

## **THE PROMISE OF JESUS FULFILLED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

*The aim of this session is to provide a chronological overview to the New Testament story from the birth of Jesus in the Gospels to the growth and ministry of the church and the renewal of all things in Revelation.*

Israel's long history has been one continuous failure to live according to their covenant obligations. Each and every promise kept by God in some way had been misunderstood, ignored or presumed upon by Israel. As the prophets had warned, failure to keep the covenant would lead to disastrous consequences – the Promised Land was conquered by foreign powers and her people were exiled and once again enslaved.

## **FROM THE BIRTH OF THE MESSIAH TO THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST**

### **Jesus is the new in the New Covenant (Gospels and Acts)**

- God kept all his promises by sending us 'his only begotten Son,' Jesus (1 John 4:9; Gal. 4:4; 2 Cor. 1:20; cf. Matt. 21:33-46/Mark 12:1-12/Luke 20:9-19).
- Jesus is the 'mediator of a new covenant' (Heb. 9:15, 12:24), whose death as the Passover sacrifice makes possible the forgiveness of sins once and for all (cf. Matt. 26:28/Mark 14:24/Luke 22:20; Heb. 9:11-10:18; Ro. 8:3-4).
- Through Jesus, the Holy Spirit is poured out in unrestricted measure to all people so that God's people will have a new intimate knowledge of God (Acts 2:1-36; cf. 2 Cor. 3:7-18; Joel 2:28-32; Jer. 31:31-34).
- Jesus is the true 'son of David, the son of Abraham' (Matt. 1:1) i.e. the Davidic king who will rule in God's eternal kingdom (cf. Luke 20:41-44; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 22:16) and the seed that will bring blessings to all the nations of the earth (cf. Gal. 3:16-18, 22).
- Jesus is the true Israel, reflecting God's character and obedient to the law (cf. Matt. 2:13-23). Jesus embodies what Israel was meant to be.
- Jesus is the true Adam, who represents mankind before God. Through Adam's disobedience, sin and death came to all people. Through Jesus' obedience, grace, righteousness and life overflow to many (1 Cor. 15:22; cf. Ro. 5:12-21).

### **Comment:**

Who is this Jesus? Why did he die? These are the central questions of the New Testament. But as the Emmaus Road encounter shows us (Luke 24:13-27), to truly understand who Jesus is we have to turn to the Old Testament.

Or as Luke wrote (24:17), 'beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.' All the promises in Scripture only make sense in Christ Jesus.

Matthew makes this explicit in the very first line of his Gospel, 'a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.' Then he goes onto to weave together five scenes from Jesus' childhood to support his claim that Jesus is the fulfilment of Scripture, namely:

- the assurance to Joseph about the child (Matt. 1:18-25 to fulfil Isaiah 7:14);
- Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1-12 to fulfil Micah 5:2);
- the escape to Egypt and return (Matt. 2:13-15 to fulfil Hosea 11:1);
- the murder of the boys by Herod (Matt. 2:16-18 to fulfil Jeremiah 31:15);
- Jesus' family settling in Nazareth (Matt. 2:19-23 to fulfil 'what was spoken by the prophets' cf. Matt. 2:23).

This repeated pattern is meant to emphasise the fact that Jesus is not only the completion of the Old Testament story, but also that Jesus is its fulfilment.

To fulfil is more than to complete. To complete is to reach the end of a journey. To fulfil is a statement about the very purpose of the journey. Jesus is the purpose of the entire Old Testament story (cf. Eph. 1:3-14).

Working backwards through the Old Testament story, Jesus proclaims on the eve of his crucifixion that he is the Passover sacrifice (cf. Matt. 26:28). Or as John the Baptist puts it (John 1:29), 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!' Jesus' death makes possible the forgiveness of sins that was promised in the new covenant to come (cf. Ro. 3:25, 5:9; 1Cor. 11:25; Eph. 1:7, 2:13; Col. 1:20).

The writer of Hebrews (9:15) makes explicit that Jesus is 'the mediator of the new covenant.' And in Christ, all God's people will have a personal knowledge of God fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy about the new covenant (Acts 2:1-36; cf. 2 Cor. 3:7-18; Joel 2:28-32; Jer. 31:31-34).

The Gospels and Letters show that Jesus is the true and greater Son of David (cf. Matt. 3:17, 4:15-16, 15:22, 16:16, 21:5, 22:41-45) and therefore true heir to the Davidic promises and dynasty (cf. 2 Sam. 7). Jesus is the true Son of Abraham who will bring blessings to the nations (Gal. 3:16, cf. Gen. 12:1-3).

Jesus is the true Israel. That is the point of Matt. 2:13-15. Matthew is deliberately identifying Jesus with Israel with the Hosea reference. Hosea was describing Israel's exodus experience. Matthew retells Jesus' story as a re-enactment of the significant moments in Israel's history. (Or as Tom Wright puts it, the story of Jesus is the story of Israel in miniature.)

For example, Israel's experience in the exodus from Egypt (Matt. 2:19-20), crossing the Red Sea (13-17), temptations in the desert (Matt. 4:1-11), the coming of Israel to Mount Sinai to receive the law (Matt. 5:1-2), all find a parallel in Jesus' life-story in Matthew. Seen in this light, the Spirit's descent on Jesus is also a fulfilment of the prophetic promise that God's Spirit would be poured out on Israel (Matt. 3:16, cf. Isa. 44:2-3; Ezek. 36:25-27). So Jesus embodies what Israel was meant to be.

And as Paul makes clear in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, Jesus is the true Adam. Jesus, like Adam, represents us before God. It was through Adam's disobedience that sin and death came to reign over all mankind (Ro. 5:12; 1Cor. 15:21) and all creation (Ro. 8:22). But unlike Adam, Jesus did not sin. So

through Jesus' perfect obedience, we receive abundant grace and righteousness leading to eternal life (Ro. 5:17, 21).

### **The Church is the community of the New Covenant (Acts – Letters)**

- Pentecost marks the transition from the Old to New Covenant in Christ where God pours out his Spirit on his people (e.g. Isa. 32:15, 44:3; Ezek. 39:29), reversing the curse at Babel (Acts 2:1-12, cf. Gen. 11:1-9).
- The New Testament church is the true 'Israel of God' (cf. Gal. 6:16; Ro. 9:6). Just as Israel was called to be God's covenant people, so too the church is now the new covenant community (1 Pet. 2:9-10; cf. Matt. 19:28).
- The New Testament church is made up of the believing remnant of Old Testament Israel along with believing Gentiles (cf. Ro. 11; John 15:1-8). This expanded covenant community is united in Christ Jesus (cf. Gal. 3:26-29; Ro. 4:16).
- The New Testament church fulfils what Old Testament Israel was called to be i.e. a witness to the nations (cf. Isa. 49:6; Acts 1:8). The international hope of the Old Testament becomes a reality through the church (Matt. 8:11, 28:19-20; Ro. 1:16; Eph. 2:11-22).
- Life in the New Testament church points towards the future restoration of God's kingdom in its fullness (e.g. John 15:19). By the power of the Holy Spirit, the church models life in the coming age within our present fallen world (e.g. Gal 5:18-25).

### **Comment:**

The most common New Testament name for the people of God is the church. It is not a uniquely Christian term. In the ancient world, it was used to refer to a 'gathering' or 'assembly.' What is this church in the NT sense? It is the body of Christ (Eph. 4:15), God's workmanship (Eph. 2:10), the people of God (Eph. 2:12), the family of God (Eph. 2:19, 3:15), the temple of God (Eph. 2:19-22), and the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25).

This community of God is linked with the Old Testament people of God. Besides the bride of God (Isa. 54:5-8), other Old Testament images used to describe the church include branches of a vine (John 15), flock led by a shepherd (John 10:1-8), the elect (Ro. 11:28; Eph. 1:4), royal priesthood (1Pe. 2:9), the remnant (Ro. 9:27), the true circumcision (Ro. 2:28-29; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11) and Abraham's seed (Ro. 4:16; Gal. 3:29).

The church is the true Israel of God (cf. Gal. 6:15-16; Eph. 2:12; Heb. 8:8-10). Peter's description of the church in 1 Peter 2:9-10 is exactly how Israel is described in the Old Testament. So it is no coincidence that Jesus calls twelve disciples (cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; Rev. 21:9-14). This was a symbolic act by Jesus. The new covenant community will be centred on him. So Israel, the name for the people of God, is redefined in the New Testament in Christ.

However, it is important to note that the church does not replace Old Testament Israel making it obsolete. Rather the new covenant expands the old. As Paul wrote in Romans 11:11-24, it consists of the believing remnant of ethnic Israel

i.e. vine, and the believing Gentiles i.e. new graft. What is crucial is not ethnicity but faith in Jesus Christ (Ro. 10:9-13). So the church as the new people of God inherits all the privileges of Israel.

The church is also the fulfilment of what Israel was called to be i.e. a witness to the nations. Like OT Israel, the NT church has a mission mandate i.e. to live out and proclaim the word of God to the world. Like OT Israel, the church to function as a spiritual magnet to attract the nations to Christ. Unlike OT Israel, the church crosses all cultural, national, and linguistic boundaries and is empowered by the Holy Spirit. The church is an outpost of heaven on earth.

### **The renewal of all things through the New Covenant (Revelation)**

- Jesus' Second Coming will restore his chosen people to renewed bodies in a renewed world (cf. Rev. 21:1-8, 22:1-5; Ro. 8:19-21; 1Cor. 15:35-49).
- The new creation is better than the first i.e. it is perfect and holy, a world without pain, death, or sin and God will be with his people forever. The curse of Adam's sin is utterly destroyed. The life of heaven has come to earth.

#### **Comment:**

Paul wrote in Col. 1:20 that God the Father sought to 'reconcile all things to himself' through Christ Jesus. All things refer to more than just the salvation of fallen humans made in his image. As Williams (2005:276) puts it, 'the goal of redemption is nothing less than the restoration of the entire cosmos.' Because Adam's sin (cf. Gen. 3) affected not just himself but all of creation, so God's redemption through Christ involves the whole of creation.

But it is important to note that the story of the Bible does not begin with a high point i.e. Garden of Eden, and ends up at the New Jerusalem as an equally high point. The new creation is in fact better than the first. In one sense, Eden is a prototype of the world planned by God. The new creation then is the perfected prototype that is populated by a new people of God. This is what awaits all God's people when Christ comes again.

#### **EXERCISES**

**Explain in your own words what did the Old Testament people of God looked forward to? What were the 'covenants of the promise' (e.g. Eph. 2:12) that had yet to be fulfilled?**

Working backwards through the covenants: (1) the new covenant promise of a total forgiveness of sins and new relationship with God and new ability to obey God's law; (2) the coming of the Davidic king who will usher in a period of peace and justice; (3) the seed of Abraham that will bring blessings to all the nations; and (4) the seed of Eve that will decisively crush Satan and his evil forces liberating all mankind and creation from the bondage of sin and death.

**Read Luke 1:67-79. What does this teach us about the salvation that comes through Jesus? How is it related to the covenant promises made in**

**the Old Testament (e.g. Gen. 12:1-3; 2 Sam. 7:11-16; and Jer. 31:31-34)?**

Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises. Rather than retelling Jesus' story as the story of Israel as Matthew did, Luke 1:67-79 puts it in the context of the promises received from the prophets.

The promises fulfilled include: (1) God will come and redeem his people (1:68); (2) coming of the Davidic king (1:69); (3) deliverance from all enemies (1:71); (4) blessings to Abraham's descendants (1:73); (5) intimate knowledge of God and total forgiveness of sins (1:77).

All these promises fulfilled are based on God's earlier covenants through Abraham, David and the prophets.

**Read Revelation 21:1-8 and 21:22-22:5. What images are used to describe life in the new heaven and new earth when God's covenant promises are completely fulfilled? What are the similarities and differences with life in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 2:4-3:24)?**

The New Jerusalem is like Eden except better! God will be with his people. This has been God's promise all along (cf. Gen. 17:7-8; Jer. 31:33; 2Cor. 6:16; Rev. 21:3). All the things in the world corrupted by sin and death will be wiped away. The tree of life reappears with the promise of eternal life.

The heavenly city as a perfect cube (cf. Rev. 21:15-16) alludes to the only other structure that is the same shape in the Old Testament i.e. Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle where God's presence and glory is made manifest. There is no more distance between man and God anymore in this perfect creation.

**In light of our future destiny in the new creation, how then should we live today?**

Christians ought to be ever conscious of the fact that this world in its present state is not our home. This world will change on the last day. Heaven will come down to earth. So we ought to live in light of this future reality. Or as Paul puts it, 'set our hearts on things above' (cf. Col. 3:1-4). To do so is to live in light of the age to come.

**In sixty seconds or less, summarise the good news of Jesus Christ in light of what we have learnt over the last four weeks.**