

00528 אֶרֶץ found in TWOT #167

0167.0 אֶרֶץ (*'ereṣ*) **earth, land, city (-state), (under)world.**

According to KB3, (p. 87), this word appears approximately 2400 times in the OT. More specifically, THAT 1, p. 229, remarks that *'ereṣ* is the fourth most frequently used noun in the OT, appearing 2504 times in the Hebrew sections and 22 times in the Aramaic sections.

The first two meanings listed above are far and away the most crucial. That is, *'ereṣ* designates either (a) "the earth" in a cosmological sense, or (b) "the land" in the sense of a specific territorial designation, primarily the land of Israel.

In the former meaning, we are informed first (Gen 1:9-13) that God created the earth on the third day. All is done here by the divine fiat. The earth is not the product of a primordial substance, as is the case in the Babylonian Enuma Elish where the earth is formed from part of the cadaver of the fallen and slain deity Tiamat. It is a sphere that is totally under the control of divine sovereignty. The earth is the Lord's (Psa 24:1). He is its King (Psa 47:2, [H 3]), and its Lord (Psa 97:5). As such the world is good, and is not to be written off as intrinsically evil, the work of a demiurge. Absolutely no tinge of an "escapist mentality" is to be found in the OT. The reader of Scripture cannot but notice how relatively silent the OT is about the next life or another world. By contrast this is a dominating motif in other ancient near eastern literature. Can this be one of the Bible's ways of accentuating the goodness of the earth, the here and now?

Because the earth is the Lord's, it is answerable to him. As sin escalated, God determined to destroy the earth (Gen 9:11). But ultimately our righteous God is not happy with mere judgment, for this simply destroys the wicked. It uncreates. The ultimate expression of righteousness is neither dis-creativity nor turning the clock back. It is redemptive righteousness that is ultimate righteousness. This is why we have the rainbow covenant. God's intention is to establish a new heaven and a new earth (Isa 65:17; Isa 66:22; Rev 21:1).

The second major use of *'ereṣ* is to designate a particular territory. Here the references to Palestine are of special significance. The boundaries of this new land, promised to Abraham and his seed, are first spelled out in Gen 15:18. It is of interest that this promise has been fulfilled geographically only two times, briefly during the period of David, and

again during the time of the Hasmoneans during the intertestamental period.

This land belongs to the Lord, as does the earth at large. It is his heritage (1Sam 26:19). The land is holy only because the God of holiness has given it to his people. There is nothing intrinsically sacrosanct about this land any more than there is about the city of Jerusalem or the temple. If God departs, the sanctity leaves too.

The world of the Bible is divided into two sections, Israel and the nations. One is holy, the other is impure. Although God governs everywhere, the area of his sanctity and self-revelation are limited to the boundaries of the land of Israel. In alien lands the people were not even capable of worshipping the Lord (Psa 137). This is illustrated in the book of Jonah. While it is said by the prophet himself that the Lord of heaven rules the sea and the dry land (Jonah 1:9), yet he attempts to flee from the presence of God (Jonah 1:3, 10). This can only mean that Jonah attempts to flee from the area of divine revelation. Here he hopes the land of God will not come upon him. No wonder then that the prophet's messages to the exiles ring with the call that God will bring his people back to this land. The meaning "underworld" (not given in BDB) is uncertain and appears to depend on the comparison of the usage of some verses of the Psalms with similar concepts in pagan literature.

Bibliography: *'ereš* as underworld: Cross, F., and Freedman, D., *JNES* 14: 247-48. Dahood, M., *Bib* 40: 164-66 and elsewhere. Holladay, W. L., *VT* 19: 123-24. *'ereš* as city-state: Dahood, M., *Bib* 44: 297-98. _____, *Supp VT* 16: 46-47. _____, *Bib* 50: 337. Watson, W. E. G., *Bib* 53: 92-93. General: Barr, *JSS* 20: 149- (A. De Guglielmo, Antonine, "The Fertility of the Land in the Messianic Prophecies," *CBQ* 19:306-11. Delcor, M., "Les Attaches Littéraires, l'Origine et la Signification de l'Espression Biblique 'Prendre a Temoin le Ciel et la Terre'," *VT* 16: 8-25. Henrey, K. H., "Land Tenure in the Old Testament," *PEQ* 86: 5-15. Miller, Patrick, D., "The Gift of God," *Interp* 23: 451-65. Unger, Merrill F., "The Old Testament Revelation of the Creation of Angels and the Earth," *BS* 114: 206-12. Whitcomb, John C., "The Creation of the Heavens and the Earth," *Grace Journal* 8: 26-32. TDOT, 1, pp. 388-404, *THAT*, I, pp. 228-35. V.P.H.

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