

THE PROMISE OF JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT (3)

The aim of this session is to provide a chronological overview to the Bible story from the united kingdom of Israel under King David to the Babylonian exile and subsequent restoration of a remnant to the Promised Land.

Summary of 'The Promise' (2)

God's covenant with the nation through Moses is partially fulfilled. Some parts of the land still remain unconquered. But sinful Israel slips into idolatry and civil war in the Judges period. How then can God fulfil his covenant promises if his covenant people are divided and fail to keep their covenant obligations?

FROM THE NATION OF ISRAEL TO EXILE

God makes a covenant with his chosen king (David)

- The Ruth narrative shows God's continual grace on his people despite their disobedience. God initiates a plan for his chosen king to unite the people and fulfil his covenant promise (cf. Judg. 21:25; Ruth 4:18-21).
- The people come up with their own plan viz. living with constant military threats. Israel asks for a human king (1 Sam. 8-12), rejecting God as their King (Ex. 15:18). How does God respond?
- By grace, God takes up Israel's demand into his sovereign purposes. God makes a covenant with David (cf. 2 Sam. 7; Ps. 89:3-4, 132:11-12).

Comment:

During the period of Judges, the nation of Israel was a loose confederation of 12 tribes. It had no central government or capital city or an imperial court like the surrounding nations.

During times of crisis, God anointed a person with his Spirit to be a judge with the specific purpose of pushing back the enemy. So it was a military rather than judicial function. So when the tribes ask God for a king, this was a sinful request. This means they want to be like the other nations and have rejected God as their King (cf. 1 Sam. 8:7).

This request clearly dishonours God. Samuel warns the people that this will be a mixed blessing. They stand to lose more than what they might gain (cf. 1 Sam. 8:10-18).

Although kings in Israel came from questionable motives, God in his mercy wove it into the very heart of his own divine redemption/restoration plan. More than that, he was already a step ahead of them. He had set into motion his own plan for his chosen king to unite his people and display his glory to the nations (e.g. Judg. 21:25; Ruth 4:18-21).

God will not surrender his right to rule his covenant people. Israel's king will not be an absolute monarch like the surrounding nations (cf. Deut. 17:18-20). Israel's king will not stand above the covenant. Like other men, he will serve a covenant calling (cf. 1 Sam. 12:14-15).

Although the word 'covenant' does not appear in 2 Sam. 7, Scripture confirms that David clearly regards God's promise to him as a covenant (e.g. Ps. 89:3-4, 132:11-12).

The kings' response to God's covenant (1 Kings – 2 Kings)

- Israel's kings are now God's covenant mediators i.e. the king, as the national head, represents the people. So his obedience or disobedience will have enormous consequences to the life of God's chosen people.
- David's kingdom marks a partial fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham. Israel has a secure presence in the world and experienced in part God's blessings of peace, prosperity and presence through his chosen king (cf. 2Ki. 4:20-21).
- After Solomon's death, civil war breaks out and the kingdom splits into two - 10 tribes in the North i.e. 'Israel' with Samaria as capital city, 2 tribes in the South i.e. 'Judah' with Jerusalem as capital city.
- While some of Judah's kings were faithful (cf. 1Ki. 15:11; 20:31), the vast majority of kings after David disobeyed God and 'did evil in the eyes of the LORD' (e.g. 1Ki. 15:3, 26, 34; 16:25, 30).
- Israel and Judah fall into idolatry and face serious military threats from the surrounding nations. The kings failed to rule on God's behalf and reflect his glory.

What will God do next to fulfil his promises to Abraham and David? How can God rule through a chosen king, if his kings fail to keep the covenant?

Comment:

The kings of Israel serve as God's instrument to secure a land for his people and give them peace. Prior to David, God himself took on this role (e.g. Exodus).

The kings now also serve as God's covenant mediators. His obedience or disobedience will therefore have enormous consequences to the nation. He is a barometer of national covenant life. So it is no surprise that the author of the Book of Kings has a particular interest in whether a king did 'what was right in the eyes of the LORD.'

Solomon succeeds David and rules over a period of unprecedented peace and prosperity. This is the kingdom of Israel at its peak. It looks as if God's threefold promise of people (Gen. 32:12), land (Ex. 23:31) and blessing has been completely fulfilled (cf. 2Ki. 4:20-21).

But this golden age has a dark side. Forced labour (1Ki. 9:15, 21), high taxation (2Chr. 10:4), conscription and property confiscation was also a feature of his reign. Worst, so was idolatry (1Ki. 11:4-10). Samuel's stern warning to the elders of Israel when they asked for a king (cf. 1Sa. 8:10-18) has now come true.

But for David's sake, God delayed his judgment on the kingdom of Israel. After Solomon's death, civil war broke out and the kingdom of Israel united for the last 120 years splits into two i.e. 10 tribes become North Kingdom of Israel with

Samaria as capital, remaining 2 tribes become South Kingdom of Judah with Jerusalem as capital.

God sends his prophets to enforce his covenant

- As the monarchy falls into increasing apostasy, God speaks his word of warning and judgment to the kings through his prophets.
- The prophets are God's 'covenant enforcers' i.e. through the prophets God reminds the people about their covenant obligations and the consequences that follow obedience or disobedience.

Table 1: Prophets of the Old Testament

	To North Kingdom (Israel)	To South Kingdom (Judah)	To other Nations	To Post-exile community
Pre-Exile	Amos Hosea	Isaiah Micah Joel Zephaniah Habakkuk Jeremiah	Obadiah Jonah Nahum	
Exile		Ezekiel Daniel		
Post Exile				Haggai Zechariah Malachi

- The messages of the pre-exilic prophets (Amos, Hosea to Israel; Isaiah, Micah, Joel, Zephaniah, Jeremiah to Judah) are full of warnings for the people to change their ways before it is too late (cf. Lev. 26:14-39; Deut. 4:15-28, 28:15-32).
- At the same time, the prophets also anticipate the coming of an ideal King who will fulfil the Davidic promise (cf. Isa. 9:2-7, 11:1-9; Jer. 23:1-8; Ezek. 34:1-31).
- The people don't take the warnings seriously. Assyria destroys the Northern kingdom in 722 BC. The Northern kingdom never recovers. Babylon crushed the Southern kingdom in 597 BC and 586 BC and the people of Judah go into exile.
- Despite widespread rebellion from his chosen people, God by his grace promises to preserve a 'remnant' of believers who will be the object of his special love. This remnant is the true Israel of God (cf. Isa. 10:20-22; 28:5; 37:31-32; Mic. 5:7-8; 7:18; Zeph. 3:12-13; Zech. 8:11-12).

What will God do next to fulfil his covenant promises? How can God rule through his chosen king, if the people are exiled and nation destroyed?

Comment:

As covenant enforcers, the prophets draw heavily on the lists of blessings and curses in the Mosaic Law (cf. Deut. 27-28). The covenant is positively enforced through its blessings, and negatively enforced through its curses (e.g. Lev. 26:14-39; Deut. 4:15-28, 28:15-32).

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Habakkuk and Zephaniah are described as 'pre-exilic' prophets because their ministries pre-date the destruction of Jerusalem and exile of 586 B.C. Although there is great degree of diversity in many details, several themes are common to all the pre-exilic prophets.

Their messages can often be boiled down to three basic points: (1) You have sinned by breaking the Mosaic covenant. Repent! (2) If you don't repent, you will face God's judgment i.e. exile; (3) But there is hope beyond God's judgment of a glorious future restoration.

But the state of decline continued despite the prophets' warnings. By around 722/721 B.C. the North Kingdom fell and the bulk of the population were deported and scattered throughout the Assyrian empire.

As part of the Assyrian strategy to dominate the region, foreigners from other parts were brought into Israel. This led to a mixed raced people known (and despised in New Testament times) as the 'Samaritans.' The northern kingdom ceased to exist altogether and the people never returned.

The destiny of the southern kingdom was only marginally better. They had a more stable start vis-à-vis their northern neighbours. The South Kingdom began with a few good kings (e.g. 1Ki. 15:11; 22:43), but this succession of godly kings didn't last. The social and economic evils found in the North soon became commonplace in the South.

Late in the 7th century, the Assyrian empire collapsed and was replaced by another superpower, Babylon under the leadership of **Nebuchadnezzar**. Irritated by a succession of kings after Josiah who sought to rebel against Babylonian rule, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem in 588 BC and finally captured it in 587 BC.

The unthinkable had finally happened. All of Jerusalem was in rubble and the bulk of the population, including Jehoiachin – the last king of Judah, were deported to Babylon. The long-predicted exile had begun.

God promises a new covenant

- Judah's exile experience in Babylon is similar to Israel's earlier slavery experience in Egypt. God initiates his plan for a new exodus (cf. Jer. 16:14-15) and a new covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34).
- What is new about this new covenant is not the covenant partner but the quality of the covenant relationship between God and his chosen people.
- Instead of God's laws written onto tablets of stone (e.g. 10 Commandments), God's law will be written 'on their hearts.' The problem of sin will be dealt with and God's presence will be with his people in a special way (cf. Ezek. 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-32).

Comments:

The period of Israelite history known as 'the exile' lasted about 70 years i.e. from the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 587 BC to the completion of its rebuilding. The survival of the nation's faith was due in part to the ministry of **Jeremiah**, leading up to the exile and **Ezekiel**, who prophesied during the exile.

These two prophets helped the nation make sense of what they went through. This exile was both necessary (in light of their sin) and limited (in light of God's grace). Both prophets looked forward to a time of restoration.

Jeremiah, for example, spoke of this glorious future in terms of a new covenant (e.g. Jer. 31:31-33). Ezekiel, on the other hand, described this glorious future as nothing less than a national resurrection (e.g. Ezek. 37:12-14). Ezekiel also promised a Davidic king who will rule over them forever (cf. Ezek. 37:15-28).

But this does not mean that the whole exiled community was optimistic about the future. Many abandoned hope and accused God of forsaking them (e.g. Isa. 40:27, 49:14).

It is here that the words of the prophet **Isaiah** (cf. Isa. 40-55) find its mark. Be comforted. God is still sovereign. He will act again. His purpose and mission for Israel – to be a blessing to all nations – is not yet complete. So Isaiah links the future of this tiny nation with the universal purposes of God.

EXERCISES

1. Read 2 Samuel 7:1-17. How do the promises to David in 2 Samuel 7 echo the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3? What features are the same and what features are new?

Like other covenants, this was divinely initiated. It contains promises and is mutually binding.

It was through David that Israel first possessed all the territory that was promised through Abraham. Other parallels with God's covenant with Abraham is his promise to make David's name great, to maintain a special relationship of blessing with him and his offspring, especially the promise of a son (cf. Ps. 72:17).

God's covenant with David has at least three new features. (1) God will fulfil his promise to Abraham about people and land through David's line. (2) God will establish a perpetual dynasty for David's house (cf. Ps. 89:28-29). God will be tangibly present with his people through a chosen son of David. (3) God promises to be a father to David's royal descendants (cf. Ezek. 34:23-24).

2. What does God promise concerning the future Davidic king (2 Sam. 7:12-16, cf. Isa. 9:2-7; Jer. 23:1-8)?

Although David wanted to build a house for God (i.e. temple), God says he will build David's a house instead (i.e. dynasty). God binds his presence with David's kingship and dynasty.

Or as Williams (2005:185) puts it, 'God shall maintain his permanent dwelling-place as king in Israel through the kingship of the Davidic line.' Through the Davidic king, God will be tangibly present with his people.

In the New Testament, Jesus is the chosen Messiah. Jesus is the son of David (Matt. 1:1), who 'temples' with his people (John 1:14).

God will be a father to David's royal descendants. On the one level, this means God will protect David's kingship and lineage i.e. God 'adopts' David's line as his own. On another level, this promise has messianic significance (cf. Ezek. 34:23-24). In Jesus, God established David's dynasty forever (cf. 1 Chron. 22:9-10; Heb. 1:2, 5:5-6).

Isaiah revealed that there is more to this son of David than a great human king. This promised Davidic son is described by four names i.e. Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

As a Wonderful Counsellor, he will bring comfort to his people. As a Mighty God, he will be all-powerful. As Everlasting Father, he will be a provider and protector - loving, compassionate and tender with his people (cf. Ps. 103:13). As Prince of Peace, he will establish an eternal kingdom marked by peace - man will experience peace with God (cf. Ro. 5:1), with one another (cf. Luke 2:14), and with creation (cf. Isa. 11:6-9).

Jeremiah prophesied that God will raise up for his scattered people a shepherd who will rule wisely and justly. This shepherd will be a king from David's line. This king will embody righteousness, to which his name will attest i.e. 'his name will be called: The LORD is our righteousness.' This name is a pun on the name Zedekiah (= Righteousness is Yahweh), the last king of Judah. Zedekiah had the name, but the coming king will embody the reality.

3. Read Matthew 1:1, Mark 12:35-37, and Romans 1:1-4. How is God's covenant with David related to Jesus? How does this help us better understand who Jesus is and what he did?

The New Testament writers saw Jesus as the fulfilment of God's covenant promises to Abraham and David. Jesus was no afterthought or unexpected addition to God's plan in the Old Testament.

Matthew, for example, makes clear that Jesus is *the* long-promised Son of David and Son of Abraham. The 'Son of David' is a title for the messianic deliverer who would assume the throne of David in accordance with the promise of 2 Sam. 7:4-17, thereby inaugurating a kingdom of perfection and righteousness that would last forever (Hagner, 1993:9).

The title 'Son of Abraham' also carries with it a note of covenant promise and fulfilment. In Jesus, through the line of Abraham, God's covenant with Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:1-3, etc.) is fulfilled.

In Mark, Jesus explains to the scribes what it means to be the 'Son of David.' The scribes were right to say that the Messiah is a descendant of David. But what kind of Messiah is he? Would this Messiah be a general, politician or monarch? No.

God revealed to him that his descendant would be a different kind of king altogether, so much so that this descendant would be his Sovereign. That's why Jesus says David 'speaking by the Spirit' calls this descendant 'Lord.' David is

awe-struck. The kingdom that Jesus brings will be greater than any David established in his lifetime.

In Paul's Romans letter, Paul makes clear that the good news about Jesus is firmly rooted in Old Testament soil. Jesus was the goal of Israel's unfolding history through God's providence to bring about God's redemption/restoration plan. What God promised in the Old Testament (cf. Jer. 23:5; Isa. 9:6-7), he fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. The promised Son of David was revealed as the Son of God at his resurrection from the dead.

4. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. What are the 'new' features of this covenant? Why was it necessary? How does this help us understand what Jesus says in Luke 22:20?

The history of Israel exposes humanity's problem i.e. sin. Despite all of God's promises, mighty acts of deliverance, and words of warnings, the people's heart were not changed. Something much more was needed, not so much a renewal of the existing covenants but a new covenant altogether. Without such a transformation, God's people would have nothing but judgment to look forward to.

The promise of a new covenant is not unique to Jeremiah. Both Ezekiel (Ezek. 34, 36-37) and Isaiah (Isa. 40-55) held out hope of a new covenant relationship between God and his people. God promises that he himself will be their king, a Son of David will be a prince over them (cf. Ezek. 34:11-24), and his people will be a blessing to the nations. The scope of salvation will extend 'to the ends of the earth.'

Five common themes emerge in God's promise of a new covenant. Three are found in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

1. A new relationship with God

The key biblical promise of 'I will be their God, and they shall be my people' is again affirmed in Jeremiah (Jer. 31:33, cf. Gen. 17:7-8; 2Co. 6:16; Rev. 21:3). This was the very essence of the covenant relationship between God and his chosen people from the very beginning i.e. one people under one God forever. Isaiah describes it as a restored marriage (Isa. 54:5-10).

2. A new experience of forgiveness

With the mounting accumulation of sins, judgment was inevitable. But God was going to solve the problem of sin for good. He will remember it no more (cf. Jer. 31:34). Ezekiel anticipates a complete cleansing (Ezek. 36:25, 37:23), while Isaiah invites the sinner to an abundant pardon (Isa. 55:6-9).

3. A new obedience to the law

Whatever reforms that were introduced by the kings were short-lived. Something more than external a promise of obedience by God's people was needed. So God's intention was to write the law into the hearts of his people instead (Jer. 31:33). The knowledge of God will be internalized. Not only will the priest, prophet or king know God, but his community as a whole will know him.

God will give his people a new heart to enable them to follow him. (To know God means more than intellectual knowledge but to delight in things that God delights in i.e. Jer. 9:24, as well as do the things that God delights in i.e. Jer. 22:15-16.)

4. A new Davidic king

What is not included in Jer. 31:31-34 is the promise of a new Davidic king. This is found in Jer. 23:5-8 and 33:15-26. This future David will unite God's people and rule as God's agent bringing God's law and justice to the nations.

5. A new abundance of nature

Finally, the new covenant looks forward to a new abundance in creation. Abundance and fruitfulness of the land was part of God's covenant with Israel (cf. Lev. 26:3-13; Deut. 28:1-14). God will lift the curse on the earth made at Eden and will renew all creation as he comes to dwell once more with his people on earth (cf. Rev. 21:1-3, Jer. 31:11-14, Ezek. 34:26-9, 36:8-12).

FROM THE EXILE TO RESTORATION

God restores a remnant after the exile (Ezra to Nehemiah)

- After 70 years, a new superpower comes onto the scene and God stirred Cyrus, the Persian king, to issue an edict to allow the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple (cf. 2 Chron. 36:22-23).
- Only a small number, however, make the journey back to Jerusalem. The people faced intense opposition in Jerusalem. They were also disillusioned by the fact that this return to the land did not result in the glorious restoration that was promised.
- Eventually under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah and the post-exilic prophets (i.e. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi), the promised future restoration was partially fulfilled. But the problems of idolatry, social injustice and religious ritualism rampant before the exile remained.
- The prophets made clear that this was only a partial renewal. A more glorious and complete restoration of the people and fulfilment of the new covenant still remained part of the future.

Comment:

The first wave of exiles returned to Jerusalem soon after Persia replaced Babylon as the new regional superpower (cf. 2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-5). Zerubbabel led the first group of returnees in 539 BC. But their joy was short lived.

Why? This tiny community i.e. remnant, faced enormous problems right from the start. The cities were in ruins after 70 years of neglect. The early harvests were poor. They faced intense opposition from people who had settled in the surrounding areas in the interim, in particular the Samaritans.

Ezra taught the remnant people the law and sought to reorder the post-exile community around it. **Nehemiah**, on the other hand, introduced a number of social and economic reforms and rebuilt the Jerusalem walls. The restored city

walls not only ensured their physical safety but also gave the people a sense of unity and dignity.

A new temple was completed around 515 BC through the encouragement of **Haggai** and **Zechariah**.

Over time, however, when the raised hopes of the remnant failed to materialize, disillusionment and disappointment set in. This in turn led to a growing laxity in the religious and moral life of the post-exile community. Malachi spoke in this period about second-rate sacrifices, widespread divorce and other injustices in society.

At the close of the Old Testament story, the hope of a glorious restoration is yet to be fulfilled. The kingdom is not yet here in its fullness. Neither is the promised king. The post-exilic people of God continue to wait for the perfect king and perfect kingdom of God.

The monarchy was never meant to be the final fulfilment of God's covenant promises. This partial kingdom in the land of Israel was meant to point forward to a time when God would establish a perfect kingdom throughout the earth, achieved through a perfect redemption by the perfect king, Jesus Christ.

Although God dismantled this partial kingdom and won't rebuild it again in the same way, he did not break his promises. Rather, God will build an even better and bigger kingdom through Jesus the Christ (i.e. 'the Anointed One'). That is the message of the New Testament.

*What will God do next to fulfil his promise of a new covenant? Where is God's Davidic king who will usher in a new era of God's rule on earth? How will God restore his people and all creation to himself? **FIND OUT NEXT WEEK!***