

ABRAHAM AS “HEIR OF THE WORLD”: DOES ROMANS 4:13 EXPAND THE OLD TESTAMENT ABRAHAMIC LAND PROMISES?

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The future of Israel continues to be an area of intense debate, but recent non-dispensationalists have moved away from the language of “replacement” to the language of “expansion,” viz., the church does not replace Israel; rather the church is an expansion of Israel. Or put another way, the promises originally made to Israel in the OT are not nullified, but “expanded” to include the church. Recent scholars insist that this expansion applies to the OT land promises and that several NT texts explicitly teach this expansion, e.g. Matt 5:5, Rom 4:13, Eph 6:3, Heb 4:1–11; 11:8–16. This article will critically examine Rom 4:13 and argue that this text does not expand the OT land promises but rather describes Abraham’s faith in God’s promise of a multitude of descendants from all nations.

Introduction

Since the formation of the modern-state of Israel in 1948, many Christians have become fascinated with what the Bible says about the restoration of Israel and the events that will precede Christ’s second coming. American Dispensationalists have been largely responsible for this revived interest in eschatology. Popular-level Dispensational writers like Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, and John Hagee have argued for Christian Zionism,¹ which is hard to define because it is more a popular notion rather than a well-defined, carefully argued theological system. But the broad strokes are:

¹ Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970); Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1995); John Hagee, *In Defense of Israel: The Bible’s Mandate for Supporting the Jewish State* (Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine, 2007).

(1) the birth of the modern-nation of Israel in 1948 is the beginning of the end, that is, the land promises to Abraham are being fulfilled and the OT restoration prophecies are now in motion, thus (2) Christians should be expecting the return of Christ, the appearance of the Antichrist, and the rapture of the church at any moment. (3) Christians have a biblical obligation to support the modern-state of Israel since Israel has been and always will be God's chosen people.

There are many cautious Dispensationalists who disagree with Lindsey, LaHaye, and Hagee and yet still affirm a future for the nation of Israel.² It is unfortunate that Dispensationalists (even the cautious ones) are automatically caricatured as blind supporters of the modern nation of Israel and fanatical about biblical prophecy. Scholars who wish to understand Dispensationalism should not consider Lindsey, LaHaye, and Hagee as representatives of Dispensationalism as a whole.³ Caricatures of Dispensationalism can be avoided if biblical scholars come to recognize the varieties within Dispensationalism.⁴

In response to Christian Zionism, and in rejection of Dispensationalism, many biblical scholars have argued against the idea of a future restoration of Jews to the land of Israel.⁵ They insist that to believe in Christian Zionism is to interpret the Bible "literalistically" and is a return to the Jewish nationalism of the OT, which Christ has abolished by including Gentiles in the people of God and by promising a worldwide inheritance for all of God's people rather than a localized inheritance for Jews only. Further, these scholars have pointed out the grave injustices that the modern-state of Israel has committed against the Palestinian Arabs and thus urge Christians not to blindly support an oppressive, violent, and largely unbelieving nation of Israel.⁶

In making their arguments, recent non-dispensational scholars have largely discarded the idea that Israel forfeited her land promises by her disobedience since that would make God seem unfaithful to His promises. They have also largely abandoned the idea of the church "replacing" Israel in favor of the language of Israel and her covenant promises being "expanded."⁷ This means that non-dispensational scholars

² See footnote 12 below.

³ To combat misunderstandings of Dispensationalism, Michael J. Vlach has written a brief, helpful work that defines and dispels numerous myths/misconceptions surrounding Dispensationalism; see his *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths* (Los Angeles: Theological Studies Press, 2008).

⁴ For a brief overview of the varieties within Dispensationalism, see Craig A. Blaising, "The Extent and Varieties of Dispensationalism," in *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Bridgepoint Books, 1993), 9–56.

⁵ See esp. Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to "Holy Land" Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?: The Continuing Crisis over Israel and Palestine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002); Philip Johnston and Peter Walker, eds., *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

⁶ See esp. Gary M. Burge, "Modern Israel in the Land," in *Whose Land? Whose Promise?: What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), 130–64.

⁷ Stephen Motyer and others dislike the language of replacement: "For many 'replacement' has become a loaded word, indeed a test of 'orthodoxy': does the church 'replace' Israel in the purposes of God? But this question crudely oversimplifies the issues. As far as the NT is concerned, the only candidate

have moved towards newer arguments against Dispensationalism:⁸ the OT land promises have not been nullified but expanded to now encompass the whole world (Matt 5:5; Rom 4:13; Eph 6:3); the OT land promises were a promise of rest and the true “rest” is now found in Christ (Heb 4:1–11); the OT land promises pointed back to paradise in Eden and will be ultimately fulfilled when paradise is regained in the new heavens and new earth. These are serious biblical-theological arguments that do not resort to naïve spiritualizing or allegorizing, but employ typology (land as “rest” and land as “paradise”) and cite specific texts to justify their claims. Thus, the critique of older Dispensationalists that such scholars abandon literal interpretation is no longer compelling or accurate.⁹ The difference between the hermeneutics of Dispensationalists and the hermeneutics of non-dispensationalists “is not literalism v. non-literalism, but different understandings of what constitutes literal hermeneutics.”¹⁰ The issues are complex and center on: (1) whether the NT can have priority over the OT, i.e. what OT institutions and promises do the NT modify by nullification or expansion; (2) the understanding of how the NT uses the OT, i.e., whether the NT can assign new or fuller meanings to OT texts, which the original readers of the OT texts could not have comprehended during their time; and (3) the definition of and use of typology, especially whether or not it is legitimate to consider Israel as a type and the land of Canaan as a type.¹¹

The three areas of hermeneutical disagreement are rich areas for further discussion and debate, but in this article I will focus on whether or not the NT modifies/expands the OT land promise. The Dispensationalist answer is that God’s OT land promises remain *unchanged* by the NT, thus we should expect a future restoration of ethnic Jews to the land promised to Abraham, i.e. the land of Canaan. In fact, some Dispensationalists would even assert that the New Testament *reaffirms* the restoration of Israel to her land.¹²

for ‘replacing’ Israel is Jesus himself” (S. Motyer, “Israel (nation),” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, Graeme Goldsworthy [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000], 586).

⁸ These newer arguments against Dispensationalism are found in footnote 5, but also see G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 750–72; Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 206–12, 274–97; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical–Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 703–16; O. Palmer Robertson, “The Israel of God: Its Land,” in *The Israel of God Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2000), 3–31; Chris Wright, “Biblical Reflections on Land,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 17, no. 2 (April 1993): 153–67; idem., “The land and Christian ethics,” in *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 182–93.

⁹ The accusation against Covenant Theologians of abandoning literal interpretation is found mainly in Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 89–109; John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom: A Basic Text in Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 59–67.

¹⁰ John S. Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testament: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 74.

¹¹ These descriptions of the three areas of hermeneutical disagreement between Dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists come from Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity,” 74–75.

¹² See esp. Matt 23:37–39 (cf. Luke 13:34–35); Luke 1:54–55, 68–75; Acts 1:6–8 argued by: Craig A. Blaising, “The Kingdom of God in the New Testament,” in *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand

In contrast, non-dispensationalists argue that the OT land promises have been *changed*—not nullified, but *expanded* by the NT to now encompass the whole world, and this inheritance is given to *all* of Abraham's spiritual descendants, both Jews and Gentiles. This claim is justified by typology (Canaan is a type of "paradise" and a type of "rest") and also by specific texts: Matt 5:5, Rom 4:13, and Eph 6:3. Each of these texts and the issue of typology deserve an in-depth treatment that is beyond the scope of this article.¹³ Rather, this article will focus on Rom 4:13 and argue that Rom 4:13 does not expand the OT land promises but rather describes Abraham's faith in God's promise of a multitude of descendants from all nations. I will prove this by first, setting the literary context of Rom 4:13; second, giving arguments for the "expansion of the land" view of Rom 4:13; third, evaluating the arguments of the "expansion of the land" view; and fourth, giving arguments for another interpretation of Rom 4:13 that can be labeled the "inheritance of many nations" view.

The Literary Context of Romans 4:13

While there is great debate over the purpose of Romans,¹⁴ many agree that there is at least a pastoral purpose: Jews and Gentiles are in conflict with each other in Rome¹⁵ (see esp. 14:1–15:13), thus Paul writes to unify the Jews and Gentiles in Rome. Paul does this by reminding them of essential gospel truths: both Jews and Gentiles are all "under sin" (3:9), thus the only hope for both Jews and Gentiles alike is the gospel of Jesus Christ—all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, so all must believe in Christ to be justified (3:21–26). This means that no one can boast in his works (3:27), since both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith (3:28–30). Having explained his understanding of the gospel, Paul's main concern in Romans 4 is to establish the fact that *his understanding of justification by faith is not something new, but was already taught in the Old Testament*. His argument falls into five parts:

Rapids: Bridgepoint Books, 1993), 267–70; Larry R. Helyer, "Luke and the Restoration of Israel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36, no. 3 (Sept 1993): 317–29; John A. Jelinek, "The Dispersion and Restoration of Israel to the Land," in *Israel: The Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God's Promises*, ed. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998), 231–58; John A. McLean, "Did Jesus Correct the Disciples' View of the Kingdom?," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (Apr–Jun 1994): 215–27; Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 221–323; Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 182–92.

¹³ Justin Brown has written an incisive treatment of typology that compares and contrasts different notions of typology between Dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists. See his "Is Typology an Interpretive Method?" (Th.M Thesis, The Master's Seminary, May 2014).

¹⁴ See esp. Günter Klein, "Paul's Purpose in Writing the Epistle to the Romans," in *The Romans Debate*, rev. ed., edited by Karl P. Donfried (1991; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 29–43.

¹⁵ The book of Romans was written c. 57 AD and prior events in Rome help us to understand the situation for the Roman house churches. Emperor Cladius expelled the Jews from Rome in 49 AD but they were allowed to return to Rome after Cladius' death in 54 AD. Cladius' "edict must have had a profound impact on the church in Rome. In the absence of Jewish Christians, those Gentiles who had been attracted to Christianity would have taken over the church, and Jewish Christians who then returned would probably be in a minority and perhaps be viewed with some condescension by the now-dominant Gentile wing" (D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, "Romans," in *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005], 396).

1. Abraham was justified by faith not by works (vv. 1–3), which Paul states in a general theological principle (vv. 4–5) and which is confirmed by David in Psalm 32 (vv. 6–8)
2. Abraham was justified by faith not by circumcision, therefore, the blessing of justification by faith extends to the uncircumcised (Gentiles) since chronologically Abraham was justified *before* he was circumcised (vv. 9–12)
3. “The promise” made to Abraham and his seed is realized by faith, not by law (vv. 13–17)
4. Abraham was justified by faith not by law because Abraham believed “the promise” even in his seemingly hopeless situation (vv. 18–22)
5. Therefore, post-Abraham and post-Law believers are also justified by faith (vv. 23–25)

While there is a noticeable shift in emphasis from discussing justification/righteousness” in verses 1–12 to discussing “promise” in verses 13–22,¹⁶ the fact that verse 13 begins with “for” (γὰρ) cautions us from seeing too sharp a shift. While verses 23–25 apply Abraham’s example to NT believers, the flow from verses 1–22 is one continuous emphasis on justification by faith—not by works (vv. 1–8), not by circumcision (vv. 9–12), and not by law (vv. 13–22). However, Paul does not explain the *content* of Abraham’s faith until verses 13–22. The *content* of Abraham’s faith is framed in terms of God’s “promise”—Abraham believed God’s “promise,” hundreds of years prior to the giving of the Law, therefore Abraham was justified by faith. This flow of thought will be extremely important for understanding Rom 4:13 because the *content* of the promise that Abraham believed must be truth that was revealed to him. Those who argue that the “promise” in Romans 4 is an expanded worldwide land inheritance (which was never promised to Abraham in the OT) thus have an immediate problem: How can Abraham have believed in a truth that was never revealed to him?

Having set the context, let us look directly at Rom 4:13: “For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith” (ESV). Paul’s main point in verse 13 is clear: just as justification is not by works but by faith, in the same way, “the promise” to Abraham is not obtained by law but by faith. However, a difficulty arises in the phrase, τὸ κληρονόμον αὐτὸν εἶναι κόσμου (“that he would be heir of the world”). This phrase explains the “promise” given to Abraham, but it is strange since nowhere in the OT does God give Abraham or his descendants such a promise; the land promises were always localized to the land of Canaan. So what does this phrase mean?

¹⁶ This shift is evident simply by the sheer repetition of key words: in verses 1–12, the noun “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) is used six times (vv. 3, 5, 6, 9, 11 [2x]), the verb “to justify” (δικαίω) is used twice (vv. 2, 5) while the noun or verb form of “promise” is not used at all. In verses 13–22, the noun “promise” (ἐπαγγελία) is used four times (vv. 13, 14, 16, 20), the verb “to promise” (ἐπαγγέλλομαι) is used once (v. 21), while the noun “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) is used only twice (vv. 13, 22).

Arguments for the Expansion of the Land View

Romans 4:13 is a key text for those who claim that the NT expands the Abrahamic land promises of the OT to now encompass the whole world. Many scholars reference this verse as justifying their claim that the NT expands the OT land promise, but they merely reference it in passing or only offer a brief defense.¹⁷ Kenneth Bailey is the only scholar I could find who has offered a moderate-length defense of this view.¹⁸ Perhaps scholars do not find it necessary to defend this view in detail since “Paul’s statement here is a straightforward universalization of the Abrahamic land promises.”¹⁹ Since no scholar has given an in-depth defense of this view (Bailey comes the closest), I have constructed the following four-part argument:

(1) Second Temple Judaism, expressed in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, came to understand the land promise to Abraham as expanded to encompass the whole world and “Paul’s own thinking reflects ideas which were widespread in other strands of Jewish theology at the time.”²⁰ Thus, in Rom 4:13, Paul is only mirroring the expansion of the Abrahamic land promise found in Second Temple Jewish literature. For example, Sirach 44:21 declares, “the Lord assured [Abraham] with an oath . . . that he would make him as numerous as the dust of the earth and exalt his offspring like the stars, and give them an inheritance from sea to sea and from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth.” In Jubilees 22:14, Abraham blesses Jacob and says, “May [God] strengthen thee, and bless thee, and mayest thou inherit the whole earth” (cf. Jubilees 17:3; 32:19). Proponents of the expansion of the land view also cite 1 Enoch 5:7; 4 Ezra 6:59; 2 Baruch 14:13; 51:3 as supporting their view. Proponents of this view also point to Philo, a Jewish philosopher and biblical scholar, and Josephus, a Jewish historian, both of whom allegedly viewed the Abrahamic land promise

¹⁷ Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 757; Burge, *Jesus and the Land*, 85–87; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 708, 714; Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 559, 562; Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 192; O. Palmer Robertson, “A new-covenant perspective on the land,” in *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological, and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Philip Johnston and Peter Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 135–36.

The following Romans commentators hold to this interpretation: C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans 1–8*, ICC (New York: T&T Clark Ltd., 1975), 239–40; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 213; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, AB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 384; Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 184; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 274; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 142; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 227–28.

¹⁸ Kenneth E. Bailey, “St. Paul’s Understanding of the Territorial Promise of God to Abraham: Romans 4:13 in its Historical and Theological Context,” *Theological Review* 15, no. 1 (1994): 59–69.

¹⁹ Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 757.

²⁰ Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 213. Fitzmyer writes: “This generic promise is not found in Genesis, but the Jewish tradition embellished the promises made to Abraham, and Paul echoes that tradition” (384).

to be either spiritualized or expanded.²¹ This appeal to Second Temple Jewish literature seems to be *the primary argument* given to defend this view—this is apparent by reading the Romans commentators cited in footnote 17 and by recognizing that Kenneth Bailey’s sole argument (in the only moderate-length defense of this view) is an appeal to Second Temple Jewish texts.

But other arguments are given as well: (2) Some cite Matt 5:5 (“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”) as support for their view,²² which is another text that deserves in-depth treatment but is beyond the scope of this article. Jesus, like Paul, allegedly expanded the OT land promise to now include the whole earth.

(3) The use of “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” in Rom 8:17 could also support the expansion of the land view. Romans 8:17 is the only other reference to “heir(s)” in Romans. While Rom 8:17 does not define the inheritance, the subsequent paragraph hints at it: believers will inherit a creation that “will be set free from its bondage to corruption” (v. 21) and believers will inherit “redeemed” bodies (v. 23). These verses surely refer to the new heavens and new earth and to glorified, resurrected human bodies. Thus, Rom 4:13 could parallel Rom 8:17 and could refer to inheriting the whole world, that is, the new heavens and the new earth.

(4) Beyond Rom 4:13 and 8:17, Paul uses inheritance language fifteen other times.²³ The inheritance is unclear in some of these passages (Eph 1:11, 14, 18; Col 1:12; 3:24). Titus 3:7 probably refers to inheriting eternal life. Other passages either refer to inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5) or to the inheritance of the Abrahamic covenant (Gal 3:18, 29; 4:1, 7, 30). Since the kingdom of God is a worldwide kingdom, inheriting of the “world” in Rom 4:13 would be consistent with inheriting the worldwide kingdom of God. In Galatians 3–4, the inheritance is related to the Abrahamic covenant but it is not specifically defined. We could probably assume the inheritance is the land of Canaan, but there is no verse in Galatians that expands the land promise like what Rom 4:13 seems to do. However, one of Paul’s main points in Galatians 3–4 is that Gentiles are now included as the offspring of Abraham (Gal 3:7–9, 29) and thus they too share in the Abrahamic inheritance (Gal 3:29)—since Paul argues that the “offspring” of Abraham has expanded to include Gentiles, maybe Paul is implicitly hinting at an enlarged, worldwide territorial inheritance as well.

Evaluation of the Expansion of the Land View

This view is appealing and seems to arise from a straightforward reading of Rom 4:13. To be honest, I was initially convinced by this view²⁴ but after reading

²¹ See Burge, *Jesus and the Land*, 21–23, who references an essay written by Betsy Halpern Amaru, “Land Theology in Philo and Josephus,” in *The Land of Israel: Jewish Perspectives* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 65–93.

²² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 274; Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 213; Bailey, 64. However, Moo admits that this cross-reference is shaky since γῆ, not κόσμος, is used in Matthews 5:5 (p. 274 fn 19).

²³ 1 Cor 6:9; 15:50; Gal 3:18, 29; 4:1, 7, 30; 5:21; Eph 1:11, 14, 18; 5:5; Col 1:12; 3:24; Titus 3:7.

²⁴ Personal conversations with NT scholar Thomas Schreiner initially convinced me of this view. Schreiner has read an earlier form of this article and I am thankful to him for his gracious and helpful comments.

Rom 4:13 repeatedly in context, after lexical study of *κόσμος* and *κληρονόμος*, after examining the Second Temple Jewish literature cited to support this view, and after surveying additional Second Temple Jewish literature, I think there are weaknesses in its arguments and I think that there is another view that better explains Rom 4:13. I respond to this view as follows:

(1) The references to Second Temple Jewish literature are extremely limited and selective. The references are limited since only a handful of texts are chosen among the vast amount of Second Temple Jewish literature found in the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran documents, rabbinic texts, synagogue liturgies, Jewish biblical scholars, and Jewish historians. The texts cited are found in one book of the Apocrypha (Sirach), four books of the Pseudepigrapha (Jubilees, 4 Ezra; 2 Baruch; 1 Enoch), one Jewish philosopher and biblical scholar (Philo) and one Jewish historian (Josephus). *Such limited amount of literature could hardly reflect the entirety of Second Temple Judaism's view of the Abrahamic land promise.* This is an exegetical fallacy that D. A. Carson calls “appeal to selective evidence” and explains as follows: “as a general rule, the more complex and/or emotional the issue, the greater tendency to select only part of the evidence, prematurely construct a grid, and so filter the rest of the evidence through the grid that it is robbed of any substance. What is needed is evenhandedness.”²⁵ A more thorough survey of the Second Temple Jewish literature is needed.

W. D. Davies has done a very comprehensive survey of Second Temple Jewish literature and its theology of the land.²⁶ Davies argues 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.”²⁷ Davies surveys literature from the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran documents, rabbinic texts, synagogue liturgies, Jewish biblical scholars, and Jewish historians. In the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Davies sees “a continuity between these sources and the Old Testament.”²⁸ There are texts like the Psalms of Solomon 17 speaking of a Son of David whom the Lord will raise up: “And he shall gather together a holy people . . . And he shall judge the tribes of the people . . . And he shall divide them according to their tribes upon the land, and neither sojourner nor alien shall sojourn with them any more . . . And he shall purge Jerusalem, making it holy as of old” (vv. 28, 30, 33). This speaks of a restoration of Israel similar to the OT prophets, as do other texts like Tobit:

God will again have mercy on them, and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild the temple of God . . . they will all return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor . . . All the Israelites who are

²⁵ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 93–94.

²⁶ See esp. his *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 28–110; but also see his, “The Land in Extra-Biblical Sources,” in *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), 49–74.

²⁷ Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism*, 54.

²⁸ Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, 51.

saved in those days and are truly mindful of God will be gathered together; they will go to Jerusalem and live in safety forever in the land of Abraham, and it will be given over to them (Tobit 14:5, 7).

Tobit was probably written between 225 and 175 BC,²⁹ *after* the return from exile under Ezra and Nehemiah, yet Tobit still looks forward to another return from exile and restoration of Israel.

Other texts teach that eschatological salvation during the final judgment of God will be found by being in the land of Israel, which God will preserve for Himself: “Everyone shall survive from the perils aforesaid and shall see salvation in my land, and within my borders which I have sanctified for myself eternally” (4 Ezra 9:8). Davies shows that the Qumran community understood its purpose as atoning the land from wickedness so that Israel could be restored and the Qumran *War Scroll* (1QM) taught that their community, as the true remnant of Israel, would occupy the land according to their tribes and, at the dawn of the age to come, would begin an offensive war against those outside the land to drive them out and restore Israel.³⁰ Davies also surveys the rabbinic literature and shows that the land was extremely important since so much of the OT law can only be obeyed in the land of Israel, thus one-third of the Mishnah (the Pharasaic legal code) is concerned with the land of Israel. If a Jew did not live in the land of Israel, they could not obey Torah fully, so clearly the rabbis desired to live in Israel and looked forward to a restoration of Israel. Some rabbis taught that those who died outside the land of Israel would not participate in the resurrection but that even a Gentile slave girl who lives in Israel might share in the resurrection (Gen. Rabbah 96:5; T. B. Ketuboth 111a). Other rabbinic texts also expected a restoration of Israel: “‘I shall,’ said the Holy One, blessed be He, ‘bring Israel, who are precious to Me, into the Land that is precious to Me’” (Num. Rabbah 23:7 commenting on Num 34:2). Clearly, numerous Second Temple Jewish texts did *not* view the Abrahamic land promise as being expanded but as still promising a future return to the land of Canaan.

(2) The Second Temple Jewish texts that support the expansion of land view actually are more nuanced and complicated. We can look at the book of Jubilees. Jubilees was “written in Hebrew by a Pharisee between 135 and 105 B.C.E. [and is] a midrashic rewriting of Genesis-Exodus . . . Whereas the author believes that God will be gracious and forgiving towards Israel, he entertains no hope for the Gentiles.”³¹ This background should be kept in mind. In Jubilees 22:14, Abraham does bless Jacob by saying, “Mayest thou inherit the whole earth.” But a close reading of Jubilees 22 shows that its theology of the land conforms to the localized OT land promises. In Jubilees 22, Abraham says to Jacob, “May nations serve thee, and all the nations bow themselves before thy seed” (v. 11), which gives the nation of Israel a prominence among the nations of the earth in line with the OT prophets. Abraham also says, “may He renew His covenant with thee that thou mayest be to Him a nation

²⁹ Joseph Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 51.

³⁰ Davies, *the Gospel and the Land*, 52–53.

³¹ Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 46.

for His inheritance for all ages” (v. 15), thus Abraham envisions a future for the *nation* of Israel, not merely the salvation of Israelites. In verse 16, Abraham instructs Jacob: “separate thyself from the nations, and eat not with them . . . for their works are unclean.” Paul argued strongly for the unity of Jews and Gentiles, especially in Romans and Galatians and even rebuked Peter for refusing to eat with the Gentiles (Gal 2:11–14). Contrary to Paul’s emphasis on Jew/Gentile unity, Jubilees 22:16 is advocating a separation of Jews and Gentiles. And after Abraham finishes blessing Jacob, Abraham praises God by saying, “The Most High God, the God of all, and Creator of all, who brought me forth from Ur of the Chaldees that he might give me *this land* to inherit it forever, and that I might establish a holy seed—blessed be the Most High forever” (v. 27, emphasis added). Thus, Abraham, who told Jacob, “mayest thou inherit the whole earth” (v. 14), still understands his inheritance to be the land that he travelled to after leaving Ur of the Chaldees, which is clearly the land of Canaan, and Abraham believes that he will inherit it forever. All of these additional verses in Jubilees 22 agree with the OT land promises, which envision a restored nation of Israel that returns to the land of Israel and has a prominence among the nations as the nations serve and bow down to Israel. So even if Abraham’s statement in Jubilees 22:14 is taken as expanding the OT land promises, such a statement must be reconciled with the rest of Jubilees 22, which affirms the localized OT land promises and affirms a prominent place for the nation of Israel in the future.

(3) The Second Temple Jewish texts that support the expansion of land view use specific language that clearly communicate that they understood the land to be expanded, but Paul in Rom 4:13 does not use such specific language. Paul says, “that he should be heir of the world,” but notice the expansive and detailed language that the Second Temple Jewish texts use:

- Sirach 44:21 says that Abraham’s descendants would be given “an inheritance *from sea to sea and from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth.*”
- In Jubilees 22:14, Abraham says to Jacob, “mayest thou inherit *the whole world.*”
- Jubilees 32:19 recalls Jacob’s stay at Bethel and God’s promise to him: “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.*”

If Paul were going to make such an important and massive change to the OT land promises, why would he not make his meaning clearer by using more detailed language like that found in the above texts? The New Living Translation (NLT) adds the word “whole” to its translation of Rom 4:13 (“God’s promise to give the *whole* earth to Abraham. . .”), but “whole” is not found in the Greek text of Rom 4:13. If Paul read those Second Temple Jewish texts and had those texts in mind as he wrote Romans 4, he could have easily quoted from those texts and expanded Rom 4:13 to say, “that he would be heir of the *whole* world,” or “that he would be heir of *all the earth,*” etc. This point should at least cast some doubt on whether Paul was influenced by the Second Temple Jewish texts that expanded the OT land promises.

This discussion of the Second Temple Jewish literature has been brief (see Davies for more), but it shows that the best way to understand Second Temple Judaism’s theology of land is in a *variegated* or *mixed* way—while some texts expanded the land promise to include the whole world, other texts expected a restoration of Israel and return to Jerusalem; while some texts expanded the land, other texts expressed a strong desire to live in the land of Israel in order to obey the commandments in Torah that can only be obeyed in the land and in order to participate in the resurrection. Ultimately, it seems that Second Temple Judaism’s theology of land is similar to Second Temple Judaism’s theology of justification and the Law—it is complex and it is variegated or mixed. The New Perspective on Paul (represented by scholars like E. P. Sanders, James Dunn, N. T. Wright) views Second Temple Judaism as *not* legalistic but rather a religion of covenantal nomism, where a person enters into the covenant community by grace but must obey the Law to remain in the covenant community. In addition, the New Perspective on Paul understands the fundamental problem that Paul combats to be Jewish exclusivism (i.e. excluding Gentiles by requiring Jewish identity markers such as circumcision, Sabbath keeping, food laws, in order to become part of the covenant community); in other words, the problem was not legalism but exclusivism. NT scholars have responded by pointing out that the New Perspective on Paul is selective in its evidence and that Second Temple Judaism was ultimately a mixture of legalism and covenantal nomism, a mixture of exclusivism and legalism.³² I am arguing the same with regard to Second Temple Judaism’s theology of the land. Some texts expanded the land promise while other texts expected a future return to the land and a restoration of Israel. Therefore, to say that Paul mirrored Second Temple Judaism’s theology of the land really proves nothing—did Paul mirror the theology of those who expanded the land promise, or did Paul mirror the theology of those who expected a return to the land and a restoration of Israel? It could be either. However, it would not be right to say that Second Temple Jewish texts were 50/50, equally split between expanding the land promise and reaffirming a return to the land of Canaan. It is more accurate to say that while there was a *minority* of Second Temple Jewish texts that spoke of an expansion of the Abrahamic land promise, the *vast majority* of Second Temple Jewish texts made no change to the OT land promises and still expected God to fulfill his promise of giving the land of Canaan to the Jews. The literary evidence presented above seems to justify such a claim—yet even such a claim is ultimately irrelevant with regards to the interpretation of Rom 4:13. *Ultimately, we should recognize that Second Temple Jewish literature neither argues for nor against an expansion of the OT land promises because Second Temple Judaism was mixed and variegated in its understanding of the OT land promises. We are thus thrown back to an exegetical analysis of Rom 4:13.*

(4) My final response to the expansion of the land view of Rom 4:13 is to say that Paul’s other inheritance texts are also inconclusive in explaining Rom 4:13. While the inheritance in Rom 8:17 is the new creation, the context is different—in Romans 4, Paul is proving that his understanding of justification by faith is not new, but is taught in the OT in the example of Abraham; in Romans 8, Paul is describing the New Covenant blessings of the Holy Spirit given to believers, adoption as God’s

³² See esp. *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, eds. D. A. Carson, P. T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

children, and the final victory of God in restoring the cursed creation and in defeating sin and death. Other Pauline passages that speak of inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5) also do not argue conclusively for an expansion of the land promise. It all depends on how one understands the “kingdom of God.” Most Dispensationalists understand the kingdom of God in the NT as identical to the kingdom proclaimed in the OT prophets—yes, it will be a worldwide kingdom, but this worldwide kingdom will have its capitol in Jerusalem where the ultimate king of David will reign over both a restored nation of Israel and over all the other nations of earth, who will stream to Jerusalem in order to learn about God and worship God (Isa 2:2–4; Mic 4:1–3).³³ Of course, not all agree with this definition of the kingdom of God, but my point is that there is a *universality* and a *particularity* to the kingdom of God—it is a worldwide kingdom that all of God’s people will be a part of, yet it is centered in (i.e. its capitol city is in) Jerusalem where a Davidic king reigns. Others obviously disagree and view the kingdom of God to be Christ’s present reign and/or as the future new heavens and new earth. *Thus, one would have to resolve the definition of the kingdom of God before one could apply Paul’s other inheritance texts to Rom 4:13. Ultimately, we still must deal with the text of Rom 4:13 rather than citing biblical parallels about inheritance.* Biblical parallels suggest various meanings for “inheritance,” but one must prove that those parallels define the meaning of inheritance in Rom 4:13.

Arguments for the Inheritance of Many Nations View³⁴

I will now argue for an alternative view, a view that understands Rom 4:13 as describing Abraham’s faith in God’s promise of a multitude of descendants from all nations. In order to argue for this view, what follows are four observations about Rom 4:13 that note some important contextual, grammatical, and lexical issues:

(1) The phrase “that he would be heir of the world” (τὸ κληρονόμον αὐτὸν εἶναι κόσμου) has the singular pronoun “he,” not the plural pronoun “they.” Thus, the phrase “that *he* would be heir of the world” is describing the inheritance of a single individual, not an inheritance for Abraham’s descendants. The key question is, Who is the antecedent of “he”? It is possible that Paul’s phrase “to his seed” (τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ) refers to a single individual, namely Christ (like Paul does in Gal 3:16, 19), in which case Christ would be “heir of the world.” This would be in line with Ps 2:7–8: “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD. He said to Me, ‘You are my Son, Today

³³ This view is argued well by Saucy, “The Kingdom” and “The Old Testament Prophecies about Israel,” in *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 81–110, 221–45.

³⁴ The following commentators/scholars hold this view: Everett F. Harrison, “Romans” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 51; Craig A. Blaising, “A Premillennial Response,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 144–45. Leon Morris sees this view as a possibility, but is not confident of it—see Morris’ *The Epistle to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 206. Jack Cottrell takes “heir of the world” as referring to both people (i.e. innumerable physical and spiritual descendants) and land, not the land of Israel but the new earth. See Cottrell’s *Romans*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), 295.

I have begotten you. ‘Ask of me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession’” (NASB). But this view is unlikely since Gal 3:16 explicitly identifies the “offspring” as Christ whereas Rom 4:13 does not. Such a shift from Abraham to Christ would also be quite jarring in the context since there is no mention of Christ until verse 24 of Romans 4. Since this Christological interpretation does not work, the only other possibility is Abraham. Thus, it is not the descendants of Abraham who are “heirs of the world,” but Abraham himself is “heir of the world.”

(2) The surrounding context of Romans 4 defines “the promise” not in terms of Abraham inheriting land, but in terms of Abraham becoming the father of many nations and having innumerable descendants (vv. 17–18). This is an extremely important point. We must allow verses 17–18 (which are clear) to define “the promise” in verse 13 (which is strange and unclear). Most interpreters assume the meaning of “the promise” in verse 13 rather than allow the surrounding context to define it. In Romans 4, Paul is drawing upon the chronological order of Genesis 15 to make his point about Abraham’s justification. In Genesis 15, Abraham is worried since he still has no children and Eliezer of Damascus will be his heir (vv. 2–3). In response, God says that Eliezer will not be Abraham’s heir (v. 4); rather God promises Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars (v. 5). Abraham believed that promise (v. 6a), *therefore* Abraham was justified by his faith in that promise (v. 6b). Paul’s point is exactly the same in Rom 4:13–22—Abraham’s justification was not by law, but by faith in God’s promise of innumerable descendants. Thus, the phrase “that he would be heir of the world” should be related to the promises quoted in Rom 4:17–18. In Romans 4, Paul makes clear that Abraham’s justification was based on his faith in two promises: the promise that he would be the “father of many nations” (v. 17, where Paul quotes Gen 17:5) and the promise that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars (v. 18, where Paul quotes Gen 15:5). These promises were made to Abraham in the OT, so they give Abraham concrete revealed truth to believe—and because Abraham believed these promises (vv. 20–21), he was justified by faith (v. 22, where Paul quotes Gen 15:6). Therefore *the main problem with the expansion of the land view is that it makes no sense for Abraham to be justified through faith in a promise never revealed to him. The expansion of the land view leaves Abraham with no concrete revealed truth to have believed since God did not reveal to him that he would inherit the entire physical territory of the world.* Put another way, faith is certainly more than intellectual assent, but faith must have concrete intellectual content that is to be affirmed and trusted. If the promise given to Abraham is the promise of becoming the father of many nations and having innumerable descendants, then Abraham had concrete promises to believe. But if the promise that Abraham must believe is the promise of inheriting the entire physical world, it would have been impossible for him to believe since such a promise was never revealed to him in the OT. Thus, it would be impossible for Abraham to be justified by faith, undermining Paul’s entire point in Romans 4. A person can only believe truth that God has revealed. Thus, we should correlate the promise of Rom 4:13 with the promises of Rom 4:17–18:

- Rom 4:13: Abraham was promised to be “heir of the world” (unclear)

- Rom 4:17: Abraham was promised to be the “father of many nations” (quoting Gen 17:5)
- Rom 4:18: Abraham was promised to have descendants as numerous as the stars (quoting Gen 15:5)
- RESULT in Rom 4:22: Abraham’s faith in these promises led to his justification

If Paul had quoted from OT passages that promised an inheritance of the land of Israel (e.g. Gen 12:7; 13:15; 17:8), then “heir of world” in verse 13 would refer to inheriting land. But Paul quotes from OT passages that promised worldwide descendants (Gen 15:5; 17:5). Thus, “heir of the world” describes the fact that Abraham, though initially childless, would eventually inherit the world in the sense of becoming the father of innumerable persons from all the nations of the world. Though initially childless, Abraham would beget a worldwide family that he could truly call his own, i.e. his inheritance. *But if Rom 4:13 does not refer to the inheritance of land, is it lexically possible for it to refer to the inheritance of people? Since inheritance usually refers to land, how can Abraham be “inheriting” people?* The next two points attempt to answer these questions.

(3) We must be careful how we understand the meaning of *κόσμος* in Rom 4:13. It would be a lexical fallacy to import the meaning of the English word “cosmos” into the Greek word *κόσμος*.³⁵ In English, *cosmos* describes the universe—the sun, stars, planets, etc. But the Greek word *κόσμος* is far more limited in its meaning. Unlike its related word *γῆ* (“earth” or “land”), *κόσμος* is a flexible word that does not always denote the physical world. *γῆ*, which is used in Matt 5:5, always refers to some aspect of the physical earth: soil for crops, the ground humans walk upon, a geographical region, the whole earth as a planet, etc. In contrast, *κόσμος* can refer to the physical earth, but it can also refer to the people who inhabit the world, i.e. “humanity in general,”³⁶ thus *κόσμος* has a wider range of meaning than *γῆ*. Paul uses *κόσμος* 41 times in his writings and his usage of *κόσμος* illustrates these two possible meanings: sometimes the *physical world* is in view—“[God’s] eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived since the creation of the world” (Rom 1:20). “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15). But at other times the *people* who live in this present world are in view, not physical land: “whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God” (Rom 3:19). “Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” (1 Cor 6:2) “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor 5:19). Other NT passages also show that *κόσμος* has a flexible range of meaning: sometimes the *physical world* is in view—“I came from the Father and have come

³⁵ D. A. Carson calls this “semantic anachronism” when “a late use of a word is read back into earlier literature” (Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 33).

³⁶ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., revised and edited by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 562 (heading 6 of *κόσμος*). Herein *BDAG*.

into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father” (John 16:28). But at other times *people* are in view: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). My point is that *if Paul had used γῆ in Rom 4:13, he would clearly be referring to the inheriting of land. But because he uses κόσμος, his meaning is open to interpretation and we cannot immediately assume that κόσμος refers to land. Abraham’s inheritance could be land, but it could also be people.* The context of Romans 4 is determinative and I have shown that Rom 4:17–18 indicates that the promise in verse 13 relates to people (i.e. Abraham’s worldwide descendants) not to land.

(4) We must also be careful how we understand the meaning of the word κληρονόμος (“heir”) in Rom 4:13. Because the OT joins together inheritance and land so often,³⁷ we can unconsciously begin to always associate inheritance with land, even in the NT. But we cannot define κληρονόμος so narrowly as only referring to the inheriting of land. κληρονόμος is a flexible word. An heir “receives something as a possession, [he is a] beneficiary.”³⁸ Christ is “heir of all things” (Heb 1:2), not simply heir of land. Noah “became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” (Heb 11:7), not an heir of land. Titus 3:7 seems to refer to believers as heirs of eternal life, not heirs of land (cf. Matt 19:29, also inheriting eternal life). Even though the OT usually relates inheritance with land, there are places where someone is said to have *people* as an inheritance: God speaks to His anointed and says, “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance” (Ps 2:8). In Isa 19:25, God says, “Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.” Psalm 33:12 says, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance.” Psalm 94:14 says, “the LORD will not abandon His people, nor will He forsake His inheritance.” Joel 2:17 says, “Spare Your people, O LORD, and do not make Your inheritance a reproach, a byword among the nations.” These passages show that in the OT, Israel is often considered to be God’s “inheritance.”³⁹ So it is well attested that inheritance does not always refer to inheriting land; it can also refer to inheriting righteousness, eternal life, persons, etc. It is thus lexically plausible that Abraham’s inheritance in Rom 4:13 is not land, but people, namely, a worldwide group of descendants, which Paul explicitly describes in Rom 4:17–18.

Summary and Conclusion

In this article, I have argued against the expansion of the land view of Rom 4:13 by showing that Second Temple Jewish literature is inconclusive regarding its view of the land, thus Second Temple Jewish literature neither argues for nor against an expansion of the OT Abrahamic land promises. I have shown that the context of Rom 4:13 is focused upon the OT promises of descendants (vv. 17–18, quoting Gen 17:5

³⁷ This is particularly true in Genesis–2 Chronicles where the land of promise is prominent. But in the Psalms and the Prophets, inheritance is often *not* correlated with land, but with people.

³⁸ *BDAG*, 548 (heading 1 of κληρονόμος).

³⁹ Also see Psalms 28:9; 78:71; 106:5, 40; Jer 10:16; 12:7–9; Joel 3:2.

and 15:5), not the OT promises of land (e.g. Gen 12:7; 13:15; 17:8). Finally, I have shown that *κόσμος* can refer to persons as well as land, and that *κληρονόμος* does not always refer to inheriting land, but can also refer to inheriting righteousness, life, persons, etc.

This understanding of Rom 4:13 is appropriately called the “inheritance of many nations” view. Abraham is not inheriting land, but inheriting people—namely, his innumerable spiritual descendants from all the nations of the world. According to this view, Rom 4:13 has nothing to do with the OT land promises and thus neither affirms nor expands the OT land promises. It is about the worldwide nature of Abraham’s descendants; it is not about the worldwide nature of Abraham’s land promise. Thus, Rom 4:13 simply has nothing to say about the land promise. If this view is correct, then the debate about the Abrahamic land promises moves to other texts and other issues. Matthew 5:5, Ephesians 6:2–3, Hebrews 4:1–11 and 11:8–16 still need careful analysis. And there also remains the question of whether or not the land of Canaan should be considered a type of “rest” and a type of “paradise” that finds its fulfillment in the new earth. Careful analysis of these additional texts and issues is necessary in order to build a biblical theology of the land.

While there are many more issues to address (as noted above), my hope is that this article has shown that Rom 4:13 is *not* a straightforward and obvious expansion of the OT Abrahamic land promises. Those who still advocate such a view need to reckon with the literary context of Rom 4:13 (esp. verses 17–18) and should realize that they cannot appeal to Second Temple Jewish literature to support their view since Second Temple Judaism’s theology of the land is much more complex and variegated than is often assumed.