

SESSION TWENTY – FIVE

**A PROGRESSIVE FULFILMENT VIEW OF ISRAEL'S
OLD TESTAMENT COVENANTS AND PROMISES*****Part 2: Israel's Fulfilment and the Culmination
Of The Covenant Promises in the Messianic Kingdom***

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INTRODUCTION

In the first article, we examined three of the four dispensations comprising biblical history, namely, the Patriarchal period, Israel under Law, and the church. The fourth, the Messianic Kingdom, will be examined in this article. It is essential to understand these dispensations in order to understand how the promises and covenants, originally given to Israel, come to have their fulfilment in the overall plan of God. Key to such an understanding is the matter of *progressive fulfilment*. In the previous article, attention was given to the progressive fulfilment of the New Covenant, particularly in its relationship to the church. In fulfilling the New Covenant, God did not abrogate His promises to Israel as a nation. He did, however, expand the scope of participation. This explains how some of the New Covenant promises have come to be fulfilled with the church in the present age. In the future, however, the complete fulfilment of the New Covenant must include national Israel. Then, and only then, are we prepared to consider the whole kingdom program of God (which must be understood in terms of its progressive outworking).

Completion of the New Covenant with Israel

At the same time, we must maintain that the experiences of the church thus far do not represent the *complete fulfilment* of the New Covenant. Once again, the matter of *progressive fulfilment* must be kept in mind. While the New Covenant has received a partial fulfilment with Israel (i.e., the believing remnant of the nation that partially comprises the church), it yet awaits a complete fulfilment. This will take place following the present dispensation as Christ returns to earth. Furthermore, this idea of the New Covenant progressively being fulfilled with the Second Coming will have important implications for how we understand the church prior to that time.

An important passage related to this discussion is Romans 11. In Romans 9—11, Paul is attempting to explain the role that Israel plays in God's salvation work in history. After explaining the theological truth regarding justification by faith, the question naturally arises, "well, what about Israel?" Are God's promises to Israel going to be kept? If not, how can we have confidence in the gospel promises? So, in chapters 9--11 Paul explains how God's promises to Israel will be worked out, and how at the same time He will bring blessings to the Gentile world. At the heart of this is the role that the Jewish *remnant* plays, for it is through them that God's promises to Israel are being kept. In this age, ethnic Israel plays the *minor character* in contrast to the dominating role of the Gentiles.

But at the end of this present dispensation, God will bring about a mighty saving work among the Jews. Paul writes in Rom 11:25-26a,

"For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved."

Much discussion has taken place about what Paul means by "all Israel." Space does not permit a complete evaluation at this point, but in light of his obvious distinguishing of Israel from Gentiles and in light of his distinguishing of "all Israel" from the remnant discussed earlier in the chapter, Paul probably means Israel *as a whole*. That is, at a future time in history when God's harvest among the Gentiles is fundamentally complete, He will graciously bring about a conversion of the bulk of that particular generation of Jews living at that time (namely, the time of Christ's return).¹

The point that I wish to make here is that this is vitally related to the fulfilment of the New Covenant, and particularly as it pertains to ethnic Israel. Immediately after making his statement "thus all Israel will be saved," Paul follows this by the quotation of two passages from the Old Testament. The first is drawn from Isa 59:20-21a:

"The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob."

The second is drawn from Isa 27:9:

"And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."

Understanding the manner of Paul's quotation of these passages is quite complex, particularly since he has drawn these from the Septuagint text, which differs significantly from the Hebrew. Without going into a technical discussion at this point, suffice it to say that both of these passages in Isaiah were understood as *New Covenant passages*, and Paul makes a conflation of them in order to link the salvation of "all Israel" to God's New Covenant promises with ethnic Israel. If we take a closer look at these passages, we will make a significant discovery regarding this New Covenant fulfilment. The Isa 27 passage focuses upon the forgiveness of sins that the nation will receive, whereas the Isa 59 passage focuses upon the anticipated blessing of the Holy Spirit, two of the most prominent blessings of the New Covenant. Regarding the latter, take note of the following verse in Isa 59:21:

"'And as for Me, this is My covenant with them,' says the LORD: 'My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth'"

What is significant here is that the announcement of the Redeemer coming to Zion (Isa 59:20) is linked with the granting of the Spirit and fulfilling of the covenant (Isa 59:21).

What I deduce from this is that the New Covenant is a progressively fulfilled covenant, and that a future generation of Jews living at the time of Christ's return will experience this . . . including an

¹For the reader who would like to have more detailed exegesis of this position, I refer you to Robert Saucy's chapter "The Pauline Prophecies About Israel" (pp. 246-63) in *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*; Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries Press): 720-45; S. Lewis Johnson, "Evidence from Romans 9-11," in *A Case for Premillennialism; A New Consensus*, ed. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992: 199-223; and J. Lanier Burns, "The Future of Ethnic Israel in Romans 11," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church; The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1992: 188-229. I have argued elsewhere that "all Israel" does not mean every single Jewish individual (J. Paul Tanner, "The Function of Zechariah 13 Within the Prophet's Final Oracle," [Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1981]).

outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Thus, ethnic Israel has not as yet experienced the completion of the New Covenant with her (i.e., with the nation as a whole), but only partially with the believing remnant. Yet, there is an incredible implication arising out of this observation, namely, in regard to the New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit. Romans 11:25-27 is a witness to the fact that the New Covenant blessing of the Holy Spirit extends through the tribulation and into the time of the millennial kingdom. Yet if that is true, this tends to conflict with the traditional dispensational understanding of the church and the Holy Spirit.

Classical and revised dispensationalism have affirmed the position that the church began on the day of Pentecost and will be completed at the pretribulational rapture of the church (i.e., before Daniel's 70th week).² In other words, the believers on earth during the Tribulation are "saved," but not part of the church. They are not part of the "body of Christ" nor do they experience the baptism and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as do believers today in the church. In his book on the Holy Spirit, Dr. John F. Walvoord states,

Much of the revelation concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit to those saved in the tribulation is based on inference, but a continued ministry of the Holy Spirit to believers in this period, though somewhat restricted, is evident. There is little evidence that believers will be indwelt by the Spirit during the tribulation. The possibility of a universal indwelling of all believers in the tribulation is opposed by the revelation of 2 Thessalonians 2:7, that the one restraining the world from sin, i.e., the Holy Spirit, will be "taken out of the way" during the tribulation. . . . Taking all the factors into consideration, there is no evidence for the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in believers in the tribulation.³

While acknowledging that there will be manifestations of the Spirit's power during the Tribulation, Dr. Walvoord nevertheless goes on to deny the ministry of the "baptism of the Spirit" during this period as well as the "body" nature of the church. He concludes,

While, therefore, the Spirit continues a ministry in the world in the tribulation, there is no longer a corporate body of believers knit into one living organism. There is rather a return to national distinctions and fulfilment of national promises in preparation for the millennium.⁴

²Ryrie recently reaffirmed this in his 1995 ed. of *Dispensationalism* (p. 148): "The distinction between Israel and the church leads to the belief that the church will be taken from the earth before the beginning of the Tribulation (which in one major sense concerns Israel)."

³John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1954), 230. Dr. Merrill F. Unger likewise anticipated a limited ministry of the Spirit baptism when he posited, "The baptizing work of the Holy Spirit is the only ministry of the Spirit confined to this age. It is distinctive to the formation of the church, the body of Christ. When this particular group of God's elect is completed and called out of the world, there will be no longer any need for the baptizing work of the Spirit, and it will terminate" (*The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1974], 40). There seems to me, however, very little evidence for the cessation of the Holy Spirit's ministry to believers of the tribulation in comparison to the experience of believers today. Dr. Walvoord appeals to 2 Thess 2:7 ("only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way"), but this verse probably means nothing more than that the Holy Spirit's restraining ministry upon Satan and the Antichrist will one day be lifted. You cannot prove from this that the Holy Spirit departs or that He is no longer indwelling believers. Ryrie (*Dispensationalism*, 1995, p. 126) attempts to argue on the basis of the phrase "dead in Christ" in 1 Thess 4:16 that believers today are at least distinct from believers of the Old Testament. Though that is probably true, it leaves open the question of believers today in relation to those of the Tribulation.

⁴*Ibid.*, 231.

If the New Covenant is a progressively fulfilled covenant, and if the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is one of its paramount features, and if it is evident that the New Covenant began at the cross and is still being bestowed at the completion of the Tribulation and in the millennial kingdom, would this suggest that the New Covenant is also operational through the time of the Tribulation? If one were to say "no," then it seems to me that we would have to posit a *gap* in the progressive continuity of the covenant. On the other hand, if we see an uninterrupted continuation of the New Covenant which climaxes with the outpouring of the Spirit upon "all Israel" at the end of the Tribulation, it seems to me that it would be most reasonable to conclude that the experiences we have now with the Holy Spirit that uniquely define the church (i.e., the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit and the permanent indwelling for each believer) will be operative in the Tribulation as well. Saucy sees the application of the "baptism with the Spirit" as stemming from Joel's prophecy about the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Joel's prophecy is at least partially fulfilled at Pentecost, but undoubtedly anticipates a greater fulfilment in the Tribulation period, since it mentions certain cataclysmic phenomena that have not yet been experienced. From this, Saucy concludes, "The baptism with the Spirit is therefore not some unique ministry only for the people of the present church age, from Pentecost to the rapture, but rather is the sharing by members of the church in the Spirit's ministry of the new covenant."⁵ Looking at these *church distinctives* from the perspective of their association with the New Covenant, one could argue that the continuation of the New Covenant is grounds for continuation of the church itself (or at least these very same ministries). Saucy goes on to state,

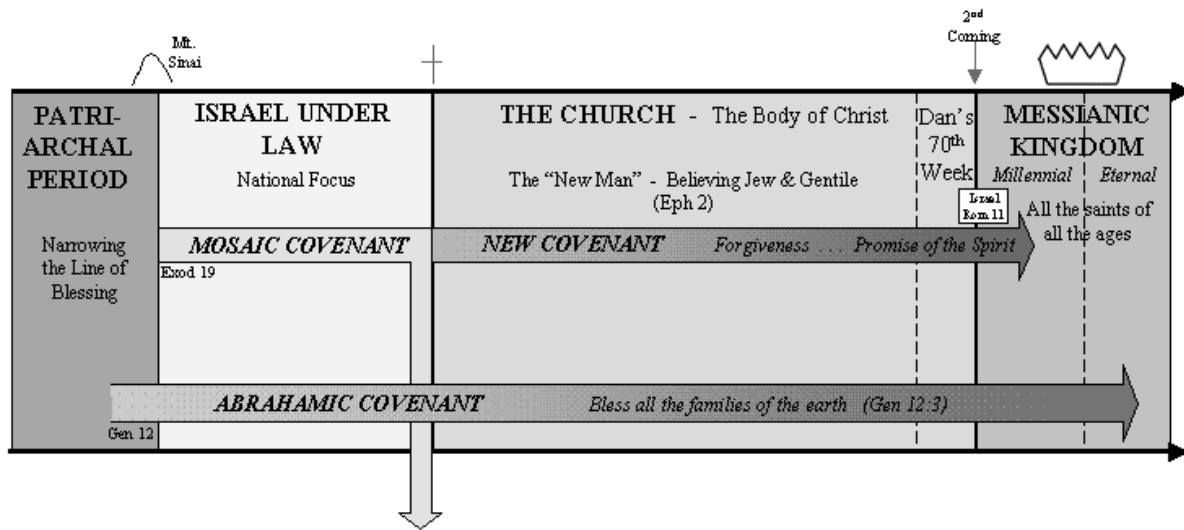
Surely the continuation of the new covenant salvation means that other believers will be indwelt by the Spirit. Since, as we saw earlier, the indwelling Spirit involves also the indwelling Christ, it must be concluded that all new covenant believers will be "in Christ" and vitally sharing his life.⁶

In summary, the Mosaic Covenant of the Old Testament has been superseded by the New Covenant based on the shed blood of Christ. Viewing the church through the lens of the New Covenant enables us to see the church as a *step forward* regarding God's promises to Israel (without becoming a "spiritual Israel") as well as participating in the blessings of the New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit, which experiences will continue through the period known as Daniel's 70th week. In fact, there is very good reason to believe that the blessings of the New Covenant (particularly those experiences involving the Holy Spirit) will reach their full height during the millennial kingdom.⁷ The following chart depicts the progressive outworking of the New Covenant in relation to the Abrahamic Covenant and Mosaic Covenant:

⁵Saucy, 183.

⁶Ibid., 186. Elsewhere, he elaborates the point further: "Dispensationalists traditionally have distinguished the church from Israel by many spiritual realities that were claimed to belong exclusively to the believers of the present church age. These centered on the body nature of the church and the related doctrines of the baptism with the Spirit and the indwelling Christ. We have argued in previous chapters that these spiritual realities are essentially the fulfilment of the promised new covenant salvation. Since this salvation was promised to both Israel and the nations, these realities that are new with the coming of Christ and the Spirit are not unique to the church. They belong to all God's people and are, in fact, that which finally binds them together as the people of God" (208).

⁷See Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 208-210.



THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

The fourth dispensation that we will discuss is the "messianic kingdom." In my understanding of the messianic kingdom, there will be a millennial phase on earth for 1000 years followed by a transition into the eternal phase. This is the fundamental teaching of premillennialism, and I am assuming this position as that which best explains the biblical data.⁸ I also view both phases as constituting one kingdom. In other words, when Christ takes up His rule in the kingdom following His return, this is the beginning of an eternal rule of Christ *directly* over His subjects.

The Old Testament Concept of the Kingdom

The expectation of the Old Testament is that God will establish the kingdom of the Messiah *following* the termination of Gentile kingdoms. According to Dan 2:44, this occurs at the time of that Gentile kingdom represented by the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's dream image:

"And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever."

In Daniel 7, further detail is provided about the kingdom of God. It is a kingdom that will be given to the Messiah, which will be universal, and which will be eternal. In Dan 7:13-14, the prophet reports,

"I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."

The remainder of the chapter goes on to clarify that this kingdom will come about after the time of the "little horn" (i.e., the Antichrist). This revelation is meant to build upon that which had already been given earlier through the Davidic covenant and further described by the earlier prophets (notably Isaiah). The Messiah is here termed the "Son of Man," and this shows the source of one of Jesus'

⁸For a positive presentation of premillennialism, see Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend, ed., *A Case for Premillennialism; A New Consensus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992).

favorite self-designations. With the particular phraseology utilized that "all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him," this passage also reflects that God's intentions with the Abrahamic Covenant will ultimately be fulfilled in the kingdom. It is there in the kingdom with its universality of worship and service to Christ that we see the fulness of God's blessings brought to the nations of this world. The Abrahamic Covenant is then a progressive covenant by God in which His blessings are progressively brought upon all peoples. In this age, believers have been placed "in Christ," and have been made partakers of the New Covenant with its blessings of the forgiveness of sins and indwelling Holy Spirit. In the messianic kingdom, the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant will be extended further, so that we have a redeemed world united in faith and service to Jesus Christ, and thereby experiencing justice, righteousness and peace. This is the general picture of the kingdom of God that is portrayed within the Old Testament. The kingdom is also portrayed in very earthly terms, and according to Isaiah 2 we will see Jerusalem having an elevated role in world affairs from which the Messiah will teach and rule over a world characterized by universal peace. The Old Testament also anticipates that the coming of Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom will follow a time of great tribulation for the nation of Israel, out of which they will be rescued by His personal intervention (Jer 30:1-11; Zech 12--14).

The New Testament Concept of the Kingdom

When we come to the New Testament, the portrayal of the kingdom of God is much more complex. The fact that the New Testament closes by portraying a period of 1000 years in which saints will reign on earth with Christ following the Second Coming (Rev 19--20) should serve as our general guideline for the ultimate fulfilment of the kingdom of God. The remainder of the New Testament, however, does not present an entirely consistent expectation of the kingdom as envisioned by the Old Testament. According to Col 1:13, believers have *already* been transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son. Space does not permit a full-blown study of the kingdom at this time, but I would refer the reader to Saucy's chapter on "The Kingdom" for a helpful discussion of the "already-not-yet" aspects of the kingdom as presented by the New Testament.⁹

I think it may be helpful to distinguish between the *primary thrust* of the kingdom teaching in the New Testament and the *secondary* aspects. Reading through the New Testament, especially the gospels, it seems to me that the primary thrust is an expectation of the kingdom quite in keeping with what we have been prepared for by the Old Testament. Furthermore, this kingdom of God will be established in the proper sense following the Second Coming of Christ to the earth.

Looking to Matthew's gospel, the first twelve chapters present a rather consistent view in which the nation of Israel is called to repent in preparation for the establishment of the kingdom (uniquely referred to as the "kingdom of heaven" in Matthew's account, "heaven" being substituted for "God" in keeping with Jewish reverence for the divine name). Jesus declares the righteousness that ought to be evidenced by His subjects (Mt 5--7), which is then followed by a presentation of His miracles as credentials for His claim to be the Messiah (Mt 8--12). Reading through these chapters, one is given the impression that the kingdom is very imminent and about to be established. It is not until we come to Mt 13 that a *twist* is given to the story. Suddenly, Jesus' teaching style changes, and He uses parables to teach about kingdom mysteries. Whether or not it was apparent to His disciples at that point, the parables were laying a foundation for the fact that the kingdom (at least as envisioned by the Old Testament) was not going to come about right away. There was going to be an intervening age in which the "sons of the kingdom" would multiply (Mt 13:38) and finally be "gathered" at the end of the age so that they might "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (13:43). From this, I

⁹Robert Saucy, "The Kingdom," in *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 81-110.

gather that the *kingdom proper* is still to take place at the end of the age. Yet in the intervening time, we have people becoming "sons of the kingdom." So, in some sense, there is a spiritual form of the kingdom in that believers become "sons of the kingdom." Matthew 13 represents a transition point in Jesus' teaching about the kingdom (at least as portrayed by Matthew), and the cause is no doubt to be found in what transpires in Matthew 12. In that chapter, the miracles of Jesus have brought the people to a point of concluding that Jesus is the "Son of David" (Mt 12:23), and the religious leaders can only divert them from following Him by attributing His miraculous deeds to power from Satan (12:24). They are close to blasphemy against the Spirit at this point (12:31), and Christ utters one of His strongest denunciations of them in response. Referring to His miracles, Christ declares, "if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (12:28). Probably what He means by this is that the multitude of miracles He had performed before them attested to the fact that He was indeed the Messiah through whom the kingdom would be established. In one sense, they had come very close to the kingdom in that they had beheld the Messiah and His miraculous credentials firsthand. The kingdom concept was so bound up with the person of the King Messiah that to be near Him was to be near the kingdom (so Lk 17:20-24 -- "the kingdom of God is in your midst").¹⁰

Nevertheless, the plain teaching from the rest of the gospels reveals that the actual formal establishment of the kingdom had not as yet come about. Near the end of His earthly ministry, the Scriptures clearly reveal that the kingdom (in its proper sense) had not yet been established. This is reflected, for instance, in the final trip to Jerusalem in Lk 19:11:

"And while they were listening to these things, He went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately."

These people actually thought the trip to Jerusalem was going to result in Jesus being made King and the kingdom of God brought into reality. Ironically, it resulted in His death on a cross. Nevertheless, following this statement in Lk 19:11, Christ uses the occasion to tell the parable of the nobleman. In the story, a nobleman (representing Christ) is said to have gone "to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return" (19:12). In the interim, he entrusts his finances to various slaves to do business with. Eventually he returns, and this is depicted in Lk 19:15:

"And it came about that when he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money"

The point is that the kingdom was not being established at that point in His earthly ministry. Jesus would have to go away, and return again at some point in the future to establish the kingdom. That this is the proper understanding is confirmed by the explicit teaching of Luke two chapters later. Following His teaching on the Second Coming in Lk 21:25-28, the Lord goes on to say in regard to the closely attending signs,

"Even so you, too, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near."

¹⁰Regarding the Luke 17 passage, unfortunately the *KJV* translation ("the kingdom of God is within you") has skewed the proper understanding of this passage. For the proper translation, see I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1978): 652ff. Given that Jesus was speaking to the unbelieving Pharisees, we know that He could not be talking about an *inner spiritual* kingdom in the heart. He is simply making the point that He Himself was *among them*, and the opportunity of the kingdom was thus in their midst as well. The fact that He goes on to talk about the Second Coming in vv 22-24 suggests that the coming of the kingdom will be established in connection with His return.

In the very next chapter, the Lord shares the Passover with the disciples and declares (Lk 22:18),

"For I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes."

Matthew adds even greater detail to reveal that the *kingdom proper* is established following the Second Coming. In Mt 24, we have the clear announcement of the Second Coming following a period of tribulation (24:29-31). Then, in Mt 25, we are told of consequential events that accompany His return. One of these is the separation of the sheep and goats in Mt 25:31ff.:

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. . . . Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

In summary, the Old Testament expectation of the worldwide kingdom of peace and righteousness ruled by the Messiah is reaffirmed in the New Testament, and it will be established following the Second Coming of Christ. The question may be asked, however, "But is there any sense in which the kingdom is a present reality?" The answer to this is "yes, there is."

The Kingdom as a Present Reality

Having concluded that the kingdom proper is to be established by Christ at His return, there is some evidence of a *present reality* to the kingdom. Col 1:13, for instance, declares,

"For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son."

For the word "transferred," the Apostle Paul used the aorist verb μετέστησεν, which implies that in some sense believers are already in Christ's kingdom. It seems to me that this is talking about our *citizenship status*, for elsewhere Paul typically views kingdom entrance as a yet future experience connected with the Lord's return and the believer's resurrection (e.g., 1 Cor 15:50; 2 Tim 4:1,18). According to Phil 3:20, "our citizenship is in heaven." As was noted in Mt 13:38, through faith in Christ we become "sons of the kingdom." The point here is that when the kingdom is formally established, we who have obtained a new citizenship as "sons of the kingdom" will become the subjects of Christ's kingdom, i.e., we will be resurrected to be in the kingdom at that time.

Further insight on the present reality of the kingdom is afforded by Rev 1:5-6:

"To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever."

In light of these verses (which allude to Ex 19:5-6 and the idea of a kingdom of priests), we can see that our citizenship status also results in a *present kingdom function*, namely, of being believer-priests. Yet, Rev 5:10 seems to consider our present role of being priests as distinct from that of "reigning on earth."

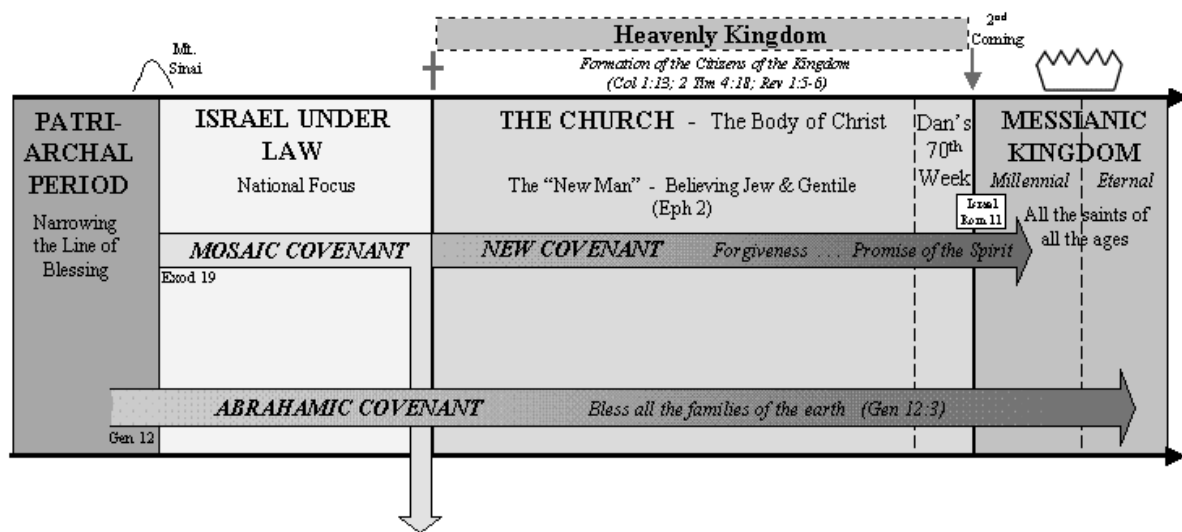
A key to understanding this dynamic of "kingdom citizenship" is to recognize the concept of what Paul speaks of as being "in Christ." In the very same chapter in which he mentions being "transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son," Paul goes on to talk about the mystery of the church and the glory of "Christ in you" (1:27; cf. Gal 2:20; Rom 6) and presenting "every man complete in Christ" (1:28). Since we are positionally "in Christ," we participate in His death, in His resurrection, and in His present position in heaven. This is reaffirmed in Eph 2:6:

". . . and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus."

If Jesus is a King in heaven, and we are "in Christ," then we can understand that there is some sense in which we are *in His kingdom*. Another passage that sheds some light upon this truth is found in 2 Tim 4, the last letter that Paul wrote before his death. Paul's idea of being "in Christ" so permeated his thinking that he could expect to be "with Christ" at the very moment of death (see Phil 1:23). Facing his own death and realizing that he would die before the return of Christ (note 2 Tim 4:6 -- "the time of my departure has come"), he declared in 2 Tim 4:18),

*"The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."*¹¹

I feel that Paul made this statement out of the same conviction in which he saw himself "in Christ." Facing death, he would soon be "with Christ" and hence in His heavenly kingdom. This dimension of the "heavenly kingdom" can be added to our understanding of the covenants and the future kingdom:



Therefore, we can conclude that the New Testament looks forward to the kingdom of God being established after the return of Christ (and this is the primary emphasis of kingdom teaching), but because believers are "in Christ" and have a citizenship in heaven where Christ is, there is also a sense in which we are part of the "heavenly kingdom" now. We *belong* to it (not to Satan's domain of darkness), and we will be "with Christ" in it should we die. Though this truth about the *heavenly kingdom* is a minor part of the New Testament revelation about kingdom truth, it does have a bearing upon our understanding of Christ's present relationship to the kingdom and the Davidic Covenant. To this we shall now turn our attention.

The Progressive Nature of The Davidic Covenant

A brief description was given earlier of the fundamental expectations of the Davidic Covenant as revealed in 2 Samuel 7. This included the promises to David of a line of "sons" (a dynasty), throne, temple and kingdom. In light of the previous discussion of the kingdom in the New Testament, I think it is clear that the Davidic Covenant will have its ultimate fulfilment in the Messianic kingdom

¹¹Paul's reference to the Lord's "heavenly kingdom" in verse 18 should be seen in contrast to his mention of the kingdom in verse 1. In the case of verse 1, Paul associated the kingdom with Christ's appearing, thus reflecting his general expectation that the *kingdom proper* would come about at Christ's return. As believers die during the interim period, they are taken to the "heavenly kingdom."

that follows the Second Coming. The kingdom promise of the Davidic Covenant does result in the millennial reign of Christ on the earth. The greater difficulty, however, is to identify in what sense, if any, the Davidic Covenant has a partial fulfilment in the present age of the church. Dispensationalism has traditionally asserted that Christ does not occupy the Davidic throne until after the Second Coming. To underscore the fact that this is no minor issue, Dr. Ryrie in his 1995 book on *Dispensationalism* states, "One of the major departures, if not *the* major one, of progressive dispensationalism from traditional dispensationalism and premillennial teaching is that Christ, already inaugurated as the Davidic king at His ascension, is now reigning in heaven on the throne of David."¹² Perhaps this highly cautious attitude about the Davidic Covenant is understandable, in that amillennialism has essentially discounted a future millennial kingdom on the basis that Christ is already reigning in fulfilment of the Davidic Covenant. However, given that the other biblical covenants are progressively fulfilled covenants, it should not seem too surprising that the Davidic Covenant would be also.

That Jesus Christ is a king in fulfilment of the Davidic promise, all agree. That He is enthroned now as the Davidic king is another matter, and is in fact the very point of dispute. Unfortunately, there are no clear verses one way or the other to settle the dispute.¹³ A foundational passage pertaining to the discussion is Psalm 110. This psalm of David begins by saying,

"The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.' The LORD will stretch forth Thy strong scepter from Zion, saying, 'Rule in the midst of Thine enemies.'"

The psalm goes on to announce the position of Christ as a priest of the order of Melchizedek (vs 4), and as One who will come to "shatter kings in the day of His wrath" (vs 5) and "judge among the nations" (vs 6). The latter aspects are not difficult to understand. In His present position at God's right hand, He is actively serving as High Priest. In the Tribulation before the Second Coming, He will pour out His wrath on the Antichrist and all who are aligned with Satan. Regarding the latter, the Son's wrath is elsewhere depicted in Psalm 2, verses 9 and 12 (also a strongly Messianic psalm). Given that Ps 2:9 is alluded to in Rev 19:15, we are quite right in finding its fulfilment in the Tribulation/Second Coming scenario.¹⁴

The more challenging question is whether His "sitting at the Father's right hand" implies that He has taken the Davidic throne. There are certainly verses that might lend themselves to this suggestion. Rev 3:21, for instance, states,

"He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

One could quibble about whether or not sitting on the Father's throne is the same thing as sitting on the Davidic throne. Then there are the numerous verses that emphasize Christ's present rule and authority. Matthew 28:18 declares,

¹²Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (1995), 167. Cf. Stephen J. Nichols, "The Dispensational View of the Davidic Kingdom: A Response to Progressive Dispensationalism," *Master's Seminary Journal* 7:2 (Fall 1996): 213-39.

¹³Bock, however, does attempt to argue for a present aspect of the Davidic covenant along five biblical rationales. See Darrell L. Bock, "Current Messianic Activity and OT Davidic Promise: Dispensationalism, Hermeneutics, and NT Fulfillment," *Trinity Journal* 15:1 (Spr 1994): 55-87.

¹⁴Cf. Rev 2:25-28 which also links Psalm 2 with the Second Coming.

"Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'"

Ephesians 1:20-22 certainly has Psalm 110 in mind when it states,

". . . He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church."

Even Rev 3:7 might imply a partial fulfilment of the Davidic Covenant when it states,

". . . who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens."

Peter, after mentioning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, says in 1 Pet 3:22,

". . . who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him."

In Acts 2:30-36, Peter draws upon Christ's exaltation to the Father's right hand and quotes Ps 110:1 in his explanation of the Pentecost event. The fact that He also makes reference to the throne of David in Acts 2:30 (citing Ps 132:11) suggests to some that Ps 110:1 does have at least *a fulfilment* of the Davidic Covenant in mind (some would even see a complete fulfilment).¹⁵ Saucy, for instance, states,

The meaning of the "right hand of God" in Psalm 110:1 and Acts 2:33 is, therefore, the position of messianic authority. It is the throne of David.¹⁶

Saucy does, however, believe that there will also be an earthly aspect to Christ's messianic reign. Ryrie, on the other hand, argues that the text is not claiming actual *Davidic rule*, only an identification of Jesus as the Davidic king by virtue of the resurrection. He states,

Actually, what Peter is arguing for is the identification of Jesus of Nazareth as the Davidic king, since Jesus, not David, was raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father. He does not add that He is reigning as the Davidic king.¹⁷

Even if we were to grant Ryrie's point, his position must still overcome the more serious challenge presented by Acts 13:32-33 in Paul's sermon at Pisidian Antioch:

"And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'Thou art My son; today I have begotten thee.'"

By "the promise," Paul clearly means the promise of the Davidic Covenant, for he had used the same expression earlier in the sermon. Note vv 22-23:

¹⁵Bock cogently remarks, "One has to explain why Psalm 132:11 and its reference to promise, an oath, and to David's throne is evoked, if it is a reference to a different throne than the one Jesus is sitting upon as a result of resurrection" (*Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, 88).

¹⁶Saucy, 72. Cf. Bock and Blaising, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 177-181.

¹⁷Ryrie, 168.

" . . . He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.' From the offspring of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus."

So, the "promise" clearly pertains to the promise of the Davidic Covenant. Yet notice that in vs 33 Paul says "God has fulfilled this *promise*" (ταύτην ὁ θεὸς ἐκπεπλήρωκεν - perfect tense). Now in what sense has God fulfilled the Davidic Covenant promise? Either He has fulfilled it completely, or He has filled it partially, but it is hard to deny that He has fulfilled it in some way. In my thinking, with the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God, we do have a *partial fulfilment* of the Davidic Covenant with Christ as king. I will come back in a moment to discuss in what sense He reigns.

Someone might object that this passage is saying nothing more than that the resurrection marks Jesus out as the Davidic king of promise, not that He has commenced His Davidic rule. Romans 1:3-4, for instance, could be understood this way:

" . . . concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord."

I would counter, however, that it is precisely the connection of the Davidic Covenant reference with Psalm 2 in the latter part of Acts 13:33 which demonstrates that Christ's Davidic rule has indeed commenced. Paul does not simply point to the resurrection alone as an affirmation of the fulfilment of the promise to David. He adds, "as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'Thou are my son; today I have begotten Thee.'" This quotation is drawn from Ps 2:7, in which reference was made to the Davidic Covenant to show by what right God's Messiah had to rule.¹⁸ Yet when we look at the context of Psalm 2 in which this quotation occurs, fulfilment is linked to the king's coronation. For instance, the preceding verse declares, "But as for Me, I have installed My king upon Zion, My holy mountain." Since verse 7 clearly finds its fulfilment with the resurrection (so Acts 13:33), the most plausible conclusion is that the king's installation coincides with the resurrection. Following a recollection of the Davidic Covenant promise ("Thou are My son"), the remainder of the verse highlights the uniqueness of this special occasion: "Today I have begotten Thee."

For one to assume the office of king was to assume the status of son (though I would agree in the case of Jesus, the father-son relationship had far greater significance).¹⁹ Likewise, the act of being "begotten" looks at change of status (not physical generation) connected with entry into kingship. This is confirmed by the way the term "first-born" parallels the notion of kingship in Ps 89:27, a psalm also focusing upon the Davidic Covenant:

"I also shall make him My first-born,

¹⁸The use of the term קִּיָּן ("decree") rather than בְּרִית ("covenant") should not deter us from understanding Ps 2:7 in reference to the Davidic Covenant. The term קִּיָּן is a term for covenant, and the parallel use of the two terms elsewhere (e.g., 2 Kgs 17:15; Isa 24:5; Ps 105:10; and 1 Chr 16:17) reveals the close connection between the two words.

¹⁹The "son" relationship that the Messiah enjoys should first be understood in its ancient near eastern significance as a forensic metaphor. Moshe Weinfeld, in his studies of Hittite documents with adoption formulas, has brought forth an illuminating parallel:

"When I conquer the land of Mitanni I shall not reject you, I shall make you my son . . . he shall sit on the throne; I, the king, called him my son" ("The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90 [1970]: 191).

the highest of the kings of the earth."

What, then, is the occasion for this installation as Davidic king? The psalmist's reference to "Today" finds its realization at the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, as the Apostle Paul rightly understands in Acts 13:33.²⁰ Thus, Paul's declaration "God has fulfilled this promise" must mean more than a declaration that Jesus is the Davidic king. The attachment of these words from Psalm 2 clarifies that this Davidic king has commenced His rule by virtue of his resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. I would add, however, that the Second Coming (with the inauguration of the Millennial Kingdom) will bring about a significant escalation of what His rule as the Davidic king means. Yet, the "already" aspect of His Davidic rule allows the Apostle John to legitimately call Jesus Christ "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev 1:5) who is thus entitled to exercise the "key of David" (3:7).

Though the Scriptures imply that Jesus is the Davidic king presently in heaven, more reflection needs to be given to the kind or extent of authority He now exercises. Hebrews 10:12-13 (consistent with Mt 25:31) seems to imply that He has not as yet taken up His full reign, for there is some aspect of "waiting" to it:

"but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet."

Drawing upon Ps 110:1's stipulation of sitting at the right hand of God, this verse in Hebrews expresses that Christ is also *waiting*. So I conclude that Christ has been exalted to a position of authority over everyone (including Satan and the full angelic realm -- Eph 1:21; 1 Pet 3:22), but He has not utilized the fullness of that authority to exercise dominion over all His enemies. We could also say that not all his "enemies" have yet been made subject to Him. However, let us be careful to note that the "waiting" does not mean *inactivity* as king. Though he is waiting for all His enemies to be subdued (a future accomplishment), He is presently exercising His kingly authority. Hence, the Lord Jesus declares, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18). On this basis, we have confidence to engage in the Great Commission. At the time of the Second Coming, all enemies will be subdued (even Satan himself will be bound), thus inaugurating the fulness of the kingdom when Christ will actually rule over the earth.

Likewise, his posture of *sitting* ("He sat down at the right hand of God") should not be used as an argument against His present kingly activity (implying that He is presently inactive as Davidic king). In the context of Hebrews, this is used to signify that His atoning work is fully accomplished. Hence, He can "sit down," in contrast to the earthly high priests who continually *stand*, performing sacrifices which are unable to take away sins (Heb 10:11; cf. Heb 1:3).

Before completing the discussion about Christ's exercise of authority in conjunction with the Davidic Covenant, I want to digress for a moment to bring in another piece of valuable evidence that the Davidic Covenant is now being progressively fulfilled. This argument, however, pertains not to the "throne" aspect but to the "temple" aspect. One of the promises of the Davidic Covenant is that David's "son" would build the temple for God. Of course, there was a partial fulfilment of this in Solomon who built the Old Testament temple. I say "partial fulfilment" because there is a greater degree of fulfilment of this function in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this present age, Jesus is building God's temple in fulfilment of the Davidic Covenant, only this temple is not made with

²⁰The linking of Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14 is also used in Heb 1:3-5 in relation to the resurrection-ascension of Christ.

stones and mortar . . . it is made up of *living stones*. In the very passage of Eph 2 depicting the "one body," we are told in vv 19-22 that the Gentiles are

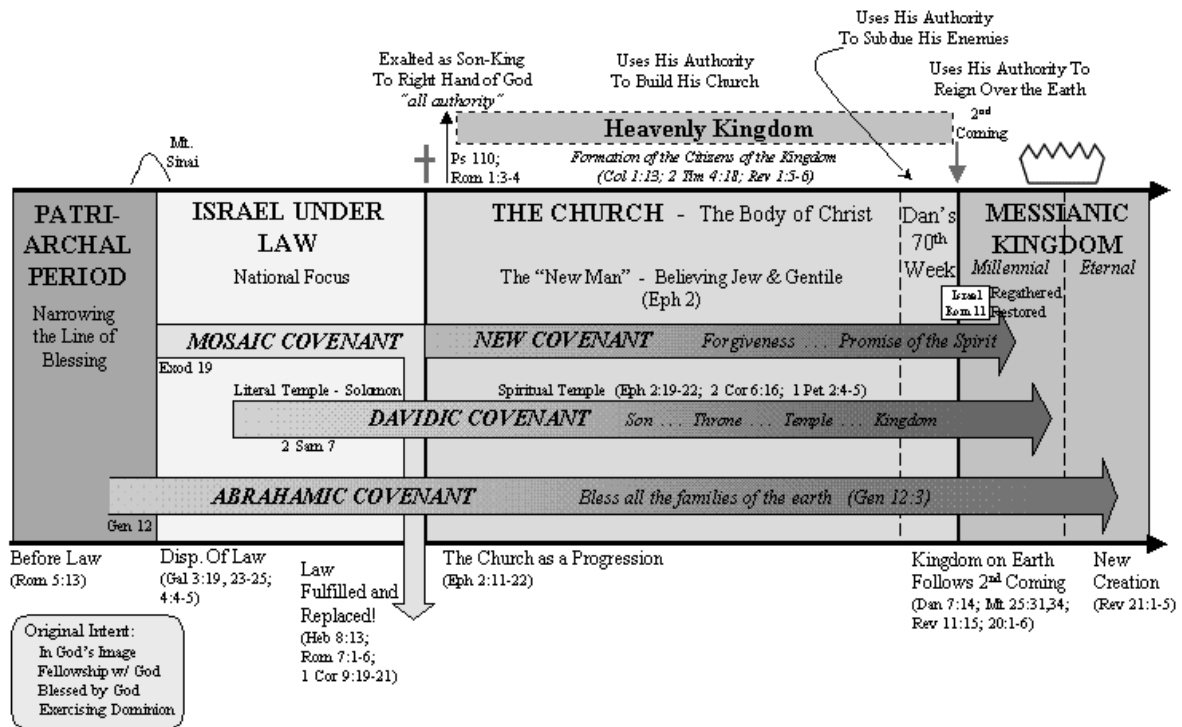
"of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

This is not a spiritualizing of the text! The New Testament itself is teaching us that the old literal temple has a higher sense of fulfilment. Both are part of the scope of fulfilment in the promise. This is not just an isolated teaching, either, for Paul teaches in 2 Cor 6:16 that "we are the temple of the living God." Peter echoes the same in 1 Pet 2:4-5:

"And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Here is my point: if the "temple aspect" of the Davidic Covenant is being fulfilled in the present age, then I think we have to admit that the Davidic Covenant is being progressively fulfilled and that there is probably some partial fulfilment to the "throne aspect" as well. Paul's statement in Acts 13:33 that "God has fulfilled this promise" certainly seems to confirm this view. We may not be able to define precisely in what sense Christ is exercising His authority in this present age, but I would suggest that it at least consists in exercising His authority to build His church.²¹ The earth and its political entities have not as yet been made subject to Him (Heb 2:8) nor are the kingdom citizens yet reigning with Christ (1 Cor 6:2-3; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:25-27), but He is delivering His subjects from spiritual bondage and the domain of darkness (Col 1:13). Perhaps we could depict His Davidic functions in relation to the covenants and Messianic kingdom in the following way:

²¹The bestowing of the Holy Spirit may also be a Davidic kingly function. In Acts 2:33, we are told, "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured forth this which you both see and hear." In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was connected with the theocratic kingship. Upon being anointed as king by Samuel, 1 Sam 16:13-14 tells us that "the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward" and that "the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul." So there is some relationship of the kingship to the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, the Davidic king enjoyed this privilege of the Spirit, whereas the general populace did not. Under the New Covenant, the Davidic king *par excellence* (i.e., Jesus) shares this privilege with all His true subjects.



CONCLUSION

God's historical program of salvation will climax with the Messianic kingdom being given to the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet as we attempt to comprehend the developments as a whole, we have to view this in relation to the biblical covenants established by God. Other than the Mosaic Covenant (which is a temporary covenant), God's program of salvation is vitally connected to three primary covenants: the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant. These covenants are not independent of one another but are quite interrelated. In particular, we have the Abrahamic Covenant, which, with its express purpose of bringing God's blessing to all peoples, forms the foundation for all other covenant goals. Furthermore, all three covenants exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, for it is through Him that these covenants find their realization. These covenants should also be seen as *progressively fulfilled covenants*. Though they lead to an ultimate fulfilment in the Messianic kingdom, we must also see how they have partial fulfilments in the preceding dispensations.

One of the most significant contributions coming out of this study is the clarification of the relationship of Israel with the church. The church is not some "spiritual Israel" that completely takes over the promises and expectations that had been given to Israel in the Old Testament. At the same time, the church is not some "parenthesis" or interruption of God's program with Israel, as though she has a program completely distinct from that of Israel. I agree with Robert Saucy when he writes,

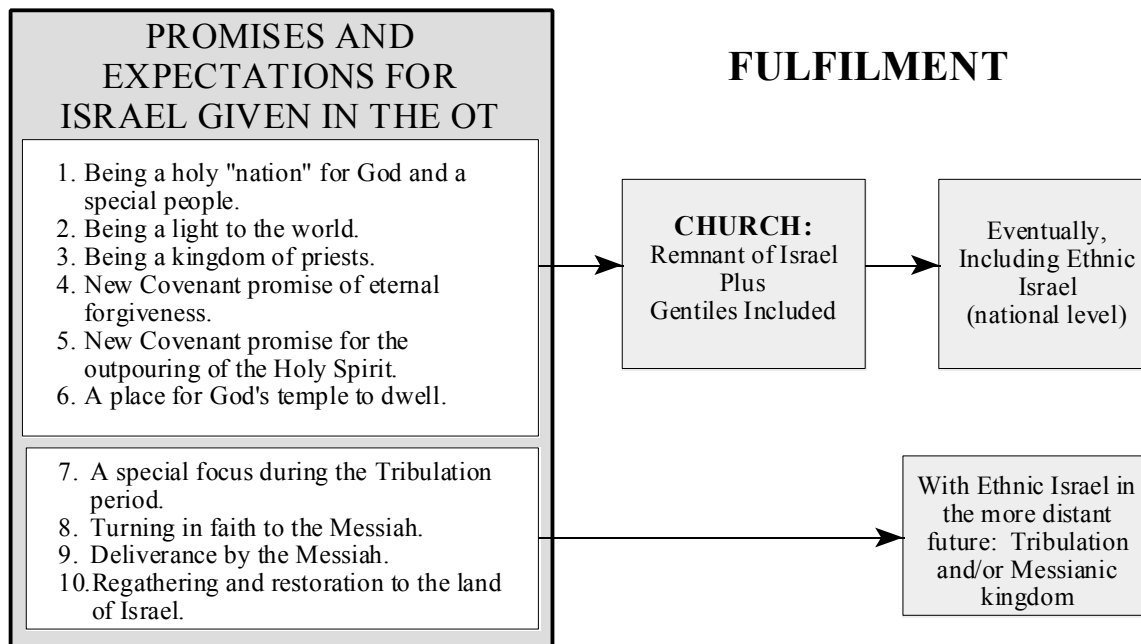
The present age is not a historical parenthesis unrelated to the history that precedes and follows it. Rather, it is an integrated phase in the development of the mediatorial kingdom. It is the beginning of the fulfilment of the eschatological promises. Thus the church today has its place and function in the same mediatorial messianic program that Israel was called to serve.²²

²²Saucy, 28.

To be very clear, however, we must understand that though God is bringing about partial fulfillments of the covenants with the church during the present age, there are still distinctive plans that God will yet accomplish through ethnic Israel. This would include the special role they have in the Tribulation in which they come under attack by the nations of the world (Zech 12:3; 14:2), their turning in faith to Messiah at the end of the age (Zech 12:10), the regathering and restoration of the nation to the land of Israel (Ezek 36--37), the establishment of Jerusalem as the world capital of Messiah Jesus when He returns (Isa 2:1-4), and even a special place for Israel among the nations of the world (cf. Isa 60:5,11; Hag 2:7; Zech 8:22-23).²³

So, there are some promises and expectations that were given to Israel in the Old Testament that can only be fulfilled with ethnic Israel, and these will come about in the Tribulation and Messianic kingdom. There are other promises and expectations that have a degree of fulfilment in the present age with the church. This is so because the church includes the believing remnant of Israel, and it is only by extension and expansion that Gentiles are allowed to partake of the same blessings. Perhaps we could diagram it this way:

²³Dr. Bruce Waltke, esteemed OT scholar and respected friend, wants to discount these promises to ethnic Israel, because they have not been reaffirmed by the NT ("A Response," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 347-59). He charges that there is a complete "lack of *any* convincing exegetical evidence from the New Testament that the 'not-yet' fulfillment of the kingdom will be realized by ethnic Israel in the land according to a literalistic interpretation of the Old Testament" (355). Waltke goes on to claim that the hermeneutic of the apostles was that "visible representations of the kingdom in Old Testament covenants and prophecies should be interpreted as having an invisible, spiritual fulfillment" (355). Summing up his own article "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual" (in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments; Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg [Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1988]: 263-88), Waltke writes, ". . . prophecies finding fulfillment up to the ascension of Christ, such as his birth in Bethlehem, will have an earthly, visible fulfillment, and those pertaining to the church formed with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost from Christ's heavenly Davidic throne will have an invisible, spiritual fulfillment" ("Response," 355). As much as I appreciate his insights, I find this hermeneutic rather arbitrary and lacking explicit confirmation. To insist that all OT promises to Israel find "invisible, spiritual fulfillment" is probably pushing things too far. To have *expansion* of OT promises (which I have argued for) is one thing, but to have denial of them is another. For example, the very specific promises to Israel about regathering and restoration to the land of Israel in connection with the New Covenant and Messianic rule (so Ezek 36--39) cannot simply be thrown out. Dr. Waltke, in essence, throws them out, because the NT does not reaffirm them ("If revised dispensationalism produced one passage in the entire New Testament that clearly presents the resettlement of national Israel in the land, I would join them. But I know of none!" ["Response," 357]). I would counter that neither does the NT deny them. In fact, it is not so surprising that the NT does not emphasize such promises, given that the NT focuses on the Gentile harvest. Dr. Waltke's hermeneutic, I feel, leads to an unsatisfying conclusion that the promises to Israel were nothing more than *symbols*. He writes, "In brief, Israel's covenants and promises were unconsciously expressed in the symbols and imagery of the Old Testament dispensation(s)" (358).



In the progress of the fulfilments of the covenants, the "people of God" concept is expanded. In the OT, Israel was known as the *people of God* (e.g., Jud 20:2). In Hosea, God puts Israel on notice that He can make them "not My people" (Hos 1:9). Yet, He can turn again and make this "not My people" into "My people." In Hos 1:10 (cf. 2:23) we read,

"Where it is said to them, 'You are not My people,' it will be said to them, 'You are the sons of the living God.'"

If God can do this with His own people Israel, then He can surely take Gentiles who are "not His people" and make them "My people," which is precisely the point of Romans 9:24-26.²⁴ Because the scope of the New Covenant promises has been enlarged beyond the remnant of believing Israel, God has indeed done this. Hence, Peter can conclude in 1 Pet 2:10 in regard to all those who have partaken of the New Covenant (whether Jew or Gentile),

"for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY."

This explains why many of God's promises to Israel have now become the heritage of the church. Though the church is distinct from Israel, the church becomes a means by which God can begin fulfilling His covenant promises to Israel and go beyond this to do so with Gentiles as well. Furthermore, the church consists of those who are presently the "people of God," and the church now has the commission once given to ethnic Israel to be a light (i.e., a witness) to those in darkness. The esteemed status granted to Israel at Sinai in Ex 19:5-6 has now been bestowed upon the church as Peter so elegantly states in 1 Pet 2:9,²⁵

²⁴This concept has been brilliantly developed and explained by W. Edward Glenny in "The 'People of God' in Romans 9:25-26," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:605 (Jan-Mar 1995), 42-59.

²⁵ Cf. W. Edward Glenny, "The Israelite Imagery of 1 Peter 2," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1992), 156-87.

"But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."

Nevertheless, the expansion of the "people of God" concept does not deny a special future for ethnic Israel. To the contrary, we should joyously anticipate it, for as Paul says in Rom 11:12,

"Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!"

How rich is the mercy of God, and how wisely He has worked through the dispensations of history to fulfil His covenants and promises!