

Lesson 45: God’s Plan for Israel and the Church (I)

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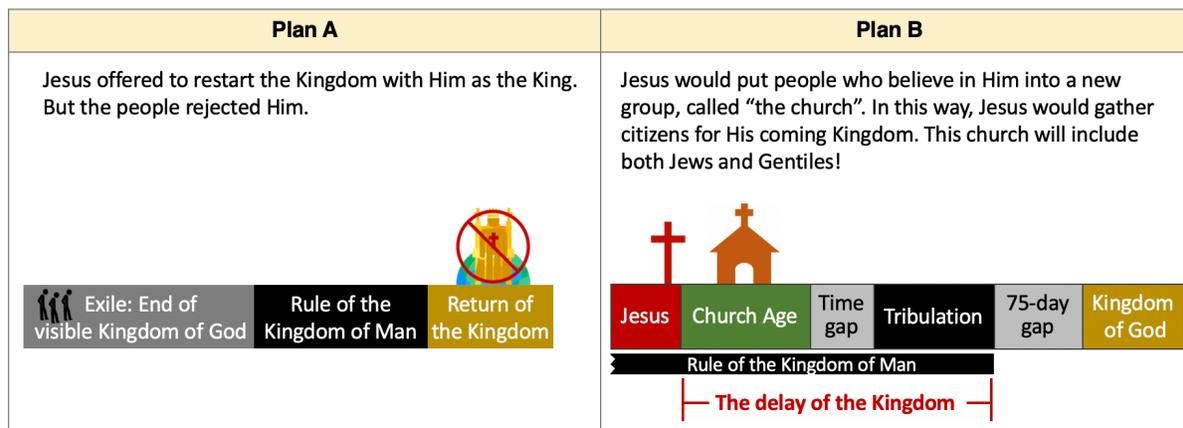
After the Fall at the garden of Eden, God promised to send a Saviour who would rescue all mankind from death. Because mankind as a whole continually rejected Him, God chose to work with Abraham and his family, the nation of Israel. Through them, He planned to accomplish His goal and bless the world.



However, Israel too, rebelled against God. So, instead of being a thriving model of the visible Kingdom of God on earth for all the world to see, God punished them. He sent them into exile and handed political power over to Gentile rulers.

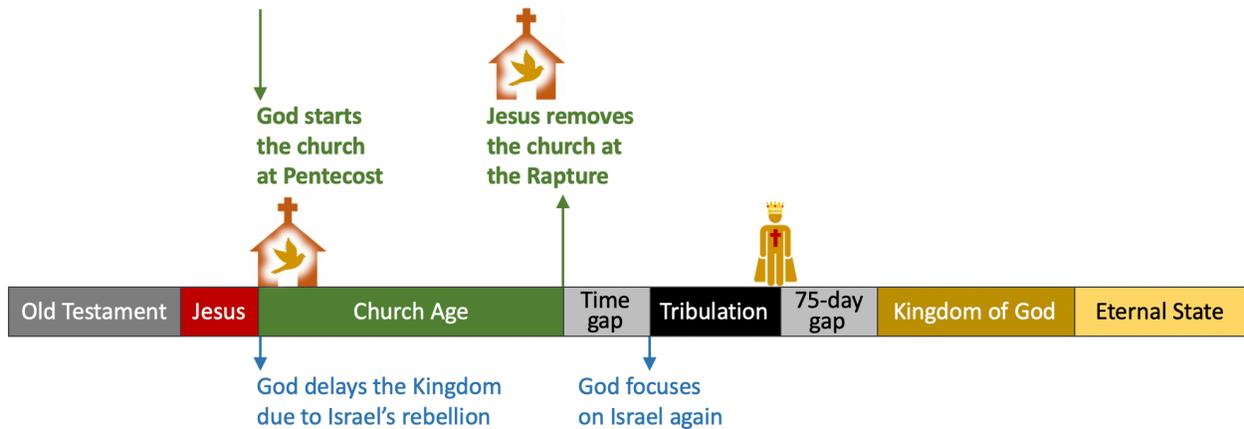
Since that time, the Jews have been waiting eagerly for God to send His Messiah and restart the Kingdom of God on earth.

Unfortunately, when the promised Messiah finally came and offered to restart the Kingdom, the Jews rejected Him. So Jesus delayed the return of the Kingdom. Instead, He started a new group called the church.

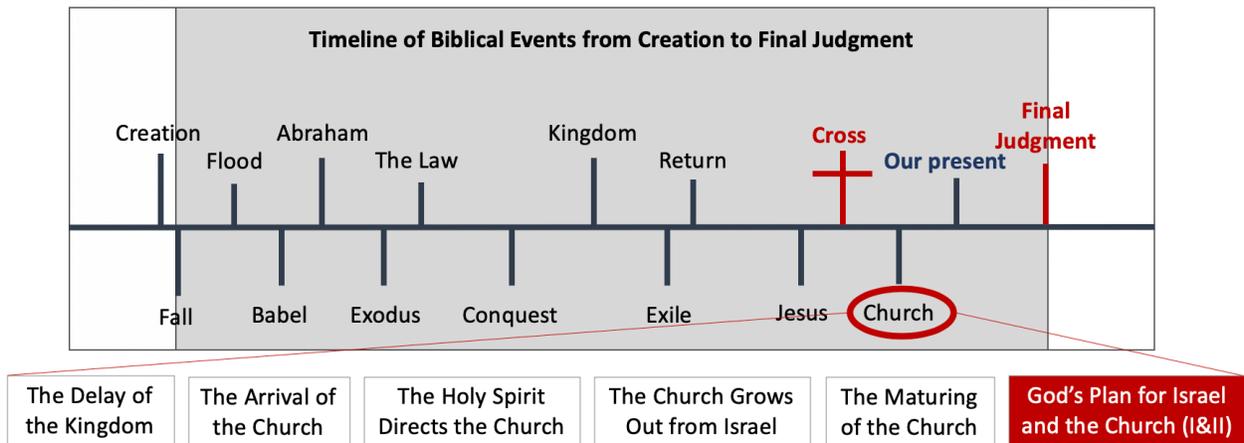


God the Holy Spirit began the church at Pentecost. Yahweh’s chosen apostles and prophets led the early church and through the Holy Spirit, wrote and completed the New Testament. The Holy Spirit also helped the young church grow and mature.

Nevertheless, even while God was focusing on the church, He made it clear that He had not forgotten Israel.

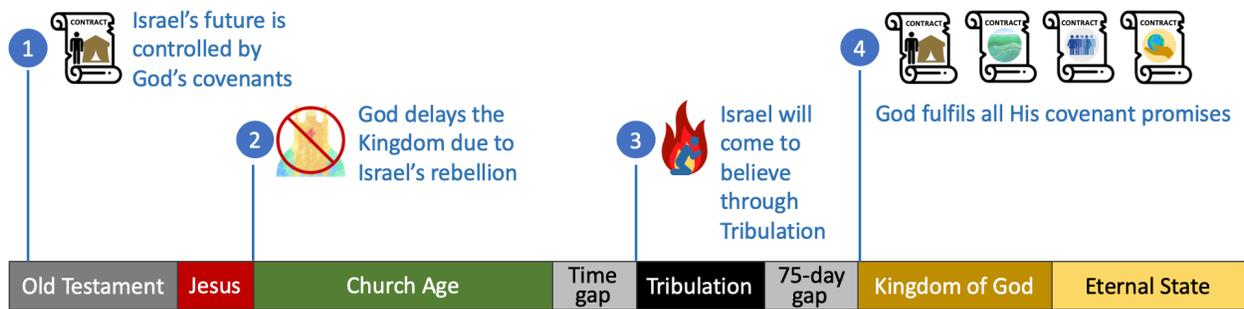


In fact, God gave specific prophecies and apocalyptic literature to help believers understand His future plan for Israel, the church and the rest of the world.



In this lesson and the next, we will study God’s plan for Israel and the church. Both Israel and the church belong to God, but He has different plans for them. We need to be very clear on what God has told us He will be doing so we can have clarity, assurance and security even as we live our lives here and now.

God’s Plan for Israel



1. Israel’s future is controlled by God’s covenants

God chose to work with Abraham and his descendants. They were to be a blessing to the world, pointing mankind to their Creator-God.

In order to teach them how they were to behave as His representatives, God made the conditional Mosaic Covenant with them. If they obeyed His law, He would bless them. If not, He would curse them.

Abrahamic Covenant	Mosaic Covenant
Unconditional Promises <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land • Descendants • Worldwide blessing Genesis 12:1-3	Conditional Promises <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blessings for obedience • Cursings for rebellion Deuteronomy 28:1-68 Leviticus 26:1-46

In all of their history, Israel never fully enjoyed the blessings God meant for them because they were never able to obey His law.

This also meant that they were never able to be the kind of worldwide blessing that God had intended them to be.

However, God had made an unconditional contract with Abraham. It was a “package deal” promising him three things, including that he would be a worldwide blessing. The Bible tells us that God is deeply serious and committed to all His covenants. In fact, He tied His own character and reputation to His fulfilment of the promises in the contracts.

This is what the writer of Hebrews wrote.

Hebrews 6:13–18

¹³ For example, there was God’s promise to Abraham. Since there was no one greater to swear by, God took an oath in his own name, saying:

¹⁴ “I will certainly bless you,
and I will multiply your descendants beyond number.”

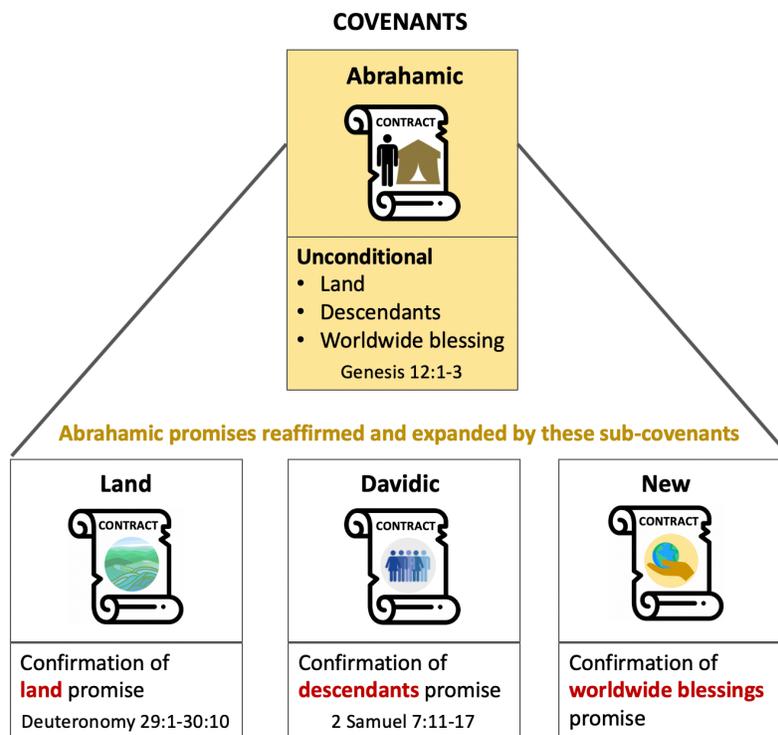
¹⁵ Then Abraham waited patiently, and he received what God had promised.

¹⁶ Now when people take an oath, they call on someone greater than themselves to hold them to it. And without any question that oath is binding.

¹⁷ God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. ¹⁸ So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us.

Because God is committed to His contract with Abraham, God intervened to deal with rebellious Israel.

First, in His mercy, He assured them through sub-covenants that He would surely keep His original promises.



Then, importantly, He promised them through the New Covenant that He would do for Israel what they were not able to do for themselves: He would change their hearts.



	Abrahamic Covenant	Sinai (Mosaic) Covenant	New Covenant
Parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God • Abraham and descendants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God • 12 tribes of Israel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God • Israel and Judah
Promises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land • Descendants • Worldwide blessing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blessings for obeying all the laws • Cursings for disobeying the laws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God will forgive their sins. • God will change their hearts. • God will regather all Israel to the Promised Land forever.
Signatories 	God alone (by passing between the animal halves)	God (with the sign of the Sabbath)	Jesus (by dying on the cross)
Founding sacrifice 	Abraham sacrificed a heifer, goat, ram, turtledove, and pigeon. Genesis 15:9–10	Moses sacrificed bulls and sprinkled the blood on the altar and on the Israelites. Exodus 24:4–8 Hebrews 9:16–20	Jesus' death on the cross was the blood sacrifice. Jeremiah 31:31–33 Luke 22:14–20
Type 	Unconditional	Conditional	Unconditional

However, unlike previous contracts, Yahweh did not make, sign and start the New Covenant at the same point in time.



In the Old Testament, Yahweh promised that He would make a New Covenant with His people, Israel and Judah. He also told them the promises of this New Covenant.



Parties to the New Covenant

God told the Old Testament prophets to record that He would make this contract only with Israel and Judah. It was an expansion of the Abrahamic contract. And He would make it with them as a nation. This contract was not with the individual Jews within the nation.

Jeremiah 31:31

“The day is coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah.”



However, it was only in the New Testament that this contract was signed.



Signatories

In all the previous unconditional contracts like the Noachic and Abrahamic covenants, Yahweh alone signed them because He alone was responsible for and capable of delivering on the promises.

Interestingly, for the New Covenant, Jesus alone signed it by His death. Jesus was the only party responsible for delivering on the promises of the covenant. With this act, Jesus showed He was God. He is Yahweh of the Bible. He is the only One who can deliver on these promises!

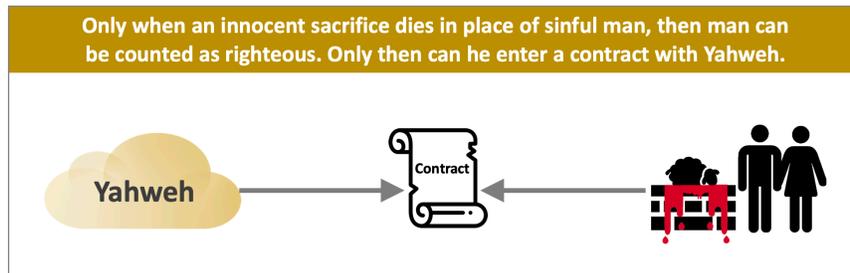


Founding Sacrifice

Recall that sinful man cannot have a contract with God unless their sins have been paid for.



That was why God told mankind to shed the blood of innocent animals as the founding sacrifice for His earlier covenants.

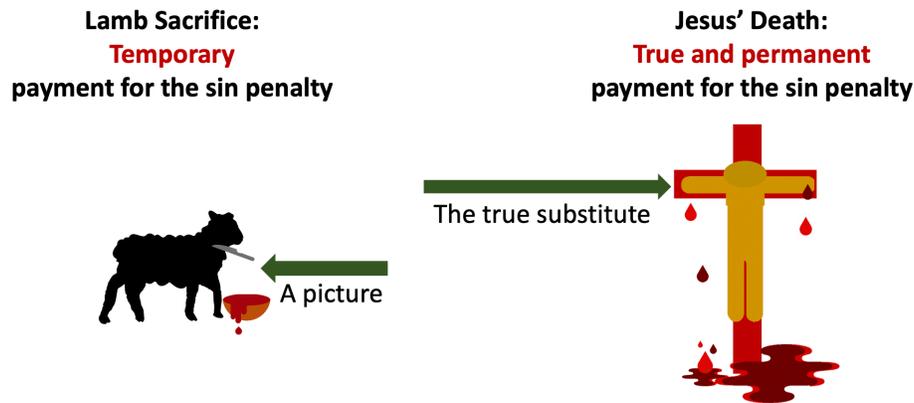


This was because blood represented life and the penalty for sin was the loss of life, that is, death.

Hebrews 9:22b

For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

However, the animal sacrifices that God instructed and accepted were just a temporary picture of the real permanent sacrifice.



In reality, animals do not have the same value as man who is made in the image of God. So ultimately, mankind requires a real man to be the sufficient substitute for sins.

Hebrews 10:4–10

⁴ For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵ That is why, when Christ came into the world, he said to God,

“You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings.

But you have given me a body to offer.

⁶ You were not pleased with burnt offerings or other offerings for sin.

⁷ Then I said, ‘Look, I have come to do your will, O God— as is written about me in the Scriptures.’”

⁸ First, Christ said, “You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings or burnt offerings or other offerings for sin, nor were you pleased with them” (though they are required by the law of Moses). ⁹ Then he said, “Look, I have come to do your will.” He cancels the first covenant in order to put the second into effect. ¹⁰ For God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.

This was why Jesus initiated the New Covenant by being the founding sacrifice Himself! For the New Covenant, Jesus’ own shed blood was the blood sacrifice.

This was what Jesus said at the Passover meal He shared with His Jewish disciples before His death.

Luke 22:14–20

¹⁴ When the time came, Jesus and the apostles sat down together at the table. ¹⁵ Jesus said, “I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before my suffering begins. ¹⁶ For I tell you now that I won’t eat this meal again until its meaning is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.”

¹⁷ Then he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. Then he said, “Take this and share it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come.”

¹⁹ He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

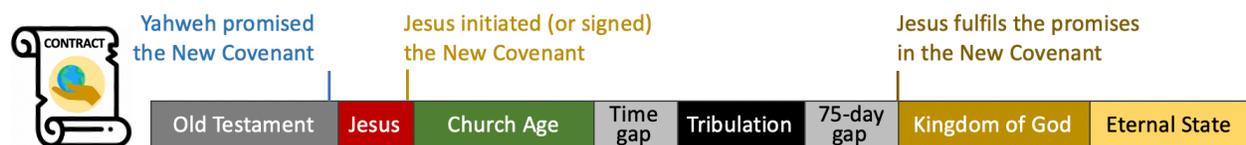
²⁰ After supper he took another cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.”



For the disciples at this Passover meal, they must have realised that Jesus was referring to the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah and the other prophets! Jesus said that His sacrificial death and spilt blood was necessary to start the covenant.



What Jesus did on the cross made it possible for Israel to receive all the promises of the New Covenant when Jesus restarts the Kingdom of God on earth at a future time.



To be clear, while God had stated the promises of the New Covenant in the Old Testament and Jesus signed (or initiated or ratified) the contract by His death, the promises of the New Covenant for Israel have not yet been fulfilled today. What were these promises?



Promises of the New Covenant



These three promises that Yahweh made under the New Covenant were a package deal. God intends to fulfil all three at the same time.

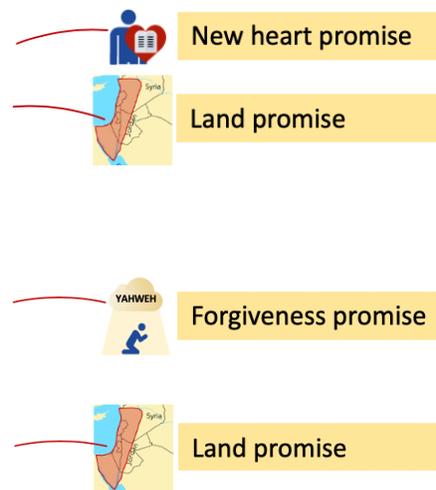
Why do we think so? It is because of how the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah recorded what God said.

Ezekiel 37:14, 23, 26

¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again and return home to your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done what I said. Yes, the LORD has spoken!”

²³ They will never again pollute themselves with their idols and vile images and rebellion, for I will save them from their sinful apostasy. I will cleanse them. Then they will truly be my people, and I will be their God.

²⁶ And I will make a covenant of peace with them, an everlasting covenant. I will give them their land and increase their numbers, and I will put my Temple among them forever.



Jeremiah 31:23, 31–34

²³ This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: “When I bring them back from captivity, the people of Judah and its towns will again say, ‘The LORD bless you, O righteous home, O holy mountain!’



³¹ “The day is coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. ³² This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife,” says the LORD.



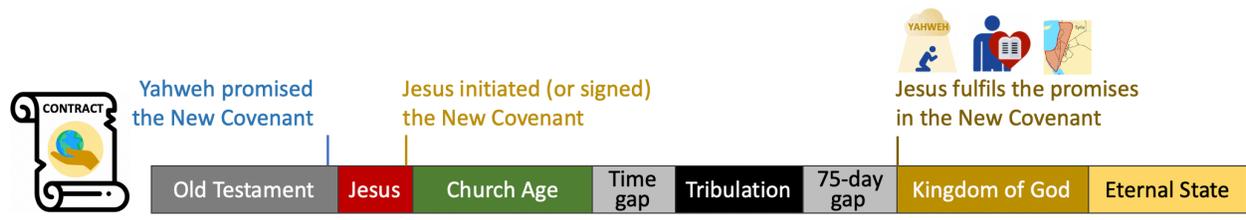
³³ “But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days,” says the LORD. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, ‘You should know the LORD.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,” says the LORD. “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”



(See also Isaiah 55:3, 59:20–21; Jeremiah 32:37–41, 50:4–5; Ezekiel 11:17–20, 16:59–62, 36:25–32.)

This means the New Covenant promises have not yet been fulfilled, nor are they being gradually phased in or fulfilled for national Israel. Today, national Israel is still in rebellion against their Messiah and so they do not enjoy any of these promises.

Rather, God will fulfil all three together at the same time when Israel returns to its land in the coming Kingdom.



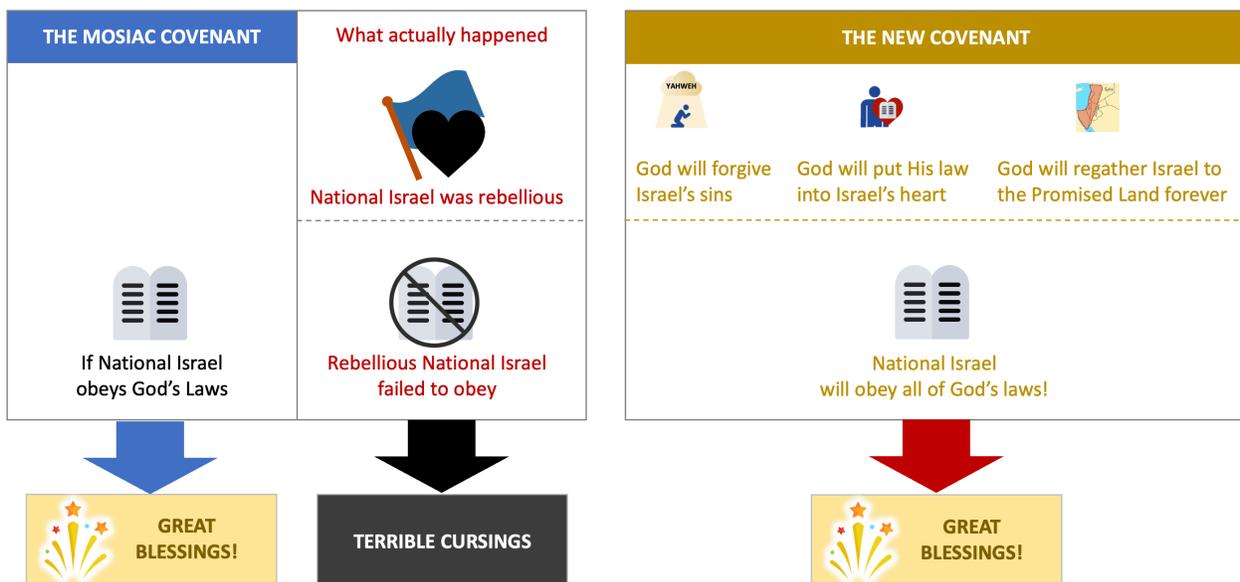
Unexpected blessings from Jesus' signing of the New Covenant

The New Covenant is meant only with Israel and Judah and the promises of the New Covenant apply only to them.

However, when Jesus signed the New Covenant by dying on the cross, several additional amazing and unexpected blessings come out of it as well!

a. National Israel will finally be able to enjoy the blessings of the Mosaic Covenant.

In all of national Israel's history, they were never able to enjoy the blessings that God wanted to shower on them because they were not able to be faithful to Him. But when God fulfils His unconditional New Covenant with them, national Israel will finally be loyal to Him. They will get to enjoy God's blessings!



These are the promises that God made under the Mosaic Covenant that Israel will get to enjoy.

Leviticus 26:3–13

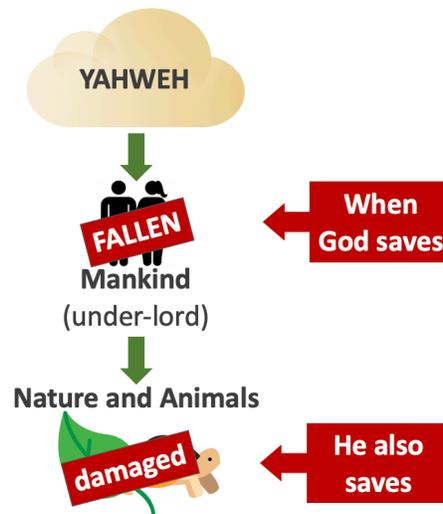
³ “If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, ⁴ I will send you the seasonal rains. The land will then yield its crops, and the trees of the field will produce their fruit. ⁵ Your threshing season will overlap with the grape harvest, and your grape harvest will overlap with the season of planting grain. You will eat your fill and live securely in your own land.

⁶ “I will give you peace in the land, and you will be able to sleep with no cause for fear. I will rid the land of wild animals and keep your enemies out of your land. ⁷ In fact, you will chase down your enemies and slaughter them with your swords. ⁸ Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand! All your enemies will fall beneath your sword.

⁹ “I will look favorably upon you, making you fertile and multiplying your people. And I will fulfill my covenant with you. ¹⁰ You will have such a surplus of crops that you will need to clear out the old grain to make room for the new harvest! ¹¹ I will live among you, and I will not despise you. ¹² I will walk among you; I will be your God, and you will be my people. ¹³ I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so you would no longer be their slaves. I broke the yoke of slavery from your neck so you can walk with your heads held high.

(See also Deuteronomy 28:1–13.)

These blessings have huge impact on nature and the environment as well. When God created man and made mankind under-lord over His creation, He laid down a firm relationship between man and nature. If mankind obeyed Him, nature would thrive. If mankind rebelled, nature would suffer.



This is why when national Israel is finally obedient to Him, nature and the environment are blessed with a far-reaching decrease in the effects of the curse! This man-nature relationship is what Paul refers to when he writes the following:

Romans 8:18–22

¹⁸ Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. ¹⁹ For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. ²⁰ Against its will, all creation was subjected to God’s curse. But with eager hope, ²¹ the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay. ²² For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

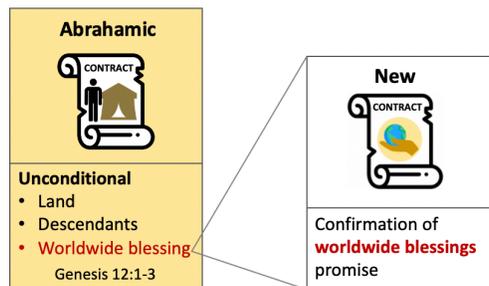
b. Abraham’s family will finally be the worldwide blessing that Yahweh had promised.

Because of Israel’s persistent rebellion, as a nation they have not fulfilled their role as a worldwide blessing.

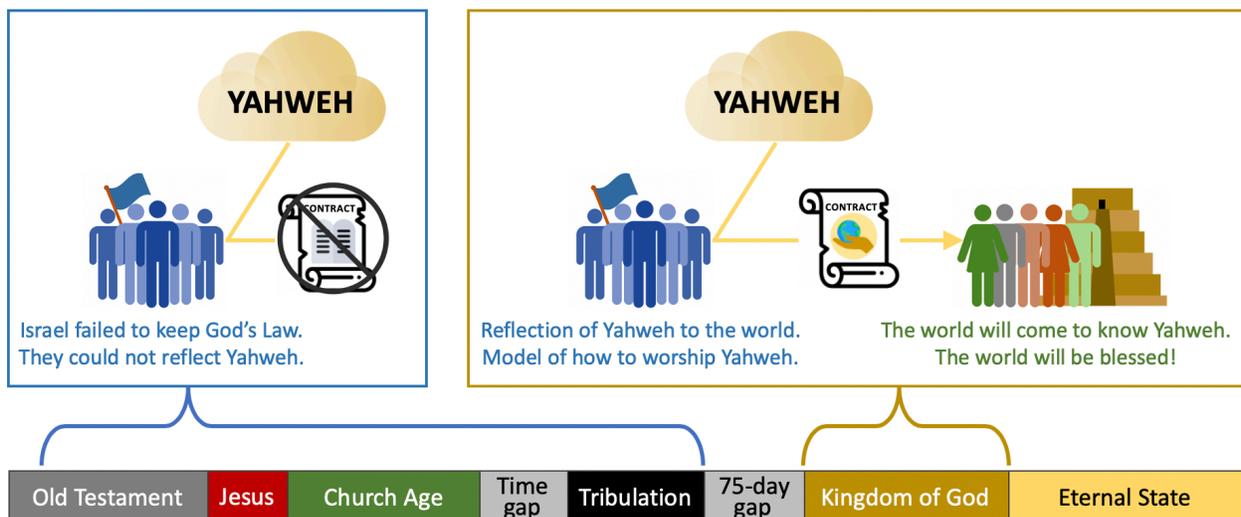
In fact, at some points in biblical history, it appeared as if God blessed the world despite Israel’s rebellion! For example, God meant for Israel to record His history and truth and then act as His representative to go as missionaries into the pagan nations and tell them about Him. The Jews did indeed record Scripture but how God’s Word was brought to the nations around the world was not because of their obedience.

It was God who sovereignly caused His Word to go around the world through the hands of His rebellious exiled people!

However, when God fulfils His promises in the New Covenant, Israel will finally truly be a worldwide blessing.



They will be God’s very own witnesses and representatives and reflect Him to the world.



This is how Yahweh describes the Jews at the future time of the return of the Kingdom. Israel will draw the nations to Him because the peoples of the world will see that God is with Israel.

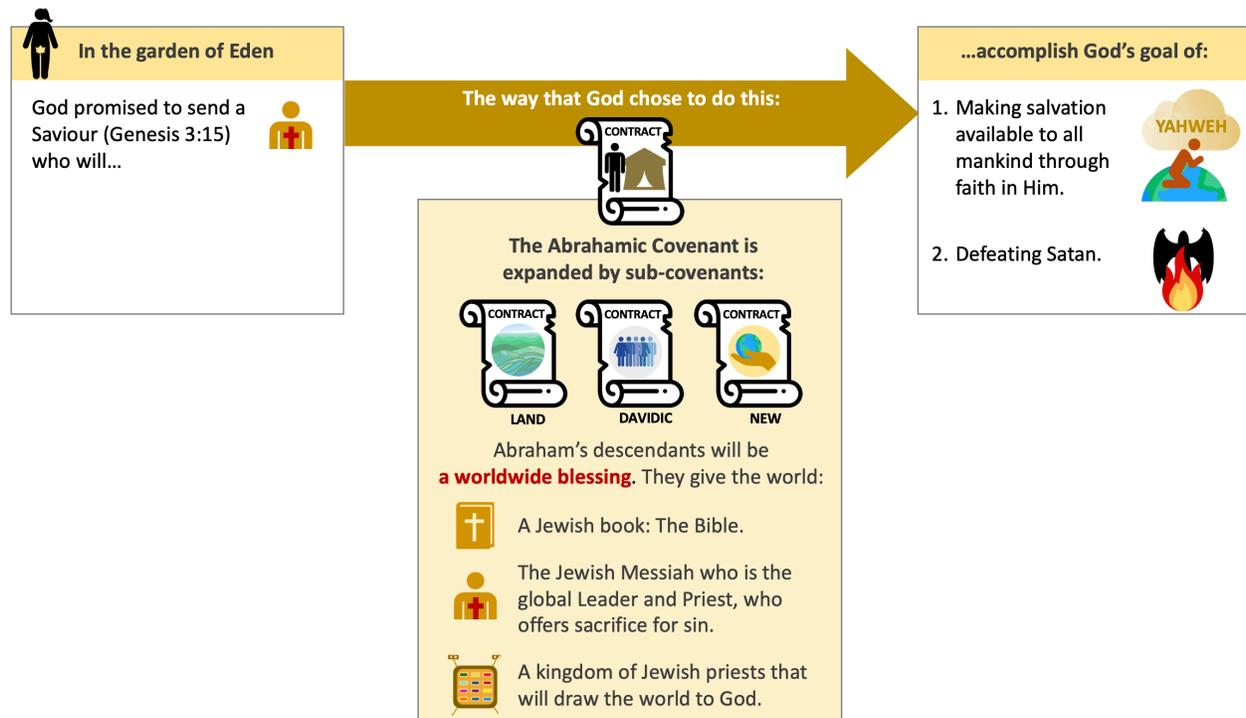
Zechariah 8:20–23

²⁰ “This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: People from nations and cities around the world will travel to Jerusalem. ²¹ The people of one city will say to the people of another, ‘Come with us to Jerusalem to ask the LORD to bless us. Let’s worship the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. I’m determined to go.’ ²² Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD of Heaven’s Armies and to ask for his blessing. ²³ “This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: In those days ten men from different nations and languages of the world will clutch at the sleeve of one Jew. And they will say, ‘Please let us walk with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’”

This means that the unconditional promise of worldwide blessing that God made with Abraham will be made possible by God’s unconditional New Covenant. They will finally be the kingdom of priests that God wants them to be.

Exodus 19:3–6

³ Then Moses climbed the mountain to appear before God. The LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “Give these instructions to the family of Jacob; announce it to the descendants of Israel: ⁴ ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. ⁶ And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.’ This is the message you must give to the people of Israel.”

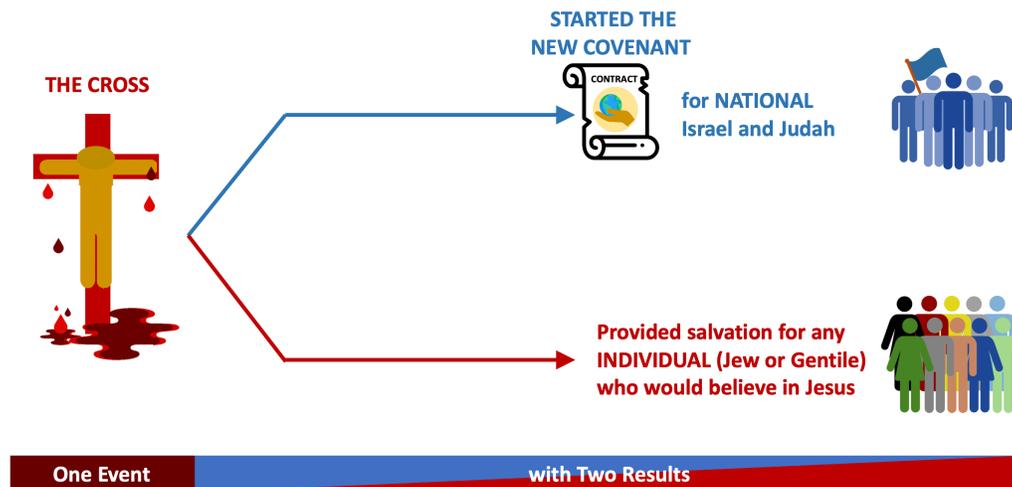


Aside from these two unexpected benefits for Israel that come from Jesus signing the New Covenant, there is one more of great importance to the rest of the world because of the cross.

c. Jesus' death on the cross made it possible for all mankind from Adam to the last person in human history to be forgiven of sins and reunited with God.

The New Covenant with promises of forgiveness of sins and a new heart that could obey and love God was only made with Israel and Judah. The New Covenant does not belong to non-Israelites.

Then how would non-Jews in the Old Testament like Adam, Eve, Noah, Enoch, Melchizedek and Gentiles throughout all of history receive forgiveness from God? The amazing thing is that when Jesus died on the cross, that one event unexpectedly achieved two very significant results!



How do we know the Cross achieved these two results?

Yahweh described the Messiah's two achievements. (In the following passage, God the Father calls the Messiah "my servant".)

Isaiah 42:1–6

- ¹ "Look at my servant, whom I strengthen.
He is my chosen one, who pleases me.
I have put my Spirit upon him.
He will bring justice to the nations.
- ² He will not shout
or raise his voice in public.
- ³ He will not crush the weakest reed
or put out a flickering candle.
He will bring justice to all who have been wronged.
- ⁴ He will not falter or lose heart
until justice prevails throughout the earth.
Even distant lands beyond the sea will wait for his instruction."
- ⁵ God, the LORD, created the heavens and stretched them out.
He created the earth and everything in it.

He gives breath to everyone,
life to everyone who walks the earth.

And it is he who says,

⁶ “I, the LORD, have called you to demonstrate my righteousness.

I will take you by the hand and guard you,
and I will give you to my people, Israel,
as a symbol of my covenant with them.

And you will be a light to guide the nations.

 Jesus' death started the New Covenant

 Jesus' death provided salvation for the world

The Messiah Himself said the same when He spoke in the following passage:

Isaiah 49:5–6

⁵ And now the LORD speaks—

the one who formed me in my mother’s womb to be his servant,
who commissioned me to bring Israel back to him.

The LORD has honored me,
and my God has given me strength.

⁶ He says, “You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me.

I will make you a light to the Gentiles,
and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

 Jesus' death started the New Covenant

 Jesus' death provided salvation for the world

These passages mean that Jesus did indeed sign the New Covenant by being the founding sacrifice Himself.

However, through that act of dying, He also makes salvation possible to anyone in the whole world who trusts Him!

What does this mean? It means that entirely separate from the New Covenant, through the cross, God forgives sins and gives changed hearts to those who put their trust in Jesus.



One Event with **Two Results**

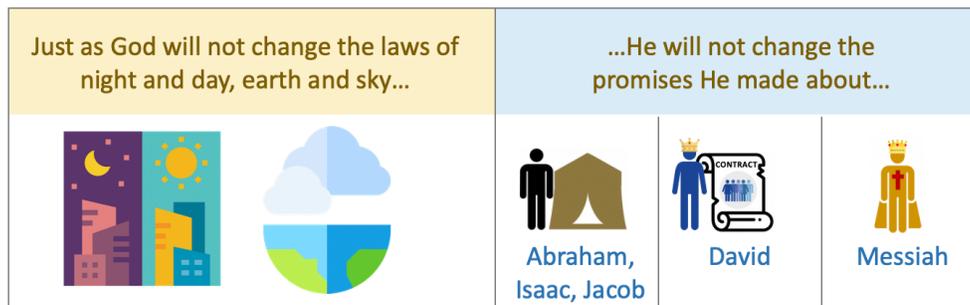
We must be very clear about this and not misunderstand. Just because “forgiveness of sins” and “changed hearts” are also given to Gentiles:

- It does not mean that Gentiles are part of the New Covenant.
- It does not mean that God broke the terms of the New Covenant by including other parties (the Gentiles) into the Covenant.
- It does not mean that God abandoned Israel and replaced them with the Gentiles and He only means for the Gentiles to benefit from forgiveness of sins and a changed heart.

This is what the prophet Jeremiah recorded.

Jeremiah 33:23–26

²³ The LORD gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, ²⁴ “Have you noticed what people are saying?— ‘The LORD chose Judah and Israel and then abandoned them!’ They are sneering and saying that Israel is not worthy to be counted as a nation. ²⁵ But this is what the LORD says: I would no more reject my people than I would change my laws that govern night and day, earth and sky. ²⁶ I will never abandon the descendants of Jacob or David, my servant, or change the plan that David’s descendants will rule the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Instead, I will restore them to their land and have mercy on them.”



In fact, Yahweh tied His entire character to how He acts with regards to the covenants He made. He says that watching how He has acted in His covenant with Noah, Israel will be able to understand and be assured of how He treats His other covenants with them.

Isaiah 54:9–10

⁹ “Just as I swore in the time of Noah
that I would never again let a flood cover the earth,
so now I swear

that I will never again be angry and punish you.

¹⁰ For the mountains may move
and the hills disappear,
but even then my faithful love for you will remain.
My covenant of blessing will never be broken,”
says the LORD, who has mercy on you.



Just as God kept His promise made to Noah...

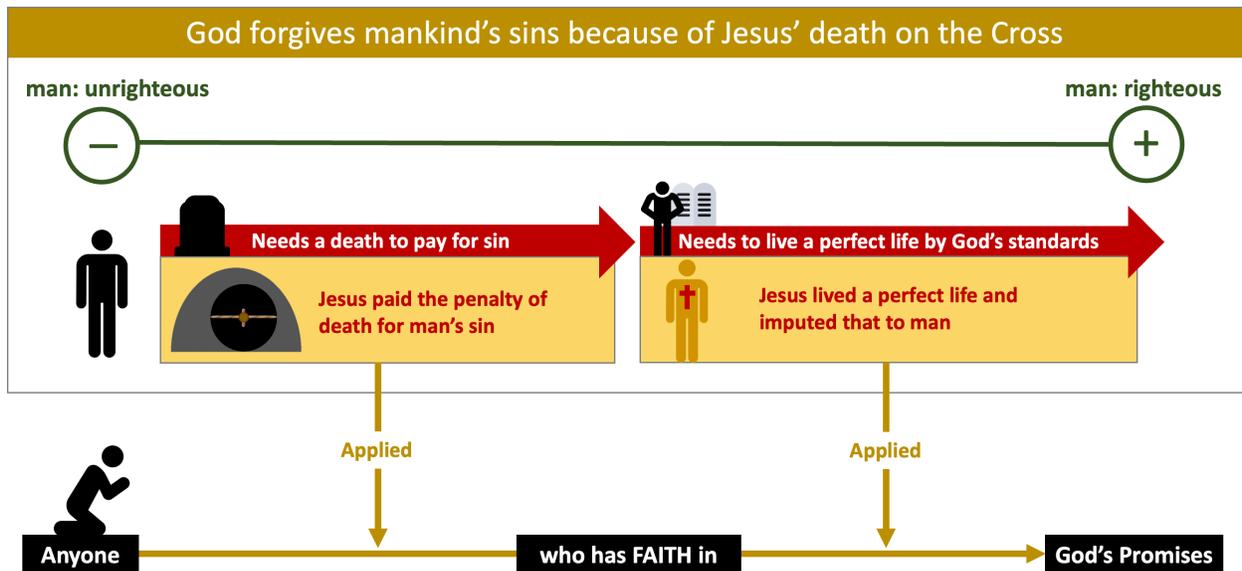


...He will keep His promise about the New Covenant

If God indeed manipulates and cheats with His covenants by changing the parties and terms, then how can mankind have any trust in Him and His character?

Yahweh makes covenants and keeps them carefully because He wants mankind to know that He is a promise-making, promise-keeping God. He wants mankind to know that He can be trusted.

So with His death on the cross, Jesus signed the New Covenant for Israel and Judah. But with His death on the cross, Jesus also provides salvation to anyone who trusts in Him. The promises of forgiveness and a changed heart apply to anyone in the world who believes in the Messiah. What's more, the Cross is the only way for mankind to be reconciled to Yahweh forever.



It is amazing how Yahweh ties everything He has recorded in the Bible together into a framework. When we study His words in the right context, it helps us understand the big picture of what He is doing. And more importantly, it helps us appreciate His sovereignty, wisdom and mercy more clearly!

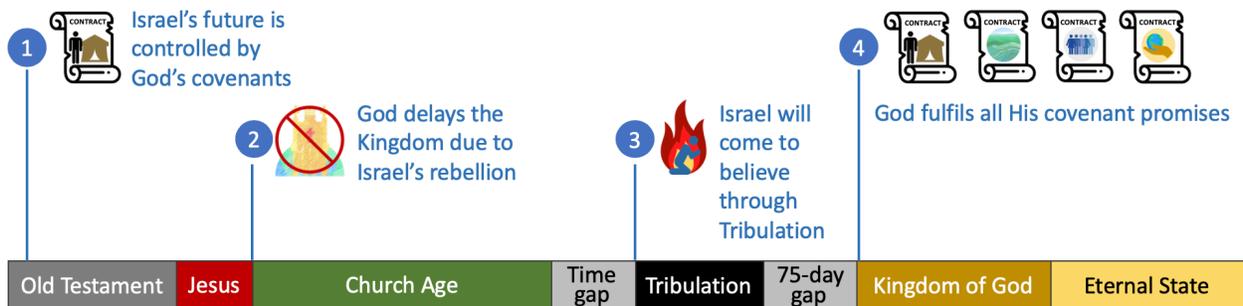


Type

Just like the Abrahamic contract, the New Covenant is a sub-contract that is unconditional. God guarantees it. It was made with national Israel, not with individual Jews. However, individual Jews would only benefit from it through faith in God alone.



We have seen and reviewed how Israel's future is controlled by God's covenants with them. But what else do we know of God's plans for Israel?



2. God delays the Kingdom due to Israel's rebellion.

At Jesus' first coming, as He started His ministry He offered to restore the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 4:17

From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."

If Israel had repented, Jesus would have restored the Kingdom.



However, Israel did not repent. They not only remained rebellious, they rejected their Jewish Messiah that Yahweh had sent. So Jesus started the church age.



But what does this mean for national Israel? Two important things:

a. First, the Bible tells us that during the church age, God has set aside national Israel because of their rebellion.

National Israel was supposed to be Yahweh’s kingdom of priests, delivering to everyone the worldwide blessing that He promised through Abraham. In fact, God gave Israel many benefits because of their role. The apostle Paul summarised it this way.

Romans 3:1–2, 9:4–5

¹ Then what’s the advantage of being a Jew? Is there any value in the ceremony of circumcision? ² Yes, there are great benefits! First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God.

⁴ They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God’s adopted children. God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave them his law. He gave them the privilege of worshiping him and receiving his wonderful promises. ⁵ Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.

God showered these blessings on Israel because they had a worldwide job and mission. They were supposed to bring the good news of God’s salvation back to the world.

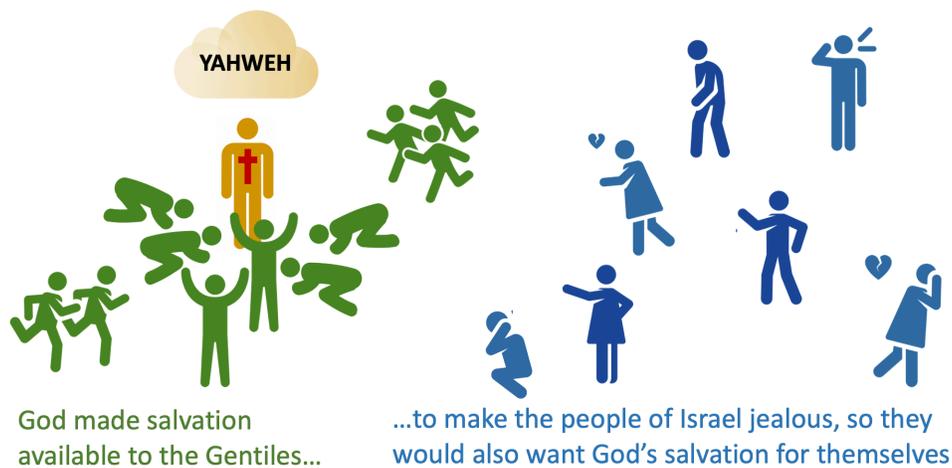


But instead of being faithful and obedient to God and fulfilling the full mission He has for them, Israel rebelled.

And so for now, God set Israel aside and is focused on inviting Gentiles to:

- believe in Him and
- temporarily take over the role of delivering the worldwide blessing, meaning to be missionaries to the pagan culture.

In doing this, God wants the Jews to become jealous of believing Gentiles. This jealousy will cause them to turn to Yahweh again.



Paul writes to the church in Rome to explain this.

Romans 11:7–18, 23–24

⁷ So this is the situation: Most of the people of Israel have not found the favor of God they are looking for so earnestly. A few have—the ones God has chosen—but the hearts of the rest were hardened. ⁸ As the Scriptures say,

“God has put them into a deep sleep.
To this day he has shut their eyes so they do not see,
and closed their ears so they do not hear.”

⁹ Likewise, David said,

“Let their bountiful table become a snare,
a trap that makes them think all is well.
Let their blessings cause them to stumble,
and let them get what they deserve.

¹⁰ Let their eyes go blind so they cannot see,
and let their backs be bent forever.”

¹¹ Did God’s people stumble and fall beyond recovery? Of course not! They were disobedient, so God made salvation available to the Gentiles. But he wanted his own people to become jealous and claim it for themselves. ¹² Now if the Gentiles were enriched because the people of Israel turned down God’s offer of salvation, think how much greater a blessing the world will share when they finally accept it.

¹³ I am saying all this especially for you Gentiles. God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles. I stress this, ¹⁴ for I want somehow to make the people of Israel jealous of what you Gentiles have, so I might save some of them. ¹⁵ For since their rejection meant that God offered salvation to the rest of the world, their acceptance will be even more wonderful. It will be life for those who were dead! ¹⁶ And since Abraham and the other patriarchs were holy, their descendants will also be holy—just as the entire batch of dough is holy because the portion given as an offering is holy. For if the roots of the tree are holy, the branches will be, too.

¹⁷ But some of these branches from Abraham’s tree—some of the people of Israel—have been broken off. And you Gentiles, who were branches from a wild olive tree, have been grafted in. So now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in the rich nourishment from the root of God’s special olive tree. ¹⁸ But you must not brag about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off. You are just a branch, not the root.

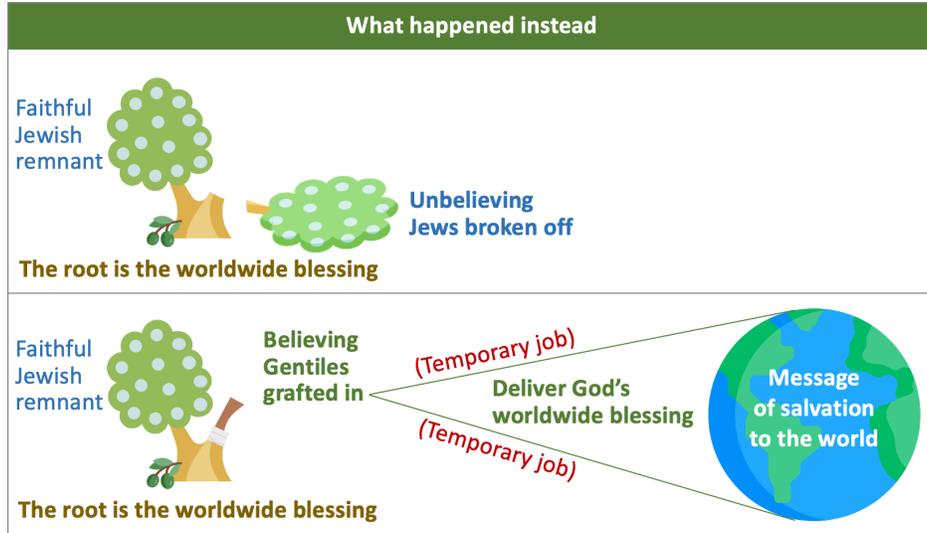
²³ And if the people of Israel turn from their unbelief, they will be grafted in again, for God has the power to graft them back into the tree. ²⁴ You, by nature, were a branch cut from a wild olive tree. So if God was willing to do something contrary to nature by grafting you into his cultivated tree, he will be far more eager to graft the original branches back into the tree where they belong.

In this picture that Paul uses, the worldwide blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant (“the blessing God has promised Abraham”) is the root of the tree.

The olive tree itself is Israel (Jeremiah 11:16–17). And they were supposed to be the channel of God’s blessing to the world. They were supposed to be God’s missionaries.

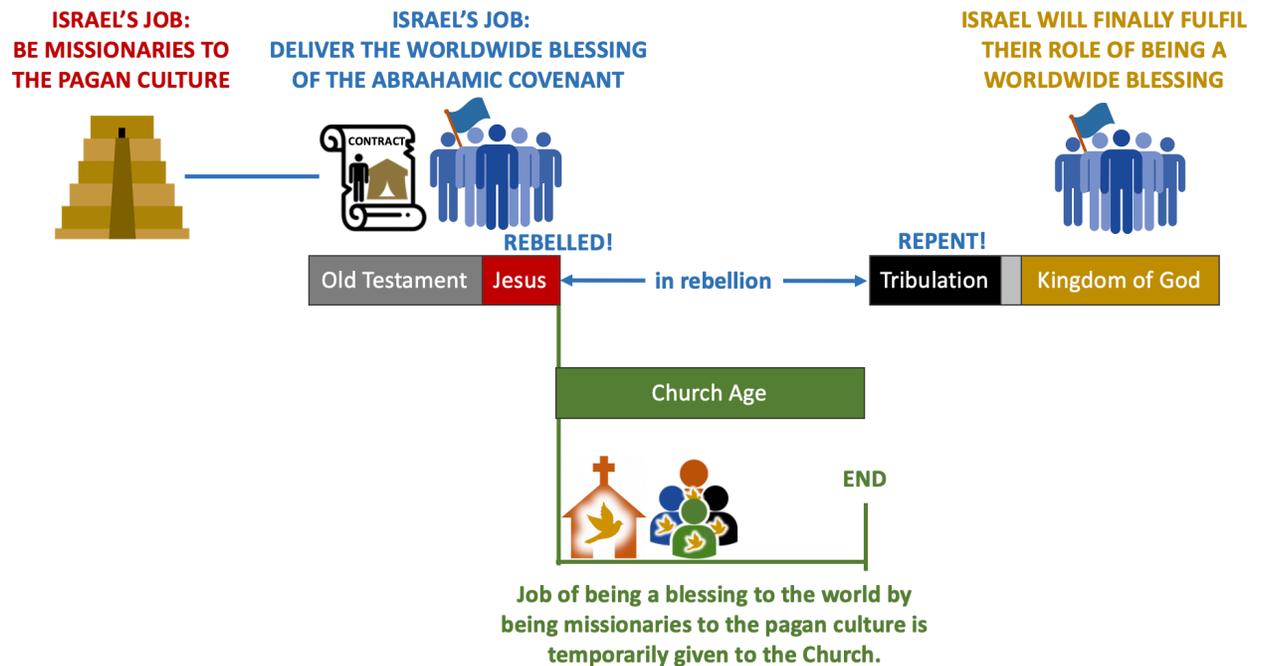


But because of their rebellion, God is currently judging them. He has “broken off” rebellious Jews from their role and instead, He has brought in (“grafted in”) believing Gentiles.

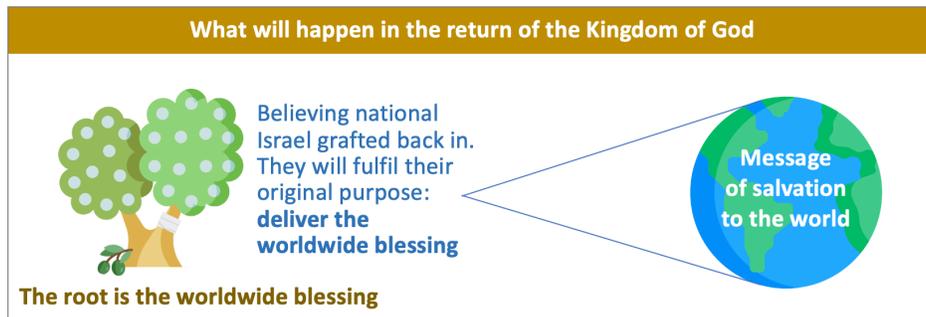


In other words, believing Gentiles have temporarily taken over Israel’s role in delivering the worldwide blessing and being missionaries to the world. However, to be clear, this temporary job is given to them outside of the Abrahamic Covenant. Gentiles are not included suddenly as parties to the Abrahamic contract.

And God has not abandoned national Israel. In the future, through the New Covenant, rebellious Israel will indeed come to understand who Messiah Jesus is and the offer He is making to them. As a nation, they will place their trust in Him and God will put Israel back (“graft them back”) into their role of being a kingdom of priests and delivering the worldwide blessing!



In the future, Paul says the whole world will be blessed even more when believing national Israel fulfills their role!



b. Second, in this church age, while national Israel has been set aside, individual Gentiles and individual Jews can both come to put their faith in Christ for salvation.

God puts all who come to faith in Him during the church age into a new group called “the church”! This is something that Old Testament believers did not know about because it was not prophesied earlier.

With His death and resurrection, Jesus unites believing Jews and Gentiles into the church, which is also called His body. Paul explains this to Gentile believers.

Ephesians 3:1–7

¹ When I think of all this, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles...

² assuming, by the way, that you know God gave me the special responsibility of extending his grace to you Gentiles. ³ As I briefly wrote earlier, God himself revealed his mysterious plan to me. ⁴ As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ. ⁵ God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets.

⁶ And this is God’s plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God’s children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus. ⁷ By God’s grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News.



Paul also explains it this way.

Ephesians 2:11–18

¹¹ Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. ¹² In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope.

¹³ But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. ¹⁵ He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups.

¹⁶ Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. ¹⁷ He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. ¹⁸ Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

The apostle Paul says that Gentiles were "outsiders" who lived without access to God's covenant promises. The Abrahamic, Land, Davidic and New Covenants were made only with Israel, not with Gentiles. But with the death of Jesus, Gentiles now have access to the atonement that Christ provides. Gentiles who were once "far away" have now been "brought near" to God because of Christ's death. Believing Gentiles and Jews are now joined together in a completely unexpected way not described in the Old Testament. This blessing is unexpected because it is not mentioned in the covenant promises.

Paul mentions this unexpected blessing for Gentiles again when He writes to the church in Rome about how Gentile believers in Macedonia and Achaia were giving money to help the Jewish believers in Jerusalem.

Romans 15:25–27 (NIV)

²⁵ Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there.

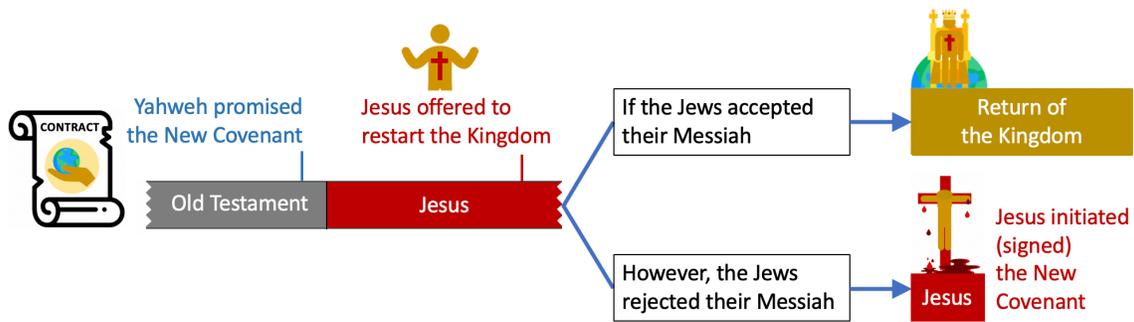
²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. ²⁷ They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

The apostle repeats that Gentile believers are now sharing in the Jews' spiritual blessings, that is, they can benefit from Christ's death and they have temporarily taken responsibility of delivering the worldwide blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant.

What would have happened if the Jews didn't reject Jesus?

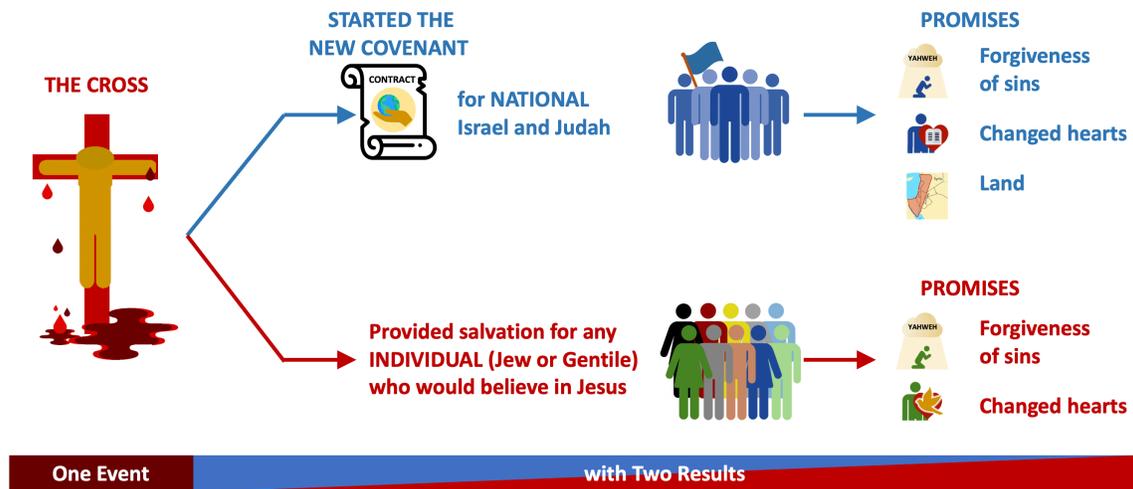
Through the New Covenant, God promised Israel national forgiveness, a nationwide change of heart and full possession of the Promised Land. These promises were what the Jews were expecting at the end of the Old Testament period.

When Jesus started His ministry on earth, He offered them the return of the Kingdom. But instead of repenting from their sins and accepting their Messiah, as a nation they rejected Him. Their rejection led Jesus to the cross, where He signed or initiated the New Covenant through His own death!



In fact, it was through Israel's rejection that God caused:

- Jesus to die on the cross as the founding sacrifice to sign the New Covenant for national Israel.
- Jesus to die on the cross in place of all mankind, as mankind's substitute. This makes it possible for God to forgive all of mankind's sins (not just Israel's).

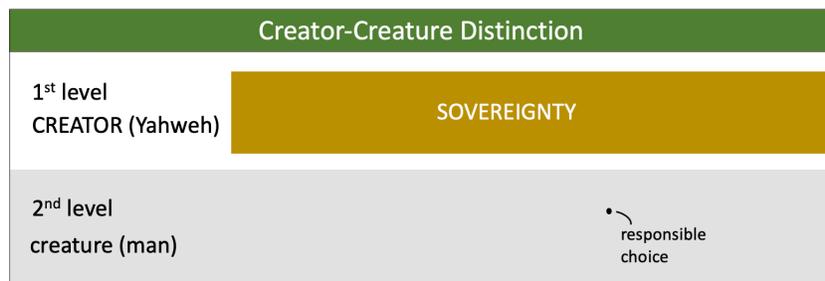


But this rejection also delayed the return of the Kingdom of God to earth. It has been postponed till Jesus' second coming. When He returns, He will fulfil all the promises of the New Covenant and this will cause national Israel to fulfil their role.

Some people wonder what would have happened if the Jews had accepted Jesus when He was on earth. If they did, then He would not have been crucified! But if He did not go to the cross, how would God be able to offer salvation to the whole world? We don't know!

Most of us find it baffling how Israel's rejection of God's plan (the Messiah coming to be King) resulted in God's plan being successful (the Messiah coming to die for mankind)! How did God do that? And how can His plans move ahead when people keep rebelling?

This is where we recall the Creator-creature distinction.



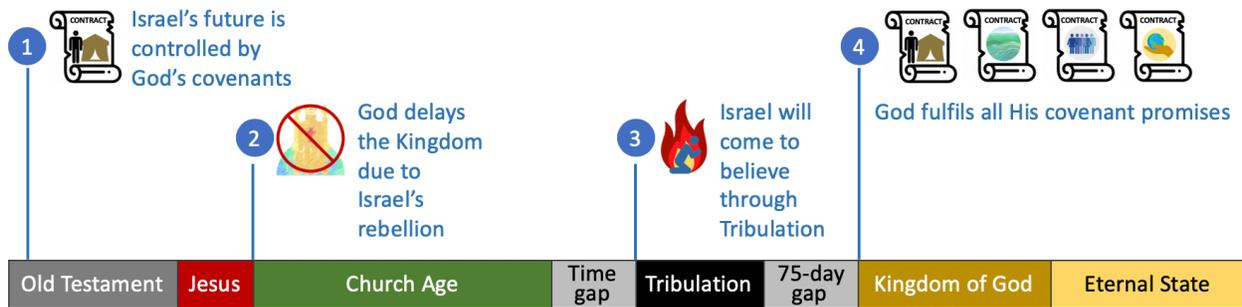
Only a truly sovereign God can give mankind genuine free will. A sovereign God can direct world events toward His goals while giving mankind the ability to make real decisions. People are responsible for the decisions they make and can be praised or punished for their choices. We must not forget that the way the Creator-God sovereignly directs the world is on a completely different level than mankind's ability to make choices.

With Israel, the Jews chose to rebel against Yahweh and His Messiah. Yet, it was through their rebellion that God achieved His goal of providing salvation to the world. In the future, God will resume His plan with Israel and they will come to national faith in their Messiah.

We can only marvel at how God works. Despite mankind's constant rebellion, He is still able to keep all His covenantal promises and direct history towards the good end that He has in mind.

He is really to be praised and worshipped as the one and only sovereign Creator-God who can accomplish all that He sets out to do while giving mankind the ability to make real choices. There really is no other like Him!

Aside from telling us what happens to the Jews during the church age, the Bible also tells us what will happen to them after.



3. Israel will come to believe through Tribulation.

At the beginning of the nation of Israel, God gave them the Mosaic Covenant. He told them that their future would be determined by how they respond to this covenant. If they obeyed, they would be blessed. If they disobeyed, they would be disciplined (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28).

Through Moses, God also told the nation of Israel that they would persistently be rebellious. And they would be severely disciplined for their continued rebellion by being exiled from the Promised Land, not once, but twice!

Deuteronomy 4:25–31

²⁵ "In the future, when you have children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time, do not corrupt yourselves by making idols of any kind. This is evil in the sight of the LORD your God and will arouse his anger. ²⁶ "Today I call on heaven and earth as witnesses against you. If you break my covenant, you will quickly disappear from the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy. You will live there only a short time; then you will be utterly destroyed. ²⁷ For the LORD will scatter you among the nations, where only a few of you will survive. ²⁸ There, in a foreign land, you will worship idols made from wood and stone—gods that neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. ²⁹ But from there you will search again for the LORD your God. And if you search for him with all your heart and soul, you will find him.

³⁰ "In the distant future, when you are suffering all these things, you will finally return to the LORD your God and listen to what he tells you. ³¹ For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon you or destroy you or forget the solemn covenant he made with your ancestors.



The first time of discipline was the 70-year exile to Babylon that ended with the partial return of the Jews (verses 25–29).

The second time began with the destruction of the Second Temple by the Roman army in AD 70 (verses 30–31).

Although the modern nation of Israel does exist today, millions of Jews are still scattered all over the world. And nationally, Israel is still in rebellion against their Messiah.

However, God will one day punish Israel so severely for their continued rebellion against Him that they will finally repent as a nation.

This special time of punishment is the “Tribulation”. And it is meant specifically for Israel.

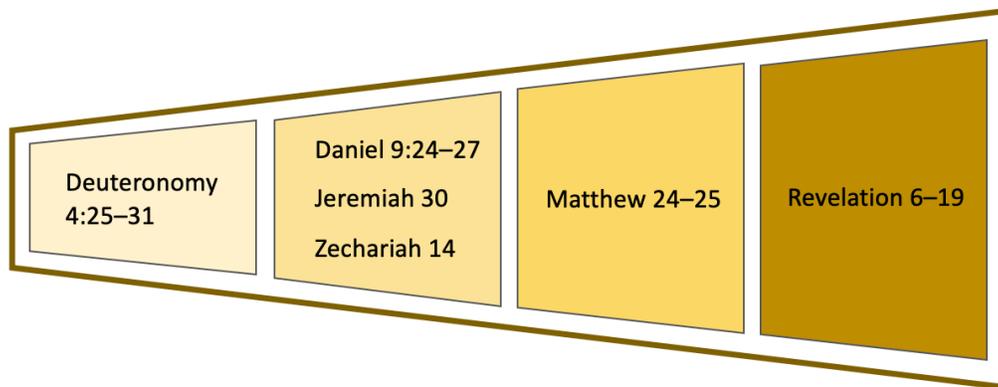
Jeremiah 30:7a

In all history there has never been such a time of terror.

It will be a time of trouble for my people Israel.

Did God give any details about the Tribulation? Yes.

God gave more information about Israel’s Tribulation as time went on.



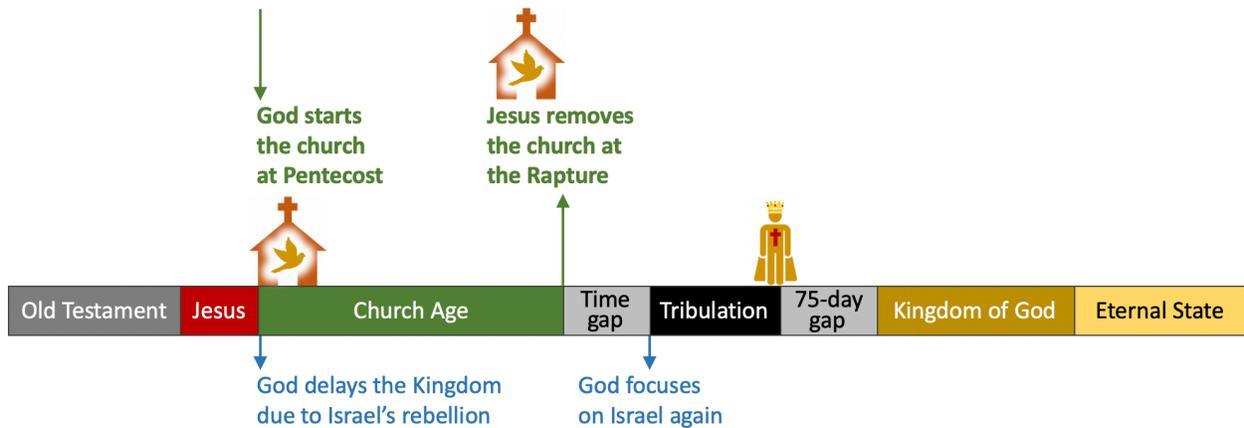
Details about Israel’s Tribulation Period

Deuteronomy 4	Daniel 9, Jeremiah 30, Zechariah 14	Matthew 24	Revelation
First Exile (v27) Israel exiled for breaking the Mosaic Covenant. Jews worshipped idols.	First Exile (Daniel 9:24) Yahweh extended Israel’s exile because of their continued rebellion. The extra time is for them to repent.		
	Messiah’s 1st Coming (Daniel 9:25–26) By the time Messiah comes, Jerusalem is rebuilt. Messiah is killed. Jerusalem and the Temple are destroyed and the Jews are scattered.	Messiah’s 1st Coming (v4–5) Jesus reminded His disciples He is the Messiah.	
		Warning Signs (v6–8) There will be wars, rumours of wars, famines, earthquakes and false christs. These events are “birth pains”. What is about to be born? The Kingdom of God!	The events of Revelation 6–19 will be discussed in upcoming lessons. It is enough to note for now that they provide even more details about these Tribulation events.
	Peace Treaty (Daniel 9:27) A ruler makes a 7-year peace treaty with Israel, but breaks it at midpoint. He desecrates the Temple. (This means another temple has to be built because Herod’s Temple was destroyed in AD 70 and there is currently no Temple.)	Peace Treaty (v15) Jesus refers to Daniel and how the rebuilt Temple will be desecrated.	
Tribulation (v30a) Many Jews will be killed.	Tribulation (Jeremiah 30:4–7; Zechariah 14:1–2) Jerusalem and the Jews will be attacked. It will be a time of terror like no other.	Tribulation (v16–22) Jews will suffer the worst persecution they have ever experienced in their entire history.	
		Final Warning Signs (v29) Physical catastrophe in space! Stars shift their positions; sun and moon fail to work.	
Israel Repents (v30b–31) After persecution, Israel will repent and return to Yahweh.	Messiah rescues His people (Jeremiah 30:10–11, 18–22; Zechariah 14:4) Messiah will arrive to destroy the enemies of Israel and rescue His people. He will bring them home from distant lands.	Messiah’s 2nd Coming (v30–31) The nations will panic. Messiah Jesus comes to regather all the Jews from around the world.	

Events in grey have already occurred.

(Note: This is just a portion of all the Scripture talking about Israel’s Tribulation.)

In the future, after the rapture of the church, only unbelievers will be left on earth, both unbelieving Jews and Gentiles. This is when the time of Tribulation will begin.



What is the purpose of the Tribulation?

- a. The Tribulation is meant to discipline Israel and make them repent and recognise their Messiah. This is what Paul said to the Gentile church in Rome.

Romans 11:25–27

²⁵ I want you to understand this mystery, dear brothers and sisters, so that you will not feel proud about yourselves. Some of the people of Israel have hard hearts, but this will last only until the full number of Gentiles comes to Christ. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved. As the Scriptures say,

“The one who rescues will come from Jerusalem, and he will turn Israel away from ungodliness.

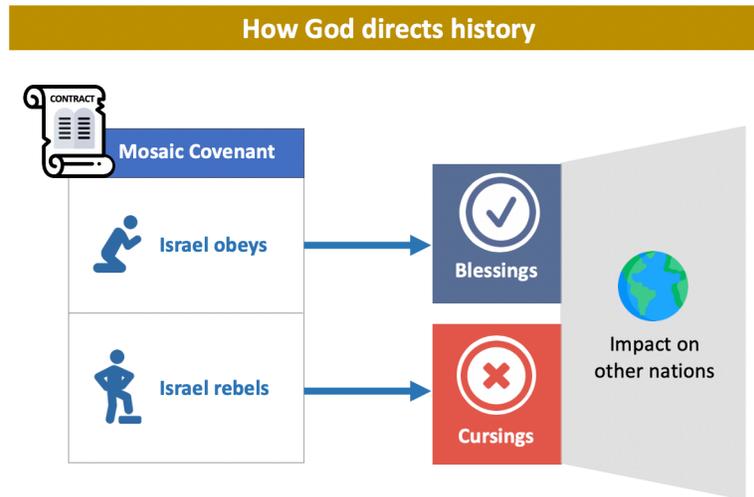
²⁷ And this is my covenant with them, that I will take away their sins.”

Finally, national Israel will repent, recognise their Messiah and come to believe through the Tribulation! National Israel, including Jews who believed and then died during the Tribulation, will be ushered into the restored Kingdom of God on earth!

- b. But God will also judge and get rid of all rebellious Jews who continue in their unbelief. None of them will enter the coming Kingdom.



- c. However, this future Tribulation will affect all unbelieving nations and people as well. Recall that God directs history by Israel's response to His covenants with them.



When the church is raptured, the only people left on earth at the start of the Tribulation will be unbelievers: both Jewish and Gentile unbelievers. And the Gentile nations and Gentile unbelievers will also suffer the Tribulation that God pours out on Israel.

- d. Ultimately, through the Tribulation, Yahweh's purpose for national Israel is to bring in the Kingdom of God. But how are the Tribulation and the Kingdom connected?
- To begin the Kingdom, the King must return to earth.
 - But the Messiah King will not return until Israel repents nationally.
 - And Israel will not repent until the nation goes through extreme and extraordinary discipline: the Tribulation.



So the Tribulation will lead to Jesus finally bringing back the Kingdom of God on earth!

This is what Jesus told the Jews at His first coming.

Matthew 23:37–39

³⁷ “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me. ³⁸ And now, look, your house is abandoned and desolate. ³⁹ For I tell you this, you will never see me again until you say, ‘Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!’”



Only when national Israel welcomes their Messiah will Jesus bring in the Kingdom. This is what He said before He went to the cross.

Mark 14:23–25

²³ And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ And he said to them, “This is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice for many. ²⁵ I tell you the truth, I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new in the Kingdom of God.”



Finally, after the Tribulation, the Bible tells us that God will bring in the Kingdom because Israel will finally accept their Messiah!

Romans 11:12

Now if the Gentiles were enriched because the people of Israel turned down God’s offer of salvation, think how much greater a blessing the world will share when they finally accept it.

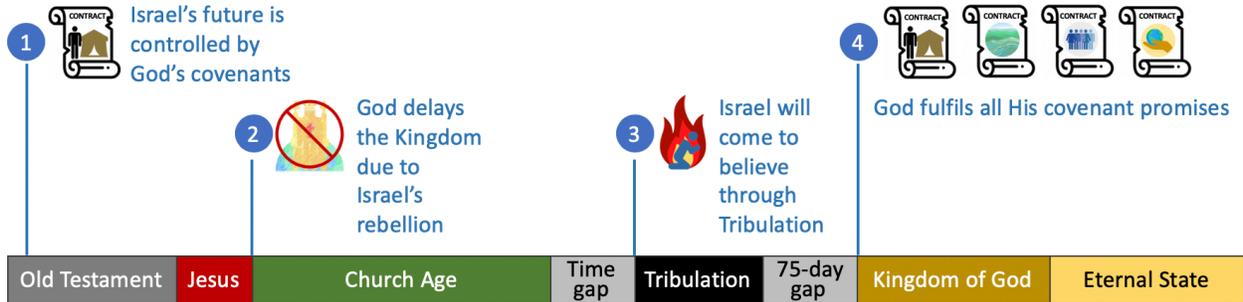
Israel brings blessings to the whole world by bringing in the Kingdom of God!

The nation of Israel, Abraham’s descendants, finally brings the world great blessings through their Tribulation!

<p>Abrahamic</p>	<p>Abraham’s descendants will be a worldwide blessing. They give the world:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Jewish book: The Bible The Jewish Messiah who is the global Leader and Priest, who offers sacrifice for sin. A kingdom of Jewish priests that will draw the world to God. The returning Kingdom of God on earth.
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4. God fulfils all His covenant promises to Israel at the start of the Kingdom of God.



All of the unconditional promises God made to Israel from the Abrahamic Covenant to the Land, Davidic and New Covenants will be fully fulfilled at the time of the Kingdom!

<p>Abrahamic</p>  <p>Unconditional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land • Descendants • Worldwide blessing <p>Genesis 12:1-3</p>	<p>Land</p>  <p>Unconditional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God will regather Israel to possess their Promised land forever <p>Deuteronomy 29:1-30:10</p>	<p>Davidic</p>  <p>Unconditional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David's dynasty will be eternal • David's dynasty will be in Jerusalem <p>2 Samuel 7:11-17</p>	<p>New</p>  <p>Unconditional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God will forgive sins • God will change hearts • God will regather Israel to their land <p>Jeremiah 31:31-34</p>
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This exciting phase in history will begin when the Messiah Himself rules the whole world from David's throne in Jerusalem.

In the Old Testament, we saw that even though God is everywhere present at the same time, He also chose to be at a particular location so people could meet with Him. This was what King Solomon said when he was dedicating the Temple he had built for Yahweh.

1 Kings 8:12–13, 27–30

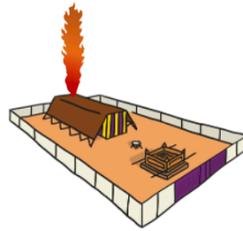
¹² Then Solomon prayed, "O LORD, you have said that you would live in a thick cloud of darkness. ¹³ Now I have built a glorious Temple for you, a place where you can live forever!"

²⁷ "But will God really live on earth? Why, even the highest heavens cannot contain you. How much less this Temple I have built!" ²⁸ Nevertheless, listen to my prayer and my plea, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is making to you today.

²⁹ May you watch over this Temple night and day, this place where you have said, 'My name will be there.' May you always hear the prayers I make toward this place. ³⁰ May you hear the humble and earnest requests from me and your people Israel when we pray toward this place. Yes, hear us from heaven where you live, and when you hear, forgive.

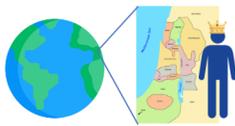
Likewise, throughout the Old Testament, we saw that God is everywhere but He also chose to meet with mankind at certain places.

Yahweh is everywhere present at the same time.

<p>In the garden of Eden</p> 	<p>On Mount Sinai</p> 	<p>In the Tabernacle</p> 	<p>In the Temple</p> 
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However, He also chose to be at particular locations to meet with mankind.

When the Messiah brings back the Kingdom of God, Yahweh will once again live physically with mankind! But unlike in the past where Israel's king would only rule Israel, the Messiah will now rule the entire world. And unlike in the past, when a king would only rule for a period of time, the Messiah will now rule forever. Never before has God ruled on earth in such a direct way!

Kingdom of God in the Old Testament	The Coming Kingdom of God
 <p>The king rules only in Israel.</p>	 <p>The King rules the entire world!</p>
 <p>Old Testament</p> <p>The king rules only for a short time.</p>	 <p>Kingdom of God Eternal State</p> <p>The King rules forever!</p>

This is the promise that God had made to David.

Isaiah 11:1–5, 10

¹ Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot—yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root.

² And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³ He will delight in obeying the LORD.

He will not judge by appearance
nor make a decision based on hearsay.

⁴ He will give justice to the poor
and make fair decisions for the exploited.
The earth will shake at the force of his word,
and one breath from his mouth will destroy the wicked.

⁵ He will wear righteousness like a belt
and truth like an undergarment.

¹⁰ In that day the heir to David's throne
will be a banner of salvation to all the world.

The nations will rally to him,
and the land where he lives will be a glorious place.

When Yahweh made the contract with David that one of his descendants will be on his throne in Jerusalem forever, people in the Old Testament were not sure how God would do this.

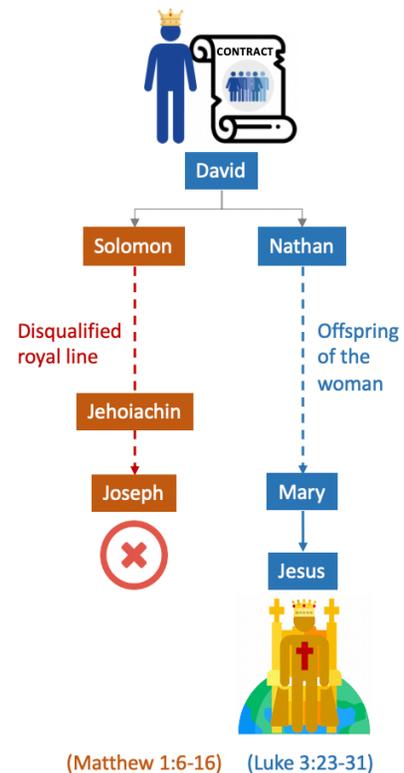
- To be David's descendant means he must be **fully human**.
- But to be able to rule righteously forever means he must be **immortal**.

What's more, when God cursed the royal family line of Jehoiachin, Jews wondered even more how God would fulfil His promise.

However, the creative sovereign God is never thwarted. And in the time of the coming Kingdom, we see that His chosen Messiah Jesus, who is fully human and fully God, from the family line of David through Nathan, will fulfil the Davidic covenant fully.

Finally, the entire world will be ruled physically and personally by the all-righteous Creator-God of the universe, the ideal leader!

[For more details on the time of the Kingdom, refer back to Lesson 30: The Jewish Expectation (Part 2)].



In this lesson, we examined what the future will be like for Israel, God's elected people. He still intends to fulfil the promises, covenants and plans He made with the nation that He created when He first called Abraham out of the pagan Kingdom of Man all those years ago. God will not break His word. In upcoming lessons, we will go through in greater detail what the Bible tells us about Israel's role in God plans to end mortal history.

In the next lesson, we will study God's plan for the church.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. From what we've studied in this lesson, we can see that God still has plans for Israel. Then why do you think Christians spend so little time studying the future of Israel as described in the Bible? What other passages in the New Testament do you think are actually discussing Israel's future?
2. Did you notice how deeply involved God is with the life of Israel? If He is so concerned for them, how do you think He feels about you? How deeply involved is God in your life? How much of your life do you let Him be involved in?
3. Because God loves His people, He does not tolerate sin and rebellion and He works to drive it out of those whom He loves. Reflecting on Israel's experience with Yahweh, how do you think God has dealt with you? What has your experience of God's grace and discipline been like in your life?



Pre-reading for next lesson:

- How to live in fellowship: Romans 12
- Beware of false teaching: 2 Peter 2
- Pass on correct teaching: Titus 2–3
- Prepare against Satan's attacks: Ephesians 6:10–20