, perhaps even over-privileging the so-called canonical context so that the canonical context silences the literary-historical context of Matthew. Four issues in particular deserve attention: (1) the Jewishness of Matthew's Gospel; (2) the relationship between Matthew 5:5 and Matthew's universal mission statement in 28:19–20; (3) the political-territorial background to Matthew and significance of geography for Matthew; and (4) the reception context of Matthew 5:5.

(1) The expansion of the land view does not take seriously the Jewishness of Matthew's Gospel, but rather dampens Matthew's focus on the Jews and amplifies Gentile inclusion to a level never intended by Matthew. Certainly, Matthew's view of Jews and Gentiles is complex and highly debated. Opinions range from a strong privileging of Gentiles and rejection of Jews,⁹⁸ to views that consider Matthew's Gospel a sect within Second Temple Judaism that never broke away from Judaism to form "Christianity,"⁹⁹ a sect that was perhaps even anti-Gentile because of Gentile persecution of the Jews.¹⁰⁰ The latter view has been quite thoroughly refuted; there was a decisive break with Judaism yet Matthew advocates a clearly Jewish-focused form of Christianity.¹⁰¹ The Jewishness of Matthew's Gospel is well-known and documented elsewhere;¹⁰² it is also fairly well-agreed that Matthew's Gospel was written by a Jew to a Jewish-Christian community consisting of mainly, if not exclusively,

⁹⁸ Kenneth W. Clark, "The Gentile Bias in Matthew," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 66, no. 2 (1947): 165–72. Clark claims that Matthew "was a gentile Christian who wrote his gospel in Syria, where Gentile Christianity threatened to dominate even in the days of Paul. He was persuaded that the Christian gospel, originally delivered to the Jews, had been rejected by them as a people; that God had now turned his back upon Judaism and chosen the largely gentile Christianity . . . the assurance that the gentiles have displaced the Jews is the basic message and the gentile bias of Matthew" (p. 172).

⁹⁹ J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990); Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹⁰⁰ David C. Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 57 (1995): 19–48. Sim goes to the extreme of saying that Matthew's church "accepted the legitimacy of both the Jewish and Gentile missions within the mandate of the whole Christian church, but engaged in only the former" (p. 44), leaving the Gentile mission to other Christian communities.

¹⁰¹ Donald A. Hagner, "Matthew: Christian Judaism or Jewish Christianity?," in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, ed. Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 263–82; Douglas R. A. Hare, "How Jewish is the Gospel of Matthew?," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2000): 264–77; Daniel J. Harrington, "Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community," in *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations*, ed. David J. Rudolph and Joel Willitts (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 159–67; Donald Senior, "Between Two Worlds: Gentiles and Jewish Christians in Matthew's Gospel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (1999): 1–23. Also see Richard Bauckham, "The Parting of the Ways: What Happened and Why," *Studia Theologica* 47, no. 2 (1993): 135–51.

¹⁰² For example, see Craig A. Evans, "The Jewish Christian Gospel Tradition," in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 244–45; Hagner, "Matthew: Christian Judaism or Jewish Christianity?," 263–64; Oskar Skarsaune, "Jesus and the Jewish People According to Luke, Matthew and Justin," www.lcje.net/papers/2003/skarsaune.doc (accessed September 12, 2016).

Jewish believers in Jesus.¹⁰³ The exact identity of the author, intended audience, and date of composition are irrelevant for our purposes here. What is crucial is to ask: How would a first-century Jew have read Matthew 5:5? Would such a Jew be thinking about the inclusion of the Gentiles and the worldwide nature of inheritance while reading Matthew 5:5? Or would such a Jew have immediately recognized the allusion to OT land promises made to Israel? The expansion of the land view ignores or downplays the Jewish-focused historical context of Matthew, and universalizes Matthew 5:5 based on its view that the land of Israel was a type fulfilled in the new earth. However, Matthew's focus on the Jews puts the burden of proof upon the expansion of the land view to prove that Matthew 5:5 was universal.

Thus, my main point here is that Matthew's Jewish focused historical context bolsters the view that Matthew 5:5 refers to the land of Israel; yet this point has been met with significant resistance. The main objection is hermeneutical and can be phrased a few different ways: my view excludes the church and forces one to read Matthew as no longer relevant to believers today. Since Matthew 5:5 is not an OT promise addressed to Israel, but a NT promise addressed to the church (which includes Jews and Gentiles), Matthew 5:5 must speak of inheriting the earth.¹⁰⁴ Another way of phrasing this objection is to say that my view requires a double hermeneutic: one has to read Matthew and constantly think about whether the text applies only to Jews, or to both Jews and Gentiles. Since Matthew's Gospel is for all Christians, interpreters should not have to wrestle with whether or not the text applies to Gentiles.¹⁰⁵

Much could be said in response, but I will limit myself to the following points: First, it is incorrect to say that Matthew's Gospel was originally intended for all Christians.¹⁰⁶ David Sim and others have proven that like the authors of the NT epistles, the Gospel writers had a specific audience in mind when they wrote.¹⁰⁷ The careful interpreter recognizes that a crucial question to ask in the exegetical process is: What did this text mean for its original audience? Although we cannot be sure of all

¹⁰³ Exceptions to this consensus include: Clark, "The Gentile Bias in Matthew," 165–72; John P. Meier, "Matthew, Gospel of," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 4:624–26. Clark and Meier both argue that a Gentile wrote Matthew's Gospel.

¹⁰⁴ This objection was voiced by NT scholar Thomas R. Schreiner in personal conversation and in response to an earlier unpublished form of this article.

¹⁰⁵ This objection was voiced by theologian Stephen J. Wellum when I presented an earlier form of this article in a Ph.D. seminar at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, on May 4, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Some have tried to argue that all four Gospels did not have specific audiences in mind but were written with all Christians in mind: Richard Bauckham, ed. *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*, trans. John Bowden (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 106–15.

¹⁰⁷ Philip F. Esler, "Community and Gospel in Early Christianity: A Response to Richard Bauckham's Gospels for All Christians," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51, no. 2 (1998): 235–48; Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, AB (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 25–28; David C. Sim, "The Gospel for All Christians?: A Response to Richard Bauckham," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 84 (2001): 3–27.

the details, it seems fairly clear that Matthew wrote to Jewish-Christians who were struggling with their identity within Second Temple Judaism. Should Christianity be regarded as another sect within Judaism? Or did Christianity have beliefs and practices that forced one to separate from Judaism? Matthew's answer seems to be that belief in Jesus as the Messiah is incompatible with first-century Judaism and necessitates a parting of the ways. However, this parting of the ways has often been taken to the extreme of eliminating or universalizing OT promises made to ethnic Israel. But "Matthew would not have thought of Christianity as a new religion. Such a conclusion would be anathema to any Jewish Christian, including Paul. For Matthew, Jewish Christianity is the perfection and fulfillment of Judaism."¹⁰⁸ After surveying Matthew's view of Israel and the land, Willitts concludes, "Matthew continued to hold traditional assumptions about the people and land of Israel, although his assumptions have been reconfigured around the person of Jesus."¹⁰⁹ According to Matthew, inheritance of the land of Israel is not dependent upon obedience to Torah, but upon faith in Jesus as the Messiah, who will one day return to earth and secure the promised inheritance for Israel.

Second, regarding the charge of making Matthew 5:5 irrelevant for Gentiles, I suggest that we do not read the OT without profit just because it was addressed specifically to Israel—in the same way, even if Matthew 5:5 is directed specifically to Jews, that does not mean that it has no relevance for Gentiles. Just as Gentiles can read OT prophecies of God's promise to bring Jews back to the land of Israel and reflect on God's faithfulness to his promises, so Gentiles can read Matthew 5:5 as referring to a promise of Jewish inheritance of the land of Israel and reflect on God's faithfulness to the Jews. Romans 15:8 confirms such an attitude: "Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs." When Gentiles realize that God's "special" ministry to Israel is not unfair, but a demonstration of God's faithfulness, we no longer must insist that every part of Scripture must have direct relevance to Gentiles.

Third, Matthew 5:5 is not the only passage in Matthew that is directed to Jews only. There are at least three other passages directed *only* to Jews: (a) In Matthew 1:21, Matthew explains the significance of Jesus' name: "[Mary] will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save *his people* from their sins." In its original context, "his people" refers to the Jews, and of course it can be broadened to include Gentiles on the basis of theological synthesis and harmonizing. But Matthew does not have Gentiles in view in 1:21. As Matthew unfolds, certainly it will become clear that Gentiles are included in God's people, but 1:21 was a promise directed to Jews.¹¹⁰ (b) In 2:6, Matthew quotes from Micah 5:2 to show that the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem was predicted in the OT: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means the least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." Here Jews are explicitly in view ("my people

¹⁰⁸ Hagner, "Matthew: Christian Judaism or Jewish Christianity?," 281.

¹⁰⁹ Willitts, "Zionism in the Gospel of Matthew," 138.

¹¹⁰ Even many non-dispensational commentators recognize that the primary referent of "his people" is the Jews, even if Matthew *later* expands God's people to include Gentiles: e.g. Carson, "Matthew," 101; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 53; Luz, *A Commentary on Matthew 1–7*, 95; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 98–99.

Israel'), not Gentiles. Jesus will shepherd Israel. Of course, we can broaden out to say that Jesus will shepherd Gentiles as well (e.g. John 10:16), but that is not what Matthew is saying here. (c) Speaking to the Pharisees and Sadducees, John the Baptist says, "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham" (3:9). Here is a third passage directed exclusively to Jews, not Gentiles. The Jews were tempted to trust in having Abraham as their ancestor, but faith and repentance must be added to one's ancestry. Again, we can draw out a broader principle (e.g. people should not trust in a Christian upbringing in a Christian home), but that is not Matthew's point here. The Jewish exclusiveness of these three passages may offend Gentile readers and tempt them to water down the Jewishness of Matthew's message, but it is undeniable that Matthew made promises and gave warnings that were directed *only* to Jews. Broader theological synthesis should not be allowed to downplay or nullify the Jewish focus of Matthew. Similar to these three passages, Matthew 5:5 refers to a Jewish inheritance of the land of Israel, yet such a focus on the Jews can be easily harmonized with the fact that Gentiles will also inherit the renewed earth (e.g. Rom. 8:18–25; 2 Pet. 3:13).

(2) Most biblical scholars have allowed the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19–20 to *predetermine* their reading of Matthew 5:5. Their logic is that since the Great Commission is universal in scope ("make disciples of all nations"), Matthew 5:5 *must* also be universal in scope ("inherit the earth"). This is problematic from a methodological/hermeneutical standpoint: no reader starts at the end of a work and reads backward; readers proceed from beginning to end and would thus read Matthew 5:5 before Matthew 28:19–20. Perhaps the ending of a work may modify or change one's reading of earlier parts, but a correct reading strategy will approach the text as the original readers would have: from beginning to end.¹¹¹ From a literary standpoint, Menakhem Perry has argued for the "primacy effect," whereby material located at the beginning of a literary work influences and shapes the reader's expectations and understanding of subsequent material.¹¹² In this regard, Matthew 1:1 and the subsequent genealogy would seem to be the interpretive key to understanding Matthew, not Matthew 28:19–20. Warren Carter and Anders Runesson have cut through the standard focus on Gentiles and spiritual matters in Matthew 1:1–17 and have recognized the political-territorial implications for Jews in Matthew 1:1–17.¹¹³ Runesson is particularly insightful. After observing that Matthew 1:1–17 focuses on four persons/events (Abraham, David, the exile, and the Messiah), Runesson suggests that:

¹¹¹ This point is made in Schuyler Brown, "The Two-fold Representation of the Mission in Matthew's Gospel," *Studia Biblica Et Theologica* 31, no. 1 (1977): 30–31; Willitts, *Matthew's Messianic Shepherd-King*, 9–10, 29–30.

¹¹² Menakhem Perry, "Literary Dynamics: How the Order of a Text Creates Its Meanings," *Poetics Today* 1, nos. 1/2 (1979): 35–64, 311–61. This point is also made in Warren Carter, "Matthaean Christology in Roman Imperial Key: Matthew 1.1," in *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman Imperial Context*, ed. John Riches and David C. Sim (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 151; Willitts, *Matthew's Messianic Shepherd-King*, 29–30.

¹¹³ Carter, "Matthaean Christology in Roman Imperial Key," 143–65; Anders Runesson, "Giving Birth to Jesus in the Late First Century: Matthew as Midwife in the Context of Colonisation," in *Infancy Gospels: Stories and Identities*, ed. Claire Clivaz, et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 301–27.

few have asked for the unifying element of all four events. . . . The common element seems to me to be the land, or as Matthew writes a few verses later, the land of Israel (*gē Israel*, Matt 2.20, 21). The land of Israel was promised to Abraham (1.1, 17) and brought to its ultimate climax under the ideal kingship of David (1.6, 17); the loss of the land followed with the exile (1.11, 17), the disaster which is now going to be triumphantly reversed with the birth of the Messiah (1.16, 17).¹¹⁴

If one reads from beginning to end, the expansion of the land view has difficulty. My plea is a modest one: given the intended Jewish audience of Matthew, given the political-territorial implications of Matthew 1:1–17, and assuming one reads from beginning to end, how would a first-century Jew have read Matthew 5:5 on first pass? Would Gentile inclusion have been in the forefront of his mind as he read, or the promised Jewish inheritance of the land of Israel? Granted, after reading all of Matthew, one might argue that there is also a territorial inheritance for Gentiles, but such an inheritance for Gentiles should not be allowed to cancel out the original promise of Matthew 5:5—that Jews were promised an inheritance of the land of Israel.

(3) My brief discussion of Matthew 1:1–17 above leads us to consider the political-territorial background to Matthew and the significance of geography for Matthew. Two points need to be made here: First, those living in Western democratic governments where there is a clear separation of church and state are likely to (unconsciously?) separate religion from politics in their reading of Matthew. But religion and politics were never separated in the ancient world. What we call “religion” today best compares in the ancient world to philosophy and the mystery cults.¹¹⁵ However, when ancient peoples thought of “religion,” they “usually did so in ways that merged ethnic aspects with a specific land, specific laws, and worship of a specific god. In other words, the concepts of land-law-god-people were intertwined in a world in which the political and the religious were inseparable.”¹¹⁶ Once the modern separation of religion and politics is put aside, one can read Matthew 5:5 and recognize its audacious political-territorial implications. Although Matthew 5:5 is a promise for the meek, it is by no means a meek statement. Matthew 5:5 is a political-territorial claim against Roman imperial rule. In the first century AD, the land of Israel belonged to the mighty Roman Empire, but Matthew 5:5 makes the radical claim that the meek (not the mighty) will inherit the land. This would be akin to African or Asian colonies of the British Empire claiming that their land belongs to them and not to the British Empire. Matthew 5:5 is not a statement about the expansiveness or universal scope of inheritance; it is a bold political-territorial claim against Rome.

¹¹⁴ Runesson, “Giving Birth to Jesus in the Late First Century,” 310.

¹¹⁵ See the discussion in Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007): 457–512.

¹¹⁶ Anders Runesson, “Judging Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew: Between ‘Othering’ and Inclusion,” in *Jesus, Matthew’s Gospel and Early Christianity: Studies in Memory of Graham N. Stanton*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner, Joel Willitts, and Richard A. Burridge (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 136–37.

Yet Jesus was not advocating armed rebellion; the inheritance is promised to the meek, who wait upon the Lord to fulfill his promises.

Second, the political-territorial claim of Matthew 5:5 may make more sense when we consider that Matthew is particularly interested in geography, but not for the sake of historical details or background.¹¹⁷ For the ancients, geography was not a neutral, scientific discipline aimed to develop a precise representation of the world; one's geography reflected a world-view and political agenda. Geography "is not merely the setting for history; it is *an active agent of meaning in the historical narrative*. . . . Maps are not merely a mirror of intellectual achievements . . . they also play a very hands-on role as expressions of claims, are employed as tools of argument in conflicts and function as means of exerting control."¹¹⁸ An overlooked passage in Matthew 2:20–21 provides crucial background to Matthew 5:5 and is a perfect example of using geography to make a political-territorial claim. The angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to *the land of Israel*, for those who sought the child's life are dead. And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to *the land of Israel*." Although peripheral to the main point of these verses, Matthew's use of the phrase "land of Israel" reveals his Jewish bias. While the Romans referred to Jewish territory with the Latin term *Palestina* and others referred to Jewish territory as Judaea (for the southern region) and Galilee (for the northern region),¹¹⁹ Matthew uses the traditional term *land of Israel*, "signaling both the unity of the land (the designation clearly refers to both Galilee and Judaea) and claiming 'Israelite', i.e. Jewish, ownership of it, in contrast to the factual situation under the Romans."¹²⁰ In other words, Rome ruled over the Jews and their land and would have never labeled Jewish territory as "the land of Israel" because it was Roman land that would have been designated as *Palestina* on a map. Yet Matthew is so bold as to claim that the land belongs to Israel. The sentiment of Matthew 5:5 is likely similar to what Matthew did in 2:20–21: he makes a bold political-territorial claim of Jewish ownership of the land. Matthew is not making an expansive claim about a universal earthly inheritance for Jews and Gentiles.

(4) In closing this section on literary-historical context, I want to discuss the reception context of Matthew 5:5 and propose that reception context has biased modern-day readings of Matthew 5:5 toward a universalistic reading. Reception context refers to the history of interpretation of a text *after* it was written.¹²¹ Campbell warns that "while we might be tempted to think that 'reception context' is not relevant for understanding an author's use of a particular lexeme [or phrase], such an attitude is

¹¹⁷ Matthew's interest in geography to make theological points is expounded in Willitts, *Matthew's Messianic Shepherd-King*; Jürgen Zangenberg, "Pharisees, Villages and Synagogues: Observations on the Theological Significance of Matthew's Geography of Galilee," in *Logos-Logik-Lyrik: Engagierte exegetische Studien zum biblischen Reden Gottes*, ed. Volker A. Lehnert and Ulrich Rüsen-Weinhold (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2007), 151–69.

¹¹⁸ Zangenberg, "Pharisees, Villages and Synagogues," 155–56. Emphasis original.

¹¹⁹ For more regarding the terminology that non-Jews used to refer to Jewish territory, see Zangenberg, "Pharisees, Villages, and Synagogues," 167n53.

¹²⁰ Runesson, "Judging Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew," 142.

¹²¹ See the discussion in Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meanings*, 147–48.

naïve. The reason that reception context matters is that certain words will be ‘heard’ by modern readers through the lens of how others have understood them in the past.”¹²² Gentiles from Western democracies where religion and politics are divorced from each other have dominated biblical scholarship in the past hundred years. Many such scholars ignore or downplay the political-territorial context of Matthew and such a practice builds presuppositions regarding biblical teaching where the idea of Jews inheriting the land of Israel becomes *a priori* implausible and impossible. Carter states more forcefully:

Matthaeian scholars, shaped by the contemporary separation of ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ and by their location in a long ‘spiritualizing’ (and confessional) tradition of reading Matthew, have avoided ‘political’ interpretations of Jesus’ mission to save from sins, preferring ‘spiritualized’ interpretations. There is no denying that inner transformation matters, but contemporary attempts to separate the religious and the secular (political, socioeconomic) should not anachronistically control the exegesis.¹²³

We must seriously consider how much modern Gentile biblical scholarship has skewed readings of texts like Matthew 5:5. If one has proper respect for the Jewishness of Matthew’s Gospel and for the political-territorial background of Matthew’s Gospel, viewing Matthew 5:5 as an inheritance of the land of Israel not only becomes plausible but more fitting to Matthew’s literary-historical context.

Conclusion

Guidance for Preachers

The length and complexity of this article may overwhelm the pastor who hopes to preach on Matthew 5:5. Let me offer some suggestions about how this interpretation of Matthew 5:5 could be explained to people in a church context: (1) Carefully note that the Greek word $\gamma\eta$ is flexible and can refer to a wide variety of things. Take the congregation to other passages where $\gamma\eta$ refers to soil (Matt. 13:5, 8, 23), the ground (Matt. 10:29; 25:25), and even a socio-political region of the earth (Matt. 2:6, 20, 21; 9:26, 31). However, most interesting is Matthew 27:45 when during Jesus’ crucifixion darkness falls over all the $\gamma\eta$ (land or earth?). Even English translations such as the ESV and HCSB recognize the ambiguity and possibility that it can refer to either land or earth.

¹²² Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, 77–78.

¹²³ Carter, “Matthaeian Christology in Roman Imperial Key,” 157. Cf. Runesson, who after claiming that the events/persons of Matt 1:1–17 find a common theme in the land of Israel, asks: “Would finding such a strong focus on the land in Matthew be strange? In my view, it is only [strange] once we read the Gospel through the lens of almost 1900 years of non-Jewish Christianity, beginning with Ignatios [*sic*. Ignatius] and later patristic writings, that we may be able to downplay the importance of the land for Jewish, including messianic-Jewish, theology” (“Giving Birth to Jesus in the Late First Century,” 310).

(2) Explain that while $\gamma\eta$ itself is flexible, we are concerned with the specific idea of *inheritance*, and in the OT nearly every reference to inheritance refers to inheriting the land of Israel. Then explain how Matthew was written by a Jew to Jews who had just broken away from the synagogue and needed encouragement that Jesus is indeed the true Jewish Messiah. Thus the “Jewishness” of Matthew’s Gospel would lead us to think that any first-century Jew reading Matthew 5:5 would have immediately associated the idea of inheritance with the land of Israel. The burden of proof lies with those who claim that Matthew is expanding the land promise.

(3) Show that when Matthew wanted to refer to the whole earth, he made his meaning clear by adding the adjective ‘whole/entire’ as in Matthew 16:26; 24:14; 26:13. Take the congregation to these passages and show how Matthew clearly referred to the whole earth and suggest that Matthew could have done the same in Matthew 5:5, but did not. If Matthew was going to make a massive change to the OT land promises, we would expect him to have made his point unmistakably clear and to have said something like “the meek will inherit the *whole* earth.”

(4) Show that Matthew 5:5 alludes to Psalm 37 and that Psalm 37, in its original context, clearly refers to the land of Israel. Then suggest that we should stick to the OT meaning unless clear and compelling reasons force us to re-evaluate the NT use of an OT text.

(5) Show that David authored Psalm 37 and that although David was Israel’s greatest king, he was still unable to give Israel the full, consummate inheritance of the land. Israel’s wicked enemies constantly threatened them and Gentile nations constantly ruled over them. Thus David himself spoke of a future inheritance of the land in Psalm 37. Matthew 5:5 is therefore telling us that Jesus is the greater David, the final Davidic king who will fulfill the promises of Psalm 37 by defeating Israel’s enemies and giving the land to Israel at his second coming.

(6) Explain that a Jewish inheritance of the land does not exclude Gentiles and does not mean that Matthew 5:5 is irrelevant for Gentiles. Jesus’ kingdom will include Gentiles. His kingdom’s *authority/dominion* will be worldwide, yet because he has taken on a human body, *he must rule from a specific location on the earth*, which Scripture makes clear is Jerusalem. There is thus both a worldwide kingdom (Jesus’ authority/dominion reaches the whole world) and a localized land inheritance (a capitol city/region). Furthermore, Matthew 5:5 is not irrelevant to Gentiles; the God of the OT who made promises to Israel will be faithful to those promises and such faithfulness gives Gentiles confidence that God will also fulfill his promises made to all people in the NT.

Hopeful Contributions

What are the hoped-for contributions of this article? My main goal was to provide a detailed exegesis of Matthew 5:5 that provides an alternative interpretation for non-dispensationalists to consider and respond to, an exegesis that does not quickly resort to theological arguments, but argues from lexical-syntactical analysis and from the literary-historical context of Matthew. I have argued that Matthew 5:5 reaffirms an eschatological Jewish inheritance of the land of Israel, yet it should be read in conjunction with other passages that speak of Gentile inclusion in the kingdom of God (8:11; 25:34). At the same time, this is not a “flat” reading of the land promises,

as progressive covenantalists have suggested. The OT land promises do not cross over to the NT unchanged. Matthew 5:5 presents the land promises as fulfilled in Christ. Christ is the greater David who fulfills the promises of Psalm 37 and Christ is Isaiah's servant who fulfills the promises of Isaiah 61. The OT land promises go *through* Christ in Matthew 5:5 and *come out* as a reaffirmation of a Jewish inheritance of the land of Israel in fulfillment of Psalm 37 and Isaiah 61.

Secondly, in light of the constant danger of misrepresenting opposing views, I hope to have fairly and accurately portrayed the non-dispensational interpretation of Matthew 5:5 and (in the small space available) to have fairly represented some of the larger arguments regarding the land, particularly the land as a type.¹²⁴

Suggestions for Further Debate

Now I want to provide some suggestions for further debate that all sides might consider: (1) Dispensationalists need to argue for their own biblical metanarrative and need to engage directly with the arguments concerning the land as a type, with the biblical metanarrative of non-dispensationalists, and with specific NT texts that dispensationalists have largely ignored (e.g. Matt. 5:5; Rom 4:13; Eph. 6:3; Heb. 11:8–16).¹²⁵

(2) Non-dispensationalists need to consider whether or not typology and/or theological arguments of fulfillment in Christ have muted or even pre-determined the meaning of specific passages of Scripture (e.g. Rom. 9–11; Luke-Acts; Matt. 5:5) and thus should consider producing detailed exegesis of such passages.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Progressive covenantalists in particular feel that their view has been misunderstood and misrepresented. See esp. Wellum and Parker, "Introduction," in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 1–6. Also see Wellum's response to critiques of *Kingdom Through Covenant* at the 2014 National Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, available at <http://www.wordmp3.com/details.aspx?id=17630> (accessed February 22, 2017).

¹²⁵ Dispensationalists will have to also answer questions like: How do we explain the imprecise and inconsistent borders of the land in the OT? What is the relationship between land and temple—will there be a re-built temple in the future? How do we account for spiritual equality in Christ if Israel has a privileged place in the future—does not dispensationalism rebuild the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles that Christ abolished (Eph. 2:11–22; Galatians 3)? How is the dispensational understanding of the land not a flat, literalistic reading of the Bible—does not dispensationalism carry over the land promise into the NT without change, which is in essence a denial of progressive revelation?

¹²⁶ Particularly important are the specific texts mentioned in Larry R. Helyer, "Luke and the Restoration of Israel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36, no. 3 (1993): 317–29; Michael J. Vlach, "A Case for the Restoration of National Israel," in *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 177–201; Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 221–96.

Two other major works that have been largely neglected by non-dispensationalists are: Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007); James M. Scott, ed., *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). James Scott's article on Rom 11:26–27 is particularly worthy of interaction.

In addition, non-dispensationalists will have to answer questions like: What is the relationship between the Abrahamic and new covenants since both promise to Israel an inheritance/return to the land of Israel? Who is the singular "great nation" promised to Abraham (Gen 12:2)—how can it be the church (cf. 1 Pet 2:9) when the church consists of people from *every* nation? It simply does not make logical sense for the church (made up of people from every nation) to become a singular "holy nation" since the church

(3) Building off my previous point and intentionally being repetitive for the sake of emphasis, I want to say that as an observer of the debate between dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists, and as someone who has switched positions (from amillennial to dispensational premillennial), and who has personally interacted with people on both sides—it seems that dispensationalists will not be satisfied until non-dispensationalists produce careful exegesis of the specific NT passages mentioned in point #2 above, while non-dispensationalists will not be satisfied until dispensationalists interact directly with the arguments that the land is a type, with a canonical reading concerning the land, and with the specific NT texts mentioned in point #1 above. So far, both sides seem to have done little to satisfy the primary concerns of the other side. Therefore, it seems to me that until this third point is heeded, scholars on both sides will talk past each other and remain entrenched in their respective positions. Hopefully, this article will allow progress to be made.

is not a “nation” in any typical use of the term, since a nation implies a government and a territory. Will there be nations (not just ethnicity, but nations) in the new earth, as Rev 21:24, 26 clearly states? If so, what is the definition of a “nation”? And why cannot Israel also be one of the many nations that dwell in the new earth? On this last point, see Michael J. Vlach, “God’s Future Plans for the Nations,” in *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 165–76.