

# 6: The Jew first, and then the Gentile

Jon Garvey... The end of the Old Testament

Israel's Messiah 'opens the gates of salvation to people over the world, and expands the Promised Land right across the earth to make room for them!'



PHOTO: EMPICS

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**L**et's review the status of the five Covenants we have covered, at the end of the Old Testament period. The *Covenant with Adam* is broken, and all mankind still has its penalty of death hanging over it because they are still lost in sin<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, the *Covenant with Noah*<sup>2</sup> guarantees the common blessings of life until the end.

The *Covenant with Abraham* still stands<sup>3</sup>, but awaits the 'seed' who will fulfil it<sup>4</sup>. But the *Covenant with Moses* that stemmed from it has been broken by Israel, and they are still under its penalty of exile, even though a remnant has returned to Canaan as 'slaves'<sup>5</sup> of foreign rulers. Deuteronomy, though, foretold this<sup>6</sup> and offered some possible hope for Israel, because God will in some way remember the unconditional *Covenant with Abraham*<sup>7</sup>.

God's *Covenant with David* is irrevocable<sup>8</sup>, but Israel now has neither a king nor what was promised through him<sup>9</sup>. Faith might hope for its fulfilment<sup>10</sup>, but can see no possible way for it to happen. Amazingly God now promises a *New Covenant* to replace that of Sinai (which has nothing to offer now but condemnation), and this is what we will look at now.

## The sixth Covenant – with Jesus

**N**ew Covenant themes dominate the later Old Testament, but the clearest proclamations of it are in Jeremiah<sup>11</sup> and Ezekiel<sup>12</sup>. In both cases the prophecies come immediately after their warnings have come true; Israel has been exiled, the temple destroyed and the Mosaic covenant ended by judgement. Yet suddenly both prophets are upbeat again – it's as if, judgement having fallen, the stage is immediately cleared for the restoration promised in Deuteronomy.

As described in these prophets, the New Covenant blessings are the same as the old. Ezekiel in particular repeats the Abrahamic promise of many people (36:37-38), possession of Canaan (36:24-28) and God's own blessed presence (36:28). In fact he takes us right back to the covenant with Adam, saying Israel will be like Eden (36:35).

In addition Ezekiel affirms the continuity of David's Covenant – 37:24-28 show that David (meaning the promised ideal son of David) will be their king 'for ever'.

The subject of both these passages, sadly often ignored, is the nation of Israel. **It is Israel who have broken the Mosaic Covenant and been punished, and Israel who are promised the New Covenant.** Jeremiah promises that only if the world ends will Israel's descendants (but only a remnant, note) fail to be a nation (31:35-37). Ezekiel prefaces his prophecy about Messiah with a promise of reunion between the northern kingdom, hopelessly scattered for centuries, and the renewed kingdom of Judah (37:15-23).

## Not like the Covenant...

**Y**et the most significant thing about this New Covenant is missed surprisingly frequently by those very Christians who notice Israel's place in it! For they say, 'Here is proof that God still keeps the Covenant He made through Moses.' Or, a bit more astutely, 'Here is proof that God will give Israel another chance through a New Covenant.'

But the Sinai covenant was broken! The curses were its last word to Israel because they had continued to sin – as Paul repeatedly stresses<sup>13</sup>. And should God give them another Covenant to obey, centuries of history proved they would disobey it just like the old, because their indwelling sin



# the covenants of God

negated the good promises Moses had been given. Ezekiel puts this very clearly in the humiliating words of 36:16-23; hardly an encouragement for Israel to pull their socks up and try harder!

No, at the heart of the New Covenant with Jesus is a more wonderful promise than Israel had ever received: the gift of a new heart, a heart miraculously recreated by God in a state of willing obedience. A gift not conditional upon obedience, but **guaranteeing** it<sup>14</sup>. A gift not commanding holiness, but **producing** it<sup>15</sup>. A gift requiring faith<sup>16</sup>, but since given unconditionally also **providing** it, lest any man should boast<sup>17</sup>.

This truly is a Covenant of grace, affording forgiveness, saving faith and holiness, so that God's people might be **assured** the blessings of God. Given the scope of what it promised to provide it is no wonder that it could only come through God's only Son Jesus – in Himself Prophet, Priest and King of the New Covenant – Himself bearer of the Divine Name<sup>18</sup>.

The work of Christ in mediating this Covenant is so well known that we need not spend too much time on it here. It is described throughout the Old Testament prophets, but particularly in the Servant Songs in Isaiah, and especially in Isaiah 53 where the tremendous cost to God, and to His Anointed, is portrayed.

## Only two religions – 'Do' and 'Done'

**D**r Bruce Winter wisely says that there are only two religions in the world: 'Do,' and 'Done.' **If we have not understood that our salvation is through supernaturally endowed faith in what Jesus has done, from first to last<sup>19</sup>, then we haven't understood the New Covenant and are no better off than the Jews under the Old<sup>20</sup>.** If we try to mix the two, adding our effort to the perfect work of Christ, we pretend we could brighten the sun by holding a smoking candle in front of it.

## A light for the Gentiles

**Y**ou will notice that, far from teaching Replacement Theology, so far the New Covenant has left no room for the Gentiles at all! How can Jesus become Saviour of those who are strangers to the nation of

Israel? Scripture shows that God always intended to save all nations through Israel. The promise to Abraham, the teaching of Deuteronomy, the salvation of people like Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, and the Ninevites in Jonah – all these show that God is interested in humanity, not just the Jews. But how does this Covenant provide a foundation for the Church?

The answer is, through **inclusion** of Gentiles into God's holy people. And the basis of that inclusion is simply the surpassing greatness of Christ and His atoning blood. There is a fascinating chapter in Isaiah that, almost as an aside, opens the gates of salvation to people over the world, and expands the Promised Land right across the earth to make room for them! Isaiah 49 contains one of the famous Servant Songs. In v5, Messiah speaks of His incarnation to save Israel. In v6, Yahweh says that this job is too small for Him – 'I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, to bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.'

Later, in v20, God is speaking to Zion, here probably meaning the whole land of Israel. It seems there will be so many sons and daughters (remember all those Gentiles!) that they'll complain about lack of space. The Lord remedies this bountifully in Isaiah 65:17-25 – look it up!

The New Covenant is the culmination of all the promises of God, and fulfils all the other Covenants. Where Scripture isn't describing it, it's looking forward to it – never back, because it triumphs now and will do so forever. Heaven and earth will pass away, but not the word of Jesus. Let's enjoy it a lot, and tell as many people as we can, both Israelite and outsider – the Jew first, and then the Gentile.

Next time we'll round the series off by showing how Father and Son planned this all from the beginning.

1 Romans 5.12

2 Isaiah 54.9

3 Micah 7.18-20

4 Isaiah 6.13; Galatians 3.16

5 Ezra 9.9; Nehemiah 9.36

6 Deuteronomy 4.25-28

7 Deuteronomy 4.29-31

8 2 Samuel 7.15-16

9 Lamentations 2.8-9

10 Isaiah 11.1-10

11 Especially Jeremiah 31.31ff

12 Especially Ezekiel 36.22-36; 37.18-28

13 eg Galatians 3.10

14 Jeremiah 31.31-34; Ezekiel 36.26-27, 37.23-24

15 Ezekiel 37.28

16 Habakkuk 2.4

17 Jeremiah 31.18; Ezekiel 36.22-23, 37.23; cf Ephesians 2.8-10

18 Philippians 2.9-11

19 Romans 1.17

20 Galatians 5.1-6

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