

THE PROMISE OF JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT (2)

The aim of this session is to provide a chronological overview to the Bible story from the call of Abraham (Genesis 12) to the establishment of the nation of Israel (Judges 21).

Summary of 'The Promise' (1):

- Storyline of the Bible unfolds along the lines of God's covenant with his people e.g. Adam (Hos. 6:7; Ge. 1:26-30, 2:15-17), Noah (Ge. 8:22ff.)
- **A covenant is a promise of relationship that God makes with man** - 'I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'
- Through a covenant, God tells people how he wants them to act and makes promises to how he will act toward them e.g. mutual obligations.
- Genesis 1 and 2 shows the pattern of God's relationship with mankind.
- Man has the obligation to obey God and serve as his covenant mediator with creation. He would be blessed with God's presence and eternal life if he obeyed; death and separation from God if he disobeyed.
- Genesis 3 shows that pattern broken by sin. Sin is not just about breaking God's law but making our own laws independently from God e.g. tree of knowledge of good and evil.
- Mankind's relationship with God, with one another and with creation is disrupted because of sin (Ge. 3:14-19; cf. Ro. 5:12, 8:22; Eph. 2:3).
- Sin spreads and affects all mankind i.e. death (Ge. 4 - 11)
- God sends a flood (Ge. 6:9ff.) as act of judgment and grace - to punish sin and to preserve a godly line to fulfil his promise of renewal.
- God promises hope even in the midst of judgment i.e. death. God promised a seed (Ge. 3:15), hinted that death is not our only final destiny (Ge. 5:24 - Enoch, cf. Heb. 11:5), and renewed his covenant with creation through Noah (Ge. 8:20ff.). God's purposes will not be thwarted despite man's sin.
- Sin persists. God scatters mankind across the face of the earth (Ge. 11).

What will God do next to save mankind and all creation from sin?

How can God work in history to achieve a worldwide result of salvation?

How can God make himself known to a humanity that is now divided, scattered and rebellious against him?

FROM NOMADS TO THE NATION OF ISRAEL (Abraham to Moses)

God makes a covenant with one man (Abraham)

- God narrows his covenant promise to Abraham (cf. Gal. 3:16-29).
- By grace, God promises Abraham a land, a people and a blessing (Ge. 12:2-3, cf. Luke 1:72-73).
- By choosing Abraham, God shows he is not turning his back on the world. Through Abraham, God will build a nation to represent him in the world.
- The outward sign of this covenant is circumcision (Ge. 17:1-14, cf. Deut. 10:16, 30:6). (This marks them out as a covenant people.)
- What was required of Abraham in this covenantal promise is faith (cf. Ro. 4:3, Gal. 3:6, Heb. 11:8-12; Jas. 2:23-24; Eph. 2:8-9).

The patriarch's response to God's covenant (Genesis 12 to Genesis 50)

- The story of the patriarchs (e.g. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) shows how God's covenant promise faces constant threats to its fulfilment e.g. famines, barrenness of their wives, lack of trust in God, family disputes etc.
- The patriarchs remembered God's promise but forgot their mission i.e. to maintain their uniqueness as God's covenant people in order to bless to the nations.
- Abraham's seed multiplied into a nation but were enslaved in Egypt (cf. Ex. 1:1-14). God's promise of seed, land, and blessing was only partially fulfilled.

What will God do next to save mankind and all creation from sin?

How can God work in history to achieve a worldwide result of salvation when the patriarch's failed their mission?

How will God fulfil his promise to Abraham – seed, land, blessing – when Israel are enslaved in a land not their own?

God makes a covenant with one nation (Moses and Israel)

- By grace, God remembers his covenant promise to Abraham (Ex. 2:23-25). God confirms and expands this covenant to include a nation (cf. Ex. 6:6-8).
- God reveals himself as 'Yahweh' or the LORD, a God who is faithful to his covenant promises (Exodus 3:13-15).

- The Exodus experience reveals the general pattern of God's plan of restoring mankind and the world to a right relationship with him e.g. deliverance, community, relationship, blessing (cf. Ex. 6:6-8).
- God's act of judgment and deliverance taught Israel an important principle i.e. God saves by substitution (Ex. 12:1-28, cf. John 1:29, 1Co. 5:7).
- God gives Israel the Law (cf. Ex. 19-24). The Law is a function of the covenant. The Law does not create a relationship (cf. Ex. 19:4-5, 20:1-2) but shows how the people are to relate to God, to one another and to the world as God's covenant people.
- Obedience to the Law maintains the covenant relationship (cf. Ex. 19:3-6). Blessings will follow obedience. Curses will result from disobedience (cf. Deut. 28).
- Obedience to the Law serves a missionary purpose. Israel, as a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation,' is to be a model of what life under the rule of God is like and in turn attract other nations to the glory of her LORD (cf. Ex. 19:6; Isa. 49:6).
- Israel is more than just a vassal state. God is not only king, he is also a father to his people (cf. Ex. 4:22, Deut. 8:5, 26:18). The prophets use the image of marriage to emphasise the closeness of the covenant relationship (e.g. Hos. 1-3, Jer. 2-3, Eze. 16, Isa. 54).

EXERCISE

1. *Read Genesis 12:1-3. What is the purpose of this covenant? How is this purpose related to God's covenant through Adam?
2. 'The greatest threat to the covenant of God is the people of God.' Discuss this statement in light of Abraham's (Ge. 12:10-16, 16:1-2, 20:1-2) and Isaac's actions (Ge. 26:6-11). What did God promise? How did they respond? What lessons can we learn from this today?
3. Read Galatians 3:15-29. Summarise in your own words what Paul meant in this passage. Who is the promised seed? What is the place of the Law? How is this relevant to us today?
4. *Read Exodus 6:6-8. What did God do or promise he will do? How does this covenant mediated through Moses expand and confirm his earlier covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3?
5. *Read Exodus 12:1-13. What is the Passover? What important principle do we learn from this event? How is this related to Jesus i.e. 'Lamb of God' (John 1:29, cf. Rev. 5:6-7) who also died at a Passover (John 13:1; cf. Luke 22:1)?
6. Read Mark 14:12, 22-25 and Matthew 26:17, 26-29. What is the significance of the Lord's Supper, Jesus' final meal at the Passover festival? What did Jesus mean when he said, 'this is my blood of the covenant'?

* Do these questions first.

The nation's response to God's covenant (Joshua to Ruth)

- Through unbelief and rebellion, the nation of Israel failed to obey the Law. As a result, most died in the wilderness under God's judgment (cf. Num.).
- The Joshua narrative traces the partial fulfilment of God's promise of a land.
- God didn't let Joshua finish the job because he wanted the God's covenant people i.e. Israel, to learn an important lesson of faith (Judg. 2:20-22).

Will the nation be faithful to God in obeying the Law and enjoy the full blessing of a land?

- The Judges narrative shows the nation's failure to keep their end of the covenant.
- A pattern of backsliding, repentance, deliverance, and backsliding (cf. Judg. 2:10-19) repeats itself and worsens over time resulting in idolatry and civil war (cf. Judg. 17-21).

Like the divided and rebellious humanity at Babel, the Book of Judges ends with a crisis – God's own covenant people are divided against one another and worshipped other gods.

How can God's covenant promise be fulfilled if his own covenant people disobey?

FIND OUT NEXT WEEK!