

THE DIVINE PLAN

From Paradise to Paradise

Any study of the background of the New Testament must include an overview of the divine plan of redemption that leads up to and informs the revelation of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not possible to do justice to this topic in one or even several discussions, or one or two courses; but an outline of the biblical material will bring the major points to mind and provide a general survey for the studies to follow. The best way to focus on the divine plan of creation that is restored through redemption is to incorporate the covenants that the LORD made down through the ages. After all, it is through solemn covenant promises that God has guaranteed his plan to restore all of creation to Paradise--but a greater and different Paradise than the one in the beginning.

CREATION

General. God created a perfect universe where everything was in order.¹ Everything came into existence by obedience to God's word (Ps. 33).² Human life was the crowning point and the focus of God's creation.

Human Life. Human life in Genesis 1 is the "image of God." The image is not shape or structure, but capacity.³ According to Genesis 2:7, the body plus the inbreathed breath of life produce a living soul, or better, a human being.⁴ With this inbreathing of the breath of life, the human being becomes God's

¹ Genesis 1 presents the initial picture of God's perfect work. Other passages will also treat the subject. Job 38 and following tells how great this work was; and in Job 38 God tells us that it was accompanied by the sons of God--angels--singing for joy. In Revelation 4 and 5 the angels still have not gotten over creation, and sing of the greatness of God.

² The emphasis in Genesis 1 is clearly in the commands of God. Thus, the chapter forms a fitting prologue to the Torah, the Law. Everything is here because it obeyed God's word. Thus, obedience to the word of God brings this kind of beauty, order, and fulness. Deuteronomy 30:15-20 provides a good exposition of this truth, with many allusions to Paradise.

³ Both male and female will be the image of God, not just male, and not just male and female united. Human beings are the image of God because they have been given moral, spiritual and intellectual capacities.

⁴ The Hebrew word translated "soul" is *nephesh*. It is the whole person, the being--the soul in the body. In Hebrew one would not say that he had a soul--he is a soul.

image, and it is passed on by procreation to every human being. So this breath of life constitutes the image of God;⁵ it gives to humans the moral and spiritual capacities to represent God (or, we would say, God gave humans the communicable attributes⁶). The “image of God” is a description of the capabilities of humans; it is a functional description, for the purpose of the capabilities is to represent the divine rule on earth.⁷

When God created humans with this capacity, he also made promises to them that required their responsible service--in other words, here was the **divine plan** for the “image of God”--people:

SEED: God blessed (enabled) them, and told them to be fruitful and multiply on the earth (in other words, share God’s work of creating life--eternal souls).⁸

DOMINION: God had enabled them to represent him, and so he commanded people to rule and have dominion in the earth--to serve as God’s vice-regents over all spiritual and natural forces.⁹

LAND: The human beings were to enjoy the bounty of creation, that Paradise, by obeying God’s commands and by worshiping and serving him.¹⁰ By obedience and service they would enjoy the *sabbath*

⁵ The word for “breath” used in Genesis 2:7 is *neshamah*. Its use shows that the breath brings life, spiritual understanding, and a functioning conscience. So it is far more than a breathing set of lungs. It is the whole spiritual nature..

⁶ Some of God’s attributes were not shared or given (communicated) to humans--eternality, infinity, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence; but others were shared, and even though we have only a tiny share of the divine attribute, we do have compassion, mercy, love, faithfulness, wisdom, goodness, and the like.

⁷ Gerhard von Rad in his *Old Testament Theology* points out the probably background of the expression Moses used: the pharaohs would put up images of themselves to mark out their dominion. To destroy one of those images was to challenge the pharaoh’s sovereignty.

⁸Genesis 5:1, 2 shows that this “image” or capacity is passed on seminally. And, according to Genesis 9, all humans are still the image of God--even though they are spiritually dead and have seared consciences and lack true spiritual understanding. That can be changed with regeneration.

⁹ One of the terms for dominion means treading underfoot opposition--this suggests the anticipation of rebellion and spiritual opposition.

¹⁰ The first commandment was that they not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And the expression in Genesis 2:15 that God put them in the garden “for serving and keeping” probably refers to worship and service, because that is what the words mean through the Torah, and because prior to the curse there would be no need for gardeners (only after sin are they expelled to work the ground), and because throughout the Bible God is about the business of restoring a kingdom of priests.

rest of God¹¹ (the point of the message in Deut. 26).

THE FALL

The Act. The woman was beguiled by Satan to disobey God. The temptation denied the word of God, doubted the goodness of God, and appealed to her desire to be like God, knowing good and evil.¹²

Adam sinned wilfully when the woman gave him the fruit. Thus, Paul would say, “By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin.”

The Oracle. Immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God came to question them and to announce the effect of their sin on themselves and on every human who would come after them.¹³ The main areas of God’s plan for the image of God were affected severely:

¹¹ The Hebrew word *shabat* has been translated “to rest,” and its noun *shabbat* as “sabbath rest.” Its main point is to cease; but it carries the idea of an enjoyment and celebration of what has been accomplished. God was not worn out after creation and in need of rest--he wanted to enjoy it. And the sabbath day was supposed to be that way for people, an entering into the goodness and bounty and joy of the creator--that is, before the legalists got hold of it and made it a burden. Genesis 2:15 says God put them in the garden, but the verb is “set to rest” (another word for “rest,” *nuach*). Here is the beginning of the theology of the sabbath: when they sinned, they broke the sabbath, and God had to go back to work to restore creation’s purpose and joy. When Jesus was doing miracles on the sabbath day, he defended his efforts by saying that “Hitherto my father works, and I must work also.” When he died on Friday of the Passion Week, he declared that the work of re-generation/re-creation was finished, and then he rested from his work in the grave. But on the first day of the week, as if in response to God’s “Let there be light, the Light of the world came out of the tomb. Now, each of us who believe in him have entered into that sabbath rest, according to the Book of Hebrews. And yet, there remains a sabbath rest for the whole world which is groaning for it.

¹² Wisdom literature will teach that becoming like God is not accomplished by challenging God. They wanted to be wise, but in their disobedience became afraid and hid themselves. Proverbs will teach that wisdom begins with the fear of God, which leads to obedience, which brings about true godliness.

¹³ Thus it is a little too simplistic to call Genesis 3 a curse. The humans are not cursed; rather, God announces what life will be like now that they have introduced sin into it--and so the oracles include both the bad (results of sin) and the good (there would ultimately be victory).

SEED: Death would now reign over the race, making fruitfulness urgent.¹⁴

DOMINION: Far from being like God and ruling over creation, they had fallen prey to the serpent (and thus to another of God's creation--Satan), and so were expelled from Paradise to work the ground from which they were taken.

LAND: They were barred from the beautiful garden and had to work by the sweat of the brow and with pain to survive.¹⁵ The land would be cursed--thorns and thistles and dust would be their lot.

And what happened to the **IMAGE of GOD?** The Bible says that the presence of sin in ordinary humans (unbelievers) means they are spiritually dead, even though physically living, that their spiritual understanding is darkened, and their consciences are seared and not working right. It will take a new creation to restore the image. *And we call that regeneration.*

Signs of Redemption. There was grace from God for the confessing sinners (they did confess, after blaming others)--the LORD God clothed them with animal skins.¹⁶ And there was faith from the confessing sinners: Adam named his wife Eve, and Eve named her son Cain as expressions of their faith.¹⁷

JUDGMENT AND RE-CREATION

The narrative in Genesis continues this cycle of creation--failure--judgment--redemption. In fact, this continues through the Bible--it is the story of the Bible. The work of God's redemption begins to take on the form of re-creation.

Rebellion. As the story progresses, sin gets worse and worse, until by the time of the Flood the knowledge of evil consumes the intentions of the human race.¹⁸ Apparently demon-possessed human

¹⁴ "Death" is separation, essentially. Physical death is separation from this life, from the land of the living. Spiritual death is separation from God, and all that is spiritual. Eternal death is eternal separation from God and all who live in him (glorified new creation).

¹⁵ Likewise in Genesis 4 Cain was banished from the fertile soil and had to be a ceaseless wanderer in the world (like the "outback").

¹⁶ God clearly deprived an animal of its life to clothe the sinner. Thus, Cain and Abel knew from the beginning how to make sacrifices. And Leviticus tells us that all the animal skins of the sacrifices went to the priests for clothing.

¹⁷ Their naming statements express faith and hope. Under the punishment of death, and having been expelled from the garden, he named his wife "mother of all LIVING," and she named her son "Cain" because she had produced him with the LORD's help. They truly were believers in the LORD.

¹⁸ There could hardly be a stronger statement about sin: "the thoughts of their hearts were only evil continually" so the LORD regretted having made them (a bold human expression simply to say how

despots overstepped their bounds in their quest for immortality through what is clearly immorality.¹⁹ What the nature of wickedness we have here, God saw that it was serious enough to stop with a judgment on all flesh.

Judgment. The judgment was on all creation, all nature and all flesh. God would use a flood, because it would purge the world, and it would also be a new beginning, for in Genesis 1 everything was under water. This severe judgment shows the magnitude of the sin and the extent to which God will go to preserve righteousness in the world--and he will do it again at the end of the ages.²⁰

Redemption and Re-Creation. Genesis 6:8 tells us that Noah found “grace” (unmerited favor) in the eyes of the LORD. Then, as a recipient of grace, he walks with the LORD in righteousness, and becomes a preacher of righteousness and a true worshiper.

Noah will be the new **ADAM**, given the same commandments and the same responsibilities. When the Flood ended, dry land began to appear, just as in the creation. Noah then could leave the ark and start a new race. But he was by duty bound to preserve the human race.

And so God instituted a covenant, the **NOACHIAN²¹ COVENANT**. It was an unconditional and unilateral covenant in which God bound himself to safeguard life. He would never again destroy the world this way. But he would hold murderers responsible for shedding blood. This covenant was designed to show that God was a *covenant God*, a *God of grace*. Covenants are not needed by God, for his

much the sin grieved him). And the fact that Noah “found grace” means that he was no better than the rest of them. It defies the meaning of “grace” to say Noah was a righteous man and so God decided to extend grace to him. No, Genesis 6:9 come after Genesis 6:8.

¹⁹ The “sons of God” in Genesis 6 is a term that refers to angels/demons, but here they co-habit with human women. Thus, we must have powerful humans controlled by demons beginning to build harems of all the women they wanted. The demonic influence produced grotesque beings, giants in the land, ancient heroes who thought they were gods or demi-gods. But God announced they were but flesh, and in about a hundred years would die in the flood. There is much more going on here than people normally see. These are the angels who left their habitation and almost perverted the human race; they are preserved in prison until the judgment day. Thus, when Jesus says that people were marrying and giving in marriage, it is an allusion to great hubris, not to normal harmless life. See my commentary, *Creation and Blessing*, on Genesis 6.

²⁰ The Flood was truly an “eschatological event,” for the end of mankind had come on the earth. Jesus likewise uses the times of Noah as a sign of the coming judgment. It will be as in the days of Noah, the wicked will be taken away, and the righteous will enter a new order. That coming judgment will not be by water, but by fire.

²¹ We call it the “Noachian” covenant because the name “Noah” in Hebrew is actually pronounced *No-ack*, which was Anglicized to a laryngeal *h*, “Noah.”

word is sure and reliable. But God used covenants for our sake, that we might be convinced that when he swore on his own life that he would keep his promises. Even though people might be unfaithful, he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself--it is his nature to speak the truth and fulfill his promises.

Noah, with a chance to rule over the earth as the second Adam, the ability to be fruitful and multiply, and the commission to do God's work on earth, lay naked and drunk in his tent, bringing about the curse of his descendants,²² the Canaanites.²³

Rebellion Again. Commanded to spread out and populate the earth, the human race banded together to make a name for themselves lest they be scattered.²⁴ Their sin was pride and rebellion; out of it came the beginnings of pagan worship with the *ziggurat* (the step-tower). Throughout the Bible "Babylon" is the symbol of pride and rebellion. The Babylonians said it has been made in heaven and brought down to earth; Genesis 11 says that it was made on earth by humans. But the Book of Revelation says God will destroy Babylon, and then the heavenly Jerusalem will descend from heaven.

Judgment Again. God scattered the race by confusing their language. In God's view, international strife and misunderstanding is better than collective apostasy (Genesis 10 shows the results of Genesis 11; by seeing the results first the reader is more curious to know what happened). The human race was now hopelessly scattered and not united. There was no nation or tribe that God could use to restore blessing. He would have to make one.

Re-creation Again. So God started over by creating a new **SEED** from one man whom he elected, gave him a promised **LAND**, and promised that through him **DOMINION** would come to this troubled world.

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

The Faith of Abraham. The covenant would have to be made with a true believer. And so Genesis 12 records the call of Abram with divine promises. And Genesis 15:6 tells us that he "believed in the LORD, and he [the LORD] reckoned to him righteousness." Abram had left Ur by faith; the covenant was made with Abram the believer. Here was the beginning of the restoration of the **IMAGE**

²² The attempts to make Ham's act a homosexual act are contrived. Ham saw his father's nakedness, and having no respect for his father, told his brothers. They covered up the father because they respected him and wanted to preserve his dignity. To read more into the event is unwarranted. But on the basis of these character traits, Noah prophesies the nature and acts of their descendants.

²³ It was Canaan who was cursed, not Ham the culprit, and not Ham's little boy Canaan. This was a prophetic oracle of future peoples.

²⁴ The people at Babel in Genesis 11 were motivated by both fear and pride, much like modern nations in their arms buildups.

of God.

The Plan of God. God planned to create a people who would serve him and be the means of bringing blessing to the world. This is seen in the twofold command of God for Abram: “Get you out” and “be a blessing.” God promised Abram fame and family and land if he got out; and God promised that Abram would be protected and blessed and ultimately be a blessing to the world if he himself was a blessing. So Abram got out (first command) and then Abram was a blessing (second command) by making proselytes in Haran and by proclaiming who the LORD was at the altar.²⁵

The Covenant of God. God cut the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 15 (not 12). The covenant was unconditional and unilateral (God made it by himself; it was not a bi-lateral agreement--Abram was asleep and God swore by himself).

N.B. The promises of the Abrahamic Covenant are therefore certain and unconditional--they will be fulfilled. But, participation in the blessings of the covenant are conditioned upon faith and obedience.²⁶

God would build a nation to be his image, his representatives on earth. And his promises would focus on restoring the plan of creation:

SEED: God promises to make the seed like the sand of the seashore.

LAND: God promised a land that would be as bountiful as Eden.

DOMINION: God promised that kings would come from their line (Gen. 17) until the one comes to whom the scepter belongs (Gen. 49:10).²⁷ The Abrahamic Covenant never was completely fulfilled in the history of Israel, not in the sense of a faithful people living securely in a land of abundance and enjoying dominion as God’s vice-regents over all creation. Why not? On the human side Paul tells the Romans it was because of sin; on the divine side the writer to the Hebrews says it was not God’s intention to fulfill the promises without us.

²⁵ See the exact expression in Exodus 34:5-7 where we have the content of the proclamation given there by the LORD to Moses.

²⁶ A lot of people think that when Israel failed and followed other gods, then the covenant was nullified. No, it does not work that way. The unbelievers removed themselves from the covenant hopes, but the promises remained in place, and will be fulfilled eventually. Hosea could say to his wicked generation, God says, “I am not your God, and you are not my people.” Thus, Paul could explain to the church at Rome that “not all Israel was Israel.” But then Hosea said there would be a future re-gathering, and the God would say “You are my people and I am your God.” The promises of God are sure; participation in them requires faith.

²⁷ Many English Bibles leave the word as a name, “Shiloh”--until Shiloh comes. The Hebrew word is a combination of little short words; translated it means “who to him.” In other words there would be kings in Judah until the one comes to whom the scepter belongs--the Messiah.

THE COVENANT AT SINAI

A Holy Nation, A Kingdom of Priests. At Mount Sinai God established a covenant with Israel (Exod. 24) that formed them into the nation, the people of God. The purpose was to form a nation that would be holy, so that it could be a priestly nation (Exod. 19). This recalls the intent of the Abrahamic Covenant promises that the seed would be the means of blessing to the world (Gen. 12:1-3).

The Sinaitic Covenant was not a replacement of the Abrahamic Covenant; rather, it was the first expansion or development of it. Its focus was on the “seed,” the people--who were they, and what were they to do. So the emphases from creation and the Abrahamic Covenant are reiterated here:

SEED: The “seed” is Israel, the nation, that flourished in Egypt; now they would be directed on how to live so that they could fulfill the purpose of the promise.

LAND: While the promise of the land is not the main focus of the Sinaitic Covenant, it is assumed as one of the goals of the SEED. They would be led to the land by the LORD--but they had to conquer it by faith.²⁸

DOMINION: The promise of dominion for the time being focuses on the fact that Israel was to be a theocracy--God rules over his people. God would use humans to administer his theocracy, and in time a monarchy would administer the theocracy. But each form of administrators failed, and so the dominion awaited a faithful ruler.

The Law of Moses. Because the nation was a theocracy, then God’s word was Law--hence, the LAW. The Law was never given as--never intended to be--a means of salvation. Spiritual salvation has always been by God’s grace through faith, and not by works.²⁹ The Law was given to a nation of believers (largely) who had come out of Egypt by faith through the application of the blood of the lamb. No one was ever redeemed by the works of the Law.

The Law of Moses was given to the people of God to direct them in the way of obedience so that they could enjoy the blessings of God on their life and fulfill their calling to be a kingdom of priests. To do this the Law regulated the life and the ritual of the people, and in the process it revealed sin as it revealed the holiness of the LORD who was the king. Ultimately, it was God’s intent that the Law be a tutor, a

²⁸ The biblical books of Joshua and Ephesians are twin books--they each develop the themes of election, inheritance, and spiritual warfare.

²⁹ In Romans 4 Paul makes this point by showing that Abraham was justified by faith long before the Law was even revealed. An Israelite came to faith the same way we do--believing the word of God, trusting in God’s provision of forgiveness and atonement, and demonstrating his faith by living a righteous life. He just did not know how it was all going to work out--who would eventually pay for the sins once and for all. But God could grant them forgiveness and eternal life on the basis of the blood of Christ, for God knew how the sins were to be paid, from the foundations of the world.

pedagogue (Gal. 3) to bring us to Christ.³⁰

The Theocracy. God's program through the nation of Israel could be described as the universal reign of God. At different times it found different expressions or forms, with different administrations on earth. With Israel it was to be a simple theocracy--God ruled. This called for several things to be in place:

The Holy Place. The central sanctuary represented God's dwelling place among his people--the central government as it were.³¹ And the structure of the sanctuary revealed the way to get to God--decision at the gate, atonement at the altar, washing at the laver, light for the way, provision for the way, intercession before the presence, and once a year entrance through the mediator. All this was necessary because the presence of a holy God required cleansing and atonement. And it all was not only teaching the way to approach the LORD, but setting out the order of worship--because worship is to reflect clearly the way to get to God.

The Holy Offerings. Purification was effected by sacrificial ritual so that the believing people could maintain their relationship to God as a holy nation. The sacrifices were the outward expression of the spiritual reality of personal surrender and submission of life and substance to God. Some of the sacrifices spoke to this directly, and other sacrifices were for the celebration of worship with a communal meal. Truly the promised SEED was no ordinary nation.

The holy Calendar. God laid claim to the hours, days, weeks, months, seasons, and years by the festivals and appointed feasts. If the people wanted the blessings of God on their land, they would have to show their allegiance with these things. But the holy calendar went beyond that to reveal the plan of redemption: freedom from bondage through the blood of the lamb (Passover), resurrection to life from the dead (First fruits), the beginning of the people of God (Pentecost³²), the ingathering of the people (Trumpets for New Years), the removal of all sin from the people (Atonement), and the fulfillment of all promises in the land (Tabernacles, Sabbath Year and Jubilee).

Holy Administrators. The theocracy would be administered by the Lawgiver and Mediator, then the Priests, Prophets, and Kings. They were all to lead the nation to righteousness and service, for the

³⁰ This means that when Christ came God did not have to teach people what atonement was, for they had been taught this for 1400 years in the Law and the drama of the ritual. Likewise, propitiation, redemption, sanctification, righteousness and numerous other concepts had been taught for centuries, so that people knew exactly what it all meant when the apostles explained why Christ died.

³¹ His presence was actually there, for the holy place was the one spot on earth where heaven and earth touched, the gate of heaven as it were. So in Isaiah 6 the young prophet could peer into the holy of holies in his vision and see the pre-incarnate Christ on his glorious throne in heave (Jn. 12).

³² We shall return to study each of these festivals later; but the day of Pentecost was in Israel the time when the loaves were presented--what the harvested grain produced, or what the resurrection produced. It was also a time to commemorate the giving of the law at Sinai.

nation was to be a kingdom of priests.

THE PALESTINIAN COVENANT

General. This covenant is not really a totally new covenant, and it is not called the Palestinian Covenant--in fact, the word Palestine was only used here because it conveniently made the point of the covenant with reference to the land--but it was not the land of Palestine in those days. The point is that there was a second giving of the law, so to speak, what we call Deuteronomy ("second law"). This was the re-statement of the Law of Moses for the generation about to enter the land; it was cast in the form of prophetic sermons and exhortations as well as legal precepts.

It continues the emphasis on how the SEED should live to be a holy nation, blessed and used by God. But it clearly adds a greater emphasis on the **LAND**. The end of Deuteronomy has a number of admonitions for the people standing on the edge of "the land"--a land flowing with milk and honey, a rich and good land of rivers and trees and mountains, all kinds of fruit and crops, copper in the hills, and on and on. The sermons actually are cast in the setting of the garden of Eden: See, I have set before you blessing and cursing, good and evil--if you obey, you will enjoy the land, if you disobey, you will be driven out of the land.

So the Sinaitic Covenant dwells more on the responsibilities and blessings of the SEED. The Palestinian Covenant (or re-giving of the law to the generation entering the land) reiterates much of that, but clearly emphasis the blessing of the **LAND**.

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

General Circumstances. From God's plan it had always been the will of God that His theocracy would be centered in Jerusalem and be administered by His king who would be known as His Son.³³ The plan of creation, reiterated by the covenants, promised a SEED and a LAND and DOMINION. The Davidic Covenant would now take the promise of dominion and ratify that with a covenant.

The people rushed the plan of God by demanding a king like the other nations--and so he gave them one, Saul. Ultimately, because of the people's unbelief, the monarchy failed as the administration of the theocracy. People could rule over the nation, but could not rule themselves. They were eventually run out of the land and lost dominion and kingship with the exile.

³³ The title "Son" was introduced into the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7, and would apply to every king of Judah that God ordained. But ultimately one would come for whom the designation "son" meant much more, i.e., that he shared the divine nature of the Father. Kingship would then be focused on Him in a greater way than David, Solomon, or any of the others.

But instead of Saul, God had chosen David, a man after his own heart.³⁴ David had the kind of faith that God wanted, the kind of commitment to the Law, the kind of prayer and worship that would lead the nation, and the kind of humility that the servant of the LORD needs. And so he made a covenant with David; the aspects of the covenant form a royal ideology:

Dynasty: The family (house) of David would be an eternal dynasty. This was unconditional and unilateral when God swore to it. An eternal dynasty means every king has to have a son, or, one of them has to live forever. Thus Paul starts Romans by affirming that Jesus is declared to be the son of David and Son of God by the resurrection.

Participation. While the promise of an eternal dynasty was sure, individual participation in it required faith and obedience. Kings who did not believe, or who were wicked, were either removed or damned. Those who obeyed were blessed.

Kingship: The promised kingdom was one of eternal righteousness and peace (see Ps. 72, 89, Isa. 9, 11), extending from sea to sea, filled with the blessing and knowledge of the LORD, with all nations subjected to the King. Each king probably thought when being coronated that he might be the one--but after a few sins and wars he would realize that they looked for another, or as the last words of David say, "Not so was my kingdom" (2 Sam).

The failure of the monarchy over the theocracy is well documented by the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, as well as the prophets. Rebellion, Judgment, and Re-creation are the continued themes throughout the Old Testament period. Finally the judgment was the exile to Babylon--but this did not end the covenants or the covenant promises--it ended the participation in the blessings of those covenants for the majority of the people.

LAND: Because of sin they were exiled from the land.

SEED: Because of sin the nation was destroyed in the war and exile; only a remnant of believers held to the promises of God.

DOMINION: Because of sin the kings and the people became subject to the pagan nations and their kings. This is what Daniel called "the times of the Gentiles," and it will continue til Christ comes.

But, in Israel's darkest hour the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel (and earlier Isaiah and others) began to lay out a New Covenant that God would make with Israel and Judah. Here was the grace of God at work, in spite of the failure of the people.

THE NEW COVENANT

Judgment. As the nation sank more and more into idolatry and unrighteousness, the message of judgment through captivity became more pronounced, until the blow came and all the promises of God seemed to come to an end. God used the wicked nations to judge Israel, ultimately to purge the nation of idolatry and rebellion. Never again did the nation embrace idolatry on such a scale as it had before the exile.

³⁴ This expression simply means "the one God wanted."

The remnant of true believers, like Ezekiel and Jeremiah, had to suffer for the sins of the nation. But their sufferings and eventual deaths were different--they would lie down in peace--not so the wicked.

Re-creation. The prophets spoke of a glorious renewal of God's plan with another generation that would come out of the exile. Hosea and Joel had spoken of it, as had Isaiah (see Isa. 54 particularly); but Jeremiah (31) and Ezekiel (36) gave the most details for this "new" covenant. It would be more of a renewal of the old covenant promises than a completely different covenant.

But it must be stressed that this "New Covenant" was for Israel and Judah. The SEED would be re-gathered to the LAND and once again serve as a KINGDOM of priests. Paul will make it clear in Romans 11 that we who are Gentiles have been grafted in to Israel's New Covenant.

The Promises. So what were the promises laid out in the oracles about this new covenant? They are as follows:

1. Israel would be restored to the promised land and remain forever.
2. Israel would dwell in peace and safety in their land, without fear of danger or terror from anyone.
3. All of nature would be renovated so that all signs of the curse would be forgotten as all nature fulfilled its destiny undisturbed.
4. God would purify the nation so that their sins would be removed.
5. God would write His Law on their hearts so that they would be a holy people.
6. God would pour out his Holy Spirit, not only on Israel to make the bones live (Ezek. 37), but on all nations.
7. Everyone would know the LORD, so that no one would have to evangelize.
8. The temple and city of Jerusalem would be re-built of the finest elements of creation.
9. Nations would come to worship the LORD in Jerusalem and bring their tribute, their gifts.
10. A righteous, powerful, divine king would rule in Jerusalem and over all the world.

The listing of these promises of the New Covenant are not in a chronological order. In fact, many of them will overlap in the timing of their fulfillment. But what is clear is that bits and pieces of the promises have been partially fulfilled over the ages, but it will take the second coming of Christ before all of it will be fulfilled to the divine intent.

For example, when the people came back from captivity, they had a re-gathering to the land. But there was no lasting peace and prosperity, and so they knew they had but a down payment or token (whichever metaphor works best) on an ultimate fulfillment. The old man Simeon in Luke 2 was waiting for it.

Or, they returned and built the temple, but it was not even as good as Solomon's, and it certainly did not fulfill Isaiah's and Ezekiel's pictures. So it too was a partial fulfillment of something far greater to come.

When Christ came into the world, he died on the cross to pay for sins. The provision was in place,

but not all of Israel came to faith. Many did, but that was simply a foretaste of what is yet to come.

God sent the Holy Spirit on Pentecost so that the Law could be written on our hearts, as Paul says. But this has not yet been poured out on all flesh. There is more to come.

Christ has been exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on High, and so he reigns over his people. But he has yet to come to put down all rebellion and establish a kingdom or righteousness and peace around the world. In other words, we have received tokens, pledges of things to come. It is the way Jesus did his miracles: Isaiah said Jesus would heal the sick, make the blind to see, set the prisoners free, among other things; and Jesus did just enough to declare he is the Messiah, but the complete fulfillment awaits the coming in glory.

The Fulness of Time. At a pre-determined time God sent forth His Son into the world, to be born of a woman, to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, and to redeem the world. The prophets were precise: the child is born, the Son is given (Isa. 9). There was a birth in Bethlehem, the child was born to Mary. But the Son was sent into the world; He was from above, He was not of this world. The incarnation fulfilled many passages of Scripture, not the least of which is the dedication Psalm 40: “Here I come to do your will . . . a body you have prepared for me . . . in the roll of the book it is prescribed for me.” This second Adam was completely obedient and so was able to gain victory over Satan, sin, and death, undoing all that the first Adam had introduced into the world. Jesus the Messiah restored God’s plan through His obedience: the human race had lost its way, but Jesus declared, “I am the way”; the race had believed a lie, and Jesus announced, “I am the truth”; and the race had entered into death through their sins, yet Jesus said, “I am the life.”

The cycle of judgment and re-creation was now finalized: the judgment for sin was placed on Him as the innocent substitute who became the curse; and the re-creation of new life comes through His resurrection, and ours.

The New Covenant. Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant in the Upper Room with the elements of what we now call Eucharist, or Holy Communion. In his words Jesus connected Exodus 24:8, Jeremiah 31, and Isaiah 53 to show that the New Covenant subsumed and fulfilled the old. Then with His blood on the cross he sealed the covenant, as the Book of Hebrews says. And yet, all the promises of the New Covenant--which are “yes” in Him, Paul says--will be completely fulfilled at the second coming. Those who now enter into the New Covenant by faith in Jesus Christ--and there is no other way since he is God in the flesh--will doubtless have a share in the fulfillment of all the promises to come.

The promises of the New Covenant began to be fulfilled with Christ. In the Upper Room He breathed on the disciples (cf. Gen. 2:7) and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn. 20:22). He then died on the cross to pay for our sins, making the salvation through the forgiveness of sins available. He then sent the Holy Spirit to indwell believers permanently as a pledge of eternal life and as an enablement to live righteously in this world. Today, believers, both Jews and Gentiles, enter into this new covenant by the grace of God through faith--prematurely, as Paul said, being grafted in to the covenant now before its

fulfillment. Christ will come again to complete all the promises of the New Covenant--which means all the promises of all the covenants that came together in the New Covenant. Most of these promises will be fulfilled in a far more glorious way than we could even imagine.

The Promises of the Covenants. And how does the plan of God take form in the final outworking of the promises?

SEED: The promise of a “seed” for Abraham through which the families of the earth will be blessed finds fulfillment in Christ. But then all of us who are “in Christ” are also the “seed of Abraham.”³⁵ In salvation the promise of a seed will be fulfilled. Christ will present the redeemed in glory, saying, “Here I am and the children/seed you have given me” (from Hebrews from Isaiah 8). He will bring many sons/children to the kingdom to sit down with Abraham.

LAND: Many scholars argue that the land promises do not apply in salvation, for we are going to be in heaven. However, several hints suggest otherwise. Revelation 5 tells us that we are going to reign with Christ on earth. The same book reiterates from Isaiah that there will be a new heaven and earth, a new creation. And, Daniel and Revelation indicate that the saints will be from every tribe and nation and language on earth--they keep their unique identities in glory, but will be perfected, or glorified. The clue is that Jesus after the resurrection, although glorified, is still the man Jesus, albeit the God-man, Jesus the Son of God. The scores of passages about the age to come locate spiritual Israel in the promised land. And why not? Why should the promises not be fulfilled, albeit in a renewed creation? This is part of the study of the nature of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation, and the prophecies of the renovation of the holy land in Ezekiel, Isaiah and Zechariah.

It is unlikely that all the redeemed of the ages will be in exactly the same place without variation or movement. The believers in Christ have their citizenship in heaven, but will administer angels on earth. The eternal state seems to have a whole hierarchy of responsible positions and services based on service now; and perhaps the Jews will be given that land in the new earth where they will realize their inheritance and calling.

DOMINION: In and with Christ the seed will reign with Christ on earth. Jesus will reign as king, even though we do not now see everything under his feet. But according to Hebrews 1, when the Father again brings the firstborn into the world, all the angels will bow, and everyone will bow and proclaim Him Lord. And as Christ’s representatives, we will rule over cities and judge angels.

The Davidic King. The fulfillment of all the covenant promises in the Bible hang on one thing--the person of the Messiah. There is no participation in the New Covenant apart from faith in Him. If indeed the Messiah is God manifested in the flesh, and there is only one God, then how could there be salvation apart from Him?

Jesus, of course, was born into the family of David, in the city of David, to fulfill the royal ideology.

³⁵ The “seed of Abraham” can refer to the natural descendants of Abraham, Hebrews, and that would be the physical seed. It can refer to Israelites who believe, and they are the physical and spiritual seed. It can also refer to non-Israelites who are in the covenant, and they--we--are the spiritual seed/descendants of Abraham, but not the physical descendants.

Jesus was declared to be the Son of David according to the flesh, and the Son of God by the resurrection.

Jesus ascended on high and was seated on the right hand of the Majesty on High (Ps. 110) until the Father makes His enemies the footstool for Him. When Jesus rose from the dead, the Father declared, “You are my Son; this day I have begotten you” [Ps. 2:7; from the dead--Rev. 1:5]. It was His coronation day, but not His receiving of the kingdom. In some future point of time, the Father will say to the Son, “Ask of me and I will give you the nations as your inheritance” (Ps. 2:8). Then He will bring His firstborn again into the world (Heb. 1--the second coming) and He will reign with righteousness and justice forever.

Jesus will come with power and glory to judge the world and to fulfill all promises. As a survey of the Messianic promises will reveal, there will be great and amazing aspects of His coming. For these we shall have to look at the next section of the material, the Messianic Prophecies.