

# GOD'S LEAD-UP TO CHRIST'S COMING

A Biblical - Theological Understanding of the Covenants\*

DON BADHAM

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## PREFACE

This study was written primarily for myself. Gradually over the last couple of years, with the help of scholarly books, such as those listed in my bibliography, I have been discovering truths that I wish I had learned many years ago, for example:

- The fascinating passages in Isaiah on the “servant of the Lord”
- The theme of a believing remnant within Israel throughout its history
- How Jesus came as the new and perfect Israel, re-enacting the nation’s past and succeeding where Israel had failed
- How the New Testament writers interpreted Old Testament scripture, not always literally but Christologically

Until recently I hadn’t seen that the church is also the true Israel. I hadn’t realised that the church of today is a continuation of the believing remnant of Old Testament times. The church didn’t begin at Pentecost! Abraham really is the father of all who believe. Rom.4:11-12

Over the years I have understood to an extent some facets of these truths. But only in the last couple of years have I been able to put it all together. It was when I made a thorough study of the covenants that the picture became complete. **But throughout all of my sixty years of Christian life, I have never heard anyone preach or teach any of these truths. Yet they are only very basic truths.** I am now filled with joy, having discovered how wonderfully Jesus’ coming fulfilled it all so perfectly. Now I want to share it with my friends.

## INTRODUCTION

The Old Testament is comprised of many stories of events in the life of Israel and their patriarchs that happened over many centuries. We often draw moral lessons from them. This is helpful. But is this all that the Old Testament is – just stories of various characters and events with a moral attached to them? These events cover a huge expanse of time. Is there an underlying theme?

It is good to stand back from this long series of events and view it all as a whole. When we are low to the ground, it is often hard to see exactly where we are in relation to distant places. The clusters of bushes and trees around us obstruct our view. “It is hard to see the

forest for the trees.” But a bird’s eye view overcomes these obstructions and enables us to see the relationship of things and places that are distant from us.

A map is a bird’s eye view of a particular part of a country. In this study we will develop a verbal map of the overall message of the Bible. The Bible is a unity. So we need to see the overall message, rather than a number of unrelated stories. In this study we will follow the progress of revelation from the time Adam and Eve had glorious fellowship with God in Eden through to the end of time when God will again dwell with humankind in the new creation. It will examine the several stages of biblical history and their relation to each other. We will find that Israel’s history is not just a series of haphazard events but that it was governed by the purpose of God.

## **THE TWO MAIN THEMES OF THE BIBLE**

Many themes can be traced in the Bible. But a number of theologians believe the dominant themes are “the kingdom of God” and “covenant”.

### **THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

In studying this theme we need to distinguish between the absolute sovereignty of God and “the kingdom of God”. God is sovereign over all of his creation. He is sovereign over even his enemies, even Satan himself, although they continually fight against him. In the end they will all be forced to submit to him.

But the term “kingdom of God” in the Bible refers to his rule over those who willingly submit to him. The kingdom of God is the main theme of Jesus’ teaching. He began his ministry with the announcement. *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* Matt. 4:17 He taught men how they might enter that kingdom. Matt. 5:20; 7:21 His miracles proved that the kingdom of God had come upon them. Matt. 12:28 His parables illustrated truths about the kingdom. Matt. 13:11 He taught his disciples to pray, *“Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* Matt. 6:10 Also he promised that he would return one day to confer the full blessings of the kingdom upon his followers. Matt. 25:31, 34

In Eden our forefathers rejected God’s rule and all creation went awry. Ever since then (from Genesis to Revelation), he has been working to reinstate his kingdom, *“to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”* Eph.1:10 (For a fuller understanding of this subject, refer to my study, “The Kingdom of God”).

### **THE COVENANTS**

We now come to the main theme of the Bible: Covenant. In the time of the Old Testament, covenants were relationships established by kings over their subject peoples. In order to re-establish his rule over his people and eventually over all his creation, God made various

covenants with mankind. They were made to develop a close, loving relationship with his people, as he worked out his plans in history. Covenants bind people together. In these covenants God said over and over again to his people, *“I will be your God and you will be my people”*. Exod. 6:6-8; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 32; 38; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23; Zech. 8:8 When God’s people entered into a covenant relationship with him, they were obliged to be his subject people and to live under his rule. The main covenants God made were with Adam (Gen. 1-3), Noah (Gen 9), Abraham (Gen 12, 15, 17), Israel (Exod. 19:3-8; 20-24) and David (2 Sam. 7; Ps. 8). During the time of the prophets, after Israel had failed God miserably, he promised a new covenant (Jer. 31:29-34; Ezek. 36:24-38). These covenants span the whole of the Old Testament. William J. Dumbrell explains, *“They (the covenants) were and really are divine announcements of the manner in which salvation history would unfold and thus are promises by God of the way in which history will proceed by divine guidance until the new creation.”*<sup>1</sup>

These covenants were not like ordinary covenants, involving promises made between equals. In the divine covenants, God was Lord. They were never negotiated. God stipulated the conditions of the covenants. Men were simply expected to agree with them. Each party to the covenant was to be faithful to the other and loyal in love.

Spanning the entirety of the Old Testament, they each have the same eventual aim in mind: to overturn the curse and bring God and mankind together in loving relationship. So they are united in theme. Each one builds on the previous one, not supplanting it but supplementing it. This means that throughout the Old Testament, there are common threads that eventually link with the coming of Jesus under the new covenant.

These threads are not readily noticed by someone casually reading the Bible. A degree of effort by diligent digging is required. But this is richly rewarded when from time to time these threads are noticed. This is analogous to the way God usually reveals himself to us. Usually he doesn’t proclaim his existence by confronting us with a blaze of light. Instead he expects us first of all to have a seeking heart and a willingness to exert ourselves in searching for the truth. A little diligence is required to find him while he is waiting to be discovered.

## **GOD’S COVENANT WITH ADAM**

### **THE KINGDOM OF GOD WAS ESTABLISHED AT CREATION.**

Adam and Eve living before God in the garden of Eden provide us with the pattern of the kingdom of God. God established a perfect creation which he loved and over which he ruled. He is King and the entire universe is his kingdom. Even though the specific phrase “kingdom of God” is not found until much later in Scripture, the idea is taught in the

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<sup>1</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 4.

opening pages of the Bible. “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” Gen.1:31 The kingdom means that the creation related perfectly, that is, as God intended it should, to everything else and to God himself. As king God made the rules for all creation.

### **HUMAN BEINGS ARE GOD’S REGENTS OR VICEROYS.**

On the sixth day of creation, “God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’ ” Gen.1:26-28. God made mankind in his “image”, in his “likeness”. What do these terms “image” and “likeness” mean? God as Creator is radically different from everything he has created – including humankind. But if humankind is created “in God’s image”, then in some way we are **like** him. This likeness is explained in the verses that follow.

In Genesis 1:26, God says, “Let us make man in our image...and let them rule ...over all the earth”. He then says to the human beings he has created, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over...”Gen. 1:28 So under God, humanity is to rule over the nonhuman parts of creation on land and in the sea and air much as God is the supreme ruler over all. As von Rad explains, “Just as powerful earthly kings, to indicate their claim to domination, erect an image of themselves in the provinces of their empire where they do not personally appear, so man is placed upon earth in God’s image as God’s sovereign emblem. He is really only God’s representative, summoned to maintain and enforce God’s claim to dominion over the earth.”<sup>2</sup>

The two words in this statement of purpose are the verbs, “rule” (1:26, 28) and “subdue” (v. 28). According to Eugene H. Merrill, both verbs carry the idea of dominion. “Both may be traced back to the verbal root meaning ‘to tread down’ ”.<sup>3</sup>

Two passages in the Old Testament suggest what is meant by humankind’s dominion of the earth : Genesis 2:15,19 -20 and Psalm 8.

#### **Genesis 2: 15**

After God created Adam, he placed him in the garden “to work it and take care of it”. So a major purpose of Adam’s creation was to “work the ground”.

#### **Genesis 2: 19- 20**

Here Adam was given the responsibility of naming the animals. According to von Rad, in the ancient Near East, to name something could be equivalent to exercising dominion over it. “When Yahweh brought the animals to Adam ‘to see what he would name them’, he is in effect transferring from himself to Adam the dominion for which man was created .”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Von Rad, *Genesis*, 58.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 15.

So God has placed human beings on earth to be his regents. A regent is a person whom a king appoints to represent him and to rule under his authority.

### **Psalm 8**

Verses 5 to 8 are based on Genesis 1: 26- 28. Verse 5 says, *“You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, and crowned him with glory and honour”*. As the N. I.V. suggests in the footnote, “heavenly beings” may be translated “God” (Heb. “Elohim”). This is the better translation in view of the well-established fact this psalm is a commentary on Genesis 1:26-28. This psalm tells us that man was *“crowned ...with glory and honour”*. God *“made him ruler over the works of his (God’s) hands”*. The Hebrew word for “ruler” here refers to someone who reigns, has dominion, subdues. It generally speaks of a king. Ps. 103:19; Mic. 5:2; Isa. 14:5; 19:4; 2 Sam. 23:3; Prov. 29:26. As God’s image and regent, man himself is a king crowned with glory and honour. In the psalm, the objects of his dominion are exactly the same as those in Genesis 1:26- 28. So while man is subject to God, the rest of creation is subject to man and exists for his benefit.

So God has given mankind authority to rule over his creation, to control it, regulate it and harness its potential. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen comment, *“...we are God’s royal stewards, put here to develop the hidden potential in God’s creation so that the whole of it may celebrate his glory.”*<sup>5</sup>

### **MAN’S RULING POWER WAS TEMPORARILY CURBED.**

However sin has modified humankind’s ability to rule and subdue. All of creation has been affected by its curse. But one day this curse will be lifted. Creation will resume its pristine glory. It will *“be liberated from its bondage to decay.”* Rom. 8: 18- 25 The wildness of animals will be tamed. Isa.11:6-9. The verb used to describe the leading of animals by a child in verse 6 (“nahag”) is one that speaks of leadership or headship.<sup>6</sup>

### **JESUS IS AN EXAMPLE OF OUR ULTIMATE DOMINION OVER CREATION.**

In the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as the Second Adam. This refers to him as being the “first man” of a regenerate community, of a new creation. 1 Cor. 15: 21- 22, 45; Rom. 5:12- 21 On earth he demonstrated the kind of life all believers will live on earth throughout eternity. Eugene H. Merrill writes, *“The life he lived demonstrated by its power and perfection all that God created Adam and all men to be. In other words, Jesus fulfilled in his life the potentialities of unfallen Adam, just as by his death he restored all mankind to those potentialities”*.<sup>7</sup> Merrill gives some examples of this from the Gospels. *“On one occasion Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee when a furious storm overtook the boat and threatened to swamp it. Jesus, awakened by the disciples, rebuked the winds and waves, and so startling were the results that his friends asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and waves obey him!”* (Matt. 8:23- 27) Although one could easily argue that Jesus worked this miracle because of his deity, that does not seem to be the conclusion of those who witnessed the event. Of paramount interest in the account (see also Mark 4:36-41; Luke 8:22-25) is the disciples’ sense of Jesus’ sovereignty over creation. Jesus spoke to

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<sup>5</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *Finding our Place in the Biblical Story*, 37

<sup>6</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* 17.

<sup>7</sup> Merrill, *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*.17

the elements as their Lord and they obeyed him. Is this not akin to the dominion to which Adam was appointed?

“Another incident may suggest even closer affinities to the dominion over creation enjoyed by the Adamic Covenant. Matthew 14:22- 23 (cf. Mark 6:45- 51; John 6:16- 21) relates the story of the disciples who were again in the grip of the angry sea when suddenly they saw Jesus walking on the water. Emboldened by this, Peter asked Jesus to allow him to walk on the waves as well. Successful at first, Peter lost his confidence and began to sink and only the strong arm of the Lord preserved him.”<sup>8</sup>

### **ADAM WAS GOD’S “SON”, CREATED IN HIS IMAGE.**

*“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness’*. Gen. 1:26

Adam had a special relationship to God like that of father and son. This is indicated in Genesis 5:1- 3. These verses state that God created Adam “in the image of God” and that Adam had a son “*in his own likeness, in his own image*”. So these verses indicate that Adam was God’s son, just as Seth was Adam’s son. This idea is picked up in Luke 3:38 which calls Adam “the son of God”. As God’s son, he was God’s image bearer, representing him to the world.

After Adam’s failure, Israel inherited his role and is called God’s “son” also. Exod. 4:22-23 As his son, the nation was to be his image and to represent him to their world. The “Song of Moses and Miriam” pictures Israel as a new Adam, entering the Promised Land as a new Eden. Exod. 15:17 Later in God’s covenant with David, he and his royal descendants take on Israel’s responsibility and become God’s “sons”. 2 Sam.7:14-15

### **AS GOD’S REGENT ADAM REPRESENTED HIM TO THE WORLD.**

So the relationship between humans and God is best captured by the term “sonship”. On the other hand the relationship between humans and the creation may be expressed by the term “kingship”. As God’s regents, they were to “subdue” the earth and its creatures, and “rule” over them. Gen. 1:28. They had a relationship with God, enjoying his presence as he walked in the garden. Gen. 3:8 They had a relationship also with the world. They were to have fellowship with God and learn to know him. In turn they were to represent him to the world.

In this way they were like priests before God in the garden sanctuary of Eden. A priest is a mediator, representing God to the world and the world to God. In the garden humans needed to learn the ways of God in order to represent him and exercise his rule over the world as he himself would. Adam’s king/priest role anticipated Israel’s later role when it took his place as God’s “son”. Exod. 19:5- 6 It also anticipates our dual function as believers both now and in the new Jerusalem. We are now “*a kingdom of priests*”. 1 Pet.2:4-5, 9-10; Rev.1:5-6; 5:10; 20:4-6; 22:4-5

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 17

## **EDEN IS A PROTOTYPE OF THE FUTURE NEW EARTH.**

Adam and Eve were created outside the garden and placed in it. Gen.2:8 The Hebrew word for “garden” refers to a fenced-off enclosure, protected by a wall or hedge.<sup>9</sup> In the Old Testament royal gardens were surrounded by walls. 2 Ki.25:4; Neh.3:15; Jer. 39:4; 52:7 So the garden of Eden was separated from the rest of the world. The rest of the world needed to be brought under God’s rule. As God’s regents, Adam and Eve had this responsibility. Their mandate was to extend the geographical boundaries of the garden until Eden covered the whole earth. Dumbrell notes, “The newly formed earth must not only be filled but, as essential to human life, be tamed and thus be included in the blessing.”<sup>10</sup>

Later the tabernacle and also the temple were sacred places for Israel. God’s presence was in them also. So Eden was a prototype for these later Israelite sanctuaries. This explains why in Solomon’s temple and in the temple of Ezekiel’s vision there were carved palm trees and open flowers. 1 Ki.6:29; Ezek. 40:16, 22, 26, 31; 41:18-20, 25-26

There are some similarities between them. Each was associated with cherubim (i.e. guardian creatures). When Adam and Eve were banished from the garden because of their sin, cherubim were placed on the east side of the garden. Their job was to guard the way to the tree of life. Gen.3:24 From this we know that the entrance to the garden was in the east. Like the garden in Eden, the entrance to the tabernacle and the temple were also in the east and were guarded by cherubim. 1Ki.6:23-28; Exod.25:18-22; 26:31; 27:12-16 Two guarded the inner sanctuary of Solomon’s temple and two more the mercy seat of the ark in the sanctuary.

Eden must have been in an elevated position, as in it arose a river which flowed from Eden and divided outside the garden into four systems. In Ezekiel 28:13-14 Eden is said to be “the holy mount of God”. God’s presence was in Eden in a special way. So perhaps the river signifies the outflowing of God’s presence to the world as the boundaries of Eden were gradually extended. At the end of time a life-giving river will flow from God’s presence in the temple. Ezek.47:1-2; cf. Joel 3:18 Dumbrell comments, “The new creation is explained in explicit Eden terms in Revelation 22:1-5, making it plain that the Eden of Genesis 2 is the model for what is finally to come – God in the midst of his people in the new creation, which is the aim of the covenant with creation”.<sup>11</sup> So originally Eden was a garden in just one locality on earth. But at the end of time, the whole of the recreated earth will be another Eden.

## **GOD PROVIDED LIFE FOR ADAM AND EVE IN EDEN**

In the centre of the garden was the tree of life. Gen.2:9 Later in the tabernacle and the temple there was the menorah (the branching lamp-stand) which was like a stylised tree of life.<sup>12</sup> In the presence of God there is life. “*With you is the fountain of life*”. Ps. 36:9 In the new Jerusalem God will dwell with his people forever. In John’s vision of it he saw a river of the water of life flowing from God’s throne. Also the tree of life stood on each side of it. All who live in the new creation will have access to it eternally .Rev.22:1-5 This is symbolic of

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<sup>9</sup> Dumbrell, *The Search For Order*, 24

<sup>10</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 32

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 8

<sup>12</sup> Peter J.Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 211

eternal life which will be the experience of all believers through Jesus' death. This could have been the experience of Adam and Eve if they had not fallen into sin. It seems that before the Fall, they had not eaten its fruit. Gen. 3:22

### **GOD'S PLAN IS FOR HIS PEOPLE TO ENTER HIS REST.**

In six days God completed his work of creation. A perfect world had been created in which humankind could joyfully live under God's blessing. Creation was complete and faultless. God pronounced it as being "very good". Gen. 1:31 Nothing more needed to be done to improve it. So from the seventh day onwards God began his rest. Gen. 2:2 But because of their disobedience, Adam and Eve failed to enter God's rest for them. They were expelled from his presence in their sanctuary home of Eden.

Later Israel would become God's people, God's "son", a new Adam. Canaan would become their sanctuary home where God would live with them. He promised a rest also to them. This rest would include living at peace in the land, free from conflict, famine and plague. Joshua told his people, "*The Lord your God is giving you rest and has granted you this land*". Josh. 1:13 cf. Deut. 3:20; 12:9-10; 25:13 But this was only a shadow of the rest he had planned for humankind at the beginning. Heb. 4:8 Through Jesus believers can now in this life experience God's rest in part. Matt. 11:28 But at the end of time they will enter into his rest in its fullness (Heb. 4:9), and enjoy the fullness of life he has planned for them from the beginning.

### **OBEDIENCE WAS REQUIRED UNDER THE COVENANT.**

Adam and Eve had been given the privilege of eating from every tree of the garden. As God's regents, all was theirs. But there was one exception. As a test, one tree was forbidden. As God's regents, they must be willing to obey their King whom they represented.

Many years after their fall, God created another "son", another "Adam", the nation of Israel. Exod. 4:22-23 At the time of their creation, they too needed to be tested as they wandered through the wilderness. O. Palmer Robertson comments, "The purpose of this testing was to teach man that he *does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*". (Deut. 8:3) Even the providential ordering of God which deprives of bread may become a source of life, if Israel will learn that existence does not depend primarily on consumption of the material substance of the creation. It depends instead on fellowship with the Creator, which arises from an acceptance in joyful trust in all that he orders for life".<sup>13</sup>

Similarly God led Christ, "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:22, 45) also into the wilderness for testing. Matt.4: 1-11 He fasted for forty days. Then Satan tempted him to turn stones into bread in order to alleviate his hunger. Christ repulsed this temptation by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3.

Only obedience maintains man's relationship with God under the covenant. But under each covenant, man fell. But it was Christ's obedience that established the new covenant. "*Just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through*

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<sup>13</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 85



*the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.” Rom. 5:19 Robertson explains, “Restoration of fallen man hinges on the one act of obedience of Christ, the second Adam...Only radical obedience may provide a proper basis for restoration of men guilty of radical disobedience. Herein lies the significance of the ultra-drama enacted in Gethsemane. Christ, the second Adam, genuinely grappled with the demand for radical obedience. Three times in great agony Christ struggled with this ultimate of decisions. (cf. Matt.26:39; 26:42; John 18:11) In evident progress of obedience he moves from: ‘If it is possible, let this cup pass from me’ to ‘If this cannot pass away unless I drink it, your will be done’ to ‘The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?’ ‘Though he was a son, he learned obedience through the things which he suffered.’(Heb. 5:8) As obedient unto death, he is able to save all that come to God by him.”<sup>14</sup>*

Adam and Eve were forbidden only to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So we must assume that the tree of life was open to them and that it symbolised the gift of eternal life. If they had obeyed God, their obedience would have been symbolised by partaking of it. However by learning of good and evil through disobedience, they could not be permitted to eat the fruit of the tree of life. Instead they were banished from God’s presence in the garden. However the tree of life remained and recurs as a symbol of eternal life for those who are saved. Rev. 2:7; 22:2

### **GOD’S REGENTS DISOBEYED THEIR KING.**

It seems that the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil presented two choices: life or death. This was a test whether Adam would be what he was created to be: an obedient son. Merrill notes, “To have dominion over all things is not a blanket endorsement for man to do as he will. Human dominion must be exercised within the framework of the permissions and prohibitions of the King to whom man is only the image.”<sup>15</sup>

Adam and Eve were tempted to assert their autonomy: to become a law unto themselves. Autonomy means choosing for oneself what is right and what is wrong, rather than relying on God for direction. Only God has the right to determine what is right and what is wrong. This story teaches us the nature of sin: it is a quest for autonomy, a desire to separate oneself from God. Dumbrell notes, “The climax of the narrative finds the human pair just where man was at the beginning of the account – outside the garden.”<sup>16</sup>

### **GOD GIVES HIS FIRST GOSPEL PROMISE**

In Genesis 3:15 God promised to reverse the terrible effects of sin through a coming redeemer. He promised that his purposes for creation and the human race would continue. It would continue through a member of the human race itself (“the woman’s seed”). He would destroy the serpent (Satan) and restore goodness to the world. However this human being would be fatally “wounded” in the fight. God planned that through various covenants over time he would achieve this – covenants with Noah and his family, Abraham and his descendants and especially through the Davidic kings. It would be through that line of “seed” – Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Israel and David, and eventually culminating in Christ. In him

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 85-6

<sup>15</sup> Merrill, *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, 19.

<sup>16</sup> Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 24.

we have the promised seed, the one who fulfils all God's promises and especially the Abrahamic promises. 2 Cor. 1:20

### **THEY ARE BANISHED FROM THE GARDEN.**

Because of sin, they are expelled from the garden and then from God's presence. The presence of God brings life. Ps. 36:9 So expulsion meant death The possibility of eternal life in the garden was now denied them. The process of death for humanity and the world had begun.

### **ADAM'S FALL WAS ANALOGOUS WITH ISRAEL'S LATER FALL.**

Dumbrell teases out an analogy between Adam and the nation Israel, "Israel was created, as was Adam, outside the divine space to be occupied – Israel outside of Canaan and Adam outside of the garden. Both Israel and Adam were given, as was Adam, law by which the divine space could be retained. Israel transgressed the law, as did Adam. Israel was expelled, as was Adam, from the divine space. Clearly the creation account indicates to Israel the nature and purpose of her special status and role, which once belonged to the man. After Adam, the priest/king, failed to exercise his dominion over the world, the mantle passed to national Israel, a corporate royal priest (Exod.19:5-6)." <sup>17</sup>

## **GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH**

### **THE FLOOD STORY: GOD BEGINS AGAIN WITH HIS CREATION.**

Sin continued to multiply on earth. Eventually it reached such a low point that God decided to destroy the world of humanity through a great flood and to begin again. God told Noah to build an ark. Then Noah, his extended family and several of each kind of animal on earth were delivered from judgment. Why take these animals into the ark? Because God was concerned for the **whole** of creation – including the animals. Salvation involves not only human beings, but the whole of creation which had suffered through human sin.

The story of the flood is told in such a way that the reader is reminded of the creation of the world. Gentry and Wellum explain, "Just as God ordered the original heavens and earth out of the chaotic deep or ocean (Gen. 1:2; Heb. "tehom"), so here God orders the present heavens and earth out of the chaotic floodwaters. Genesis 8:1 records that God caused a wind ( Heb. "ruah") to pass over the waters of the flood covering the entire earth, which reminds one of the creation narrative where the Spirit ( Heb."ruah") of God hovers over the waters of the original chaotic deep. In the creation narrative, God gathers the waters together, and the dry land emerges; then he commands the earth to bring forth vegetation. After the flood, the dry land emerges as the waters subside and the earth brings forth vegetation, as we see when the dove returns with an olive leaf in her beak. These parallels indicate that after the flood, we have a new beginning like the first beginning."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>18</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 162

## **NOAH BECOMES A NEW ADAM.**

In this story Noah is presented as another Adam. *“Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth’ ”*. Gen, 9:1 This reminds us of God’s previous covenant with Adam, *“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it...’ ”* Gen. 1:27-28

God made a covenant with Noah, similar to his previous covenant with Adam. So now Noah stood as the new head of the human race. Noah was God’s new regent. *“All the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, every creature that moves upon the ground and all the fish of the sea”* were given into his hands, as they had been given previously to Adam. Gen. 9:2 cf. 1:28 But now, because of the presence of *sin on the earth, man’s rulership over the animal world would be affected by “fear and dread”*. Gen. 9:2

So God’s covenant with Noah, like his covenant with Adam, maintained a relationship between God and the human race on the one hand, and between humans and creation on the other. Humans must express obedient sonship in their love for God and rule over creation as responsible stewards.

## **THE FLOOD IS A FORESHADOWING OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT.**

As part of the covenant God made with Noah, he promised, *“I will never put a curse on the ground again because of man. I will not do it even though his heart is always directed toward what is evil”*. Verse 21 We might think that God would want to curse the ground repeatedly because of man’s continual sinning over the centuries. But he knew that the sin problem would never be solved in this way. In his grace he planned that *“the seed of the woman”* would eventually appear on earth. He would bring salvation for man and victory over the devil. Gen.3:15 So it was important that God be patient and let man continue in his sinning until this “seed” arrived.

God judged the world once – in the time of Noah. This would be a demonstration to all successive generations that he hates sin and plans to judge the world once more at the end of time. 2Pet. 3:6-15 So the *“seed of the woman”* would now come through Noah and his family. This seed would eventually reverse the effects of sin and bring in a “new creation” that would be totally brought under God’s rule.

## **NOAH BECOMES ANOTHER FALLEN COVENANT PARTNER.**

So God gave mankind a new start with Noah. But like Adam, Noah also failed in his commitment to God. Like the first Adam, he was a gardener. He planted a vineyard. The sin of both resulted in shameful nakedness. Gen. 9:18-29 So once again the human partner of the covenant failed. But again God remained committed to his part of the covenant. His covenant with Noah indicates to us that God’s giving man a new start did not provide the remedy man needed. The remedy still lay ahead.

# THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM.

## A NEW START IS NEEDED.

God had made a covenant with Adam. But he and his descendants failed in their part of the covenant. There was murder among their children (chapter 4). In the genealogical list in chapter 5, the words “*and he died*” appear again and again (5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31). This was the result of Adam’s sin. In chapter 6 – 9 sin became so great that God had to send the Flood.

God made another start with Noah and his family. He became “another Adam”. However Noah also sinned and brought shame on himself. Eventually his descendants defied God by building the Tower of Babel (ch. 11). There the peoples of the earth had sought to make a name for themselves by building the tower. But God intervened and frustrated their efforts.

## ABRAHAM WAS ANOTHER ADAM.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis compress the history of mankind from creation to the early second millennium B.C. into a brief overview. It seems that Moses, the writer, was in a hurry to get on to the story of Abraham. All of the remaining 38 chapters of the book relate to him and his next three generations. N.T. Wright explains further, “Abraham emerges within the structure of Genesis as the answer to the plight of all mankind. The line of disaster and of the ‘curse’, from Adam through Cain, through the Flood to Babel, begins to be reversed when God calls Abraham and says, “*In you shall all of the families of the earth be blessed*”.<sup>19</sup> The final meaning of history will be found in his descendant, Jesus of Nazareth.

So God made another start with Abraham. Dumbrell writes, “With the chaos of human history left behind, God begins again with Abraham, as he will later begin with Israel in Egypt, by an exodus. Like Israel later, Abraham will be moved out from the midst of a pagan environment; the call will come to him outside the land of promise. Like Israel he will be armed with a charter of blessing by which the future of the human race will be provided for, and his carefully chosen descendants, Israel, placed in a Promised Land to be a new Eden”.<sup>20</sup>

Gentry and Wellam comment also “Israel is, in fact, the last Adam because there will be no major new starts for the human race from this point. Israel will display to the rest of the world within its covenant community the kind of relationships – first to God and then to one another, as well as stewardship of the ecosystem – that God originally intended for all of humanity. In fact, through Abraham’s family God plans to bring blessing to all the nations of the world. In this way, through the family of Abraham, through Israel, his last Adam, he will bring about a resolution of the sin and death caused by the first Adam”.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> N.T.Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 262-63

<sup>20</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 70

<sup>21</sup> Gentry and Wellam, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 247

## **ISRAEL WAS TO BE A NEW “CREATION”.**

In one sense, Abraham and his descendants would be a “new creation”. In choosing Abraham, God was really calling into existence something that did not exist. Referring to Abraham, Paul writes, *“He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed, the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were”*. Rom 4:17. When Paul wrote this, he must have been thinking of Genesis chapter 1. Over and over again in that chapter are the words, *“And God said, ‘Let x be.’ And x was”*. God spoke the word and called into existence things that did not exist. Paul saw God’s call of Abraham as a kind of “new creation”. Bruce writes, *“Out of post-Babel chaos portrayed by the nations and peoples of the world, lost and scattered in the earth, and by the deadness and infertility of Abraham’s and Sarah’s bodies, the word of God to Abraham is a powerful word, bringing something out of nothing.”*<sup>22</sup>

## **GOD MADE A COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM**

Abraham was 75 years old when God made a covenant with him. It began with a call for separation from his country, his people and his father’s household in Ur and going to the land God would show him. Gen 12:1-3. This covenant consisted of promises God made to him,

*“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;*

*I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.*

*I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;*

*And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”.*

This covenant was later ratified in formal covenant agreement (Gen 15:4-21) and later reiterated with more detail on three occasions during Abraham’s lifetime. Gen 13: 14-17; 17:1-21; 22:15-18. It was finally confirmed to Isaac (Gen 26:3-5, 24) and Jacob (Gen 28:13-15; 35:9-12 cf. 46:1-4).

## **GOD PROMISED A GREAT NATION.**

*“I will make you into a great nation ... I will make your name great”*. 12:2

Abraham was told that he would be made into a great nation that would be the means by which God would bless all the people on earth. God still loved the world and wanted to bless it. But the means he would use to accomplish this would be the nation of Abraham.

The peoples of the earth had tried to make a name for themselves at Babel. But God had stopped them. Now God promised to make Abraham’s name great and to make him into a great nation. The people of Babel had tried themselves to make their name great. But Abraham’s greatness would be a gift from God.

The promise to Abraham to make him great was similar to God’s promise later to David when God made a covenant with him. 2 Sam 7:9.

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<sup>22</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Romans*, 118

## **ABRAHAM WOULD BE A BLESSING TO THE NATIONS.**

*“And I will bless you ... and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”.* Gen 12:2-3.

God promised to make Abraham into a great nation, to bless him, to make his name great and to give him the land of Canaan. Gen 12:7. But God’s purpose in doing these things was for the nations to be blessed. Dumbrell comments, “The principal statement of these three verses (Gen 12:1-3) is contained in the final clause of verse three. The Hebrew syntax indicates this and the clause is most probably to be taken as a result clause, indicating what will be the consummation of the promises that the preceding verses have announced. That is to say, the personal promises given to Abram have final world blessing as their aim”.<sup>23</sup>

The word “bless” expresses God’s purpose to give his creatures all they need to fulfil their lives in his creation as he intends for them. The word “curse”, by contrast, expresses God, awful judgment on his creatures when they rebel against his purposes for them. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Green comment, “God’s words of blessing on Abraham in 12:1-3 suggest ... what God is planning to do through this man. The fivefold repetition of the word ‘bless’ is deliberately set in opposition to the fivefold occurrence of the word ‘curse’ in Genesis 1-11. God’s curse or judgement on mankind has meant their loss of freedom (3:14-16), their alienation from the soil (3:17-19; 5:29), their estrangement from one another (4:11), and their moral and spiritual degradation (9:25). The repetition of ‘bless’ in Genesis 12:1-3 declares that through Abraham, God is at work to reverse the effect on judgment on his creation. Though sin has brought God’s curse on creation, God is still at work to recover his purpose of blessing for all that he has made, and Abraham is to be the medium of divine restoration for the world.”<sup>24</sup> So the word “bless” forms the substance of the covenant. This word will find its fulfilment when Christ eventually comes and destroys the curse imposed by the Fall. Gal.3:13 He will also be the “seed” of Abraham in whom the world will obtain blessing.

## **GOD MADE A PROMISE OF LAND.**

*“To your offspring I will give this land”.* Gen.12:7

God had promised that Abraham would be a blessing to the nations of the world. Now God was promising him and his descendants a land to live in, the land of Canaan. Canaan was a narrow land bridge connecting the land continents of Africa, Europe and Asia. Trade routes between them came through Canaan. Ezekiel referred to it as *“the centre of the nations, with countries around her”* and as *“the centre of the land”*. Ezek.5:5; 38:12 God’s plan was that people travelling through Canaan were to see a people who loved God and loved one another. They were to be a light to the nations. Isa.42:6; 49:6 God would bless them and they in turn were to bless the nations. Canaan was to become a pattern or a microcosm of the entire world. Through them the nations were to see what God intends for them also.

The Bible’s description of Canaan corresponded with that of Eden. For example, both Eden and Canaan are described as a sanctuary. Years later, after Israel had miraculously crossed

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<sup>23</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 71

<sup>24</sup> Bartholomew and Goheen, *Finding Our Place In The Biblical World*, 55

the Red Sea, they sang a song of praise to God. In that song, they sang, *"You will bring them (Israel) in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance – the place, O Lord, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established,"* Exod.15:17 Later during the Exile, God promised Israel that they would return to Canaan. In the Scripture that describes that promise, we again see correspondence between it and Eden. In Isaiah 51:3 the renewed Canaan is described as *"the garden of the Lord"* and *"like Eden"*. In Ezekiel 36:33-36 it is described as *"the garden of the Lord"*.

### **ABRAHAM WAS A MAN OF FAITH.**

There are three main elements in God's covenant with Abraham (a) He promised that Abraham would become a great nation. (b) Abraham was promised the land of Canaan. (c) God promised that Abraham and his seed would be a blessing to the nations. The promises were repeatedly made when the fulfilment seemed impossible. At the time of his call, he was 75 years old. He was promised that he would become a great nation, even though he had no children. Gen.15:2-5 He was kept childless until an age when he was *"as good as dead"*, that God's power might be evident as the source of Isaac's birth. Gen.21:1-7; Rom.4:19-21; Heb.11:11; Isa.51:2 It wasn't until he was 100 years old that Isaac was born. Also Canaan, the land promised to him was already occupied. Gen.15:7-21 Abraham never inherited the land during his lifetime. In order for Sarah to be buried in her old age, he had to purchase the required amount of land. Gen.23. These circumstances seemed to threaten the fulfilment of the promises. By this means Abraham learned that he must live by faith in the promises of God, even when it seemed that promises were impossible of fulfilment. But *"Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness"*. Gen.15:6 Graeme Goldsworthy comments on this, *"Abraham's faith is certainly not perfect, not always strong, and sometimes borders on unbelief. (Gen.15:2-3) Yet at the crucial times he takes God at his word and believes his promises. The key is not the strength or perfection of Abraham's faith, but the strength and perfection of the God he trusts. Abraham learns that God is utterly reliable and faithful to his word. And since Abraham deserves nothing of what he is promised, it must be seen as a pure and unmerited gift. That is why he is accounted as righteous before God by simply believing"*.<sup>25</sup> It was only fitting that the one through whom God initiated his salvation plan and who believed the promises should become the pattern of all true saving faith. Rom.4:11-12, 16

### **GOD MADE PROMISES TO ABRAHAM REGARDING HIS "SEED".**

In Genesis 12:2 God told Abraham, *"I will make you into a great nation"*. Later in verse 7 he referred to the nation as *"seed"*. *"To your seed I will give this land"*. From then on in Genesis this nation is referred to as Abraham's *"seed"*. 13:15-16; 15:13; 16:10; 17:7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 16, 19; 21:12; 22:17, 18; 24:7; 26:3, 4, 24; 28:13, 14; 32:12; 35:12; 48:3,4 Robert L. Saucy comments, *"We should note ... that the term "seed" carried with it a certain 'doctrinal intention' that linked it with the original promise of a victorious 'seed' for all mankind. (Gen.3:15) The promise of a seed to Abraham was a continuation of this original promise. As a collective noun, 'seed' can refer both to one person and to numerous, related family descendants, implying a corporate solidarity between the one and the many. This double sense is evident in the term 'seed of the woman' which moves from the collective many to*

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<sup>25</sup> Goldsworthy, *According To Plan*, 158

the singular 'he' (Gen.3:15). Thus it is with the seed of Abraham. The expression refers to the one, Christ (Gal.3:16), and the many in union with him. (Gal.3:29)"<sup>26</sup>

### **GOD'S PROMISE WAS UNCONDITIONAL.**

In Genesis 17 God made his promises into a covenant. In the making of this covenant God told Abraham to cut three animals in half and arrange them to have an aisle between the halves. Normally, according to the custom of the time, the two parties of a covenant would walk between the halves, signifying a self-imposed curse, should either party break the covenant. The sense was, "If I break my word, may I become like this severed animal!" Compare Jer.34:18-20 But in this ceremony only God, in the form of a smoking firepot, passed between the pieces. So in this ceremony, he was declaring two things: (a) The keeping of the promise depended on him and him alone. Because he was God, this covenant would eventually be fulfilled even though the human partner, Israel, turned out to be unfaithful. (b) Even if it was the human partner who was unfaithful, God himself would accept the curse for this breaking of the covenant. John Bright explains this further, "This covenant is depicted, simply as a binding promise – or better, a promissory oath – on the part of God. No particular conditions are attached to it. True, it is assumed that Abraham would continue to trust God and walk before him in righteousness and obedience, and the point is now and then made that Abraham did so (e.g.22:16; 16:50). But the giving of the promise itself is not made subject to conditions. There is no list of commandments that Abraham must obey, or obligations that he must fulfill, if it is to be made good ... The patriarchal covenant thus rests in God's unconditional promises for the future, and it asks of the recipient only that he trust".<sup>27</sup> O. Palmer Robertson adds, "By this divine commitment, Abraham's doubts are to be expelled. God has solemnly promised, and has sealed that promise with a self-maledictory oath. The realisation of the divine word is assured".<sup>28</sup>

As it turned out, Abraham and his descendants often did prove to be unfaithful. In Egypt he deceived Pharaoh. Gen.12:17-20 He caused Sarah's maid-servant Hagar to become pregnant. Then he told Sarah, "*Do with her whatever you think best*". Gen.16:8 At another time he deceived Abimelech, the king of the Philistines. Chapter 20 In the third generation Isaac's son, Jacob, was a deceiver. But none of these actions invalidated the covenant. Eventually it would require another son of God to become the human partner of another covenant, the new covenant, a son who would be faithful in every respect, Jesus Christ, God's Son.

### **THE COVENANT FORMULA: "*I will be their God, and they will be my people*".**

In chapter 17 God confirms the covenant. It is at this time that we first hear the covenant formula – at least the first part of it - "*I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be your God.*" Gen.17:7-8 God promised that he would be Abraham's God and the God of his descendants. The full formula is found in Jeremiah 31:33, "*I will be*

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<sup>26</sup> Robert L. Saucy, *The Case For Progressive Dispensationalism*, 44

<sup>27</sup> John Bright, *The Kingdom Of God*, 25-6

<sup>28</sup> Robertson, *The Israel of God*, 131



*their God, and they will be my people*". God spoke these words to Moses, promising that he would free his people in Egypt and bring them to Canaan. Exod.6:6-7 Other references to this formula are found in Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 26:17-18; Jer. 7:23; 11:4-5; 24:7; 30:22; Ezekiel 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:27; Hosea 1:9-10; 2:23; 2Corinthians 16:16; Hebrews 8:10; Revelation 21:3. Sometimes only the first half of the formula is stated. Sometimes it is the second half. At other times the full formula is given. Each time it expresses the close relationship between God and his people. So this formula is at the very heart of the covenants.

## **THE COVENANT SIGN WAS CIRCUMCISION.**

In chapter 17 Abraham was given a covenant sign. The sign of the covenant with Noah had been the rainbow. Later the Sabbath would be the sign of the covenant at Sinai. Exod.31:12-17 Abraham was told that circumcision would be the sign of God's covenant with him. All males must be circumcised. 17:9-14. This sign would signify membership in the covenant community. But how did it signify such membership?

The Bible does not clearly explain the meaning of circumcision. Scholars have various views. Geerhardus Vos suggests, "The removal of uncleanness seems to have everywhere underlain the practice among Israel and elsewhere ... In Deuteronomy 10:16 Moses exhorts the people to circumcise the foreskin of their hearts. In Deuteronomy 30:16 the thought assumes the form of a promise: *'The Lord thy God will circumcise the heart, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and all thy soul.'* These ideas are further developed by the prophets. Jeremiah says, *'Take away the foreskin of your hearts, ye men of Judah'.4:4*"<sup>29</sup>

The N.I.V. Bible states, "Circumcision was God's appointed 'sign of the covenant' (Gen.17:11) which signified Abraham's covenantal commitment to the Lord – that the Lord alone would be his God, whom he would trust and serve. It symbolised a self-maledictory act (analogous to the oath to which God had committed himself (Gen.15:17). "If I am not loyal in faith and obedience to the Lord, may the sword of the Lord cut me off and my offspring (Gen.17:14), as I have cut off my foreskin".<sup>30</sup>

Other scholars believe that we must look to Egypt for the correct meaning. Abraham had connections with Egypt and would have understood Egyptian culture. Gen.12:10-20 Ishmael married an Egyptian. Gen.21:21 Hagar, Sarai's maidservant was Egyptian. Gen.16:1 Later Israelites lived for 400 years in Egypt. Exod.12:40 The Egyptians practised circumcision, but only priests were circumcised. So this would have been meaningful to Abraham and his descendants. John D. Meade writes, "Circumcision in Egypt means affiliation or identification with the deity and consecration to his service. The rite was obligatory for all priests to the deity, while the evidence suggests that circumcision was not forced upon the laity ... Although formal differences existed between the Egyptian rite and the Israelite rite, these differences actually functioned as the grounds for significant theologising in Israel. In Israel every male baby was consecrated or devoted to God at eight days old. The family of Abraham and Sarah were to be signified as the priesthood of Yahweh from birth."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 89

<sup>30</sup> N.I.V. Study Bible, 31

<sup>31</sup> John D. Meade, *Meaning of Circumcision in Israel*, 27-9

# GOD'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

## THE LEAD UP TO THE COVENANT

The book of Genesis tells us that Adam and Eve were the crowning achievement of God's creative work. Unlike the rest of creation, they were made "*in his image, in his likeness*". Their creation involved a unique covenant relationship with God. As such they were his "sons". Gen.5:1-3 As part of the covenant, they were to "rule" and "subdue" the earth. God placed them as servant kings to rule over it under his overall rule. They were placed in a garden sanctuary where they were to function as priests to the rest of creation. They were to be blessed by God in order to be a blessing to it. The purpose of the covenant was for mankind to establish God's rule over his creation – his kingdom.

However the first humans rebelled against him. This resulted in chaos and death in creation. This in turn led to a downward spiral until eventually God had to intervene. He judged the human race by a flood. But he made a new beginning with Noah and his family. When the flood receded, God commanded them to be fruitful and multiply. 9:1 As another Adam, Noah was given the same mandate as that of Adam. But Adam and his descendants also failed. Later at the tower of Babel, humankind was scattered over the face of the earth.

So God made a new start, this time with Abraham. God promised him that his descendants would become a great nation, would possess the Promised Land and would be God's people. Through them all nations would be blessed.

## ISRAEL WAS ENSLAVED IN EGYPT.

In the time of Abraham's grandson, Jacob, because of a severe drought, Abraham's descendants went to live in Egypt. In time they multiplied to become a very large number of people. God's promise to Abraham of descendants was clearly being fulfilled during this time. The Egyptians no longer regarded them with friendliness and made them slaves. God had foretold this to Abraham 400 years previously. Gen.15:13-14 So the book of Exodus begins with Israel enslaved in Egypt. God's promises to Abraham of their possessing the land of Canaan seemed impossible of fulfilment. Goldsworthy comments, "Once again the reality of the promises of God seems to recede out of reach. To all outward appearances Israel's God is powerless to keep faith with his chosen and unable to prevent foreign gods from exercising rule over his people".<sup>32</sup>

But by defeating these gods and performing signs and wonders (Exod3:20; 4:21; 7:3; 11:9, 10; Deut.4:34; 6:22; 7:19), he revealed his character as the God who is absolutely true to his covenant commitment.

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<sup>32</sup> Goldsworthy, *According To Plan*, 169

## THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT WAS PUT INTO ACTION.

In Egypt the Israelites cried out for help. God heard them. *“God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.”* Exod.12:24-35 cf.6:1-6 Goldsworthy writes, *“This does not imply that he could ever forget his promises, but rather that he is about to act on the basis of these promises.”*<sup>33</sup>

## GOD REVEALS HIS NAME: YAHWEH.

God chose Moses to be the one through whom he would liberate Israel. He revealed himself to Moses at Mount Sinai (Horeb) out of the burning bush. Exod.3:1-4:17 Again Goldsworthy writes, *“He identifies himself as the God of the patriarchs (Exod.3:6), which means that he is the one who promised that Israel would be his free people in their own land. He announces that he is about to fulfil that promise by releasing the Israelites from Egypt (Exod.3:7-9). Then he commissions Moses to confront Pharaoh and to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Nevertheless, it will be God’s power that secures their freedom through signs and wonders.”*<sup>34</sup>

Then God revealed himself as “Yahweh”. Exod.3:14-16 This name occurs 6,800 times in the Old Testament and much has been written about its precise meaning. The name is linked to the Hebrew “to be”, which gives the identity “I AM” in 3:14. Bartholomew writes, regarding this term, *“... perhaps the best translation of this expression is ‘I will be whom I am’.* Understood this way, the name Yahweh indicates not just that God is present now, but also that he will be faithfully God for his people in the history that is to follow ... Israel need not be concerned about divine arbitrariness or capriciousness. God can be counted on to be who God is.”<sup>35</sup> This is the name by which God wished to be known and worshipped in Israel. The N.I.V. Study Bible states that “Yahweh” is *“the name that expressed his character as the dependable and faithful God who desires the full trust of his people (see v12, where ‘I will be’ is completed by ‘with you’; see also 34:5-7)”*<sup>36</sup>

The Hebrew Old Testament consisted only of consonants. “Yahweh” appears in the Hebrew Old Testament as “YHWH”. In English translations it usually appears as “LORD” (in capitals). Alan Cole explains, *“The pious Jew of later years was reluctant to pronounce God’s name lest he incur the penalty for taking the name of YHWH in vain (Exod.20:7). He therefore read the vowels of ‘Adonai’, ‘my Lord’, with the consonants YHWH, so pronouncing the hybrid ‘Jehovah’ in English.”*<sup>37</sup>

In Exodus 3:13-15 Moses asked God to tell him his name. This, together with Exodus 6:3, seems to indicate that prior to this time, God’s name “Yahweh” was unknown. But the N.I.V. Study Bible explains this, *“This does not necessarily mean that the patriarchs were totally ignorant of the name Yahweh, but it indicates that they did not understand its full implications as the name of the One who would redeem his people. That fact could be*

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 170

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 170-71

<sup>35</sup> Bartholomew and Goheen, *Finding Our Place In the Biblical Story*, 60-1

<sup>36</sup> *N.I.V. Study Bible*, 91

<sup>37</sup> Alan Cole, *Exodus*, 70

comprehended only by the Israelites who were to experience the exodus and by their descendants.”<sup>38</sup>

### **ISRAEL WAS GOD’S SON.**

God told Moses to confront Pharaoh, telling him, “Israel is my firstborn<sup>39</sup> son. Let my son go so he may worship me”. If pharaoh refused, God threatened, “I will kill your firstborn son”. Exod.4:22-23 The Egyptians regarded pharaoh as a god, the incarnation of Ra. So this was a showdown between the Lord and pharaoh, to demonstrate who was ultimately sovereign and in control.

Israel thus collectively inherited Adam’s role as God’s “son”(Cf. Jer.3:19-20; Hos.11:1), and God was referred to as Israel’s Father. Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer.3:4; 31:9; Mal.1:6 As his son, the nation was to have a close relationship to him. Like Adam, they would fulfill God’s promise to Abraham that he and his descendants would be blessed in order to be a blessing to the nations. Gen.12:1-3 Later King David also would be called God’s “son”. 2Sam.7:14

### **CANAAN WOULD BE ANOTHER “EDEN”.**

In order to release his people, God performed signs and wonders. Exod.3:20; 4:21; 7:3; 11:9-10; 15:11 He sent ten plagues upon Egypt. The last plague was the Passover in which God killed the first-born sons of Egypt, including that of Pharaoh himself. Exod.11:4-5 But because of the blood of the Passover lamb, Israel was saved. This was a foreshadowing of the shedding of the blood of “*Christ, our Passover*” (1Cor.5:7), God’s “*firstborn*”. Col.1:15-20

The last catastrophe for Egypt took place at the Red Sea. There the army of Egypt was destroyed. But Israel gained freedom and salvation. After the victory Israel rejoiced in God their Saviour. Exodus chapter 15 contains the song they sang in celebration. In this song Israel is pictured as a new Adam ready to enter the Promised Land, their new “Eden”. They sang, “ *... in your strength you will guide them ( Israel ) to your holy dwelling ... you will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance – the place, O Lord, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary , O Lord, your hands established.*” Exod.15:13,17 Bartholomew and Goheen write, “Exodus 15 records the victory song of Moses and the Israelites. God is pictured as a mighty Warrior who has won the battle for his people and will reign forever. The hymn expresses confidence that God will continue to direct his newly redeemed people. He will lead them to the land he is giving them and plant them on ‘the mountain of his inheritance’. The Israelites’ new home is the place that God himself has chosen for his dwelling, the sanctuary he has established (Exod.15:13-18). All of these phrases indicate that the land is like a second Eden. In the ancient Near East, the gods were traditionally thought of as living upon mountains. Here, however, the whole land is pictured as the Lord’s mountain, his dwelling, his sanctuary. God’s planting of the Israelites in the land will be a major step on the way toward the recovery and restoration of the creation.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *N.I.V. Study Bible*, 94

<sup>39</sup> “Firstborn” here does not mean “first” in chronological order. It means “first in rank”, just as the firstborn son in a Hebrew family was the son who had the highest rights, privilege and responsibilities in the family. Israel was given the privilege of being the people chosen by God, through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

<sup>40</sup> Bartholomew and Goheen, *Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, 64

Dumbrell notes, "In Deuteronomy the Promised Land is extravagantly idealised. It is the very quintessence of fertility and fruitfulness".<sup>41</sup> It was a land that flowed with milk and honey. Deut.31:20 It was *"a good land – a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills"*. Deut.8:7-9 Moses told them, *"He (God) will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb, the crops of your land – your grain, new wine and oil – the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks in the land that he swore to your forefathers to give you. You will be blessed more than any other people; none of your men or women will be childless, nor any of your livestock without young. The Lord will keep you free from every disease ..."* Deut.7:13-15 *"The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end"*. Deut.11:10-12 Dumbrell writes, "There are thus real parallels to be drawn between Adam's and Israel's position. Like Adam, Israel was formed outside of the land (cf.Gen.2:8). Like Adam, Israel was then put into a sanctuary which God had created. As in the case of Adam, life in the land was to be regulated by covenant and finally, like Adam, Israel was to be expelled from the land if the understanding upon which the land was possessed was not kept, the divine presence was not enjoyed, and the covenant relationship bonding Israel and Yahweh together from a national point of view was breached irretrievably".<sup>42</sup> Finally, Israel's future return from Babylonian exile was to be a return to Eden, *"The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord."* Isa.51:3

As Eden was God's sanctuary for Adam, so Canaan was his sanctuary for Israel. Later the portable tabernacle would be moved around the land, indicating that the whole of the Promised Land was a sanctuary for Israel. Of course, eventually under Solomon, the temple in Jerusalem would centralise worship there.

So God promised that his presence would always be with his people, saying, "And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people". Lev.26:12 He would walk once more among his people.

### **CANAAN WAS TO BE A LAND OF REST.**

As Israel was preparing to enter Canaan, God promised them "rest". Deut.3:20; Josh.1:3 This rest referred to their occupation of the land when they would be living safely, free from conflict, famine and plague. They were to be blessed by God's presence in the land, as Adam and Eve had been blessed by his presence in Eden.

Under David and Solomon, Israel did receive a measure of rest from conflict with surrounding enemies.1 Ki.5:4; 8:56 But in no measure did it ever enter the fullness of God's rest. That would need to wait for sin to be dealt with at the Cross. So only at the end of time

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<sup>41</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 185

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 187

would God's people be able to enter fully into God's rest and enjoy the fullness of life with him in his creation. This is what he had planned for them from the beginning. All that Israel ever enjoyed was only a shadow, a type or pattern of God's rest.

Dumbrell comments, "The notion of 'rest' to which the book of Deuteronomy makes frequent reference (3:20; 12:9; 25:19; 28:65) is ... bound up with the concept of a pleasant life in the land, secure and blessed (15:4; 23:20; 28:8; 30:16). This means no more than Israel's firm possession of the gifts of creation in the way in which they were to be used. In this theology of rest, we are clearly returning to the purposes of creation set forth in Genesis 2:4b-25 and typified by the Eden narration, namely that humankind was created to rejoice before the Deity and to enjoy the blessings of creation in the divine presence ... Israel in Canaan is a microcosm of humankind as blessed, an illustration of what is intended for whole world. Of course, we know that the expectation of 'rest' was not realised in Israel's experience and that finally they were driven from the land. The epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament makes much of this Old Testament failure, reminding us that while Israel failed to enter this rest inherent as the essential meaning of covenant promises (Heb.4:8-10), there still remains for the believers an eternal Sabbath rest as the fulfilment of creation's purpose".<sup>43</sup>

Israel's rest was only a temporary rest. Heb.4:8-9 It was only a partial entering into God's rest. It typologically pointed forward to a greater "rest" to come. Heb.3:7-4:13; Matt.11:28-29 It was at creation when God entered into his rest. Gen.2:2-3 But God's people will enter fully only at the new creation. Isa.65:17-18; 2 Cor.5:17; Gal.6:15; Eph.2:10; 4:24

### **ISRAEL ARRIVED AT SINAI**

Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and into the wilderness. Three months after leaving Egypt, they arrived at Mount Sinai. This was the same area where Moses had first met God. Bartholomew and Goheen write, "But there is a difference. Then God speaks to man from a burning bush; now, the whole mountain is ablaze (19:16). God is calling an entire people to be his, not just an individual. God reveals himself to the Israelites in thunder and lightning on the mountain, as an awesome reminder of whom they are dealing with. This too is holy ground."<sup>44</sup>

### **THE COVENANT IS REFERRED TO BY VARIOUS TERMS.**

Often the name of this covenant made with Israel is called "the covenant at Sinai" because it was made there, or "the Mosaic covenant" because Moses was the mediator of it. However the Bible never refers to it by those terms. The New Testament refers to it as "the old covenant" in 2 Corinthians 3:14. The book of Hebrews refers to it as "the first covenant". 8:7 9:1,15,18 The Old Testament refers to it as "the Torah". This word is translated in our English Bibles as "law". Deut.1:5 In Exodus 24:7 it is called "the Book of the Covenant". In this study it will be referred to as "the Israelite covenant".

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 189-90

<sup>44</sup> Bartholomew and Goheen, *Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, 64

## **THE COVENANT WAS A VASSAL-TREATY.**

This covenant, consisting of Exodus 20:1-23:34 has been identified as a sovereign-vassal text, similar to political instruments of the Near East at that time. Bartholomew and Goheen explain this, "A vassal treaty was a contract established between a great conquering king and a nation coming under his control. Around the time of Moses, this was the means by which the Hittite kings administered their empire. The shape of the covenant in Exodus is much like one of these vassal treaties. It is clearly not a treaty between equals. God is the great King, and Israel the subordinate nation. In this case Israel has come under God's control and become his people, not through his **conquest** of them ( as the Hittites would conquer neighbouring tribes), but because he has delivered them from slavery in Egypt." <sup>45</sup>

## **UNDER THIS COVENANT GOD DECLARED HIS PURPOSE FOR ISRAEL. Exodus 19:3-6**

First of all, through Moses, God reminded Israel of what he had done for them. He had brought them out of Egypt like an angel carrying its young on its wings. He had brought them to himself, namely, Sinai. He was a God who wanted to have a close, personal relationship with his people.

But why had he chosen them? God told them, "*If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" Exod.19:5-6 The reason why Israel was chosen to be his own possession was because all the earth was his. It was the object of his care. Israel hadn't been chosen just to be a privileged people. They (like Abraham) had been chosen for service, for the sake of the nations. They were to live under God's rulership, obeying his laws, so that they would be "a kingdom of priests" and "a holy nation". Let's examine these terms carefully.

### ***"a holy nation"***

The Bible teaches over and over again that God is "holy". Exod.15:11; Ps.22:3; 30:4; 47:8 This means that he is different from and exalted above all that he has created. Israel was to be God's people. So they too must be holy. As such, to be God's own special people, they must be different from the other nations. But they would be different only if they obeyed God's laws fully. These laws, detailed later in chapters 20 to 24, would set the parameters for life in the Promised Land. They would teach them how they could reflect God's character to the world around them. John I. Durham notes, "They are to be a display people, a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people". <sup>46</sup> Israel living in Canaan was meant to be a taste of what God intends for the whole of his creation. God would teach them godly principles of life in a whole range of ways.

### ***"a kingdom ..."***

As previously explained, scholars have noticed that this covenant with Israel is very similar to treaties or agreements conquering kings made with nations that had come under their

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 67-8

<sup>46</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus*, 263

control at that period of history. So as God made this covenant with Israel, the nation knew that he was claiming to be their king and that he regarded them as his servants.

### ***“... of priests”***

As a theocratic nation, they existed in a unique relationship to God, while representing him to the nations as priests. It is the function of a priest to approach God on behalf of others and to approach people on behalf of him. Under this covenant, Israel was to submit to God as their king and to obey his laws. In this way the nations around them would be able to catch a glimpse of God’s plan for all people of what life under his reign would look like. They were to model the kingdom of God by living a happy, fulfilling life in their relationship to God and to one another so that the nations would be drawn to know him for themselves. Eugene H. Merrill comments. “Israel must exhibit in her social, political and religious life what it means to be a redeemed people so that she might attract all other peoples to the sovereign God who created them and who desired to restore them to covenant-keeping capacity.”<sup>47</sup> They were to be a kingdom by priesthood, that is, of service to God on behalf of people and service to people on behalf of God. So they were to be a servant nation. Dumbrell writes, “Israel was always chosen for service, never to privilege.”<sup>48</sup> Many years later, in what is known as “the Servant Songs” (Isa.42:1-7; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12), God speaks to the nation through his prophet Isaiah, instructing them on how he expected them to act as his servant.

### **ISRAEL WAS TO BE A BLESSING TO THE NATIONS.**

By being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, Israel would be fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant. The Israelite covenant was really a sub-set of it. The nation would be blessed and thereby they would be a blessing to the nations. Psalm 67 says this well:

*“May God be gracious to us and bless us*

*And make his face shine upon us,*

*That your ways may be known on earth,*

*Your salvation among all nations.*

*May the peoples praise you, O God;*

*May all the peoples praise you.”(verses 1-3)*

In verse 1 Israel is praying like a priest. The nation is claiming the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:22-26. They seek God’s blessing so that salvation may come to the nations. This is the essence of the Abrahamic covenant. Again Merrill comments, “It is important to note that the election and redemption of that nation (Israel) was not for the sake of the nation itself but was for the purpose of creating a people who could model among the kingdoms of the earth what it meant to be the dominion of the Lord, and who could serve as a channel by which his salvation could be mediated to them.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Merrill, *A Theology Of Chronicles*, 172

<sup>48</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant And Creation*, 6

<sup>49</sup> Merrill, *A Theology Of Chronicles*, 167-68



But only as Israel obeyed God's laws fully would they be able to fulfil this role. Dumbrell captures the significance of this covenant for the rest of Old Testament history, "The history of Israel from this point on is in reality a commentary upon the fidelity with which Israel adheres to her Sinai-given vocation".<sup>50</sup> As we read the rest of the Old Testament, we see how unfaithful Israel was most of the time. Eventually the Christian community in the New Testament will be the continuation of the Old Testament people of God as his kings and priests in the world. 1Pet.2:4-10; Rev.1:5-6; 5:10

Israel's role as priest to the nations came into fullest expression during the reign of Solomon after he had built the temple. With its construction God had at last come to dwell on the earth in a more visible, lasting way. When Solomon prayed, at its dedication, that the foreigner, attracted to it by "*your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm*", will pray toward the temple and in so doing, "*may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel.*" Solomon saw the temple as a focal point to the nation's witness to God. 2 Chron.6:32-33 Israel, and especially the temple, were to act as a magnet drawing the nations to acknowledge the Lord.

An example of this was the visit of the queen of Sheba to Solomon at Jerusalem. 2Chron.9:1-8. She had heard of Solomon's wisdom and came to test him. She was overwhelmed by what she saw and exclaimed, "*Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on his throne as king to rule for the Lord your God*". In fact, not only this queen, but "*all the kings of the earth sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart*". (verse 23) They saw that God was with his people Israel and was blessing them.

But not everyone was impressed and voluntarily submitted to Israel's God. In Solomon's day, some kings were forced to bow in submission. Solomon ruled over all the kings from the Euphrates to the border of Egypt. 2Chron.9:26. This was an anticipation of the day when Jesus will be "King of kings and Lord of lords". Rev.17:14; 19:16

Merrill comments, "Clearly, then, Israel and her God became attractive to the curious peoples near and far who were forced to confess that Yahweh was indeed among his people and was the secret of their blessing and prosperity ... In Jehoshaphat's time all the nations surrounding Judah likewise submitted to him because the fear of the Lord fell on them. (2Chron.17:10-11) As a result they brought the king tribute, a sign of their submission to him as the representative of Yahweh. This fear arose particularly when the nations saw that Judah's success came because Yahweh fought for Judah and gave her victory (20:29)." <sup>51</sup>

### **THE LAW WAS TO BE A GUIDE FOR LIVING.**

Prior to Moses' time, God spoke to his people at various times, giving guidance on how they were to live. In that earlier time, his people were just a family. But Israel was now a nation and God was their God. They were a theophany. So now they needed a permanent standard of morality. Deut.4:8; Ps.19:7-9; 119:142. They needed external codified law. It was to be a permanent standard of righteousness so that their lives would reflect God's character to the nations around them.

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<sup>50</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 66

<sup>51</sup> Merrill, *A Theology of Chronicles*, 173

The Hebrew word for “law” in the Old Testament is “torah”. It means instruction, guidance, character for living. Dumbrell notes, “It is unfortunate that this term, the most generalised concept for covenant demand, should be translated as “law”.<sup>52</sup>

### **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS WERE ISRAEL’S NATIONAL CONSTITUTION.**

In Exodus 20 is given the Ten Commandments. They were the absolute commands or prohibitions. In the New Testament they are referred to as the “commandments”. Matt.19:17; Mk.10:9 In Exodus chapters 21 to 23 God gave the “judgments”. These are applications of the core principles. They are presented as case laws. They cover a whole variety of subjects. The Ten Commandments are fundamental principles, whereas the Judgments apply those principles to specific cases. The fact that the Ten Commandments were uttered by the voice of God himself, without any intermediary, is proof of their unique and enduring importance. This is further stressed by the fact that God himself also wrote the “ten words” (the Decalogue) on tablets of stone. Exod.24:12; 31:18; 32:16; Deut.10:2,4

So what was the purpose of the Ten Commandments? Dumbrell answers the question, “With the exception of the tenth commandment, all appear elsewhere in the Pentateuch. The answer seems to be that they serve in their interrelationship to bring a new society into existence. In short they were not law but Israel’s constitution under covenant. This was what it meant to live in covenant fellowship under their God. The code inculcates two things: reverence for God and respect for humanity. We must love God with every fibre of our being and love our neighbours as ourselves.”<sup>53</sup> The first four commandments are summed up in the words of Deuteronomy 6:5 and the remaining commandments in Leviticus 19:18, 24.

### **WHAT WAS THE ESSENCE OF THE COVENANT: LAW OR GRACE ?**

Why did God give the law to Israel? Was the law given so that by their obedience to it they could achieve a righteousness by which they could be saved? The answer is “No”. Before they reached Sinai, they had already experienced God’s grace in salvation. Before the Ten Commandments were given, God said, “*I am the Lord, your God, who brought out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery*”. Exod.20:2 He had already saved them. On that basis, the law was given. The relationship of sonship had already been established as an undeserved gift. Exod.4:22

In the first century A.D. the Judaisers perverted God’s purpose in giving the law. They taught that lawkeeping was an alternative way of achieving righteousness and salvation, other than by faith. However Paul argued that the prior covenant with Abraham continued to remain in effect. In fact it remains in effect to the present day. There has only ever been one way of salvation: faith. Robertson comments on Galatians 3:15-20, “The coming of law did not suspend the Abrahamic covenant. The principle enunciated in Genesis 15:6 concerning the justification of Abraham by faith never has experienced interruption. Throughout the Mosaic period of law covenant, God considered as righteous everyone who believed in him ... The law under Moses cannot be understood as opening a new way of attaining salvation for God’s people. Israel must maintain the law, not in order to enter the favoured condition

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<sup>52</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creations*, 119

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 163

of the covenant of redemption, but in order to continue in the blessings of the covenant relationship after having been empowered to do so through the covenantal oneness-with-God experienced by grace alone. Under both the Mosaic and the Abrahamic covenants man experienced redemption by grace through faith in the work of the Christ who was to come and die in the place of sinners.”<sup>54</sup>

### **IN THE TABERNACLE, GOD LIVED AMONG HIS PEOPLE.**

In Israel’s construction of the tabernacle, God intended for his presence to become a permanent part of the life of Israel. Exod.25:8; 29:44-45 It was a portable sanctuary, God’s personal residence among his people. Exodus concludes with God’s coming to his people. Exod.40:34-38 Bartholomew and Goheen note, “God’s occasional appearances to Israel have now yielded to his permanent presence in their midst. And the tabernacle moves with them wherever they go; God journeys with his people.”<sup>55</sup>

### **GOD WAS ENTHRONED IN THE TABERNACLE.**

The people ratified the covenant (Exod.24:4-7), signifying that were accepting God as their King and submitting to his laws. Now the tabernacle was his palace among his people. The “*holy of holies*” in the tabernacle was God’s throne room. His throne was the cover of the ark of the covenant. “... they brought back the ark of the covenant of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim ...” 1 Sam.4:4 The N.I.V. Study Bible notes, “In the space between these cherubim, God’s presence with his people was localised in a special way, so that the atonement cover of the ark came to be viewed as the throne of Israel’s divine King (see 2Sam.6:2; Ps.81:1; 99:1)”.<sup>56</sup> From here God gave directions to Moses. Exod.25:22; Num.7:89 Later the ark’s presence in the temple at Jerusalem would designate it as God’s earthly royal city. Ps.9:7, 11; 18:10

Dumbrell writes, “... the tabernacle was built by divine plan after a heavenly pattern and represented, surrounded by the tribes of Israel, as the earthly palace of the heavenly king. This is borne out by the structure of the tabernacle as tripartite; an outer court for the people; an inner larger room for priests as an inner court; finally a throne room chamber containing the covenant reminder, the Ark of the Covenant. Into this ‘holy of holies’, the palace throne room, only the high priest entered and then only once a year in a critical covenant routine. Within the tabernacle the closer the approach to the holy of holies, the more expensive and ornate were the ornaments, on the premise of ‘the best for God’ ”.<sup>57</sup>

### **JESUS IS OUR TABERNACLE AND TEMPLE.**

The tabernacle and temple are a type of the glorified Christ. Vos explains this, “The Word become flesh is the One in whom God came to tabernacle among men, in order to reveal to them his grace and glory. Jn.1:14 In John 2:19-22 Jesus himself predicts that the Old Testament temple, which his enemies by their attitude towards him are virtually destroying, he will build up again in three days i.e. through the resurrection. This affirms the continuity

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<sup>54</sup> Robertson *The Christ of the Covenants*, 175

<sup>55</sup> Bartholomew and Goheen, *Finding Our Place In the Biblical Story*, 72

<sup>56</sup> *N.I.V. Study Bible*, 381

<sup>57</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 137

between the Old Testament sanctuary and his glorified Person. In him will be for ever perpetuated all that tabernacle and temple stood for. ... In Colossians 2:9 Paul teaches that in Christ the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.”<sup>58</sup>

### **COULD PEOPLE BE SAVED DURING THE TIME OF THE OLD TESTAMENT?**

It is Christ’s death that brings salvation to the world. But could people be saved before Christ came? The Bible is quite clear in its teaching that Old Testament people also could be saved by faith. Gen.5:24; 15:6; Ps.16:11; 17:15; 23:6; Rom.4:1-8; Heb.11:13 They were saved by Christ, even though he had not yet died for them. There has never been any other way of salvation. The nation of Israel was often unfaithful and unbelieving. But there was always a remnant who were saved by faith though they did not know the historical Christ, nor hear the gospel in its New Testament form i.e. the preaching of the cross of Christ and the necessity of repentance and faith in him. They believed in God in response to what they knew of him through the progress of revelation to that point. And God responded to them in grace. Old Testament believers had some understanding of a future Messiah. Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham and Sarah all “*died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar*”. Heb.11:13 F.F.Bruce writes, “Their lives were regulated by the firm conviction that God would fulfil the promises he had given them, and in death they continued to look forward to the fulfilment of those promises, as is evident from the words which Isaac and Jacob bestowed their final blessings on their sons or grandsons, as verses 20 and 21 indicate. But more generally it is true of all men and women of God in Old Testament days that they “*died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar*”, as indeed our author affirms in verse 39, at the end of his honours list”.<sup>59</sup>

Grudem explains further, “Even Old Testament believers had saving faith in Christ, to whom they looked forward, not with exact knowledge of the historical details of Christ’s life, but with great faith in the absolute reliability of God’s word of promise”.<sup>60</sup>

Throughout the time of the Old Testament, God graciously provided a progressive revelation of the Christ event. Goldsworthy argues that these prefigurements of the gospel “provided the means whereby the Old Testament believers embraced the gospel before it was fully revealed. The Old Testament believer who believes the promises of God concerning the shadow (Heb.10:1) was thus enabled to grasp the reality. It was by Christ that the saints of Israel were saved, for such is the unity of the successive stages of revelation that, by embracing the shadow, the believer embraced the reality”.<sup>61</sup>

### **GOD PROVIDED A SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM FOR ISRAEL.**

Under the Israelite covenant, a person could obtain forgiveness of sins by means of sacrifice. The worshipper brought the offering, laid his hands on it and killed it. The priest then poured out the blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering, burnt some of the flesh, and arranged for the consumption of what was left of it. By laying his hands on the animal, the offerer was identifying himself with it and solemnly designating the victim as standing for

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<sup>58</sup> Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 154-55

<sup>59</sup> F.F.Bruce, *Hebrews (New International Commentary on the New Testament)*, 303-04

<sup>60</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 117

<sup>61</sup> Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*. 125

him. Some scholars go further and see the laying-on of hands as a symbolic transfer of the sins of the worshipper to the animal, as was explicitly so in the case of the scapegoat. Lev.16:20-22 In either case, having taken his place, the substitute animal was killed in recognition that the penalty for sin was death, its blood (symbolising that the death had been accomplished) was sprinkled and the offerer's life was spared ... Its blood made atonement for him (Lev.17:11) and fellowship was restored. Robert Shank explains further, "The offering of every sacrifice was an object-lesson proclaiming the principle of vicarious sacrifice and substitutionary atonement. That much, at least, men could understand and appreciate. Man's offering of the appointed sacrifice constituted a confession of his sin and need for cleansing and redemption. It was an expression of his faith in God and a petition for grace and forgiveness. Although the offering of animal sacrifices did not '*make the comers thereunto perfect*' (Heb.10:1), God nevertheless was pleased with the faith of the worshippers, as expressed in the act of sacrifice, and so imputed to them that righteousness which was to be imparted to all believers of all ages through the once-for-all offering of Christ – as yet to be accomplished, but eternal in the purpose of God."<sup>62</sup>

### WHAT DOES THE BOOK OF HEBREWS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT SACRIFICE?

In his book, "The Cross of Christ", John Stott looks at the meaning of sacrifice in the Old Testament and how it relates to Jesus' sacrifice of himself on the Cross. In particular he examines the substitutionary nature of Old Testament sacrifice. "This Old Testament background helps us to understand two crucial texts in the letter to the Hebrews. The first is that '*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*' (9:22), and the second that '*it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*' (10:4). No forgiveness without blood meant no atonement without substitution. There had to be life for life or blood for blood. But the Old Testament blood sacrifices were only shadows; the substance was Christ. For a substitute to be effective, it must be an appropriate equivalent. Animal sacrifices could not atone for human beings, because a human being is 'much more valuable ... than a sheep', as Jesus himself said. (Matt.12:12) Only 'the precious blood of Christ' was valuable enough. (1 Pet.1:19)".<sup>63</sup>

### COULD THE OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM PROVIDE FORGIVENESS OF SIN?

The book of Leviticus says clearly that Old Testament sacrifices brought forgiveness to the offerer (assuming the offerer repented and had genuine faith). Ps.40:6-8 "*Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering ... In this way the priest will make atonement for the man's sin, and he will be forgiven*". Lev.4:25-26 cf. Lev.1:4; 4:27-31; 5:16

On the other hand, the book of Hebrews teaches us that the Old Testament sacrifices could never bring forgiveness. "... *it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*". Heb.10:4 cf.9:9-10,13;10:11

How can these scriptures be reconciled? Both of the above scriptures are correct, although on the surface they seem to contradict each other. This seems to be the best understanding of the matter: The Old Testament sacrifices **in themselves** could never bring forgiveness (the teaching of Hebrews) but the offerer of such a sacrifice did receive forgiveness (the

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<sup>62</sup> Robert T. Shank, *Life in the Son*, 24

<sup>63</sup> John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 138

teaching of Leviticus) because such sacrifices pointed to Jesus' sacrifice which paid for all sins committed throughout time. Mathew Green explains further. "The death of Christ atoned for all sins of all sinners who have ever been or whoever would be, as well as those who were alive at the same time as he. The sacrificial system pointed forward to the sacrifice of Christ, but could not itself take away sins. The writer to the Hebrews is clear about that. *'The law ... can never by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? ... But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins'*. (Heb.10:1-4)"<sup>64</sup>

### **UNDER THE COVENANT THERE WERE BLESSINGS AND CURSES. Leviticus 26**

As in Eden there were sanctions for Israel. Obedience to their divine King would bring Israel material prosperity (vs.4-5), military success (vs.6-80), and the guarantee of his continued presence and covenant commitment (vs.9-12). On the other hand, disobedience would result in defeat (vs.14-17), impoverishment (vs.18-20), plague (vs.21-26), and even banishment from the land (vs.27-33). However if in the land of their exile they repent of their sins, God would be merciful and they would enjoy the benefits of the covenant again (vs.40-45).

## **GOD'S COVENANT WITH DAVID**

### **DAVID INSTALLED THE ARK IN JERUSALEM.**

After David became king of all Israel, he captured the Jebusite-held Jerusalem and made it his capital. 2Sam.5:1-10. As a true theocratic king, he wanted to acknowledge God's kingship and rule over both himself and his people. It was understood that the mercy-seat on the ark was God's throne. He was "*enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark*". 1 Sam.4:4; 2 Sam.6:2 Also the tabernacle and the temple were his "*footstool*". 1 Chron.28:2; Ps.99:5; 132:7-8 God's heavenly throne was linked to his earthly throne. When he sat on his heavenly throne, his earthly throne was his footstool. So now in order to acknowledge God's rulership over him and over Israel, David decided to move the ark to his capital, Jerusalem. 2Sam.6. For 20 years it had been exiled in Kiriath-jearim. 1 Sam.4:1-11. This act prepared the way for the covenant arrangements found in 2 Samuel 7.

### **DAVID DESIRED TO BUILD A TEMPLE FOR GOD.**

The ark was brought to Jerusalem and placed in a temporary facility on Mount Zion. Then David suggested to the prophet Nathan that a temple be built to house the ark. The temple would be the palace of Israel's God, David being just his regent. In the Middle East of that time, temples were regarded as palaces of their gods. With God enthroned above the ark, he would reign from his palace in Zion. Since David had a luxurious house, he could not accept the fact that God was living in a tent. 2Sam.7:1-2 However that night, God informed Nathan that David was not to build a house for him. Quite the contrary, God would build a "*house*" for him.

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 276

## **DAVID'S THRONE WOULD BE ETERNAL.**

Through the prophet Nathan, God spoke to David, *"The Lord declares to you that the Lord will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever ... Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever".* 2Sam.7:11-13,16

Up to this time there had been no royal dynasty in Israel. Saul and his son Jonathan had been killed in battle. Now God was promising David an eternal seed and an eternal dynasty. One of David's sons would succeed him to the throne and his throne would be established forever. This son would be the one who would build the temple. David's task was to eliminate all of Israel's enemies and to extend the kingdom according to the boundaries previously prescribed by God. Gen.15:18; Deut.11:24; 1Chron.28:3

## **GOD WOULD RULE THROUGH HIS REGENT.**

*"I will be his father, and he will be my son."* 2Sam.7:14

The Davidic kings were to have a special relationship to God, like that of father and son. (cf.Ps.2:7; 89:27) In Jewish thought the king represented the nation. So now the covenant promise is focused on David and his dynasty. As Goldsworthy notes, the covenant "is now focused on the one who represents the many. It is thus individualised so that 'you shall be my people' is now expressed as 'he shall be to me a son'. This is not one man for himself but one for the many, expressing the important biblical principle that Jesus is the one who lives and dies for the many (sometimes called 'corporate solidarity')." <sup>65</sup>

The concept of an adopted "son" of God goes back to Genesis 5:1-3. Adam had been God's "son" and image-bearer. Lu.3:38: Gen.1:26-28 As such he was to enjoy close fellowship with God in his Edenic sanctuary. In this way he could reflect God's image to the world. Later Israel also inherited this Adamic role. Exod.4:22-23. As God's son, like Adam, the nation was to represent God by portraying godly living to the nations around them. In this way they would fulfil God's promise to Abraham that he and his descendants would be blessed in order to be a blessing to the nations. Gen.12:1-3 Now David and the succeeding Davidic kings were to take on this role of "sons" of God.

This would be the way God wanted Israel to be governed. Israel had always been a theocracy. Num.23:21; Deut.33:5; 1Sam.12:12 Previously God had led the nation through Moses, then Joshua, and then sporadically through various judges. But from now on, he would rule through a regent. This regent would represent him, the King of Israel. The regent was to rule the nation righteously, according to the regulations prescribed by the Israelite covenant. Deut.17:14-20; Ps.89:30-31; 132:12. Eventually this would be the way that God would establish his universal kingdom: he would rule through Jesus, his Son and the perfect son of David. Lu.1:32-33

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<sup>65</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Son of God And the New Creation*, 89

## **AS GOD'S REGENT, EACH DAVIDIC KING WAS OCCASIONALLY EVEN CALLED "GOD".**

*"Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever ... "Ps.45:6*

God was the King of Israel and the Davidic king represented him on earth. Because the Davidic king was God's regent, the writer of Psalm 45 dared to even call him "God". This psalm was addressed to the Davidic king. The N.I.V. Study Bible explains this, "The Davidic king (the 'Lord's anointed' 2Sam.19:21), because of his special relationship with God, was called at his enthronement the 'son' of God (see Ps.2:7; 2Sam.7:14; 1Chron.28:6; Ps.89:27). In Psalm45 which praises the king and especially extols his 'splendour and majesty' (v.3), it is not unthinkable that he was called 'god' as a title of honour (cf. Isa.9:6). Such a description of the Davidic king attains its fullest meaning when applied to Christ, as the author of Hebrews does (Heb.1:8-9)".

Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. writes regarding this psalm, "Referring to or addressing the king as 'God', while rare, should be taken neither as blasphemy, on the one hand, nor as proof of the king's deity, on the other. As God's chosen regent, the king represented God on the battlefield (cf. Ps.82:3-5), and on the throne of the nation. When God energised him for war or accomplished just deeds through him, it was as if God himself were fighting on the battlefield or making pronouncements from the throne".<sup>66</sup>

## **THE DAVIDIC KINGS WERE APPOINTED AS PRIESTS AS WELL AS KINGS.**

Under the Israelite covenant, God had appointed Israel as a nation to be his "son". Exod.4:22-23 As a son, the nation was a "kingdom of priests". Exod.9:6 Now the Davidic kings were appointed as God's "sons". As such they too acted as priests as well as kings. They could act as priests because, under the Davidic covenant, they were mediators between God and their people. Their priesthood was "*in the order of Melchizedek*" (Ps.110:4), an order different to that of the Aaronic order (See 2 Chronicles 26:16-18). Melchizedek was the ancient king-priest of Salem (Jerusalem) who had lived a thousand years previously in the days of Abraham. Chisholm explains this further, "The Davidic king superintended the worship system of Judah, exercised authority over the Levites, and at times performed worship functions. David instructed the Levites to bring the ark to Jerusalem (1Chron.15:11-15), participated in the procession, offered sacrifices, danced before the Lord in a linen ephod, and pronounced blessings on the people (2Sam.6:12-19). At the dedication of the temple, Solomon led the ceremony by offering sacrifices, pronouncing blessings on the people, and praying to the Lord on behalf of the nation. 1Kings 8. Several kings, including Asa, Joash, Hezekiah and Josiah, commissioned the priests to repair and/ or rededicate the temple. (2Kings 12:4-16; 22:3-7; 23:4; 2Chron.15:8; 24:4-14; 29:3-36; 35; 15-19) David and Hezekiah appointed musicians to lead in worship (1Chron.6:31-32; 25:1; 2 Chron.29:25, 30) and assigned the Levites their various duties (1 Chron.23:2-32; 31:2). Jehoshaphat appointed priests to teach the people (2Chron.17:7-9) and settle disputes. (2Chron.19:8-11)".<sup>67</sup>

According to the book of Hebrews, Jesus was the ultimate and perfect Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 7 Not only is he the perfect sacrifice for our sins, he is

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<sup>66</sup> Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *A Theology of Isaiah (A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament)*, 266

<sup>67</sup> Ibid 273



the perfect Priest. The book of Hebrews teaches us that the Aaronic priests were unable to make a permanent sacrifice for the people, whereas Jesus, our High Priest, succeeded in doing this. His priesthood needed to be different from the imperfect and impotent Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament. His priesthood was of a different order, the order of Melchizedek. His higher order of priesthood makes him our perfect High Priest.

### **THE MINISTRY OF THESE KINGS WAS TO THE WHOLE WORLD, NOT JUST TO ISRAEL.**

2 Samuel 7:18-29 reveals David's response to God's promises to him. In verse 19 he was in awe of the huge responsibility God had given him and his descendants. He exclaimed, *"And as if this is not enough in your sight, O Sovereign Lord, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with men, O Sovereign Lord?"*

The N.I.V. Bible translates the last sentence as a question that David is asking God. However translations of these Hebrew words vary. Walter C. Kaiser compares them with a similar Akhadian phrase. He suggests it be translated as a statement and not a question, "This is the charter by which humanity will be directed".<sup>68</sup> The New Revised Standard Version translates it as *"May this be instruction for the people"*. Such translations would mean that the Davidic kings recognised that it was their responsibility to bring to the whole world God's instruction for living life, and not just to Israel. In that day, just as a king in the Near East was understood to be a son of the nation's god and thereby represented that god to the nation, so the Davidic king was the son of the true God and represented him. But because the true God was not only Israel's God, but also the Creator God of the whole world, so the Davidic king was to represent him to the whole world, not just to Israel. In representing him to the world, he had the responsibility to bring God's righteous instruction to the whole world. By fulfilling this ministry to the nations, the Davidic king would be fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant of bringing blessing to them. Other scriptures agree with this. *"Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession."* Ps.2:8 *"He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth ... All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him."* Ps.72:8-11 *"I will set his hand over the sea, and his right hand over the rivers"*. Ps.89:25 These psalms were written about the Davidic kings and not directly about the coming Messiah, although they are fulfilled in the fullest sense in him.

### **JESUS IS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE DAVIDIC COVENANT.**

The rule of the Davidic kings was to represent the rule of God over his kingdom. But one after the other the kings failed and the nation failed. Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah and other prophets warned the nation and its leaders. Then God's judgment fell. First the Northern Kingdom was taken into exile, then the Southern Kingdom. The last Davidic king, Zedekiah, was taken with his people into exile in Babylon in 586 B.C. At that time the 400 year old Davidic dynasty collapsed. 2Chron.36:15-19

However during this time, the prophets anticipated a greater time ahead. The Davidic kings had failed. But a greater occupier of David's throne would appear. In Ezekiel 34:23-24 he is even called "David". He will perfectly fulfil the role of the human partner in the Davidic

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<sup>68</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 155  
Gentry and Wellam, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 400

covenant. Out of the “stump” of David’s fallen tree will come a Spirit-anointed king who will fulfil the hopes of Israel and govern the world in righteousness forever. He will reign over a world transformed into another Eden. Isa.11:1-10

Isaiah says that he will be a new David who will rule over a redeemed Israel. Isaiah 9:1-7 cf. Micah 5:2-4 He is depicted, not as a fierce warrior, but as a little child ( v.6), established in his role by God’s power. He reigns over a people who are in total obedience to God and over an Eden-like earth. V.6-9 It is God’s kingdom and will last forever. He will be called “Mighty God”v.6. This may be a prophecy of the Messiah’s deity. Subsequent biblical revelation indicated that he was divine. However many biblical scholars believe that this term here refers to the king as being God’s representative in battle and that he would be empowered supernaturally. <sup>69</sup>

Eventually when Jesus came in fulfilment of these prophecies, the nation rejected him as their king. Jn.1:11 They crucified him. But on the cross he reigned as King, conquering the enemy, crushing the serpent’s head (Gen.3:15), and “*disarming the powers and authorities ... triumphing over them by the cross*”.Col.2:15 Rising from the dead, he ascended to be seated on his throne at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms. Eph.1:20-23 He is now reigning, putting his enemies under his feet. 1Cor.15:26-28 At his Second Coming, the conquest of his enemies will be consummated, (Rev.19:11-21), and he will reign forever as King of kings and Lord of lords. Rev.17:14, 18; 19:16

#### **GOD’S COVENANT WITH DAVID: WAS IT CONDITIONAL OR UNCONDITIONAL?**

*“When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men. But my love will never be taken away from him ...”* 2Sam.7:14-15

Dumbrell answers this question well, “Though verse 14 provides for chastening, the new covenant promises will not be withdrawn. The Davidic house will stand forever, but this divine pronouncement appears to contrast markedly with historical realities that eventually bring about the dissolution of the Davidic empire. From this apparent conflict springs the question of whether the promises to David are conditional or unconditional. In the Old Testament, there is evidence supporting both responses. Second Samuel 23:5 attributes the following words to David, *‘For he has made with me an everlasting covenant’*. (N.R.S.V.) Also, Psalm 89:33-37 goes to extraordinary lengths to emphasise the unchanging character of the Davidic covenant. Yet, the covenant is cast as constitutional in 1Kings 2:4; 8:25; 9:4-5; Ps.89:29-32 and 132:12 How can the covenant be both conditional and unconditional? The scriptures distinguish between the unconditional generality of the promise and the conditional particularity of an individual in the line of David. That is, though the line will not fail, covenantal promises may be withdrawn from individuals in David’s house. In physical terms the Davidic line failed when Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 587/586 B.C., but in spiritual terms Jesus of Nazareth eschatologically consummates the promises given to the house of David. Matt.1:1; Lu.1:32-33, 69”. <sup>70</sup>

We see the same principles in operation when the whole generation of Israel of Moses’ time dies in the wilderness for its sins, yet a new generation continues under the Abrahamic

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<sup>69</sup> Zuck, *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, 313

<sup>70</sup> Dumbrell, *The Search For Order*, 71

promise. The conditional nature of the covenants meant that those who reject it in unbelief will find that the blessings of the covenant are removed from them. There are warnings against unbelief of individuals who, if they persisted, were to be cut off from the covenant people. Lev.17:10; 20:1-6; 24:13-17. If there was national unbelief, then the nation was to forfeit the blessing. Deut.8:1-20; 28:15-68 The unconditional nature of the promise was not at all a contradiction of the conditional. In effect it was saying that God would not allow unbelief to frustrate his purposes to fulfil the promises originally made to Abraham. The prophets testified to the faithfulness of God, but warned against unbelief.

Each of the covenants (Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Israelite and Davidic) was perfectly fulfilled by Jesus Christ. He is the perfect Second Adam, the perfect seed of Abraham, the perfect Law-keeper of the Israelite covenant and the perfect Son of David. All of the covenants were leading up to him. He needed to fulfil those covenants perfectly. Only in that way would salvation be available to humankind.

God, the divine Partner in each of these covenants, was determined that these covenants be fulfilled. He would be faithful in ensuring this. But in each of the covenants, the human partner was always unfaithful. This was inevitable because each was a flawed partner. Their sinful nature doomed them all to fail. But by sending his Son to earth as a human being, God ensured that the human partner of each of the covenants would perfectly fulfil them.

## **THE NEW COVENANT**

### **THE LEAD- UP TO THE NEW COVENANT**

God, the Creator, was committed to caring for and sustaining all of his creation. The crown of his creation was humankind. He entrusted to them the stewardship of his world, making them his “sons” and his regents. But the first man decided to be independent of him. As a result, there was chaos and death.

However God in his mercy began to restore his ruined world by making a series of agreements with mankind, called covenants. After the Flood, he made a covenant with Noah to begin the human race again. Later in a covenant with Abraham, he planned for Abraham’s descendants to be a new nation, Israel, a model humanity, living in right relationship with him and in a loving relationship with one another. In the Israelite covenant at Sinai, God gave them the Law to teach how to be a holy nation and how to reflect his love and righteousness to the nations. As God’s “son”, the nation would have a priestly role before the nations. Lastly in the covenant with David, the kings of Israel were appointed as God’s “sons”. 2Sam.7:14; 1Chron.17:13; cf. Ps.89:26-27 As such, the kings represented him to their people and the people to their God.

However over and over again, the human partners of the covenants were unfaithful: Adam, Noah, Abraham – and also the nation Israel and their Davidic kings. God raised up the prophets to remind Israel and their kings of their obligations. Under the Israelite covenant established at Sinai, Israel agreed to be the Lord’s people and obey his commandments. The Lord promised to reward obedience with agricultural prosperity and national security, but he also threatened to punish disobedience with famine, pestilence, military defeat and

exile. These promises of blessing and curses are found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The prophets accused the people of rebellion, called them to repentance and warned them of impending judgment.

In Rehoboam's time, the nation split into two, forming the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Eventually in 722 B.C. the Northern Kingdom was taken into exile by Assyria. In 586 B.C. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Babylonians. King Zedekiah and the elite of the population were taken into exile. He was the last king to sit on David's throne. God's covenant with them had warned them of this. Exile from Canaan was one of the curses of breaking the covenant. *"If you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you"*. Lev.18:28 cf. 20:22 Just as Adam and Eve had been expelled from God's presence in Eden, so Israel was expelled from his presence in the land he had given them.

### **THE PROPHETS ANNOUNCE THE PROMISE OF A NEW COVENANT.**

The prophets had warned the nation of their violation of their covenant. But also they promised better times ahead. God would make a new covenant with them. In the Old Testament the term "new covenant" is found only in Jeremiah 31:31. But the concept is affirmed in other places under different terminology: "everlasting covenant" (Isa.55:3; 61:8; Jer.32:40; 50:5; Ezek.16:60-62), and "my covenant" (Isa.59:21; Ezek.34:25; 37:26-27). The concept of this covenant is found in many places throughout Ezekiel and Isaiah 40 to 66.

### **UNDER THE NEW COVENANT GOD PROMISED TO DELIVER HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR EXILE.**

Chapters 40 to 66 of Isaiah are addressed to Israel held captive in Babylon. Jerusalem and the land of Canaan lay in ruins. The people were discouraged by their present situation and questioned whether God would help them. Isa.40:27; 41:17; 49:14 But they needed to know that God loved them. It was because of their breaking God's law that they were suffering. Isa.42:24; 45:18-19; 64:5

But God had a future for his people. He loved them. Isa.43:4 He had not forgotten his people in exile. In response to Zion's charge that the Lord had forgotten them (49:14), the Lord asks, *"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast, and have no compassion on the child she has borne?"*(verse15) The Lord adds that even if mothers were to abandon their children, he would never forsake his people. He had freed his people and calls upon them to leave their exile in Babylon. Their hard service has been completed. Their sin has been paid for. 40:1-2

The Lord will lead his people home. As he does this, all obstacles in the way will be removed. *"Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low."* Verses 3-5 He will go before them and also be their rear guard. Isa. 52:11-12 As they make their way back, he will tend them and care for them as a shepherd cares for his flock. 40:9-11 On their journey they will *"neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them"*. 49:8-13

Some hundreds of years later, the Gospels tell us that John the Baptist became the *"voice ... calling in the desert"*. He became the one who prepared *"the way of the Lord"*. Mk.1:3; Isa.40:3 But "the Lord" of Isaiah 40:3 turned out to be Jesus Christ, God's Son. John the Baptist called upon Israel to repent (Mk.1:4), because only in that way would they find release from their spiritual exile.

## **THEIR RETURN TO JERUSALEM WOULD BE A SECOND EXODUS.**

The prophets reminded the people of the exodus from Egypt that their ancestors experienced in the time of Moses. Exodus 14 They told them that there will be a second exodus, this time from Babylon. Jeremiah said that the Lord would one day be identified not as the God of the exodus from Egypt but of the new exodus from the north country and from all the lands of the Jewish dispersion. *“‘The days are coming’ says the Lord, ‘when men will no longer say, ‘as surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt’. Instead they will say, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north, and out of all the countries where he had banished them’. For I will restore them to the land I gave their forefathers.’ ”* Jer.16:14-15 cf. 23:7-8

In the past God made a way through the waters for their ancestors. Now he would make a new way – this time through the desert. Water, formerly a barrier, would now be a blessing. *“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.”* So their exodus would be a greater one than the one in the past. Isa.43:14-20; 51:9-11

## **GOD WOULD DELIVER ISRAEL FROM EXILE IN TWO STAGES.**

The nation in Babylon was suffering from two problems: the exile, away from their beloved land, but also disobedient, hardened hearts. The latter was the reason for the former problem. Both problems needed to be dealt with before Israel could enter into the fullness of blessing God wanted to pour out upon them. Isaiah predicted that God would provide them with a deliverer who would free them from exile and return them to the Promised Land. That would be an answer to their first problem. Isa.42:18 - 43:21 But a far more serious problem would still remain: that of Israel’s persistent sin and long-term failure. Israel needed not only to be brought back to the **land** but to be brought back to the **Lord**. They needed not just a **change of address** but a **change of heart**. A second deliverer was needed to deal with their hearts and provide salvation from their sin. Isa.43:22 - 44:23

So Israel’s deliverance would be in **two** stages. The instrument God would provide to deliver them from **physical** exile in Babylon would be the future Persian king, **Cyrus**. He would be enabled to be a mighty conqueror of nations, one whose military power would be absolute. Isa.44:24- 45:13 He would free Israel from captivity by conquering Israel’s captor, Babylon. Isaiah predicted that in the second stage, Israel would be delivered from their **spiritual** exile, their exile from God’s presence due to their hardened hearts. Their physical return would get Israel out of Babylon, but the basic problem would still remain: how to “get Babylon out of the people”.<sup>71</sup> This would require the more difficult task – delivering Israel from their captivity in sin. It would provide forgiveness under a new covenant. The agent for this return from sin would be an unidentified **“servant”** who would save the nation from God’s curse by suffering for their sins. Isa.42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12

## **LATER ISRAEL RETURNED TO THE PROMISED LAND. BUT THEY WOULD STILL BE IN EXILE.**

In the sixth century B.C. Cyrus burst on the scene and extended the Medo-Persian empire into the west. He conquered Babylon in 539 and decreed that the exiled Jews could return

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<sup>71</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 437

to their land and rebuild the temple. 2Chron.36:22-23; Ezra1:1-4 This was Stage One of their deliverance.

But within a short time the elation of the Jewish returnees turned to disappointment. The three prophets who wrote after the exile, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, make this clear. Israel had expected a total reversal of their misfortune. Isaiah had spoken of a new Eden and a new heaven and earth (Isa. 51:3; 65:17). Ezekiel had described how the land would become a new Eden (Ezek.36:35-38). He had also linked the temple with a new Eden and depicted a river of life flowing from a new temple yielding Eden-like fruitfulness (Ezek. 47:1-12). But the exiles returned to a tiny territory, and were able to rebuild only a small replica of the original temple. Ezra3:10-12. Only a fraction of the Jews returned. They came back as a small body of only about 50,000, in contrast to the 600,000 men who had come out of Egypt with Moses, a thousand years previously. Ezra2:64; Num.2:32 The return to Canaan was just a shadow of the promised future glorious return to Zion of Jews and Gentiles throughout the world in the time of the new covenant.

Referring to the Palestinian Jews of Jesus' day, N.T. Wright writes, "They believed that, in all the senses which mattered, Israel's exile was still in progress. Although she had come back from Babylon, the glorious message of the prophets remained unfulfilled. Israel still remained in exile to foreigners; worse, Israel's God had not returned to them. Nowhere in the so-called post-exilic literature is there any passage corresponding to 1Kings 8:10f, according to which, when Solomon's temple had been finished, 'a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord'. Instead Israel clung to the promises that one day the Shekinah, the glorious presence of her God, would return at last. Isa.52:8; Ezek.43:1-2, 4-5, 7 ... The exile, then, has continued long after the work of Ezra and Nehemiah".<sup>72</sup>

The first stage of God's deliverance of Israel was the physical return from exile. It got the people out of Babylon, but the problem of getting Babylon out of the people needed to be dealt with by a second stage. That stage involved the spiritual return from exile. It dealt with sin and provided forgiveness under a new covenant between God and his people.

### **ONLY THE PEOPLE'S REPENTANCE WOULD BRING ABOUT THEIR DELIVERANCE.**

One thing must happen if their exile was to come to an end: they must repent. Many years previously Moses had stated clearly that their repentance would be the only condition for their release from exile. *"When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the Lord your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you."* Deut.30:1-3 The prophets also had reminded the people they must repent. Isa.44:22; 45:22; 46:8; 55:7; Jer.3:10,12,14,22; 4:1; 5:3; 15:19; 18:8; 24:7; Ezek.14:6; 18:30,32; Hos.3:5; 6:1; 7:10; 11:5; 12:6; 14:1,2; Joel2:12,13; Hag.2:17; Zech.1:3-6; 10:9-10

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<sup>72</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 269-70

Centuries later, in Jesus' day, Israel was still waiting for the exile to end. At that time they were still under the dominion of Gentile power, this time the Roman empire. So the message of John the Baptist and of Jesus was the same, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*". Matt.3:1-2; 4:17

The book of Isaiah had predicted that **two** great deliverers would bring about the deliverance of Israel from exile. The Persian king, Cyrus, was one of them. But a deliverer far greater than Cyrus must also appear: the "Servant of the Lord".

### **THE SERVANT OF THE LORD WOULD BE ISRAEL'S STAGE TWO DELIVERER FROM EXILE.**

Cyrus' release of the exiles merely foreshadowed the greater salvation to be provided by the servant. This servant is mentioned a number of times in Isaiah chapters 40 to 55.

The "servant songs", as they are often called, outline the servant's ministry (42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12) as one of suffering and ultimate vindication. Through his work, the new covenant would be inaugurated and Israel be released from exile.

#### **The Servant's Job Description Isaiah 42:1-9**

*"I will put my Spirit on him*

*And he will bring justice to the nations ...*

*I will keep you and make you*

*To be a covenant for the people*

*And a light for the Gentiles*

*To open eyes that are blind,*

*To free captives from prison*

*And to release from prison*

*Those who sit in darkness.' "*

God will use the servant to bring to the Gentiles God's justice, covenant relationship and illumination. God wants to give them a relationship with him, like the one he has with Israel. The servant's job is to make that possible. He will be God's missionary servant, working sacrificially to establish God's rule to the end of the world. He is to bring people of all nations of the earth into the kingdom of God.

#### **The Servant's Actions**

*"A broken reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out." Isa.42:2*

The servant is not one who draws attention to himself. (v.20) Also he refrains from opposing those who are already downtrodden. (v.3) Normally people do not try to mend broken reeds. If a reed bends in someone's way, it gets trampled on. People do not take the flickering stub of a candle to read by. They snuff it out and light a new one. That is how the world treats people too. But the Lord's servant does not snap off broken reeds. He bends

them up and supports them. He does not snuff out flickering flames. He fans them to a blaze again.

### **But the servant is blind. 42:18-25**

The servant is supposed to bring sight to the blind and freedom to the prisoner. 42:6-7 But the servant himself is blind and in bondage. *“Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the Lord?”* v.19 Because of her sin, Israel is unable to bring light to the Gentiles. That was why the Lord’s servant had allowed Babylon to take them into exile. But God’s servant is still blind. He doesn’t realise that he has grieved the Lord.

### **Who is this servant?**

*“But you, O Israel, my servant ...”* 41:8 *“But now listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen”*.44:1 *“For the sake of Jacob, my servant, of Israel, my chosen ...”* 45:4 *“He said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel ...’ ”*49:3

Who is the Lord’s servant? Who is this servant who has the huge task of freeing the Gentiles and taking God’s light to them – but is unable to fulfil this task because he, himself, is bound and blind? It is Israel whom the Lord addresses. They are the ones who have been given this task. But Israel also is blind and bound. The nation has failed in this task. Goldingay writes, *“The servant is supposed to be Israel; yet this servant is blind and imprisoned (42:18-25). She cannot fulfil the servant’s task, and someone has to be a servant to Israel. The problem about understanding who Isaiah means by the servant arises out of the complication: Israel is the servant, but Israel needs a servant to minister to her, as the prophet now makes explicit.”*<sup>73</sup>

In the second servant song (49:1-13), the servant is again called “Israel”.v3 But in verse 6, he is distinguished from Israel where he is given the task to restore the nation to God – *“to restore the tribes of Jacob”*. In verse 8 he mediates a covenant for the nation. In the fourth servant song (52:13-53:12), he suffers on behalf of the nation. So, not only is the servant the nation of Israel, he is also an individual or a personified ideal Israel. In some sense he is Israel, but at the same time, someone distinct from Israel as a whole. So the servant is an individual, a person. He is called “Israel” because he represents the nation. He embodies God’s ideal for his people.

*“He (God) says, ‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”* 49:6 Goldingay comments on this verse, *“ God’s purpose was through Israel to reach the world. But the plan did not work ... That was why Jesus had to come, to succeed where Israel failed, so that (in a sense) God could succeed where he had failed before. It is in this sense that Jesus is the servant, par excellence ... It is Jesus, then, who is the light of the world, he who brings a covenant relationship with his Father which all men can enjoy. It is he who refuses to snap a broken reed or snuff out a flickering flame. We can see that in his personal caring for people like the failure Peter or Mary Magdalene. It is he who is never dragged down by the weakness of these people who become his friends; he remains a burning and shining light, he does not*

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<sup>73</sup> John Goldingay, *God’s Prophet God’s Servant*, 124



waver like a flickering candle. He also retains an unshakable confidence that God will bring his work to fruition, despite being let down by his people, his family and his betrayer.”<sup>74</sup>

**More Details of His Task Are Given 49:1-13**

*“He said to me, ‘You are my servant,*

*Israel, in whom I will display my splendour’.*

*But I said, ‘I have laboured to no purpose;*

*I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing ...’ (v.4)*

*And now the Lord says –*

*He who formed me in the womb to be his servant*

*To bring Jacob back to him*

*And gather Israel to himself ... (v.5)*

*He says*

*‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant*

*To restore the tribes of Jacob*

*And bring back those of Israel I have kept,*

*I will make you a light for the Gentiles*

*That you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.’” (v.6)*

This servant song describes in more detail the servant’s special status (vv.1-3) and his commission to deliver the exiles from bondage. (vv.5-12) He is a covenant mediator on behalf of the nations, to lead them to the Lord (42:6) But first he needs to lead Israel back to the Lord. He needs *“to bring Jacob back to him (the Lord ) and gather Israel to himself.”* (49:5) He needs to bring the captives in Babylon back to God in Zion. (49:9-12) This will be a second exodus. So the servant is a second Moses.

The servant’s second task, on behalf of the nation Israel, is to be *“a light for the Gentiles”* and to bring God’s salvation *“to the ends of the earth”*. (49:6) On behalf of the nation, he will be a blessing to the nations.

The song indicates also that the servant will experience some discouragement and rejection in carrying out his task. (49:7) This paves the way for the main theme of the third and fourth songs, the servant’s rejection and suffering.

**The Servant’s Testimony of Faith and Endurance in the Face of Opposition 50:4-11**

Unlike Israel (v.2), the servant is responsive to God. *“The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me, morning by*

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 104

*morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.”* 50:4 Early each morning he waits on God. cf. Mk.1:35 The word he speaks comes from God who sent him. cf.Jn.7:16-18 He does not draw back from suffering but offers his body to the tormentors. *“I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.”* 49:6 cf.Matt.26:67; 27:30; Mk.15:19; Lu.22:63

Beatings were normally for criminals and fools. Prov.19:13; 19:29; 26:3; Matt.27:26; Jn.19:1 Pulling out someone’s beard was a sign of disrespect and contempt. 2Sam.10:4-5; Neh.13:25 Mocking and spitting indicated hatred (Job 30:10), or insult or disgrace (Deut.25:9; Job17:6; Matt.27:30) Such suffering will not deter the servant. He knows that ultimately the Lord will vindicate and honour him. 49:7 cf.52:13; 53:10-12 So he will set his face like a flint (Jesus’ suffering and disgrace were ultimately vindicated. Acts 2:23-24; 3:13; 13:29-30) Later Jesus will *“resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”* (lit.“resolutely set his face to go to Jerusalem.”) Lu.9:1

### **The Servant Will Suffer But He Will Be Vindicated. 52:13-53:12**

John Bright gives us a good understanding of this passage, “Here we read of the suffering and the victory; here we are given finally to understand what the servant is to be. It is utterly unheard of – so much so that onlookers (53:1 cf.52:15) cry out, *‘Who could have believed what we have heard?’* Here is an unlovely figure, scorned of men and seemingly cursed of God (53:2-4). It would seem incredible that in this unlikely quarter, in this *‘root out of dry ground’* (v.2), there should be manifested the very redemptive power of God (v.1). He endures brutal persecution (vv.4-6), so brutal that belatedly it dawns upon men that no sin he could possibly have committed could account for it. They begin to understand that he is suffering vicariously for others; he is bearing their sins. Finally we see him led out like a lamb to the butcher, done finally to death, yet making no complaint (v.7-9). It is clear that he has suffered innocently, indeed that he has made of his life a sin offering for the misdeeds of others (v.10. It is utter humiliation and defeat. But just when the servant has laid himself down to the death, God announces the victory. The servant will be highly exalted (v.12); he will be satisfied to know that his sacrifice has borne fruit (v.11); he will be permitted to see *‘his offspring’* (v.10) – the numerous progeny he has begotten into the kingdom. The victory of the servant lies beyond suffering. Indeed, the discharge of his mission is impossible without suffering, for suffering is the means by which that mission is to be accomplished.”<sup>75</sup>

### **The Servant of the Lord and the Future Messianic King Are the Same Person.**

Of the three major sections of Isaiah (chapters 1 to 39, 40 to 55, and 56 to 66), references to the messianic King (mainly 9:1-7 and chapter 11) are found in the first section and references to the Servant are found in the second section. Both of them will inaugurate the final resolution of Israel. When we examine carefully the passages that deal with these two personages, we find that they are the same person.

Both are chosen by God and are righteous. Isa.42:1,6; Ps.89:3-4 Both are anointed by the Holy Spirit to bring justice to the nations. Isa.11:1-4; 42:1 When we connect Isaiah 53:2 with Isaiah 11:1, 10, we see that the servant is described as *“a tender shoot, ... like a root out of*

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<sup>75</sup> Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, 148

dry ground". In Isaiah 11:1, 10 the messianic King is "a shoot that will come up from the stump of Jesse. From his roots a branch will bear fruit ". In verse 10 he is "the Root of Jesse". So the Servant of the Lord is the messianic King.

### **Jesus Comes to be that Servant.**

Robert B.Chisholm Jr. writes convincingly that Jesus became that Servant, "In the process of time Jesus Christ emerged as the Servant of the Lord, anticipated by Isaiah's servant songs. This is perhaps seen most clearly in the Gospel of Matthew. From the outset, Matthew presents Jesus as the ideal Israel (Isa.49:3) who succeeds where the nation had failed (cf. Isa.1:13-15). According to Matthew, Jesus' miracles of healing were object lessons that identified him as Isaiah's servant (Matt.8:16-17). Matthew 12:15-28 particularly identifies Jesus as the Servant. Matthew sees Jesus' warning against publicising his ministry as a fulfilment of Isaiah 42:1-4. (Matt.12:15-21) He then notes that Jesus gave sight to the blind, an act that recalls the prophecy of Isaiah 42:7 (Matt.12:22-23). Jesus' act of healing literal blindness implied that he had also the power to heal the figurative blindness referred to in Isaiah. When the Pharisees attributed his abilities to demons, Jesus convincingly argued that his power came from the Spirit of God (Matt.12:24-28 cf. Isa.42:1). Matthew's description of Jesus' death draws also on the Isaianic portrait of the suffering servant (cf.Matt.26:63; 27:12, 14 with Isa.53:7; 26:67; Matt.27:30 with Isa.50:6; and Matt.27:38 with Isa.53:9, 12). Other New Testament passages also identify Jesus as the Isaianic servant, including Acts 8:32-33; 26:23 (cf. Isa.53:7; 49:6), and 1 Pet.2:21-25 (cf.Isa53)".<sup>76</sup>

The New Testament is quite clear in its teaching that the suffering of the Servant provides the sacrificial foundation for the implementation of the new covenant. Matt.26:28; Mk.14:24; Lu.22:20; 1Cor.11:25; Heb.9:15; 12:24

Dumbrell summarises the content of the Servant Songs, "In summation, in Isaiah 40-55 servant Israel ( cf.41:8; 44:1; 48:20; 49:3 ) is swept up into an idealised presentation of a single Servant figure ( cf.49:3 ) who, in dying for Israel and its world (42:6; 49:6; ch.53 ) by his being highly exalted, brought the restored Israel to servanthood (54:17; 56:6; 65:9; 65:13-15). Jesus will be this ideal Israel and thus representative Israel."<sup>77</sup>

### **We Too Are Now God's Servants.**

In the servant songs the "servant" is Israel and also the perfect Israelite, Jesus Christ. However the fact that he fully fulfilled this role for Israel does not relieve Israel of her calling. She is still called to be the Lord's servant, a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind and free captives from prison. When Jesus came, he challenged his followers to follow his example and take up the role of the servant humbly. Luke 9:23 As God's Servant, he experienced disfigurement, suffering, pain, loss, abandonment, misunderstanding and death. We must be willing to follow the same path. Goldingay challenges us, "It is striking that when the epistles in the New Testament speak of Jesus in these terms, the context is concerned not merely with a right understanding of Jesus, but with his followers' willingness to walk the way Jesus walked. 'Christ ... left you with an example so that you might follow in his steps ...' 1 Pet. 2:21 'The attitude you should have is the one Christ Jesus had ...' Phil.2:5

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<sup>76</sup> Chisholm, *A Theology of Isaiah (A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament)*, 332

<sup>77</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 281

G.N.B. The danger of the quest for the identity of the servant in Isaiah 53 is that it diverts us from the same challenge which this chapter lays before us. The poem offers a vision of what God wants to do and can do with someone prepared to be his servant. The poem is, to use a more prosaic term, a job description. Or it is a challenge to the reader as to whether he is prepared to be a servant of this kind. The challenge, or invitation, may be accepted by Israel as a nation or by the church or by individuals who are willing to take it seriously. While Christians are convinced that Jesus met the challenge in the fullest sense, this does not mean that the passage is now a dead thing from the past, relevant only as a promise fulfilled in Christ. It is still God's vision for his people, and God's challenge to them."<sup>78</sup>

### **ONLY A FAITHFUL REMNANT WITHIN THE NATION WILL BE SAVED.**

God had often promised that Israel would be blessed and be a blessing to the nations. He made a covenant with them whereby they would be his people and he would be their God. But it was not long before it became evident that the visible, historical nation was not God's kingdom on earth. As a nation, they were unfaithful to the covenant and eventually had to be sent into exile in Babylon.

But throughout history there had always been a minority within the nation who remained faithful. It would be to a minority that God's promises to the nation would be fulfilled. So in Babylon the nation was not destroyed. The prophets foretold that God would eventually call Israel back to their land and he would dwell with them in Zion forever.

But this promise applied only to the "Remnant", those within the nation who remained true to him. *"A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God. Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand of the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous."* Isa.10:21-22 *"In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left. ... There will be a highway for the remnant of his people that is left ..."* Isa.11:11, 16 The prophecies do not indicate the size of the end-time remnant, although Zechariah's statement that *"there will not be room enough for them"* (10:10) appears to suggest a large number. They will be the true Israel, an Israel within Israel. In the end-time they will constitute the resurrected nation of Ezekiel's vision. Ezek.47 John Bright notes, "The notion of a pure remnant of God's people, cleansed in fiery trial and made amenable to God's purposes, is one of the most characteristic of all the ideas of Isaiah. Isa.4:2-4; 10:20-22; 37:30-32".<sup>79</sup>

### **There Has Always Been A Faithful Remnant.**

Isaiah was not the first to be aware of a distinction between the faithful few and the sinful majority. In King Ahab's day Elijah had mistakenly assumed that everyone in the nation had turned against God. But God revealed to him that there was a remnant of 7000 in hiding who had not bowed the knee to Baal. 1Ki.19:18 This is the first mention of a remnant of believers within the nation. Eugene H. Merrill comments, "This doctrine of the remnant is pervasive in the Old Testament. It was a fact that the people of the Lord would always tend to fall away from him except for a small minority, the remnant, who would remain faithful

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<sup>78</sup> Goldingay, *God's Prophet God's Servant*, 156

<sup>79</sup> Bright, *The Kingdom of God*. 89

to their covenant responsibilities. In other words there was always an Israel within Israel, the true kernel surrounded by the husk of an external national entity. The saving purposes and promises of Yahweh could not therefore find fulfilment in the nation as such, but only in that godly core that he preserved through the ages.”<sup>80</sup>

### **It Was Jesus Who Eventually Rescued the Remnant From Exile.**

When Jesus appeared to Israel, the nation rejected him. Jn.1:11 But as always, there was a remnant of believing Jews within the nation. They were attracted to him and put their faith in him. From this time onwards God would no longer deal with Israel as a nation. Matt.8:11-12; 21:43-46; 24:37-39 His dealings would be with this minority of believing Jews which later constituted the church. They would be the new Israel. Jesus’ chosen twelve apostles became the foundation of this new group. Matt.16:16-18; Eph.2:19-20 Later he would commission them to invite Gentiles world-wide to become part of the new group. Matt.28:16-20 Wright explains, “Did Jesus intend to found a ‘church’? The question is hopeless. Of course he didn’t; of course he did ... Jesus did not intend to found a church **because there was already was one**, namely the people of Israel itself. Jesus’ intention was therefore to **reform** Israel, not to form a different community altogether ... he challenged his followers to a distinctive lifestyle: they were to live as the people of the new covenant, those who were truly returning from exile, those for whom the prophecies were coming true.”<sup>81</sup>

### **JEREMIAH’S DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW COVENANT**

It was simply not in Israel to keep the covenant. But out of the broken pieces of Israel, God would raise up a pure Israel, a remnant. They would be the beneficiaries of the new covenant.

In the earlier chapters Jeremiah’s main message had been that Babylon would come and destroy Jerusalem and take the people into exile. Jer.5:15; 9:16; 13:19; 15:2 Because of their constant sinning, they would suffer the curse of God’s covenant with their forefathers. Lev.26:33-35 He had called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees and given him a promise concerning the land of Canaan. So now, just as Adam had been cast out of God’s presence in Eden for violating his covenant with God, Abraham’s people must be cast out of their land of promise. They are declared “*not my people*”. Hos.1:8-9

However this was not the only word Jeremiah had for his people. According to chapters 30 and 31, God would make a new covenant with them and restore them to the land. Jer.30:1-3 Jeremiah 31:31-34 deals particularly with this new covenant.

### **It Would Be A New Covenant.**

*“ ‘The time is coming’, declares the Lord,’ ... when I will make a new covenant’.”* (v.31)

It will be “new” in two senses of the word. It will be different from the new covenant that God had made with Israel. But also it will be better than that covenant was. Dumbrell comments, “The new covenant while having continuity with the past, will be both a

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<sup>80</sup> Merrill, *A Theology of Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther ( A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament)*, 194

<sup>81</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 275-77

qualitative advance upon the Sinaitic and Davidic covenants and a temporal advance in the course of salvation history.”<sup>82</sup>

**Israel Is To Be A United Nation Again.**

“... a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah”. (v.31)

The covenant will be with a new Israel, the Remnant. No longer will the nation be divided. This is to be in accordance with Ezekiel 37:15-28 which speaks of a united nation under their Davidic king and living in obedience to God’s law.

**Under the New Covenant, the Sins of God’s People Will Be Forgiven.**

“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”(v.34 cf.33:8; 50:20)

This promise is similar to Ezekiel 36:25-27 which promises a cleansing “from all impurities”, “a new heart”, “a new spirit”, and “a heart of flesh” to replace “a heart of stone”. Also Zechariah 13:1 promises under the new covenant, “On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.” Later Jesus will confirm these promises of forgiveness, “This is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”. Matt.26:28

Of course under the Israelite covenant, people could be forgiven. At the time of its establishment, God proclaimed himself “the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness ... and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin”. Exod.34:6-7; cf.Num.14:18 The sacrificial system provided for forgiveness. Lev.4:20, 26; 1Kin.8:30 The people under that covenant knew the joy of forgiveness. Ps.32:1, 5; 51:7; 86:5; 103:3

Gentry and Wallum compare forgiveness then and now, “In the Old Testament era, people were saved by grace through faith in the promises of God and the same is true in the coming of Christ, except that the promises of God are now Christologically defined with greater clarity due to the progression of revelation across the biblical covenants (see Gen.15:6; Rom.4:9-12; Gal.3:6-9; Heb.11:8-19). Promise has given way to fulfilment so that one now cannot know God, salvificly, apart from faith in Christ (Jn.5:23; Acts4:12; cf.1Jn.2:23; 4:2-3).”<sup>83</sup>

However the provision of forgiveness under the new covenant is far more than simply a continuity of the forgiveness provided under the old covenant. Under the old covenant, sin was passed over, rather than removed. There was a need for continual sacrifice of animals. This indicated that their sacrifice could not ultimately effect forgiveness. However under the new covenant, God promises that he “will remember their sins no more”. Robinson explains further, “The constant renewal of sacrifices for sins under the old covenant gave clear indication of the fact that sin actually was not removed, but only was passed over. If the sacrifice of the day of atonement actually had established a person once and for all as righteous in the sight of God, why then was the ceremony repeated annually? The blood of

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<sup>82</sup> Dumbrell, *The Search For Order*, 99

<sup>83</sup> Gentry and Wellam, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 685

bulls and goats inherently had no power to remove sin in the framework of God's administration of the world. The provisions of the old covenant, founded on such sacrifices, could not effect the actual removal of transgressions. Heb.10:1-4, 11-18

"Jeremiah anticipates the day in which the actual shall replace the typical. Instead of having animal sacrifices merely represent the possibility of a substitutionary death in the place of the sinner, Jeremiah sees the day in which sins actually will be forgiven, never to be remembered again. The continual offering of sacrifice to remove sin not only provided a symbolical representation of the possibility of substitution. It also functioned as a very real reminder that sins had not yet been forgiven. By saying that sins would be remembered no more, Jeremiah anticipates the end of the sacrificial system."<sup>84</sup>

Dumbrell says that these words point beyond forgiveness, "The word 'forgiveness', especially when used of Yahweh, means more than the power of psychological recall. When Yahweh 'remembers', it means that he will reactivate an issue or carry through a promise. So God 'remembered' Noah and took action by causing the flood waters to subside. (Gen.8:1) God also 'remembered' Hannah and his promise that she would bear a son became a reality (1Sam.1:19-20). Thus, a determination by God not to remember does not simply mean that God will forget formally. It means that sin will have been dealt with so comprehensively in Israel that no further action regarding sin will be necessary. At once we see that this verse points beyond the present experience of the Christian believer to a time when the total efficacy of the cross of Christ will be implemented. Jeremiah's eschatological age will witness a changed society, a New Israel in which the Word and the Spirit will have free reign. In the new age, sin will be foreign to human experience".<sup>85</sup>

### **Under the New Covenant, With New Hearts, God's People Will Be Obedient.**

*"It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt because they broke my covenant though I was a husband to them ... This is the covenant I made with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people' ". Jer.31:32-33*

Instead of the law written on tablets of stone under the Israelite covenant, the law ('torah'=instruction, teaching) of God will be internalised and written upon the heart. This agrees with an earlier statement, "I will give them a heart to know me". Jer.3:1 The significance of this changed heart becomes evident through contrast with Jeremiah's many negative statements concerning the heart of his contemporaries. They were "rebellious" (5:23) and stubbornly evil. 3:17; 7:24; 11:8; 18:12 cf. 4:14; 17:9; 22:17

Under the new covenant our old sinful nature will be eradicated. God's law will be written on the heart. Deut.10:16; 30:6; Jer.4:4; 9:25 This is in accordance with Ezekiel's doctrine of the new heart (Ezek.11:19; 18:31; 36:26) and the apostle John's doctrine of regeneration. Jn.1:10-13; 3:1-16 In Ezekiel 36:24-28 God promises, not only to return Israel back to their homeland again, but to cleanse them and change them. He will replace and renew their hearts and spirits. The heart that is stubborn and rebellious will be replaced by one that is

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<sup>84</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 283-84

<sup>85</sup> Dumbrell, *The Search For Order*, 101-02

soft and responsive. The spirit of disobedience will be replaced by God's Spirit. *"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God."*Ezek.36:25-28

The new covenant is superior to the old covenant. So the old covenant has become obsolete. Heb.8:6-13 But this does not mean that the old is unconnected with the new. In fact the new achieves perfectly what the old could only foreshadow. Philip E. Hughes explains, "The difference between the old and new covenants is that under the former the law is written on tablets of stone, confronting man as an external ordinance and condemning him of his failure through sin to obey its commandments, whereas under the latter the law is written internally within the redeemed heart by the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit, so that through faith in Christ, the only law-keeper, and inward experience of His power, man no longer hates but loves God's law and is enabled to fulfil its precepts. (There were, of course, lovers of the law in the Old Testament period (Ps.19, 89), but as such, they did not differ radically from believers of the New Testament era; their love of the law was by reason of divine grace granted to them, not by reason of any self-adequacy; and, as Fathers and Reformers have repeatedly emphasised, they were men and women of faith whose trust was centred in the same Christ whom the New Testament proclaims, but in an anticipatory manner, as looking forward to the coming of Him in whom all the promises of the new covenant would find their fulfilment."<sup>86</sup>

The new covenant does not mean a change in God's standards or righteousness, of right or wrong. Neither God changes, nor his law. What is new about the new covenant is the ability of both partners to keep it. Paul's statement, *"Christ is the end of the law"* (Rom.10:4) may seem to contradict this. But this verse does not mean that we are now free to disobey it. It means that acceptance with God is not through obedience to the law but through faith in Christ. Also when Paul wrote that we have "died" to the law, and been "released" from it (Rom.7:4, 6), he was referring to the law as the way of getting right with God. The Christian is no longer "under the law", since Christ has freed him from its condemnation, but the law still plays a part in his life. He is liberated by the Holy Spirit to fulfil its moral demands. Rom.8:1-4

In the chapter following Ezekiel 36, in a vision the prophet saw a vast plain with bleached bones. He knew that they were the bones of Israel, cursed by God for breaking the covenant. It was a picture of Israel in exile. The nation looked as if it would never live again. Ezek.37:3, 11 But God speaks to Ezekiel, and in his vision he called upon the Spirit of God to breathe upon the bones. They then stood on their feet, an exceeding great army. Vv.9-10 It was a nation dead in exile, now alive again through the grace of God. This was the new Israel, the spiritual Israel, the Remnant.

***Under the New Covenant All God's People Will Have a Direct Personal Relationship With Him.***

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<sup>86</sup> Phillip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle To The Corinthians*, 94



*“ I will be their God and they will be my people.*

*No longer will a man teach his neighbour,*

*Or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord’,*

*Because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest’,*

*Declares the Lord.” Jer.31:33-34*

The indwelling of God’s Spirit within his people will transform them. This in turn will create a new relationship between God and his people. The heart of the new covenant promise is expressed in the simple statement, *“I will be their God and they will be my people”*. All the covenants (Abrahamic, Israelite and Davidic) were directed towards this ideal. Gen.17:7  
Exod.6:7; 2Sam7:14 But the sinfulness of the human partners of the covenants had spoiled its realisation. However under the new covenant, through the indwelling of the Spirit, this will be achieved. cf.Rev.21:3

Under the new covenant, God promises that he will have a direct personal fellowship with his people. This knowledge of God is more than information about God; it is personal experience. The people will not only know information about him, but also, with the indwelling of the Spirit, they will have a personal relationship with him. There is a world of difference between knowing about God and knowing him. This knowledge will be direct and unmediated. In the Old Testament times, the majority of Israel would never have professed to know the Lord. A few of the great ones, such as David and Isaiah, of course did – but not ordinary Israel. They would go to consult God through a prophet or priest.

But such mediation is unnecessary under the new covenant. “God will be known instinctively and his will performed spontaneously (cf.Isa.54:13; Jn.6:45).”<sup>87</sup> There is no need for “teachers” in the sense of mediators. Saucy explains, “That there are still teachers in the church under the new covenant does not controvert the promise. Every believer is a priest directly taught by the Spirit (cf.1Jn.2:20, 27). Teachers in the church do not mediate the knowledge of God; they assist believers in their present imperfect situation to realise the direct oneness they now experience with God through the provisions of the new covenant. This covenant, however, looks even beyond the present to the time when human natures will be perfected and no human instruction will be necessary.”<sup>88</sup>

Under the new covenant, all believers are priests. 1Pet.2:4-5, 9: Rev.1:6 This fulfils the mandate for Israel in Exodus 19:5-6 Dumbrell writes, “Both prophecy and priesthood were concessions to sinfulness, but in the totally new economy prophesied by Jeremiah, there will be no need for specialisation. In fact there will be no sacrificial system and no need for teaching the Torah.”<sup>89</sup>

### **The New Covenant Is Being Fulfilled Both Now and in the Future.**

Are we now living in the time of the new covenant? Are we now experiencing its benefits? The answer is Yes and No. Jesus’ death confirms and establishes the new covenant. Isaiah’s

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<sup>87</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary)*,577

<sup>88</sup> Saucy, *The Case For Progressive Dispensationalism*, 118

<sup>89</sup> Dumbrell, *The Search For Order*, 101

suffering Servant of the Lord has come and died for our sin, purchasing a full and perfect salvation for the world.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, we are no longer slaves to sin. Rom.8:17-18 We have been set free from the law of sin and death. Rom.8:1-2 The Spirit helps us to live in alignment with God's will. God has given us a new heart and a new spirit. On our hearts God has written his law. So without the help of priests or other mediators, we can now enjoy a wonderful, deep relationship with him. But we are now experiencing only a partial fulfilment of the new covenant. It is true that the kingdom of God is here already. But the kingdom is still future also. We still have a sinful nature. Rom.7:14-20 We are in a struggle with sin. Gal.5:16-26 We still need to strive toward perfection, even though perfection is not attainable at the present time. Phil.3:10-14 It will be at the Second Coming when we will enjoy the fullness of our salvation. 1Cor.13:8-12 Then our sinful nature will be eradicated and our bodies glorified. At that time the fulfilment of the provisions of the new covenant will be complete.

So at the present, there is an overlap of the new age and the old age. This overlap was not revealed to the Old Testament prophets. They saw only the final manifestation of the Kingdom. It is the New Testament that sees the fulfilment of prophecy of the new covenant as being inaugurated by two events: his first coming which involved his death and resurrection as the Servant of the Lord and his second coming as King in power and glory. Dumbrell explains, "In Jeremiah, we are looking beyond the New Testament age to the community of the end time, to a situation when the Kingdom of God has fully come and God is all in all, and the total human community of the kingdom has been transformed."<sup>90</sup> Only then will the community of believers be fully transformed into the full image of Christ. 2Cor.3:18 Again Dumbrell comments, "When Jesus comes again, the mortal body must then put on immortality. It is only when the perishable body puts on the imperishable that death will have been swallowed up with victory. This, then, will complete the experience of the newness of the new covenant."<sup>91</sup>

### **The New Covenant Provides Multiple Blessings.**

Michael Green sums up the benefits of the new covenant, "These three great blessings of the new covenant, foreseen by Jeremiah, but never hitherto achieved, were going to be brought to the world by the shed blood of Jesus: sins would be forgiven, men and women could know the Lord personally, and God's will would be written on their hearts by the indwelling Holy Spirit (as Jeremiah and Ezekiel had in some sense foreseen. Jer.31:31-34; Ezek.11:19-20; 36:25-27) Universal pardon, universal knowledge of God, universal availability of his Spirit: these were the marks of the new covenant, and they were all going to be sealed in Jesus' blood ..."<sup>92</sup>

### **At the Last Supper Jesus Linked the Passover ( the First Exodus) With the New Covenant (the Second Exodus).**

On the night before his death, Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples. It was the annual Passover meal, celebrating Israel's redemption from Egypt in Moses' time (Exodus

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<sup>90</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 266

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 268

<sup>92</sup> Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 276

12). Lu.22:7, 8, 3, 15 But he redefined it as a drama portraying his atoning death on the cross. Matt.26:26-29; Mk.14:22-25; Lu.22:17-20: 1Cor.11:23-25 Referring to the cup, he said, “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you*”. Lu.22:20 His death on the following day would inaugurate the new covenant, the forgiveness of sins and the kingdom of God. So this drama they were enacting interpreted his coming crucifixion as a new exodus that would bring about forgiveness and reconciliation on the basis of his sacrifice as a “Passover Lamb”. N.T. Wright links the meaning of the Passover with the new covenant. Referring to Jesus’ words at the Last Supper, he writes, “Passover looked back to the exodus, and of the coming of the kingdom. Jesus intended this meal to symbolise the new exodus, the arrival of the kingdom through his own fate. The meal, focused on Jesus’ actions with the bread and the cup, told the Passover story, and Jesus’ own story”.<sup>93</sup>

## **JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD.**

### **THE OLD TESTAMENT IS MISSING AN ENDING.**

The Old Testament, with its various covenants that God had made, points forward to the coming of the kingdom of God, when the curse of sin will finally be eradicated from the earth, and all of its inhabitants will be living in submission to the divine will. It looks forward to this day, but the day never arrives. Therefore the Old Testament is an incomplete book. Bright states it this way, “It is a story whose Author has not yet written the ending: it is a signpost pointing down a road whose destination – and surely its destination is a city, the City of God (Heb.11:10, 16) – lies out of sight around many a corner. It is a noble building indeed – but it lacks a roof! ... Old Testament and New Testament thus stand together as the two acts of a single drama. Act 1 points to its conclusion in Act 2, and without it the play is an incomplete thing. But Act 2 must be read in the light of Act 1, else its meaning will be missed. For the play is organically one. The Bible is one book.”<sup>94</sup>

### **THE HUMAN COVENANT PARTNERS ALL FAIL.**

The covenants were not independent of and unrelated to each other. Rather they built on each other. Gentry and Wallum explain this, “God’s plan of salvation comes into effect through the covenants and covenant mediators – Adam, Noah, Abraham and his seed centred in the nation of Israel, and most significantly through David and his sons. Yet, in the Old Testament, it is clear that all the covenant mediators (sons) fail and do not fulfil the promises ... It is only when a true, obedient son comes, a son whom God himself provides, that God’s rule finally and completely is established and his promises realised.”<sup>95</sup>

### **SO GOD PROVIDES HIS OWN HUMAN COVENANT PARTNER.**

All of the human partners in the covenants have failed. There is no faithful, obedient son who fully obeys the demands of the covenant. So who can take their place and be the faithful human partner and bring redemption to the world? The only solution is that God himself must come and somehow be this human partner. This human partner must come

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<sup>93</sup> N.T.Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 559

<sup>94</sup> Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, 192,197

<sup>95</sup> Gentry and Wallum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 659

through Adam, then Noah and then be “narrowed” through Abraham, the nation of Israel and David’s line. This human partner must be clearly identified with God himself. Isaiah prophesied this. Gentry and Wallum write, “This coming king will sit on David’s throne (Isa.9:7), but he will bear the very titles and names of God (Isa.9:6). This King, though another David (Isa.11:1), is also David’s Lord. Ps.110:1 cf.Matt.22:41-46 He will be the mediator of a new covenant. He will perfectly obey the Lord (Isa.11:1-5), yet he will suffer for our sins in order to justify many.”<sup>96</sup> He will bring in God’s kingdom in the world as Adam was to do in the beginning as image-bearer and son.

### **GOD’S SON BECOMES THE OBEDIENT HUMAN COVENANT PARTNER.**

God sent Jesus to be that “son”. He, as the second Adam, lived a life of complete love, devotion and obedience to his heavenly Father for us. This shows us what an obedient son looks like. Then in the greatest act of obedience possible, he went to the cross for us to pay for our sin. Now God reckons or counts our entire sin to be Christ’s, and Christ’s righteousness to be ours. 2Cor.5:21 Gentry and Wallum continue, “The New Testament explicitly speaks of the obedience of Christ in these texts (Rom.5:19; Phil.2:8; Heb.5:8-9; cf.2:5-18) In addition, the concept or theme of obedience is found in numerous places. For example, the servant theme underscores Christ’s obedience (Mk.10:45; Phil.2:7; cf.Isa.42:1; 52:13-53:12); the purpose of Christ’s coming is to do his Father’s will as the Son (Jn.5:19-30; 8:28-29; 10:18; 12:49; 14:31;Heb.10:5-10); he submits to the law (Matt.3:15; Gal.4:1-4 ); and he is perfected through suffering (Heb.2:10-18; 5:8-10; 7:28).”<sup>97</sup>

### **JESUS IS THE LAST ADAM.**

In the New Testament Jesus is depicted as the true Adam. For example, he is descended from Adam (Lu.3:23-38); his baptism identified him with Adam’s race (Lu.3:21-22) and he overcame temptation where Adam failed (Mk.1:12-13). So he is the last Adam.Rom.5:18-21; 1Cor.15:20-22, 45-49 Also he is the Son of Man (a term meaning human being and thus a member of Adam’s race. (There are numerous references in the Gospels to Jesus as “Son of Man”. It is certain that every one of them links him to Adam via the vision of *Daniel 7* where the figure is not only human but also heavenly.)

### **THERE ARE TWO SENSES IN WHICH JESUS IS GOD’S SON.**

The New Testament designates Jesus as “Son of God” or simply as “the Son”. He is the eternal divine Son and also the perfect, obedient human Son that Adam, Israel and the Davidic kings never proved to be – the one “who rights all the wrongs of all the previous sons of God who failed so miserably”.<sup>98</sup>

The key to understanding the meaning of the term in each case depends on the context. Although all of the Gospels teach the divinity of Jesus, the term in the Synoptic Gospels refers usually to his being the perfect obedient successor of the failed sons of the Old Testament. On the other hand, the term in the Gospel of John refers usually to his divinity.

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<sup>96</sup> Gentry and Wallum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 661-62

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 669

<sup>98</sup> Trevor J. Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, 105

## THE SON OF GOD IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

### Jesus' Baptism

At Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan, the voice from heaven declared, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"*. Matt. 3:17 These words of the Father in heaven are a fusion of two well-known Old Testament texts, Psalm 2:7, *"You are my son, today I have become your Father"* and Isaiah 42:1, *"Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight"*. Psalm 2 is a Davidic psalm. It links with other "son" passages where David or his heir was regarded as God's son. 2 Sam.7:13-14; Ps.89:26-29 These sons had all failed to please him, but now he is declaring his approval of this Son. Michael Green comments, "The kings had proved very disappointing sons ... and there was a profound expectation and hope in Israel that one day God would bring into the world a messianic Son, a ruler worthy to inherit David's throne ... The voice from heaven announced that the ultimate messianic ruler, the true Son, had come."<sup>99</sup>

Isaiah 42 refers to the Suffering Servant of the Lord, the Servant chosen by God to suffer abuse and opposition and eventually die for the nation. Isa.42:1 -53:12 Isaiah continues, *"I will put my Spirit on him"*. At Jesus' baptism and anointing, "God Almighty was bringing in his long-promised deliverer to usher in the kingdom. He was both messianic Son and suffering Servant. And the descent of the Spirit not only marked him out for this ministry, but equipped him for the task".<sup>100</sup>

### Jesus' Temptations

Jesus came up out of the waters of baptism to be led by the Spirit into the wilderness. This reminds us of Israel's emerging from the Red Sea to go into their wilderness. In every way Jesus was the true Son that Israel never proved to be. Gordon Fee comments, "Jesus (is) stepping into the role of Israel as God's Son, going through the waters, followed by forty days in the wilderness but succeeding precisely at the points where Israel failed when they were tested forty years in the wilderness".<sup>101</sup>

Between the account of Jesus' baptism and his temptations, Luke inserts Jesus' genealogy, pointing out that he is a descendant of Israel and in turn a descendant of Adam. Jesus, the second Adam, then faced the temptations where he succeeded in his role as Son of God whereas his predecessors had failed.

### Jesus' Miracles

In Matthew 8:29 and 14:33 Jesus is called "the Son of God", firstly by the Gadarene demons and later by the disciples after they see Jesus walking on the water. What these parties meant by this is not made clear. But Graeme Goldsworthy believes that they were not referring to him as being God the Son. Rather at this time they saw him only as the Messiah, the promised successor to King David. "These and other miracles of Jesus involve demonstrations of the dominion of the Son of God over creation and thus reflect the

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<sup>99</sup> Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 82

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 82

<sup>101</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study*, 542

dominion given originally to Adam, the original son of God. Matthew presents Jesus as the new Adam who is restoring the rule of mankind over the creation and over the powers of evil".<sup>102</sup> He further writes, "The miracles recorded in the Gospels are a foretaste of the transformation of the creation that the Son of David brings".<sup>103</sup> The fact that Matthew says that the disciples "worshipped" Jesus at this time may seem to contradict Goldsworthy's thesis. However the Greek word here for "worshipped" ("proskuneo") can also mean "to do reverence to" e.g. Matt.18:26 where in the N.I.V. it is translated as "begged".

Goldsworthy's argument would explain why, following the temptations, Jesus "was with the wild animals". Mk.1:13 It could be argued that, after triumphing over Satan, he was seen in harmony with nature, as were Adam and Eve prior to their failure in Eden. He was exercising dominion over the animals that had been God's mandate to Adam. Gen.1:28 Isaiah had predicted a return to Edenic peace (Isa.11:6-9) when the Messiah begins to reign. Vv.1-5,10-16

### **Peter's Confession Of Jesus's Messiahship**

In Matthew's account of Peter's confession, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matt.16:16), Peter links the term "Son of God" with the term, Messiah ("Christ"). Because of this link, it appears that Peter here is not declaring that Jesus is God, but only that he is the Messiah. The Jews of the first century A.D. were not expecting the Messiah to be an incarnation of God but to be a conquering son of David. They were not expecting him to be "a transcendent figure, existing in some supernatural mode before making his appearance in space and time".<sup>104</sup>

### **Jesus' Trial Before The High Priest**

Similarly the High Priest's charge at Jesus' trial, "*Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God*" (Matt.16:63), also links the term "Son of God" with Jesus' messiahship. The N.I.V. Study Bible comments that the term "Son of God" used by the High Priest "would not seem to refer to deity but to royal Messiahship, since in popular belief the Messiah was to be a man, not God".<sup>105</sup>

### **The Taunts At Jesus' Crucifixion**

Likewise the taunts of the onlookers at Calvary link the terms "Son of God" and "the King of Israel", indicating they are using the terms synonymously. Matt.27:40-43

## **THE "SON OF GOD" IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

In contrast to the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John portrays Jesus' Sonship as a close and intimate relationship with the Father. It thus indicates Jesus' deity.

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<sup>102</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Son of God and the New Creation*, 42

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 79

<sup>104</sup> N.T.Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 320

<sup>105</sup> N.I.V.Study Bible. 1527

John begins his Gospel by linking the creative “Word” with the Son. Jn.1:1-18 This Gospel teaches throughout that God sent his Son into the world (Jn.3:17; 10:36: 17:18), that he has come from the Father (Jn.3:3; 6:33-42), and he is about to return to the Father. Jn.13:13; 14:28; 16:28; 20:17 All of this implies that the divine sonship of Jesus is unique. He is Son of God in a sense not true of anyone else, even believers. He is the “only” (“monogenes”) Son. Jn.1:14, 18; 3:16

### **ADAM, THE FAILED SON OF GOD ; JESUS, THE SUCCESSFUL SON OF GOD**

God put mankind on the earth to subdue it and rule over it as God’s representatives. But man did not fulfil that purpose, for he instead fell into sin. The author of Hebrews teaches that God intended everything to be in subjection to man, but he admits, “*Yet at the present time we do not see everything subject to him*”. Heb.2:8 But God sent his Son, the second person of the Trinity. He came as a man, and became the second Adam, the perfect human Son of God to succeed at the end of the line of flawed sons. He fulfilled God’s original purpose in putting man on the earth. He succeeded where all others had failed. Now, as Hebrews declares, “*we see Jesus ... crowned with glory and honour*”. Heb.2:9 God has placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be the head over everything for the church”. Eph.1:22 As a result we shall someday reign with him on his throne (Rev.3:21), thus fulfilling God’s original purpose for us.

## **JESUS IS THE TRUE ISRAEL**

### **JESUS IS THE PROMISED SEED OF ABRAHAM.**

Jesus is also “the seed of Abraham”. On first reading it seems that Paul is using unfair tactics when he argues this point in Galatians 3:16. Here he refers back to such Scriptures as Genesis 12:7; 13:15 and 24:7. In Genesis 17:7 God speaks to Abram, “*I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your seed after you*”. Goldsworthy explains this, “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “*and to seeds*”, meaning many people, but “*and to your seed*”, meaning one person who is Christ. Paul’s background comes out of the whole Old Testament background in which the whole solidarity of the race with its head is to be discerned. Paul is establishing that the seed of Abraham, Israel, has its meaning only in Christ. He alone is the true Israel.”<sup>106</sup>

As the true Israel, Jesus embodies all that God intended for the nation. As such, he repeated in his own life story the experience of the old Israel. John W. Wenham writes, “... in his coming the history of Israel has reached its decisive point. The whole of the Old Testament is gathered up in Jesus. He himself embodies in his own person the status and destiny of Israel, and in the community of those who belong to him, that status and destiny are to be fulfilled , no longer in the nation as such.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, 111

<sup>107</sup> John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, 107

## **IN LEAVING EGYPT, AS A BOY, JESUS WAS RE-ENACTING ISRAEL'S HISTORY.**

When Jesus was very young, his family avoided the wrath of King Herod by escaping to Egypt where there was a large Jewish community at the time. Matt.2:13-18 Just as Jesus escaped destruction in Canaan, so the infant nation of Israel many years previously was forced to leave Canaan for Egypt to avoid destruction in the famine there. Gen.46

After Herod's death Jesus and his parents returned to Palestine. In his Gospel Matthew claims that this fulfilled Hosea 11:1 which states, "*Out of Egypt I called my son*". Matt.2:13-18 This verse in Hosea originally referred back to God's calling the nation of Israel (God's "son" Exod.4:22-23) out of Egypt in the eighth century B.C., in the time of Moses. Hosea was lamenting the fact that, although God had rescued Israel from Egyptian slavery in the infancy of the nation, the nation was now repaying him by refusing to follow his ways.

Matthew takes Hosea's statement about ancient Israel, God's "son", and applies it to Jesus, God's Son (in the fullest sense of the word). He does this deliberately to indicate to his readers that Jesus is the new Israel. Like the nation, Jesus was "called out of Egypt" and led back to the promised land.

The similarities between these circumstances in Jesus' life and the life of Israel are obvious. Pharaoh tried to destroy the infant nation, God's "son"; Herod tried to destroy the infant Jesus, God's Son. Both Pharaoh and Herod massacre infants, and both die, enabling the return of God's "son".

## **JESUS RE-ENACTED ISRAEL'S HISTORY IN THE DESERT.**

Jesus' 40-day desert trial appears to re-enact Israel's 40-year desert trial a millennium previously. This comparison is clear, not just from the number "40" and the location, but especially from the fact that the temptations he faced are very similar to those that had been faced by Israel. Also his answers to the devil are taken from Deuteronomy 6-8 which refers to Israel's experience in the desert. So Jesus was re-enacting Israel's past and, by succeeding where Israel had failed, was re-writing the future.

One of Israel's early temptations in the desert involved food. God had performed mighty signs and wonders to release them from their slavery in Egypt. But Israel complained about the amount of food and lack of meat. In response God sent them manna. Years later Moses reminded them of this, "*Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these 40 years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*" Deut.8:2-3

The closing words of that passage, "*...man does not live on bread alone ...*" are exactly the words Jesus quoted when he was tempted to turn stones into bread to satisfy his hunger. Jesus prevailed when Israel had failed.

Another sin Israel committed during the 40-day wanderings was presuming to put the Lord to the test. They were able to remember how God had delivered them from Egypt. But over and over again they demanded that God prove himself. The book of Deuteronomy records



this also. *“Do not test the Lord your God as you did at Marah”*. Deut.6:16 It was at Marah that they had demanded fresh signs from God. Exod.17:1-7 In a visionary experience, Jesus was urged to throw himself off the roof of the temple to test God’s faithfulness to him. In response Jesus quoted the very words of Moses. Again Jesus proved faithful where Israel had failed.

One of the worst sins Israel committed in the desert was their worship of pagan deities. *“Be careful that you do not forget the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name”*. Deut.6:12-13 The devil urged Jesus to worship him. Instead Jesus told him, *“Away from me, Satan”*. Then he quoted Moses again, *“Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”* Matt.4:10 Yet again, where Israel had failed, Jesus would prevail.

John Dickson comments on this, *“For Matthew’s first readers this was evocative stuff. Every Jew knew that Israel’s sins in the desert had been an ominous foreshadowing of the failures that had characterised the entire history of the nation. The desert sins were the beginning of the end for Israel’s national and religious life. By submitting himself to a 40-day desert trial in which he would withstand the very temptations that had ruined Israel, Jesus was enacting a very powerful message for his Jewish brothers and sisters. God’s people can enjoy a new beginning, a rewriting of the tragic story of Israel. The call to follow Jesus, then, which we hear for the first time just a few paragraphs later in the Gospels (Matt.4:18-22), is an invitation to break out of the previous story, with its cycle of sin and judgment, and enter into a new story – a new ‘exodus’ from slavery - and join a revived ‘Israel’, a new people of God.”*<sup>108</sup>

### **JESUS IS THE TRUE VINE.**

In the Old Testament Israel is often depicted as a vine. In Isaiah 5, for example, Israel is a vine that God has carefully tended and cared for so that it would produce much fruit. But unfortunately it produced only bad fruit. As a result it was cursed and destroyed. In contrast to such failure, Jesus claims, *“I am the true vine”*. i.e. the one to whom Israel pointed, the one that brings forth good fruit. Jn.15:1-8

## **THE CHURCH ALSO IS THE TRUE ISRAEL.**

### **ALL BELIEVERS ARE IN CHRIST.**

Jesus is the true Israel. So also is the Church because each member of the Church is *“in Christ”*. The Church is linked to him by faith. The phrase, *“in Christ”*, is frequently used by Paul (Rom.12:5; 1Cor.1:30; Col.1:28), especially in his epistle to the Ephesians. It is used eleven times in 1:1-14 alone. John Stott writes that this phrase indicates that we are *“united to him in a very close personal relationship. It is evident from this metaphor that to be and to abide ‘in him’ was to enjoy a living and growing relationship with him ... As a branch is united to the tree (Jn.15:4-5), as a limb is united to the body (1Cor.12:27; Rom.12:4-5), as husband and wife are united to one another (1Cor.6:17), as the Father and Son are united in*

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<sup>108</sup> John Dickson, *A Spectator’s Guide To Jesus*, 56-7

the Trinity (Jn.17:21, 23), so the Christian is united to Jesus Christ. The relationship which is thus depicted is something much more than a formal attachment or nodding acquaintance, something more even than a personal friendship; it is nothing less than a vital, organic, intimate union with Jesus Christ, involving a shared life and love.”<sup>109</sup> Because of the Church’s vital link with Christ, what Christ is, is also what the Church is. So the Church also is the true Israel. Bright agrees, “...the New Testament triumphantly hails the Church as Israel according to the spirit, the true heir of Israel’s hope”. <sup>110</sup> Robertson explains further, “It is not that the Church takes the place of Israel but that a renewed Israel of God is being formed by the shaping of the Church”. <sup>111</sup>

### **JEWISH BELIEVERS IN CHRIST FORM A NEW REMNANT WITHIN THE NATION.**

God had formed Israel, his servant, to be a light to the nations. But it had failed in its task miserably. They were walking in darkness themselves. That’s why they had been sent into exile. They are still in exile. Now Jesus appears. He is the final, supremely faithful Israelite, the true Servant of the Lord. He calls upon people to repent and believe in him. In this way their exile will come to an end. The people who respond to him constitute a faithful remnant within the nation. Linked to him by faith, they become the true Israel within it. This growing group of faithful Jews become the seeds of the Church. N.T.Wright comments, “From our earliest evidence, the Christians regarded themselves as a new family, directly descended from the family of Israel, but now transformed.”<sup>112</sup>

Jesus chooses twelve disciples to form the nucleus of this renewed Israel. Just as old Israel had twelve founding fathers, so has the new. The significance of the number twelve is clear from the speed with which another was elected to take Judas’ place. Acts 1:15-26 This symbolising of the new Israel must be preserved. A few years later, it is not decreed necessary to replace James after he was killed (Acts 12:2), because the symbolism has been established.

The first task of the Servant is to restore the tribes of Jacob. Isa.49:6 So Jesus begins his ministry within Israel exclusively. His ministry is to the “lost sheep of Israel”.Matt.10:6; 15:24 When the disciples are sent out, they are told not to go among the Gentiles or enter any towns of the Samaritans.

The true Israel is comprised of all who accept him. They form the beginning of the Remnant. But the nation as a whole rejects him. “*He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*” Jn.1:11 Jesus said, “*I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside ...*” Matt.8:12-13 He tells the unbelieving leaders of the nation, “*I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit*”. Matt.21:43 In the parable of the Great Banquet (Lu.14:15-24), Jesus warned the Jews, without specially mentioning them, that refusal to accept God’s invitation would result in their rejection and the inclusion of the

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<sup>109</sup> Stott, *Focus On Christ*, 52

<sup>110</sup> Bright, *The Kingdom Of God*, 226

<sup>111</sup> Robertson, *The Israel Of God*, 118

<sup>112</sup> N.T.Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*,447

Gentiles instead. cf. Lu.20:9-19 So the nation as a whole remains in exile. But the believing nucleus within it continues to grow in its allegiance to him.

Israel as a nation would no longer be able to claim that they possessed the kingdom of God in a way that was different from other nations. Yet the people of the new covenant would be designated as Israel, the Remnant, the true Israel, "*the Israel of God*".

#### **GENTILE BELIEVERS JOIN THE REMNANT AND BECOME PART OF THE TRUE ISRAEL.**

But the Servant's ministry is not just to Israel. The Servant is to be "*a light to the Gentiles*". Isa.42:6; 46:6 Jesus tells his newly gathered disciples, "You are the light of the world". Matt.5:14 In the Great Commission he summoned the new Israel to take on the humble and lowly ministry of the Servant and take up the Servant mission of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom to the world. As Abraham's seed they are to be a blessing to the nations. Then later from heaven, he pours out the Spirit upon his church so that at last they might fulfil their calling. Acts 2:1-4

So to the core of repentant Jews who give their allegiance to Jesus are to be gathered Gentile disciples, hailing from the east, west, north and south, who will take their places in the kingdom of God. Lu.13:29 In the past, during the time of the Old Testament, Gentile proselytes could be incorporated into the Israelite nation through circumcision. Gen.17:12; Exod.12:48-49 Now under the new covenant, Christian Gentiles are incorporated into the true Israel, but without circumcision. They don't first have to become Jews.

Bright notes that God's concern has always been the salvation of the world, "Through the Old Testament the reader senses that the focus has been continuously narrowed. It begins with the broad canvas of creation and tells of the dealings of God with the whole race of mankind (Gen.1-11); then narrows to the people of Israel whom God had called to be the special servants of his purpose; then still further to the search for a pure Remnant within Israel fit to be the vessels of the divine intention. At the centre of the Bible's drama, the focus has narrowed to one man: the Messiah, Christ. But from Christ the focus again turns outward – first to the new Israel which is his Church and then, through that Church, into the entire world. The Church is called to take up the destiny of the true Israel, Servant Israel, and become the missionary people of the Kingdom of God."<sup>113</sup>

#### **ACCORDING TO THE BOOK OF HEBREWS, ISRAEL'S NEW COVENANT RELATES TO THE CHURCH.**

It is true that according to Jeremiah 31:31-34, the new covenant relates to "*the house of Israel and the house of Judah*". But in the book of Hebrews that was written to the Church, the author quotes Jeremiah's account of the new covenant and applies it to the Church. Heb.8:6-13;10:16,29;12:24;13:20 So the author of Hebrews asserts that it is the true Israel of God in which the Old Testament promises to Israel find their fulfilment.

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<sup>113</sup> Bright, *The Kingdom Of God*, 233

## **JESUS TAUGHT THE CHURCH TO CELEBRATE ISRAEL'S NEW COVENANT.**

At the Church's communion service, we remember that the "cup" is the new covenant in Jesus's blood (Lu.22:20), and that his blood was "*poured out for many*". Matt.26:28; Mk.14:24 This is a clear allusion to the fourth Servant Song of Isaiah which states that the Lord's "*righteous servant will justify many*" (53:11) and will bear "*the sin of many*"(53:12). So, although the Old Testament teaches that the new covenant was made with "*the house of Israel and the house of Judah*"(Jer.31:31-34), Jesus has made the Church's communion service a new covenant tradition.

## **THE NEW ISRAEL AND THE OLD ISRAEL ARE BOTH REFERRED TO BY THE TERM "ASSEMBLY".**

The Greek word that was chosen to designate the Church in the New Testament is "ekklesia". It is translated as "church". The word was borrowed from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, which was completed by 180 B.C. It regularly used this Greek word "ekklesia" to translate the Hebrew word "qahal" which in the Old Testament referred most often to the "congregation" of Israel. Exod.12:6; Num.14:5; 20:6; Deut.5:22; 9:10; 10:4; Judg.20:2; Jer.26:17; 50:9 Gordon D. Fee writes, "This abundant use of Old Testament "people" language makes clear that Paul saw the Church not only as in continuity with the old covenant people of God, but as in the true succession of that people".<sup>114</sup>

## **GOD'S PEOPLE ARE NOW THE CHURCH : JEWS AND GENTILES IN CHRIST.**

Paul writes to Gentile believers in Ephesians telling them that they were formerly "*excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise.*" Eph.2:12 (Here he is probably referring to the foundation promise made by God to Abraham. *Gen.17:7, 9*) On the other hand, Israel had *been "near to God"*. Deut.4:7; Ps.148:14 But now believing Jews and Gentiles have been "*brought near through the blood of Christ*". Eph.2:13 Therefore Paul can say that Gentiles are "*fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.*" Eph.2:19-20

"*He (Christ) created in himself one new man out of the two*". Eph.2:15 We need to understand what Paul meant by the term "*one new man*". Klyne Snodgrass believes it is a corporate idea, "Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection identified with and represented humanity. People are incorporated into him and when he is raised to new life, a new being comes into existence, one in which people are one with Christ and one with each other in him."<sup>115</sup> Stott explains it as "a new human race united by Jesus Christ in himself".<sup>116</sup> This new man is a "new creation." 2Cor.5:17; Gal.6:5; Eph.2:10; 4:24 It is the Church, comprised of believing Gentiles and believing Jews, linked to each other and to Christ. This means that the nation of Israel is no longer part of God's plan. His focus is now on the Church which was originally comprised of the Remnant within Israel which gave their allegiance to Christ at his

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<sup>114</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit and the People of God*, 65

<sup>115</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary Ephesians*, 134

<sup>116</sup> Stott, *God's New Society*, 101

coming, but whose numbers have since swelled by the conversion of believing Jews and Gentiles. This means therefore that there is no future for either Jew or Gentile apart from it.

### **THE JEWISH THEOCRACY IS REPLACED BY THE CHURCH.**

Ephesians 3:4-6 refers to a “mystery” - *“the mystery of Christ which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets”*. This “mystery of Christ” is the complete union of Jews and Gentiles with each other through the union of both with Christ. Stott explains, “It was a new revelation. For it was *“not made known ... in other generations”*(v.5) but was *“hidden for ages”*(v.9). These statements have puzzled Bible readers because the Old Testament did reveal that God had a purpose for Gentiles. It promised, for example, that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham’s descendants; that the Messiah would receive the nations as his inheritance; that Israel would be given as a light to the nations; and that one day the nations would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and even “flow to it” like a mighty river. Gen.12:1-3; Ps.2:8; Isa.42:6; 49:6;2: 2-4 But what the Old Testament didn’t reveal was the radical nature of God’s plan, which was that the theocracy (the Jewish nation under God’s rule) would be terminated, and be replaced by a new international community, the church; that this church would be “the body of Christ”, organically linked to him; and that Jews and Gentiles would be incorporated into Christ and his church on equal terms without any distinction. It was this complete union of Jews, Gentiles and Christ which was radically new and which God revealed to Paul.”<sup>117</sup>

### **JEWISH AND GENTILE BRANCHES ARE GRAFTED INTO ONE TREE.**

In Romans 11:17-24 Paul uses a parable of the olive tree. Actually in this parable, he refers to two olive trees – a cultivated olive and a wild olive. The cultivated olive is Israel. The wild olive is the Gentile world. Some of the branches of the cultivated olive were broken off. They represented the Jews who refused to believe in Jesus as their Messiah. This left the believing Remnant within Israel. In place of the broken-off branches, a branch from the wild olive was grafted in. This represented Gentiles who have placed their faith in him. The new life that enabled them to produce fruit for God was the life of the old stock of Israel on which they had been grafted. Then Paul says, *“...Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written : ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.’ ”* Rom.11:25-26 In other words, there will be little response to the gospel on the part of the Jews while the Gentiles are being brought into the kingdom. At present Israel is hardened except for a believing remnant. cf. Isa.10:21-22; 37:30-32; Rom.11:1-10 But there is a time coming when *“all Israel”* will be saved. This probably doesn’t mean every Jew without a single exception, but “Israel” as a whole. The words, *“The deliverer will come from Zion”* may well refer to the Second Coming of Christ. So the salvation of ethnic Israel may take place at that time. However two things are clear. Israel must be saved in the same way as Gentiles – by turning in faith to Jesus as their Messiah. Rom.11:23 Also the blessings which Israel will experience are blessings *“in Christ”* – the same blessings which the Church is experiencing. This means that in the future, they will not constitute a separate people of

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 118

God or be like a separate olive tree, but they will be *“grafted back into their own olive tree”*.  
Rom.11:24

### **THERE IS ONLY ONE PEOPLE OF GOD.**

In God’s eyes there is only one people of God. There is now no separate people of God called Israel. His people, *“the Holy City, the new Jerusalem”*, (Rev.21:1-2) is in heaven, waiting to descend to earth at the end of time. It is described as a cube. There are twelve gates, and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are upon the gates. In addition, there are twelve foundations, and the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are on them. Thus the Israel of the Old Testament and the apostolic community of the New Testament are completely and fully integrated in the new Jerusalem. This is the same as Paul’s picture in Ephesians of Jew and non-Jew, forged into one new humanity. Note the Covenant Formula in Revelation 21:3, *“They will be his people, and God himself will be with them, and be their God.”*

### **THE CHURCH IS THE ISRAEL OF GOD**

*“Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.”* Gal.6:16 Here Paul is describing the Church as *“the Israel of God”*. Stott comments, *“The Christian Church enjoys a direct continuity with God’s people in the Old Testament.”*<sup>118</sup>

### **CHRISTIANS ARE THE TRUE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM.**

Israel is not Israel just because it boasts that it is Abraham’s seed (Rom.9:6-8), nor is a man a Jew just because he has been circumcised. He is a Jew who in his inmost heart has surrendered himself to God. Rom.2:28-29 All who are Christ’s are Abraham’s seed and heirs of the promise. Gal.3:29

### **THE CHURCH IS “MARRIED” TO GOD, AS WAS ISRAEL.**

As Israel was the *“wife”* of God (Hos.1-3; Jer.3:1-5; Isa.54:4-7), so the Church is the *“bride”* of Christ. Eph.5:22-33; Rev.21:2, 9-11 So it must be the continuation of Israel.

### **OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES REGARDING ISRAEL ARE APPLIED TO THE CHURCH.**

In Romans Paul quotes two passages from Hosea which in their Old Testament context refer to Israel and applies them to the Church which consists largely of Gentiles. He does this to indicate that the Old Testament foresaw the Gentile church.

*“As he (God) says in Hosea, ‘I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people; and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one’*

And

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<sup>118</sup> Stott, *The Message Of Galatians*, 180

'It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people', they will be called 'sons of the living God' ". Rom.9:25-26

Back in the eighth century B.C., Hosea had been commanded by the Lord to take a wife who was a harlot to symbolise Israel's spiritual harlotry. His second child was a girl and Hosea was told, "*Call her Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel that I should at all forgive them*". Hos.1:6 The Hebrew words, "Lo Ruhamah" mean "Not loved".

Later Hosea had another son. "*Then the Lord said, 'Call him Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God'*". Hos.1:9 So Hosea's children were given names that symbolised God's judgment on the unfaithful northern kingdom of Israel.

However the rejection of Israel was not final. God intended later after their forgiveness to restore them as his people again. He said, "*I will betroth you to me forever*". So he continued, "*... In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people', they will be called 'sons of the living God'*" (Hos.1:10), and later, "*I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one'. I will say to those called 'Not my people', 'You are my people' and they will say, 'You are my God'*". Hos.2:23 So God reversed the situation of rejection implicit in the children's names.

Later in the New Testament in his letter to the Roman church, Paul does an amazing thing. He takes these two verses in Hosea which in their Old Testament context referred to literal Israel and applied them to the Gentile Church. In other words, "This promise is applied ... by Paul to the calling of the Gentiles, not however, because Hosea was thinking of that, but because the underlying principle was the same, and because the Gentiles had been organically incorporated into the covenant of Israel".<sup>119</sup>

### **THE CHURCH HAS INHERITED ISRAEL'S BLESSINGS.**

In 1 Peter 2:4-10 Peter says that God has bestowed on the Church almost all of the blessings promised to Israel in the Old Testament. Wayne Grudem writes, "The dwelling place of God is no longer the Jerusalem temple, for Christians are the new '*temple*' of God (v.5). The priesthood able to offer acceptable sacrifices to God is no longer descended from Aaron, for Christians are now the true '*royal priesthood*' with access before God's throne (vv.4-5, 9). God's '*chosen*' people are no longer said to be physically descended from Abraham (Isa.43:10,20; 44:1-2), for Christians are now the true '*chosen race*'.(v.9) The nation blessed by God is no longer said to be the nation of Israel, for Christians are now God's true '*holy nation*'. (v.9) The people of Israel are no longer said to be the people of God, for Christians – both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians – are now '*God's people*' and those who have '*received mercy*'. (v.10) ... What further statement could be needed in order for us to say with assurance that the church has now become the true Israel of God and will receive all the blessings promised to Israel in the Old Testament?"<sup>120</sup>

### **THE PREDOMINANTLY GENTILE CHURCH IN CORINTH IS PORTRAYED AS BEING IN A DIRECT LINE WITH ISRAEL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.**

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<sup>119</sup> Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 294

<sup>120</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 863

In his letter to Corinth, Paul writes, “... all **our** forefathers were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea”. (emphasis mine) I Cor.10:1-2 Paul believed that the nation of Israel that Moses led through the Red Sea was the forefathers of the New Testament Church.

## **APPENDIX A: THE THEOLOGY OF ZION**

The term “Zion” is found throughout the Bible, but occurs mainly in the Psalms and in Isaiah. Because Solomon’s temple was built in Zion (Jerusalem), the term came to signify God’s desire to live with his people and to have fellowship with them.

### **THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF THE TERM “ ZION”.**

The term “Zion” originally referred to the south-eastern hill of Jerusalem in which the Jebusite fortress was located and then captured by David. 2Sam.6:1-10 David brought the ark to Zion and the hill thenceforth became sacred. 2Sam.6:10-12 When Solomon moved the ark to the newly built temple on Mount Moriah, the name Zion was extended to take in the temple precincts. Isa.1:8; 2:3; 18:7; 24:23; Joel3:17; Mic.4:7 Eventually the name came to be a synonym for Jerusalem itself. 2Kin.19:21; Ps.48; 69:35; 133:3; Isa.1:8; Matt.21:5

### **JERUSALEM (ZION) WAS THE SEAT OF GOD’S RULE ON EARTH.**

David captured the Jebusite-held city of Jerusalem and made it his capital. A thousand years previously Abraham had met Melchizedek, king of Salem (Jerusalem) and priest of God Most High (Gen14:18 ) and had offered him tribute. It seems that David saw himself as successor to Melchizedek at Jerusalem, both as king (Ps.110:1-2) and as priest of the same non-Aaronic order. (verse 4)

At the beginning of his reign, David brought the ark to his capital, Jerusalem, not only the centre of his rule, but also the centre of the worship of the Lord. Previously God had met his people at Gilgal (Josh.4:19 cf.10:15, 43), Shiloh (Josh.18:1 cf.Judg.21:19; 1Sam.1:30) and Nob (1Sam.21:1 cf.22:19)

Later Solomon built the temple at Jerusalem. At its inauguration, the glory of the Lord filled it. 2Chron.5:13-14 In this way he was indicating that he was pleased to dwell there and that he had chosen it as the place of sacrifice (7:12), and a place where his Name would abide forever (7:16). The temple was his “palace” where he was enthroned above the Mercy- seat of the ark. 1Sam.4:4; 2Sam.6:2; Ps.80:1; 99:1 So Jerusalem became God’s “*holy mountain*” (Ps.43:3; 46:4), “*the holy city*” (Isa.48:2; 52:1; Neh.11:1-18; Matt.4:5; 27:53), “*the city of God*” (Ps.46:4; 48:1, 8; 87:3; Heb.12:22; Rev.3:12) and “*the city of the great King*” (Ps.48:2; Matt.5:35). According to Psalm 2:6, where God says, “*I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill*”, Jerusalem was the city from which he ruled through his “son” (the Davidic king).



Thereafter people believed they should be able to pray toward it and expect an answer from God. His true temple is in heaven. So they believed it was from there that he would hear prayer directed toward the temple on earth. 1Ki.8:30 Even after the temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., Daniel prayed three times a day with his windows opened toward Jerusalem. Dan.6:10

### **MANY NATIONS MADE PILGRIMAGES TO SOLOMON IN JERUSALEM TO HEAR HIS WISDOM.**

God gave Solomon great wisdom to enable him to rule his kingdom wisely. 1Ki.4:29-33 *“Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom ...”* Verse 34 The Bible gives details of one particular visitor: the queen of Sheba, the ruler of one of the greatest trading empires of all time, the vast Sabean kingdom of the Arabian peninsula. 1Ki.10:1-10 She was overcome by what she saw and heard, saying, *“Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the Lord’s eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness”*. Verse 9

### **IN THE END-TIME GOD’S LAW (“TORAH”) WILL BE DISSEMINATED FROM ZION.**

What a shock it must have been for the citizens of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. to see the heathen army of Babylon destroy it and the temple! But Isaiah assured the exiles that Jerusalem (Zion) would again be a *“holy mountain”* open to God’s people. Chapter 35 A remnant would repent and return to God in Zion. *“They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads”*. Verse 10 But the way would be open only for those who had repented of their sin. Only those who had been made holy would be able to make the journey there (verse 8) – all who had been healed of blindness and deafness. (verse 5) This would be at the end of time, the time of the new creation when the land has returned to its original fertility and the wildness of animals tamed. (verse 9)

Jewish and Gentile pilgrims throughout the world will come to Zion to worship God. (Isaiah 2) There they will learn of his ways, justice will be established and his law (“torah”, instruction) will run throughout the earth. Dumbrell describes this chapter in Isaiah, “The Jerusalem temple, the earthly palace of Israel’s God, is pictured in Isaiah 2:2 as a world mountain, the point of contact between heaven and earth. Thus the verse subordinates geographical reality to biblical eschatology, for the hillock of Mount Zion is elevated in theological thought to the highest of the world’s mountains, the central point of the world. ... In the last days, Zion will exhibit an overwhelming, even inexplicable drawing power, a pull that defies gravity. *“And all nations will flow to it”*. (v.2 N.K.J.V.)”<sup>121</sup> Gentry and Wallum explain the significance of this mountain, “The Mountain Temple City calls to mind other mountains in the past. First of all, the garden of Eden was on a high mountain. How else could one river divide into four and water the earth? ... Second, Mount Zion as the source of the Torah reminds us of Sinai, called the *“mountain of God”* (Exod.31), the place from which he issues the Ten Words or Commands, his instructions to rule and regulate the daily

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<sup>121</sup> Dumbrell, *The Search For Order*, 83-4

lives of his people. In Isaiah 2 we see that it is no longer from Sinai that Yahweh gives his word, but from Zion.”<sup>122</sup>

In Ezekiel 47 we see the temple as the source of all life. From God’s dwelling flows the river of life which supernaturally increases as it goes. It turns the desolate Arabah region - the valley of the Dead Sea – into a new garden of Eden. cf. Isa.33:21; Ps.46:4

### **ZION IS OUR PRESENT HOME IN HEAVEN.**

As the earthly Zion had been God’s meeting point for the tribes of old Israel in the Old Testament, so the heavenly Zion is our meeting point for the new Israel (the Church). Rev.14:1 In the New Testament it is referred to as “*the Jerusalem that is above*” (Gal.4:26), “*the holy city, Jerusalem*”(Heb.12:22). It is where the souls of deceased believers are now fellowshiping with God in heaven, awaiting the resurrection at the Second Coming. Hebrews 12:22 indicates that a person comes to Zion by being converted to Christ. Zion is where Jesus reigns now at the right hand of God and this is where we come by faith in the gospel. So it is to Zion that the returning remnant come.

Today every time Christians assemble for worship anywhere on earth, they join with the host of “*heavenly Jerusalem*”.

### **WHAT IS THE END-TIME ZION?**

*“Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth.*

*The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind,*

*But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create,*

*For I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.” Isa.65:17-18*

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,*

*For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,*

*And there was no longer any sea.*

*I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,*

*Prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,*

*‘Now the dwelling of God is with men,*

*And he will live with them.*

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<sup>122</sup> Gentry and Wallum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 469

*They will be his people,*

*And God himself will be with them and be their God.” Rev.21:1-3*

Scholars are not agreed on this topic, whether the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21 should be taken as an actual city or as a symbol of the Church in its perfected and eternal state, living eternally with God on the new earth. The vision itself takes the form of a magnificent city descending from heaven.

Many scholars believe it is God’s people living throughout the renewed earth, in total harmony with God. This will perfectly fulfil what the Old Testament covenants were meant to convey, “*He is our God and we are his people*”. Each of the covenants has this long-term purpose in mind, the Abrahamic covenant (Gen.17:7), the Israelite covenant (Exod.6:6-7; 19:4-5; Lev.11:4-5; Deut.4:20; 29:13), the Davidic covenant (2Ki11:17; 2Chron.23:16; Ezek.34:24), and the New Covenant (Jer.24:7; 31:33; 32:37-38; Zech.2:11; 8:8; 2Cor.6:16; Heb.8:10; Rev.21:30). So as John sees the New Jerusalem descend, the voice declares, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”Rev.21:3

Referring to this verse, Goldsworthy writes, “This one verse could be said to sum up and to contain the entire message of the Bible. The whole of the history of the covenant and of redemption lies behind this glorious affirmation. Every aspect of the hope of Israel – covenant redemption, promised land, temple, Zion, Davidic prince, new Eden – is woven into this one simple and yet profound statement: “the dwelling of God is with men”. In an indirect way John used the marriage theme to express this relationship. Jerusalem, not a city of bricks and mortar, but a city of people redeemed by the blood of Christ”.<sup>123</sup>

In Revelation 21:1-2 John links the notion of the “*new heavens and the new earth*” with the “*new Jerusalem*”. In Isaiah 65:17-18, Isaiah does the same thing T.Desmond Alexander comments, “Significantly, in Isaiah 65:17-18 the creation of the “new heavens and the new earth” parallels the creation of Jerusalem (cf.Isa.24:23). The repeated use of the Hebrew verb “bara”, “to create”, suggests that Jerusalem is deliberately equated here with the new heavens and the new earth. They are one and the same.”<sup>124</sup> Gentry and Wallum agree with Alexander, “As we saw in the Davidic covenant, the land as defined in the covenant with Abram in Genesis 15:18-21 and described in Deuteronomy 11:24-25 as Israel’s place becomes Israel’s possession in the time of Solomon (1Kings 4:24-25). Yet the Israelite covenant curses brought the loss of land; first the area of Galilee, then the northern kingdom, then Judah, and last, Jerusalem itself. Yet in the treatment of the new covenant, Isaiah announces that the people of the new Zion will be far more numerous than those of the old (barren woman, Isa.54:1-3) because the nations will be drawn to the new Zion. Implicit in this is the fact that more land will be required than just the real estate entailed in historical Israel. How can the new Zion find enough space in the new Jerusalem/Israel ? Isaiah 65 solves the puzzle: new Jerusalem and the new creation will be co-extensive. As Paul says, Abram believed he would inherit the world. Rom.4:13”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Gospel In Revelation*, 145

<sup>124</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden To The New Jerusalem: An Introduction To Biblical Theology*, 89-90

<sup>125</sup> Gentry and Wallum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 467-68

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