

Maize Plant Discipleship Module I

The Eternal Purpose of God

Version 0.1.1 Author's draft

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Translated by:

PRE-PUBLICATION DRAFT

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This handbook

This module, no. 1 of 16, explores God's *Eternal Purpose*, in four studies:

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Maize Plant Discipleship is an open educational resource, derived and road-tested in collaboration with Africans. It has been formulated in response to contextual doctoral research in Burkina Faso to be practical, relevant and accessible for use in majority-world contexts and is being published as a series of short, modular, low-cost handbooks:

- suitable for formal and informal modes of study
- incorporate reflective learning and group discussions,
- reliant simply upon facilitators co-ordinating small learning groups
- easily replicable, in terms of both republication and translation.

Its goal is to facilitate biblical learning that continuously moves outwards, drawing whole communities into patterns of scripturally-based discipleship, in living dialogue with contextual culture.

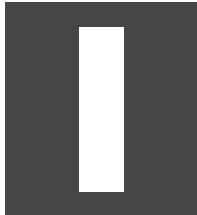
Maize Plant Discipleship Facilitators Handbook contains comprehensive guidelines on appropriately facilitating Maize Plant Discipleship learning groups and discussions.

Syllabus modules

Maize Plant Discipleship Syllabus incorporates 16 handbooks.

1. *The Eternal Purpose of God*
2. Dynamics of Vocation, The Nations
3. Dynamics of Vocation, The Jews
4. Dynamics of Commissioning
5. Dynamics of Body Membership
6. Dynamics of Revival
7. Dynamics of Truth
8. Dynamics of Intercession
9. Dynamics of Cultural Transformation
10. Disciplines of Spiritual Maturity
11. Disciplines of Running the Race
12. Disciplines of Pressing Towards our Vocation
13. Disciplines of Economic Faithfulness
14. Disciplines of Messianic Leadership
15. Disciplines of Living By Faith
16. Disciplines of Overcoming

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Covenant and Scripture

Synopsis

The covenants of God, revealed in Scripture, are vital to faithfully understanding God's historical and eternal purposes.

Appreciating the significance of the biblical covenants is an important gateway to a holistic understanding of Scripture.

Topics in this study

1. Scripture in perspective
2. Characteristics of covenant
3. Characteristics of God's covenants
4. Unfolding covenantal purpose

Terms used in this study

Covenant — an arrangement that brings about a relationship of commitment between God and his people

Commitment — the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause, activity

Obligation — a duty or commitment; an act or course of action to which a person is morally or legally bound

Scripture

Read these passages. The **bold** passages are marked for memorisation, in time for the next meeting.

- Genesis 1:27–32
- Genesis 3:17–20
- Genesis 9:9–16
- **Genesis 12:1–3** & 15.18, 17.1–22, 22.15
- Genesis 26:1–5,24 & 28:13–15
- **Exodus 19.4–6**
- 2 Samuel 7.12–16 & 23:5



Keep a marker in the passages, to refer to them throughout the study.

Scripture in perspective

Topic 1

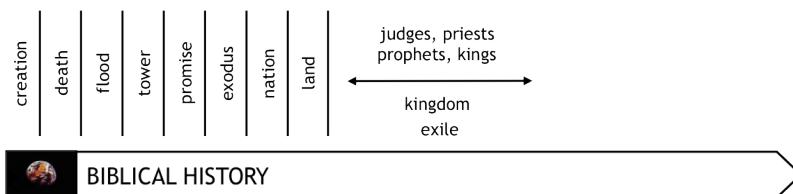
THIS TOPIC EXPLAINS how the books and stories within the Bible are bound together by a series of covenants. Without appreciating the significance of covenant, a faithful, holistic understanding of Scripture is easily missed. To illustrate this, the topic draws a contrast between *historical* and *covenantal* perspectives of Scripture.

Scripture in historical perspective

Traditional perspectives of Scripture review the principal events and stories encountered in the books of the Old Testament in the historical order in which they took place. These events are then interpreted, looking at their significance for Christian faith. Principal events include:

- **Creation**, the knowledge of good and evil and the finality of **death** (Genesis 1–3)
- A **flood** of water in judgement upon human wickedness and the confusion of **languages** (Genesis 9–11)
- A **promise** of land, descendants and kings, made to a man named Abraham (Genesis 12–22)
- An **exodus** from Egypt of Abraham's descendants and formation of a new **nation**, Israel (Exodus-Deuteronomy)
- Israel's journey into the **land** promised to Abraham (Joshua)
- Israel's experiences, ruled over by **judges, priests, prophets and kings** (Judges, Samuel)
- Israel's, and Judah's, **exile** from the land (Kings, Chronicles)

Each of these biblical events may be represented as a series of lines, which together form a *story-based timeline of biblical history*.



In these historical events, various patterns are evident: God's calling and blessing; human rebellion, judgment and disaster; return, forgiveness, deliverance. Such patterns can be discerned in the accounts of Adam, Cain, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and repeatedly in the stories of the people of Israel. They illustrate the importance of faithfulness towards God and the dangers of failing to obey his commands.

Scripture in covenantal perspective

Nevertheless, by looking carefully at the inner content of these historical narratives, it is possible to discern another, more profound pattern—one which flows through the whole of Scripture: *a series of divine covenants*. Understanding this pattern requires re-examining key themes of the biblical accounts of creation, as well as each of the Patriarchal covenants:

1. The blessing of creation—which God calls *good*¹
2. The curse placed upon the ground—following Adam's disobedience²
3. The covenant established with Noah³
4. The covenant established with Abraham⁴
5. The covenant renewed with Isaac and Jacob⁵
6. The covenant established with Israel, after the exodus from Egypt⁶
7. A covenant is made with David⁷

Adding these covenantal events to the timeline forms the figure below, *Biblical History in Covenantal Perspective*, in which the historical events can be likened to trees growing upwards, the covenants like strong roots growing in the soil of biblical history. Together they illustrate how:

God's redemption of his corrupted creation is rooted in covenant relationships established with human beings

¹Genesis 1:27–32

²Genesis 3:17–20

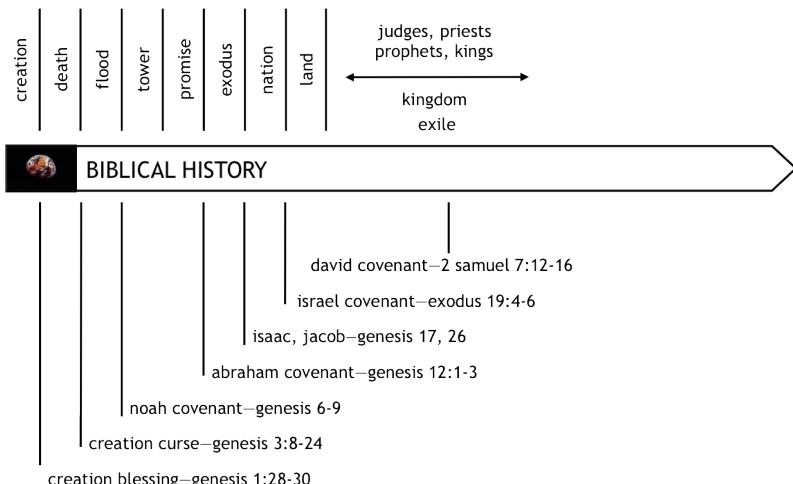
³Genesis 9:9–16

⁴Genesis 12:1–3 & 15.18, 17.1–22, 22.15

⁵Genesis 26:1–5,24 & 28:13–15

⁶Exodus 19:4–6

⁷2 Samuel 7:12–16 & 23:5; see also Psalm 89.3



Biblical History in Covenantal Perspective

Discuss Topic 1: Scripture in perspective

- Why did God chose to make covenants with human beings?
- What significance do God's covenants have to you and your community?

Characteristics of covenant

Topic 2

THIS TOPIC EXPLORES the nature of covenant. The establishment of a covenant signifies the formation of a solemn *commitment* or *obligation* binding together individuals, families, tribes and nations. Even when one party is recognisably stronger, such as a conqueror or deliverer in the context of war, covenants could be either imposed or negotiated:

- The more-powerful tribe or nation offering protection, land and reward, in the name of their leader or commander.
- The subjugated party, tribe or nation becoming a servant-people, pledging allegiance, military service and payment of taxes.

Establishing covenant

The Hebrew word for both secular and divine covenants is *beriyth*. It occurs over 250 times in the Old Testament, where it refers to a formal, binding arrangement between two parties, such as a treaty, constitution, agreement, alliance, pledge or oath. To *cut covenant* refers to the knife cut that kills a sacrificial animal, prior to the sprinkling of its blood and a ritual meal, which formerly establishes the covenant.

Terms and oaths

Terms accompany the formation of covenants. These terms prescribe behaviours that constitute either the *keeping* (maintainence) or the *breaking* (violation) of the covenant relationship. Covenant terms could include: trade, food, water or other resources; skill-sharing; land, routes, territory; taxes; ceremony, tradition; protection, allegiance, peace or war. For a conquered tribe, terms could be benign and generous or oppressive and dominating.

Covenant partners swore an *oath* to uphold the terms. These oaths were pronounced to the accompaniment of invocations consisting of:

- blessings (rewards, bounty) for upholding the covenant
- curses (sanctions, punishments) for violating the covenant.

Covenant refers to a binding obligation forming a solemn relationship between two parties.

A sacrificial meal and spoken oaths confirm the covenant relationship: blessings and curses prescribe rewards and sanctions for covenant faithfulness and violation respectively.

Discuss Topic 2: Characteristics of covenant

- How is covenant understood within your culture?
- How does this compare with covenants encountered in Scripture?

Characteristics of God's covenants**Topic 3**

THIS TOPIC ILLUMINATES significant aspects of God's covenants. Like a powerful human lord, or chief, God makes covenant relationship with a people of his choice, designating covenant terms without negotiation.

The calling of a covenant community

Each covenant that God forms sets apart a family, a tribe, a nation, a people—*a covenant community*. The faithfulness of this covenant community is vital to the service and success of God's wider purposes for his creation. They are a servant community: a community called to serve God's purposes.

- As the covenant community serves God's purpose, they are favoured and blessed by God. These blessings are a *means to an end*: the covenant community is blessed by God *in order that* they can serve God's purposes effectively, and thus bring glory to his name.
- When this principle is obscured, the covenant community risks significantly frustrating God's purposes. The covenant community carries a vital responsibility for allowing God to work out his purposes through them.

Keeping covenant

Keeping covenant means faithfully preserving the solemn relationship, by observing the covenant obligations. It requires submission and obedience to the covenant terms: including forgiveness and restitution, following breaches. Yet it means *more* than simply upholding precise terms.

Being faithful to God's covenant requires recognising, accepting and co-operating with the *vocation of the covenant community*. This is the reason that God calls a community into covenant with him: that they may become a *faithful* servant community, called to serve his eternal purpose.

Breaking covenant

Since the covenant relationship is always greater than the covenant terms (which point towards the relationship), occasional breaches can be repaired and relationship restored. Restoration happens through:

- I. a recognition of breaches (*confession*)

2. restitution (forgiveness)
3. recommitment (renewal).

When many breaches are made, without any restoration, it indicates that the solemnity of the relationship has been lost. The consequences of continual *faithlessness* towards the covenant relationship leads to the punishments and curses incorporated within the covenant.

Why is the breaking of covenant such a serious matter? Not because God is a harsh judge, but because it frustrates his purposes for the covenant. When his servant community fails to uphold the covenant relationship they cannot faithfully fulfil their covenant vocation.

Certainty of divine covenant

Even if God's people break the covenant, God *remains faithful* to his covenant purposes and upholds his sworn obligation. Because his character is unchanging, his eternal purpose remains intact. When God makes a covenant he is committing himself to fulfilling his divine purpose through that covenant.

In Hebrews 6.13–18, the writer illustrates how God's purpose in swearing an oath is to demonstrate the *unchangeable character of his intentions*. God won't change his mind. He will do what he has purposed and promised to do through his covenants and through his Covenant Community.

Discuss Topic 3: Characteristics of God's covenants

- In God's covenants, how are blessings and curses related?
- How might this effect ideas about sicknesses and other problems sometimes associated with curses?

God's covenantal purpose

Topic 4

THIS TOPIC REVEALS how the biblical covenant points towards the *restoration* of a creation that has been corrupted by rebellion against God's purposes. The *reconciliation* of human beings, into faithful relationship with their Creator, is central to this restoration.

Furthermore, each of the four *patriarchal* covenants, in particular, reveals a significant and vital aspect of God's unfolding plans and purposes, in his collaboration with a covenant community.

Covenant with Noah

God's covenant with Noah begins by reminding Noah that human beings are made ... *in his image*. There is an echo of the original creation blessing given to Adam, as Noah's family are instructed to *be fruitful and multiply, swarm over the earth and multiply on it.*⁸

- God establishes this covenant with Noah and *his descendants, all the inhabitants of the earth, every living creature ... with the earth.*
- The sign of *a rainbow* serves as perpetual reminder of God's covenant promise to never again destroy all living things.⁹

God's covenant with Noah reveals and expresses God's commitment to uphold his creation. In spite of man's evil, God will not abandon his covenant with his creation.

Covenant with Abraham

God's covenant with Abraham represents God's response towards the rebellion, degeneration and wickedness of human society, recorded in Genesis chapters I–III. It reveals God's plan for *a great nation* that will bless all the families of the earth.¹⁰

The covenant thus contains both a promise and a subtle command: *be a blessing*. This suggests Abraham is intended to convey his sense of promise, protection, blessing and divine purpose to the tribes and peoples with whom he relates. Because of his covenant with God, he is to anticipate being a blessing to others. The force of this covenant is thus destined to grow in two complementary directions:

- **Downwards** towards Abraham's descendants, who are to be blessed *in Abraham.*
- **Outwards** towards the whole human family, who are to be blessed *by Abraham.*

⁸Genesis 1:26–28

⁹Genesis 6:18, 8:6–22, 9:8–16

¹⁰Genesis 12:1–3, 15:18, 17:1–22, 22:15

God's covenant with Abraham reveals and expresses God's commitment to bless all the families of the earth through a great nation. God is committed to restoring his creation, marred by human rebellion, in and through a faithful covenant community.

Covenant with Israel

A covenant is formed with the nation of Israel, against the backdrop of a powerful deliverance and exodus from the oppression of Egypt's Pharaoh. Abraham's descendants, the sons of Israel, acknowledge God as their powerful and faithful Deliver, who has brought them to the point of entering the sanctuary of the land promised to their ancestors.

- Israel is offered the opportunity to become God's own *treasure* and to become a *kingdom of priests*, hinting at how Israel is called to mediate God's blessing to other nations.¹¹

Torah—pathway to covenant faithfulness

Central to Israel's calling is the *Torah* (meaning *Teaching*), given to Moses on Mount Sinai and centred upon the *Ten Commandments*.¹²

- Torah provides a set of clear, detailed instructions informing Israel how to live, in covenant relationship with God.
- Torah thus forms the basis for Israel's vocation: through faithfulness to the covenant, Israel is called to demonstrate love, devotion and allegiance to God.¹³
- Through covenantal faithfulness, they are to demonstrate God's wisdom and understanding and thus become a *light to the nations*.¹⁴

¹¹ Exodus 6:2–8, 19:4–6, Romans 9:4–9

¹² Deuteronomy 5

¹³ Deuteronomy 4:5–8

¹⁴ Isaiah 42:6

Life or death, blessing or curse, service or exile

Israel's choice of faithful covenant relationship or unfaithful idolatry, represent a choice between *life or death, blessing or curse, deliverance or disaster, inheritance or exile*,¹⁵ revealing God's:

- Kindness towards those embracing his covenant, submitting to his government and available to serve his purposes;
- Severity towards those rejecting his covenant, resisting his purposes, rebelling against his goodness, disobeying his teachings.¹⁶

Through their covenant with Adonai, the people of Israel become recipients of life, blessing, grace and goodness from God that will eventually overflow towards all nations and peoples.

God's covenant with Israel reveals and expresses God's commitment to use a chosen people—a covenant community—to reveal his love and glory to the whole world. God chooses an unimportant nation to demonstrate through them his goodness, kindness and covenant-faithfulness towards a world of people that has rebelled against his purpose for Creation.

Covenant with David

The covenant with Israel called upon them to recognise God as their King. The prophet Samuel thus recognises a deep tragedy unfolding when, in demanding a mortal king to rule over them, Israel rejects God's kingship.¹⁷

- After Saul, Israel's first king, falters, Samuel is directed to anoint *David, a man after God's own heart.*¹⁸
- God makes a covenant with David, promising that one of his descendants will build a Temple for God's name and that David's royal throne will continue eternally.¹⁹

¹⁵Deuteronomy 30:1–20

¹⁶Romans 11:22

¹⁷I Samuel 8:7–8

¹⁸Acts 13:22; cf. I Samuel 13:14

¹⁹2 Samuel 7:12–16; also I Chronicles 17:11–14, Psalm 89:19–37

Following David's death, rulership passes to his son, Solomon, who begins his reign with great wisdom and overt expressions of covenant faithfulness towards God—including the lavish construction and dedication of the Jerusalem Temple.

Solomon's many non-Hebrew wives and concubines lead him to worship other gods. His idolatry invites God's judgement and results in a national division: into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah and, ultimately, the exile of both from the Land.

The covenant promise to David must be fulfilled by another descendant—a branch of David's line²⁰: a Redeemer, a King, a Messiah, who will rise in the future to bring deliverance and blessing to Israel.

God's covenant with David reveals and expresses God's commitment to choose and anoint one of David's descendants to eternally establish God's kingdom reign on earth. God hints at a future Anointed King—a Messiah—who will establish the Kingdom of God eternally.

Discuss Topic 4: God's covenantal purpose

- Why does God need a covenant community and what does he most need from them?
- David was shepherd, warrior and king. Which role most faithfully expressed him as *a man after God's own heart*?

Covenant and Scripture

Summary

This concludes the first study, which:

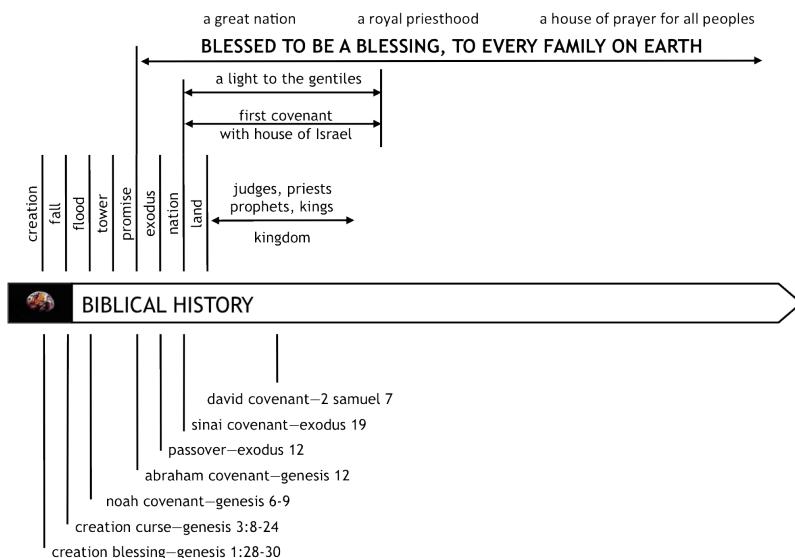
- explained how biblical, historical events are bound together by a series of covenants
- explored the nature of covenant
- illuminated significant aspects of God's covenants

²⁰Jeremiah 23:5–6

- revealed how the patriarchal covenants point towards God's unfolding plans and purposes, for both his covenant community and the nations of the world

The figure below, *A Great Nation, Blessed to be a Blessing* updates the biblical panorama being constructed by this study, incorporating scriptural elements from each of the patriarchal covenants:

- The first covenant with the house of Israel
- A light to the nations
- A great nation
- A royal priesthood
- A house of prayer for all peoples



A Great Nation, Blessed to be a Blessing

Overarching the biblical panorama is the Abrahamic covenant: a great nation, blessed to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. God's universal concern for every family—every tribe, language and nation—stretches out, beyond the era of Abraham and Israel, forming a foundational framework for a new, messianic covenant, soon to be revealed

Bonus discussion

- Who are *all the families of the earth*?
- Africa, the place and its peoples, has known many tragedies and abuses of human power. What is God's response?
- In the way we live, how do we both reflect and contradict God's commitment to creation?
- To reflect God's commitment to creation, what might we do: More often? Less often? For the first time? For the last time?

The New, Messianic Covenant

Synopsis

The revelation of Messiah is the goal of God's covenants with his chosen people.

Through the New Covenant, the Messiah became the One Mediator between God and humanity

Topics in this study

1. The Renewal of the Covenant
2. The Revelation of the Messiah
3. The Identity of the Messiah
4. The Mediation of the Messiah

Terms used in this study

Torah — *Instruction or Teaching*, as revealed to Moses and recorded in the first five books of the Bible, especially the Ten Words.²¹

Tanakh — Hebrew Bible (Old Testament); TaNaKh is an acronym formed by the first letter of the three traditional subdivisions of the Hebrew Bible: **Torah**, **Nevi'im** (Prophets) and **Ketuvim** (Writings)

Advocate — a person who pleads on someone else's behalf; a mediator, an intercessor

Scripture

Read these passages aloud; memorise the **bold** passages.

- Haggai 2:1–9
- **Jeremiah 31:31–34**
- Ezekiel 34:16–23
- Isaiah 53:11ff
- Malachi 3:1–4
- **Romans 9:4–5**
- Hebrews 9:15



The renewal of the Covenant

Topic 1

THIS TOPIC SUMMARISES the historical, covenantal background to the New Testament, focussing upon biblical prophecies of a new covenant and a priestly messiah.

²¹ Exodus 20:1–17

National renewal

Israel's lengthy exile from the promised Land symbolises a period of spiritual darkness: a reminder of their idolatrous breach of the covenant and a painful indicator of God's ongoing judgement.

Even when a remnant of Jews, led by Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi, begins a slow, partial return to Israel, followed by a rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple, it becomes clear that this restoration and return from exile is practically and spiritually incomplete and that it does not represent the definitive, hoped-for sign of God's grace, forgiveness and covenantal renewal.²²

Spiritual renewal

The popular expectation is of a glorious, messianic king who will righteously shepherd the people of Israel, cleanse the Land from pagan oppression and lead the nation towards prosperity. According to the prophets, though, God's concern is not with national, economic renewal, but a *spiritual renewal* that addresses the covenant community's repeated faithlessness.

- Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant which provides an inner cleansing from sin and a new intimate knowledge of the Lord and his *Torah, written upon the hearts of his covenant people*.²³
- Ezekiel prophesies about a renewal in terms of a *good shepherd* who will challenge the leadership of Israel, in order to call forth a renewed covenant people from amongst Israel.²⁴

According to Isaiah,²⁵ Israel's messiah will not be a prosperous, military ruler, but a despised and marginalised prophet, who lives a priestly, intercessory life of sacrificial obedience and suffering service, under the anointing of the Spirit: restoring justice to the poor and marginalised of the covenant community; providing a mediatory, atoning sacrifice, which renews the covenant community of Israel and provides *a light to the Gentiles*.²⁶

Thus, rather than a triumphal, military victory over pagan enemies, the true sign that Israel's sins have been forgiven and that her spiritual exile is over will be the Lord, suddenly coming to his temple, in the pristine form of his Messiah, the Messenger of the (New) Covenant.²⁷

²²Haggai 2:1–9

²³Jeremiah 31:31–34

²⁴Ezekiel 34:16–23

²⁵Isaiah 53:11 ff

²⁶Isaiah 49:6

²⁷Malachi 3:1–4

Discuss Topic 1: The renewal of the Covenant

1. What was the significance of the return of Jews to the promised Land, after their exile in Babylon?
2. What kind of Messiah were the Jews expecting to arise and lead them and why?

The revelation of the Messiah**Topic 2**

THIS TOPIC REVEALS how the Messiah, Jesus (Yeshua), represents the goal at which the biblical covenants aim.²⁸

Revealing the Messiah

The New Testament Gospels provide historical accounts of Jesus' life, work, signs, miracles, teaching, discipleship and, finally, death, resurrection and ascension. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John write not as impartial observers or secular historians, but as committed members of an emerging *new covenant community*. Their intent is to establish Jesus' true identity, significance and purpose as the Jewish Messiah.²⁹

They achieve this by drawing upon a wide range of biblical imagery, hints, stories, signs, events, parables and metaphors and, above all, prophecies that are deeply rooted in Israel's Patriarchal, covenant framework. They use these biblical signposts and illustrations to confirm and illuminate precisely how Jesus fulfils the ancient, covenant promises and biblical prophecies. In doing so, they strongly affirm that Jesus is the promised One: the Messiah and the guarantor of *a new covenant with the house of Israel and Judah.*³⁰

Messianic prophecies fulfilled in the Gospels

The following table of Scripture references illustrates some of the most significant ways in which the New Testament Scriptures reveal that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament Scriptures and prophecies, as the Jewish Messiah.³¹

²⁸Romans 9:4–5 and 10:4

²⁹John 20:31

³⁰Hebrews 7:22, 8:6–13

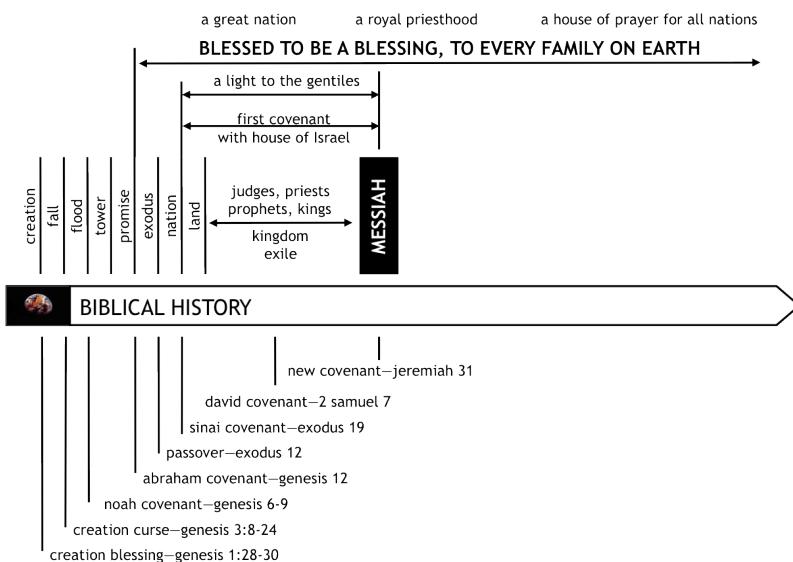
³¹If groups do not have sufficient time or resources to go through all the Scripture references, learning groups should select and discuss those elements of most interest to them.

Prophets wrote	Messiah would be	Gospels affirm
Genesis 12.1–3, 17.19, 21.12, 28.14	the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob	Matthew 1.2, Luke 3.34
Deuteronomy 18.15, 18	a prophet like Moses	Acts 3.20–22, Hebrews 3.1–2 ff.
Samuel 7.11–16; Isaiah 9.6; Genesis 12.1–3	a descendant of David and heir to his throne	Matthew 1.16, 22.40, Acts 2.30
Isaiah 40.3–6; Malachi 3.1	preceded by one who would announce him	Matthew 3.1–3, Luke 1.7, 3.2–6
Psalm 2.7; 2 Samuel 7.12–16 (Proverbs 30.4)	the Messiah, the Son of God	Matthew 3.17; Luke 1.32
Isaiah 11.2, 61.1; Psalm 45.7	anointed with the Spirit of God	Matthew 3.16, John 3.34
Isaiah 42.1–4	tender, compassionate, unostentatious	Matthew 12.15–20
Psalm 110:4; Zechariah 6:13	a priest and mediator	Hebrews 5:5–6; 6:20; 7:15–17, Hebrews 7:25–8:2; Romans 8:34
Isaiah 61.1–2; 35.5–6; 42.18	a source of healing and restoration to the oppressed	Luke 4.18–19; Matthew 11.5, throughout gospels
Isaiah 53.7–12	one whose death atoned for Israel's sins	Matthew 27.38; Mark 10.45; John 1.20; Acts 8.30–35
Isaiah 53.9–10; Psalm 2.7, 16.10	raised from the dead	Matthew 28.1–20, Acts 2.23–36, 13.33–37
Psalm 16:11; 68:18; 110:1	seated at the Father's right hand	Luke 24:51; Acts 1.9–11; 7:55, Hebrews 1:3
Isaiah 11:10; 42:1,4; 49:1,12	accepted by Gentiles	Matthew 12:21; Romans 9:30; 10:20; 11:11; 15:10
Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22–23	the cornerstone of God's messianic community	Matthew 21:42; Ephesians 2:20, 1 Peter 2:5–7

Messiah: goal of the covenants

The figure below, *Messiah and New Covenant*, updates the biblical, historical timeline being constructed by this module, illustrating how:

- the covenantal history of Israel provides the most appropriate perspective for encountering the New Testament narratives of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God
- the Messiah and his mission form the true *purpose, goal and climax* of the narratives and prophetic writings about Israel.



Messiah and New Covenant

Discuss Topic 2: The revelation of the Messiah

- Why was there a need for a new covenant?
- What is the relationship of the new covenant with the biblical covenants that had gone before it?

The identity of the Messiah**Topic 3**

THIS TOPIC EXAMINES the identity of Yeshua, the Messiah, which is rooted in the biblical covenants and the Jewish Tanakh.

Comprehending the role of the Messiah

The root meaning of the word, *messiah*, is *anointed* or *poured on*. Anointing oil was poured onto Israel's kings, as they were invested with their authority.³² This anointing represents the placing of God's Spirit upon these leaders.

Yeshua, Jesus, however, is not anointed by another human being. At his baptism by the prophet John, he is anointed directly with the Holy Spirit, at the same time as a voice from heaven declares: *This is my son, in whom I am well pleased.*

Following this, the Gospels and apostolic epistles reveal a series of identities and roles relating to Jesus, most notably: *prophet, king and high priest*.³³ The Old Testament records Israel's prophets, priests and kings holding different, complementary roles, each responsible for *mediating* a particular aspect of God's authority.

Israel's prophets mediate God's authority — in at least four distinct ways:

- entering the *heavenly council* or presence of God, whereby they hear and receive God's Word.
- anointing Israel's kings and challenging them towards covenant faithfulness
- delivering God's word to his people, announcing the coming of his kingdom—including his judgement upon faithlessness
- interceding in prayer; before God, on behalf of the nation and of God's purposes.

Abraham is the first prophet identified in scripture; he intercedes and God hears his prayer. Moses is the greatest prophet in Israel's history; he receives the Ten Commandments and the Torah. Remarkably, Scripture records Moses' intercession changes God's mind, when God is planning to destroy the children of Israel.³⁴ God also works especially

³² Exodus 30:22–25

³³ Also: initially *rabbi*—a recognised religious office, yet with no messianic overtones and thus no threat to Israel's established leadership.

³⁴ Deuteronomy 33

powerfully through the intercession of prophets Samuel, Elijah, Daniel, Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Israel's Kings mediate God's authority — as his earthly vice-regent. To the people, they represent God's government. To God, they are a representative of the nation. So closely identified with God's authority, they are said to be seated upon God's throne.³⁵ Kings David and Solomon are especially recognised for their skill in governing the people and for their prayerful intercession on behalf of Israel.

Israel's priests mediate God's authority — by interceding ritually before God, on behalf of the nation and individuals. Their role and responsibility is to approach God's throne, in order to obtain grace, mercy and forgiveness for others. Through their actions, they obtain forgiveness of sin and restoration of covenant relationship. Most notably, the Jewish high priest makes an atonement for the nation's sins, once a year, within the *Holiest Place*.³⁶.

Discuss Topic 3: The identity of the Messiah

- How does the mediation of God's authority differ between prophets, kings and priests?
- Towards which type of authority do you personally relate most vitally?

Each of the three roles—prophet, priest, king—represents a vital form of mediation and provides important insight into the identity, role and work of the Messiah. In the New Testament, Jesus is identified as:

1. A prophet like Moses
2. A branch of David
3. An Eternal High Priest

³⁵ 1 Chronicles 28:5 & 29:23

³⁶ Exodus 26:31–33, 36:35–36 (Matthew 27:51)

A prophet like Moses

Within the gospels, *prophet* is the principal role with which Jesus is popularly identified.³⁷ As prophet, Jesus:

- Announces the arrival of *the kingdom of God*, declaring that God is about to act decisively in the history of Israel.³⁸
- Calls the *lost sheep of the house of Israel* to repentance and a renewed covenant faithfulness.³⁹

Eventually, Jesus is identified as *the Prophet*—the promised one, who is *like Moses*.⁴⁰ Like Moses, Jesus addresses three of the most potent symbols of Israel's faith: Leadership, Temple, Covenant.

Leadership — *the seat of Moses* is a metaphorical reference to the priestly leadership of Israel, who exercised their authority by virtue of the Torah of Moses, which they claimed to interpret and follow.⁴¹

At the time of Jesus, *Pharisees* and *Sadducees* exercise this position. Jesus does not challenge their holding this important office, rather he holds them responsible for the ongoing corruption of the covenant relationship: criticising them for publicly going through the motions of Torah-obedience, yet with *uncircumcised hearts*, neglecting the greater commandments of humility, mercy and justice, whilst making covenant faithfulness harder for others.⁴²

Temple — Jesus prophesies the calamity of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, which symbolically represented the heart of the first covenant with Israel, predicting that God would then raise it up again, *in three days*—a metaphorical reference to Jesus resurrection.

In time, the disciples came to understand that, as far as access to God is concerned, the temple had been displaced in its significance by the Messiah.⁴³ Following Pentecost, the temple came to be identified with

³⁷Matthew 21:11, Luke 24:19

³⁸Mark 1:14–15

³⁹Matthew 10:6, 15:24

⁴⁰Deuteronomy 18:15–19, John 1:21, 6:14, 7:40, Acts 3:23, 7:37

⁴¹Matthew 23:1–39

⁴²Jesus denounces these leaders, with a form of curse: *Woe to you...* (Matthew 23). There is ample precedent for such harsh denunciations in the history of Jewish prophets. Note: the cursing of the fig tree (Matthew 17) is a metaphor, acted out by Jesus as a prophetic warning directed against the corrupted, incumbent leadership—not the Jewish people in general. Moreover, the gospels reveal that amongst them some individuals were close to *the kingdom*; some became disciples (Mark 12:28–34).

⁴³John 2:13–22, 4:21, also 6:1–4; see also Matthew 27:51, Hebrews 9:3–9, 10:19–22

the Messianic Community, who were *living stones* being made into up a *living temple* in which the Holy Spirit could dwell.

Covenant *The Prophet like Moses* is a title synonymous with *Messiah*. It hints at a renewal of covenant because of the link with Moses, who inaugurated the first covenant with Israel.⁴⁴ Prior his death, Jesus confirms the reality of the new covenant with his disciples.

Bonus discussion

- What is the relationship between prophets, kingdom and covenant?
- What faults does Jesus expose in Israel's leaders?

A branch of David

In the context of first-century Judaism, *messiah* meant *king*: the special One, promised by God, descended from David, appointed and anointed by God to govern his covenant community.

For a significant time, Jesus is highly reluctant to confirm his identity as the Messiah, frequently instructing people not to speak about him or what he had done⁴⁵. Recognising him as Messiah is foundational to the apostolic vocation.⁴⁶ Ultimately it forms the accusation against him that leads to his death.⁴⁷

Jesus' identity as the Messiah is confirmed by several different titles: *Son of Man*, *Son of God*, *Son of David*, *Good Shepherd*, *King of the Jews*.

Son of God — Before his birth, Jesus is identified, to his mother, Mary, as one who will be called *Son of God*.⁴⁸ Later, a voice from heaven declares that he is God's *only begotten ... beloved Son*.⁴⁹ *Son of God* and *Messiah* are essentially synonymous.⁵⁰

⁴⁴Deuteronomy 18:15–19; John 1:21; Acts 3:22–23 & 7:37

⁴⁵Matthew 8:4, John 6:15; though compare John 4:25–26

⁴⁶John 1:49, 11:27; Matthew 16:16

⁴⁷Luke 22:66–23:42

⁴⁸Luke 1:31–35

⁴⁹Matthew 3:17; Luke 3:22; John 1:14,18

⁵⁰E.g. Matthew 16:16, 26:63; John 20:31. In first-century Judaism, *Son of God* is not a title that implies divinity, being simply used to refer to a godly, righteous person or the *special one*, the Messiah, sent by God. In contrast, Christian tradition usually posits *Son of God* as a direct

Son of David — a name by which Jesus is frequently identified⁵¹, a recognised title of the Messiah, relating to God's covenant promise to raise up a deliverer from King David descendants.⁵² Jesus demonstrates that the Messiah is not only the descendant of David, but also David's Lord and thus, greater than David.

Son of Man — a messianic title by which Jesus identifies himself⁵³. It is apparently based on rabbinic interpretations of Daniel 7:13–14, thus possibly intentionally obscure to those other than Torah-teachers, Pharisees etc⁵⁴.

Good Shepherd — Jesus identifies himself as the *good shepherd*, a messianic reference from the Old Testament, synonymous with Son of David⁵⁵. Although he declares himself sent only to *the lost sheep of the house of Israel*, the gospels repeatedly hint at the salvation of the Gentiles—a long-anticipated aspect of the Messiah's work⁵⁶.

King of the Jews — A title used by non-Jews⁵⁷. Jesus represented a threat to the Torah-teachers and the Pharisees, who eventually plotted to kill him, using this accusation to incite the Roman authorities and the crowds against him⁵⁸.

reference to Jesus' divinity: i.e. equivalent to God, the Son, a member of the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The eternal divinity of Messiah is hinted at within the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), yet practically never the central idea. Thus Luke ends his gospel (ch.24:44–48) with Jesus encouraging his disciples to be witnesses, *not of his divinity*, but rather that: *Everything written about me in the Torah, the Prophets and the Psalms had to be fulfilled: the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day*. The pre-existence of the Messiah is communicated by John the evangelist (John 1:1ff, 17:5). Paul's epistles affirm the Messiah's divine glory (Hebrew: Sh'kinah), universal significance, eternal existence and exaltation to God's Right Hand.

⁵¹ e.g. Matthew 12:23, 15:22, 21:9 etc

⁵² Acts 13:23; 2 Samuel 7:12–13; Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5–6; Ezekiel 37:24; Psalms 89:3–4,35–36, 132:11; Luke 1:32–33, 69ff.; Romans 1:4

⁵³ E.g. Matthew 8:20, 9:6, 10:23, 11:19, Luke 9:22

⁵⁴ Luke 22:46–70

⁵⁵ Matthew 15:24; Ezekiel 34:23, 37:24. See Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4; Psalm 23

⁵⁶ John 10:11–14, 16, 27

⁵⁷ Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26; Luke 23:3; John 19:19

⁵⁸ By contrast, Herod Antipas (Luke 23:8–12, 15, unlike his paranoid father, Herod the Great, Luke 2) is un-threatened by Jesus and untroubled by the messianic accusation.

Bonus discussion

- Why did Jesus hide his identity as the Messiah?
- Which title of the Messiah do you find most significant? Why?

An eternal high priest

The final aspect of the Messiah's role is as Israel's true *high priest*, guaranteeing the better promises of the new, *eternal covenant*.

As a high priest, the Messiah:

- makes purification for sins
- sits down at the right hand of God
- lives forever; interceding for human beings.

These three realities represent the heart of the New Covenant and the fulfilment of the Messiah's vocation.

Purification for sins John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the *Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*.⁵⁹ As a priest, Jesus offered one sacrifice, once and for all, by offering up himself ... the Messiah ... through the eternal Spirit, offered himself to God as a sacrifice without blemish.⁶⁰

Seated at God's right hand Jesus exerts his claim to be the Messiah most potently when he identifies himself with the *Son of Man ... at the right hand of the Power on high*.⁶¹

Being invited to sit at God's right hand constituted the Messiah's enthronement as God's vice-regent, or co-ruling Prince.⁶² The idea of the Messiah seated at the right hand of God is found throughout scripture, forming the most definitive image of the Messiah and expression of his rule and authority.

Yet, in the traditional framework of Jewish teaching, for a man to identify himself as divine, co-existent with or exalted beside God was considered blasphemous and punishable by death—Jesus skilfully demonstrates how this is not applicable.

⁵⁹John 1:29; see I Corinthians 5:6–8

⁶⁰Hebrews 7:27, 9:14, cf. Leviticus, Numbers

⁶¹Matthew 22:41–46; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42*

⁶²Matthew 28:18

Eternal, heavenly advocate After his death and resurrection, Jesus enters the true, heavenly tabernacle, in order to offer to Adonai the sacrifice of his blood. In this way, the Messiah mediates the new, eternal covenant as a sinless and eternal high priest.

Jesus' priesthood is of a different order to the Levitical priests. Jesus comes from the tribe of Judah, not Levi and, through a *midrash*, he is identified as a high priest, *of the order of Malki-Tzedek*.⁶³ The significance attached to this is two-fold:

- He is therefore greater than Abraham
- He lives forever, interceding eternally

Greater than Abraham Having already demonstrated that Yeshua deserves more honour than Moses,⁶⁴ the writer of Hebrews now demonstrates that the Messiah is greater than Abraham, Father of the Jewish nation. This is achieved by introducing *Malki-Tzedek*⁶⁵, priest of El 'Elyon, who receives a tithe from Abraham and blesses him.⁶⁶ Because the greater blesses the lesser*,⁶⁷ the writer of Hebrews establishes that Melchizedek is greater than Abraham.

Interceding eternally The writer of Hebrews uses Malchi-Tzedek's lineage to draw attention to the reality that the Messiah became a priest by virtue of the power of an indestructible life⁶⁸. Consequently, he has an eternal intercessory ministry, advocating on behalf of human beings who come to the Father through him.⁶⁹

Bonus discussion

- What does it mean to be seated at the Right Hand of the Power?
- Why is it vital that Jesus lives forever?

⁶³Hebrews

⁶⁴Hebrews 3:3

⁶⁵From *Malki* (King) of *Tzedek* (Righteousness); he is also King of Shalem (peace)

⁶⁶Genesis

⁶⁷Hebrews 7:7

⁶⁸Hebrews 7:16

⁶⁹Hebrews 7:24–25; 1 John 2:2; Romans 8:34

The mediation of the Messiah**Topic 4**

THIS TOPIC EXPLORES Jesus' roles as Israel's prophet, king and high priest and, thus, centre of an emerging, new covenant, messianic community.

As prophet Jesus calls the covenant community of Israel to repent and to enter fully into the Kingdom of Heaven, which was arriving in the person of the Messiah, the new David, King of the Jews.

As king he forms the centre of a new-covenant community embracing a resurrected Messiah, the anointed Royal Shepherd, not only of the Jews, but also of “other sheep...not from this pen,”⁷⁰—the Gentiles, “all the families of the earth.”

The One Shepherd, whom God was using to bring about his eternal purpose, through Israel, on behalf of all the nations of the earth. As Shepherd-King, he calls to those who *hear his voice*: *Turn towards God; trust in me, follow and give your allegiance to me, submit to me as your Messiah, your Lord.*⁷¹ In so doing, he inaugurates within those that accept, follow and give allegiance to him a new, Messianic covenant community, spiritually centred around himself as the exalted Lord—their Messiah, their King.

As high priest the Messiah completely fulfils the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah, through which an anointed covenant community can experience the *Sh'khinah* glory of God.

The Eternal Covenant

As prophet, priest and king, Yeshua the Messiah is presented by the New Testament writers as greater even than the patriarchal roots of the covenantal, Jewish faith: Abraham, Moses and David. The New Testament carefully demonstrates that Jesus the Messiah is not only linked to these Patriarchs, but that he exceeds each one in holiness, obedience and submission towards God the Father.

Together, they establish that the Messiah has established the New *Eternal Covenant*: at the earthly *Pesach* of Calvary and in the heavenly Tabernacle of the Power on High. Through it, Jesus has become the One Mediator between God and human beings:

⁷⁰John 10:16

⁷¹Matthew 23:10

God, our deliverer ... wants all humanity to be delivered and come to a full knowledge of truth. For God is one and there is but **one Mediator between God and humanity**, Yeshua the Messiah, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom on behalf of all, thus providing testimony to God's purpose at just the right time.⁷²

Discuss Topic 4: The mediation of the Messiah

- How do you respond to Jesus as an eternal high priest?
- Why does humanity need a mediator between them and God?

The New, Messianic Covenant

Summary

This concludes the second study, *The New Messianic Covenant*, which:

- SUMMARISED the historical, covenantal background to the New Testament, focussing upon biblical prophecies of a new covenant and a priestly messiah
- REVEALED how the Messiah, Jesus (Yeshua), represents the goal at which the biblical covenants aim.
- EXAMINED the identity of Yeshua, the Messiah, which is rooted in the biblical covenants and the Jewish Tanakh
- EXPLORES Jesus' roles as Israel's prophet, king and high priest and, thus, centre of an emerging, new covenant, messianic community

In summary, the study revealed how:

⁷²1 Timothy 2:3–6

The Messiah's identity and vocation transitioned from being recognised, amongst his native Jewish people, as learned rabbi, to divinely-anointed prophet, to transcendent, priestly Messiah, seated at the Right Hand of the Power on High (The Eternal One, God the Father), granted complete authority in heaven and on earth and thus a perfect Mediator on behalf of people from every ethnicity, tribe, language and nation.

Bonus discussion

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The New, Messianic Covenant Community

Synopsis

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit marks the onset of the era of the Messianic Covenant Community

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit onto Gentiles demonstrates the worldwide significance of the Gospel

Topics in this study

1. New Covenant: Torah and Spirit
2. Pentecost: Messianic Community
3. Light to the Gentiles
4. Removal of *m'chitzah*

Terms used in this study

Scripture

Read these passages aloud; memorise the **bold** passages.

- Acts 1:4–5
- **Acts 1:8**
- Acts 24:14
- Romans 7:14a
- Hebrews 10:16
- James 1:25



Pentecost: Torah and Spirit

Topic I

THIS TOPIC EXPLORES significant parallels between Torah (first covenant with Israel) and the Holy Spirit (the new covenant).

Under the first covenant with Israel, God becomes displeased because the people harden their hearts against him.⁷³ Thus he declares through the prophet Jeremiah that he will make a new covenant with Israel The New, Messianic Covenant (Study 2).⁷⁴ This covenant will be different to the first. It will bring about a new intimacy with God that is characterised in these ways:

- I will put my Torah in their minds and write it upon their hearts
- All will know me, from the least of them to the greatest
- I will be merciful ... and remember their sins no more.

This is why Jesus said very clearly that he did not come to abolish Torah, but to fulfil it.⁷⁵ In other words, *the Messiah is the goal at which Torah was aiming*.⁷⁶

⁷³Hebrews 3:7ff.

⁷⁴Hebrew 8:7–13, Jeremiah 31:31–34

⁷⁵Matthew 5:17–18

⁷⁶Note the critical importance of correctly interpreting Romans 10:4: *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes*. The Greek word here translated *end* is *telos*,

This accords with Covenant and Scripture (Study 1) and The New, Messianic Covenant (Study 2), which revealed how Jesus fulfilled or completed the messianic prophecies and covenant promises, through his three mediatory roles of prophet, priest and king. The Messiah also fulfilled Torah as the Passover lamb and as the heavenly manna.⁷⁷, as well as through his teaching, which amplified and revised the Torah, saying: *You have heard, It is written...but I say to you...*⁷⁸

This topic expands upon the Messiah's fulfilment of Torah by showing how the messianic prophecies are brought to another form of completion, by the Spirit, in the Messianic Covenant Community.

Another Counsellor

Before Jesus ascends to the right hand of God, he explains to his disciples that he must go to the Father; but he will not leave them alone: he will send to them another *comforting Counsellor*.⁷⁹ This Counsellor, the Spirit of Truth, will lead the disciples *into all the truth*, preparing them for the troubles, suffering and responsibilities that lie ahead of them and telling them about things that will happen in the future.⁸⁰

Jesus instructs them to wait in Jerusalem, to wait for what the Father promised ... to be immersed in the Holy Spirit.⁸¹ When this happens the disciples *will receive power to be witnesses of the Messiah to the ends of the earth*.⁸²

In the event, this outpouring takes place at a highly significant time: the feast of Shavuot, also known as Pentecost,⁸³ one of three annual Jewish festi-

the normal meaning of which is *goal, purpose, consummation, but not termination*. The Complete Jewish Bible renders this text: *For the goal at which the Torah aims is the Messiah, who offers righteousness to everyone who trusts*. Such an understanding of Torah—that its goal was and is the Messiah—accords a unity to the New and Old Testament scripture, as well as a genuine continuity to the outworking of God's covenant-based purposes through the ages, as posited within this syllabus. An emphasis on the continuity of Torah with the new covenant is affirmed by Paul: *Does it follow that we abolish Torah by this trusting? Heaven forbid! On the contrary we confirm Torah*. Romans 3:31

⁷⁷John 6:30–71

⁷⁸Matthew 5, 6

⁷⁹John 14:15–17

⁸⁰John 16:7–15

⁸¹Acts 1:4–5

⁸²Acts 1:8

⁸³Arriving fifty days after the second day of passover, Leviticus 23:16, Pentecost derives directly from the Greek word, *pente*, meaning fifty.

vals in which every Jewish male makes a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.⁸⁴ Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people and therein lies the significance of the outpouring of God's Spirit at that time.

Torah and Spirit

When the Torah was originally given to the children of Israel, God descended upon the mountain of Horeb, which *blazed with fire to the heart of heaven, with darkness, clouds and thick mist*. He spoke to the people, out of the fire, *proclaiming his covenant to them and instructing them to obey the Ten Words*,⁸⁵ which he wrote on two stone tablets.⁸⁶

The great sound and the tongues of fire which are seen on the disciples, when the Holy Spirit is sent upon them,⁸⁷ echo the fire which blazed upon Horeb—whilst signifying also the gentleness and personal relationship of the Holy Spirit, under the New Covenant.

Table 2 demonstrates important parallels and contrasts between *Torah* (Old Testament) and *Spirit* (New Covenant).

Discuss Topic 1: Pentecost: Torah and Spirit

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Pentecost: Messianic Community

Topic 2

This topic examines

Discuss Topic 2: Pentecost: Messianic Community

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⁸⁴Matthew 26:2, cf Exodus 12:1–13:16; John 2:13; John 7:2, cf Leviticus 23:33–43, Numbers 29:12–39, Deuteronomy 16:13–16

⁸⁵Exodus 20:1–17—Jews refer to the Ten Words: the first Word being a proclamation about God, rather than a commandment.

⁸⁶Deuteronomy 4:7–14

⁸⁷Acts 2:2–4

Torah — First Covenant	Scripture references	Spirit — New Covenant
teaches God's truth	Psalm 119; John 14.26; 15.26; 16.13	teaches God's truth
given to Israel during Shavuot	Exodus 19.1, 34.22; Acts 2:1	given to Messianic Community during Shavuot (Pentecost)
Sh'khinah manifests powerfully, fire from heaven confirms divine origin	Exodus 19.16–19, 24.9–11; Acts 2:2–3	Sh'khinah manifests powerfully, fire from heaven confirms divine origin
written on tablets of stone, declares people guilty, brings death, came with fading glory	Exodus 31.18, 34.33–5, cf. Deuteronomy 6.6; 2 Corinthians 3.2–18; cf. Jeremiah 31.31, Ezekiel 36.26	written upon tablets of the heart, declares people innocent, brings life, freedom, came with greater, lasting glory
a written text communicating teaching, instruction, commandments of God	Deuteronomy 4.6–14; 1 Corinthians 2.12–16	a new spirit imparting, communicating heart and mind of Messiah
lacked power to transform human nature	Jeremiah 31.32; Romans 8:3–10	transforms human nature, cleanses hearts

Light to the Gentiles

Topic 3

This topic examines

Discuss Topic 3: Light to the Gentiles

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Removal of m'chitzah

Topic 4

This topic examines

Discuss Topic 4: Removal of m'chitzah

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Summary: Study 1

This concludes Study N, **, which:

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- In summary, the study revealed how:

Bonus discussion

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Study



The Eternal Purpose of God

Synopsis

Topics in this study

1. Covenant partnership
2. New covenant glory (part A)
3. New covenant glory (part B)
4. God's eternal purpose

Terms used in this study

Scripture

Read these passages aloud; memorise the **bold** passages.

Covenant partnership

Topic I

THIS TOPIC EXAMINES

Inheriting the blessing

Furthermore, Adonai invites those who are willing to trust in and follow his Messiah, to receive the fresh 'breath' of his Spirit, to become **covenant-partners**, pursuing his eternal purpose. Gentile followers of the Messiah, by being united spiritually to the Messiah have become the spiritual "seed of Abraham" and, as a consequence, heirs of the blessing:

If you belong to the Messiah, you are seed of Abraham and heirs according to the promise.⁸⁸

Accordingly, those united with the Messiah are not only those who themselves are 'blessed,' but also those who are called "to be a blessing...to all the families of the earth," receiving not only the blessing of first horizon of the covenant promise—the blessing of God towards them—but the also receiving the injunction of the second horizon—the injunction to be a blessing to all the families of the earth:

I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and I will make your name great and **you are to be a blessing**. I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and **by you all families of earth will be blessed**.⁸⁹

What this means is that the body of the Messiah—the Messianic Community, the ekklesia, the Church—has inherited the Abrahamic blessing and are, therefore, themselves, like Abraham *avenu* before them, **blessed to be a blessing...to all the nations of the world**. God has invested his

⁸⁸Galatians 3:26–29

⁸⁹Genesis 12:1–3

blessing in those who follow the Messiah, in order that they reach out to other families, peoples and nations to bless them.

Failing to inherit the blessing

Adonai's covenant promise to bless Abraham was not simply for his own benefit or that of his descendants; Abraham and his descendants were blessed *for a specific purpose*: to demonstrate God's covenant faithfulness and for his blessing to spread out to all nations. Whenever Israel became insular and parochial and failed in serving the God's purposes, Israel suffered God's judgement. Yet God could not abandon his eternal covenant—instead, he disciplined them, sometimes severely, in order to return them towards faithful covenant service.

In two thousand years, the Messianic, Christian covenant community—the Church—has also become insular, parochial, self-serving, even idolatrous and, for long periods, largely failed in its vocation to be a blessing to the nations of the world. Oftentimes, other forces—military, legal, political and religious—entered into the moral vacuum, further short-circuiting the blessing that God intended to come through his covenant community. Nevertheless, the blessing of God has continually flowed out towards all nations and in the twentieth century, if numerical growth is any measure, it has reached surging proportions.

The responsibility of the blessing

Today, the Abrahamic blessing of God remains upon those who are united with the Messiah through their faith: they are **blessed to be a blessing to all the nations of the world**. To receive the blessing without seeking to be a blessing to peoples outside of God's covenant grace and goodness represents faithlessness towards the new covenant into which followers of the Messiah have been brought and, effectively, a rejection of the covenant terms.

Thus it is that we find Paul expressing the radical determinant that those confessing allegiance to the Messiah cannot claim a true inheritance alongside the Messiah *unless* they also act in covenant partnership with God—sharing practically in the *“fellowship of his suffering”⁹⁰.

The Spirit himself bears witness with our own spirits that we are children of God and if we are children, then we are also heirs,

⁹⁰Philippians 3:10

heirs of God and joint-heirs with the Messiah—**provided we are suffering with him** in order to be glorified with him.⁹¹

Thus, all those united with the Messiah—Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians—are called into a form of ‘covenant community partnership’ with God: *called to serve the eternal purpose of God.*

God’s ‘new covenant’ with the house of Israel expresses God’s commitment to create a faithful messianic covenant community...

A community receiving and imparting the ‘shalom’ of the kingdom through forgiveness of sin; a single ‘new humanity’— a mystical ‘body of the Messiah’— comprising Jew and Gentile, united in reaching out to all nations with the Good News of God’s reign through his Son

Discuss Topic 1: Covenant partnership

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New covenant glory

Topic 2

This topic examines

From the genesis of creation, throughout the ages and the various biblical covenants, to the present and into the future, God has been and remains committed to his eternal purpose. He has never been, nor ever will be, diverted from it, until all is fulfilled. In the new covenant he has been faithful to this eternal purpose, revealed progressively through the covenants and the prophetic writings that bear witness to it:

Table 2

God’s covenant commitment ...with ...therefore /through the covenant to uphold his creation Noah God will not abandon his commitment to his creation, in spite of man’s evil to bless all the families of the earth through ‘a great nation’ Abraham God is committed to restoring his creation, marred by human rebellion, using a covenant community to bring human beings back into right relationship with him to use a covenant community to reveal his love and glory to the whole world Israel God chooses an unimportant nation,

⁹¹ Romans 8:17

to demonstrate his loving, covenant faithfulness towards a world of people which has rebelled against his eternal purpose for Creation to anoint one of David's descendants to eternally establish God's kingdom David God hints at a coming Anointed One—a Messiah—a coming King who will establish the Kingdom of God eternally, on earth to create a renewed, faithful covenant community, blessing all nations through God's reign through his Messiah Israel, Messiah Yeshua God establishes a Spirit-anointed, covenant-keeping community of Jew and Gentile together, receiving and imparting the 'shalom' of the kingdom

The covenants reveal God's eternal purpose

Clearly, throughout 'covenant history', God has been resolutely working out his purposes in covenant partnership with human communities:

- The first covenant recognised his commitment to creation. He would not 'begin again,' but work through this creation.
- The second and third covenant revealed and established his method: a covenant nation through which all other nations would ultimately be blessed.
- The fourth and fifth covenants revealed an Anointed King—a king, in some mysterious way, who was actually the Eternal One, God himself—acting to bring reconciliation, redemption and righteousness to a renewed covenant-community, blessed—by the outpouring of the Holy Breath of God—to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth.

Together the covenants reveal...

God's eternal purpose accomplished in the Messiah Yeshua.⁹²

Bringing many sons to glory

Those who love God and are called in accordance with his purpose...he determined in advance would be conformed to the pattern of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers; and those whom he thus determined in advance, he also called; and those whom he called, he also caused to be considered righteous; and those whom he caused to be considered righteous, he also glorified!⁹³

⁹²Ephesians 3:11

⁹³Romans 8:29–30

Paul, writing to the Roman believers, arrives at one of the summits of his epochal arguments, speaking specifically about those called in accordance with God's eternal purpose. For those thus called, he writes, the process of their conformance to the pattern of the Son, the Messiah, comes to completion with their glorification. The writer of Hebrews makes essentially the same point when he declares:

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, the Creator and Preserver of everything should bring the Captain of their salvation to the goal through suffering.⁹⁴

The Messiah was brought by God, through suffering, to his goal. Which goal? The goal of "bringing many sons to glory" ... "that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." Thus, God's eternal purpose may be understood as bringing many 'sons' to glory.

What does it mean to be brought to glory? The New Testament principally presents the following four distinct, though overlapping, aspects of 'glory':

- The glory of the Messiah
- The glory of knowing the Messiah
- The glory of suffering with the Messiah
- The glory of resurrection with the Messiah

The glory of the Messiah

'Glory' typically refers to "brilliant, radiant beauty, splendour" or "high honour." The Hebrew word, Sh'khinah, refers uniquely to the glorious presence of God. In the old covenant schema, the Sh'khinah presence dwelt in the Holiest place, only entered by the high priest, once a year. In the new covenant schema, the Sh'khinah presence was no longer confined to the temple, but located absolutely within the Messiah:

...his Son, to whom he has given ownership of everything and through whom he has created the universe. This Son is the radiance of the Sh'khinah, the very expression of God's essence, upholding all that exists by his powerful word.⁹⁵

⁹⁴Hebrews 2:9–10

⁹⁵Hebrews 1:1–3

The New Testament, however, also presents the Messiah as a relatively inglorious figure, “emptying” himself and “taking the form of a slave,” in order to obey God, in a way that resonates with the curious Messianic prophesy of Isaiah, “he was not well-formed or handsome...his appearance did not attract us...he was despised; we did not value him.”⁹⁶

Thus, the New Testament presents a more subtle form of glory. One that does not physically overwhelm, as when angels met prophets like Daniel, Ezekiel and John, causing them to fall on their faces, but rather which invites trust, confidence, love and self-surrender and, ultimately, transformation into the likeness of the character of the Messiah.

The Word became a human being and lived with us and we saw his Sh'khinah, the Sh'khinah of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.⁹⁷

The glory of knowing the Messiah

Such transformation takes place mysteriously within the hearts of those in covenant relationship with the Messiah.

God who...said, “Let light shine out of darkness”...has made his light shine in our hearts, the light of the knowledge of God's glory shining in the face of the Messiah Yeshua.⁹⁸

Those who respond to this glory of the grace, truth and humility of the Messiah are thus, themselves “...changed into his image from one degree of glory to the next.” However, this transformation does not take place in a spiritual vacuum, but by following in the footsteps of the Messiah, who “learned obedience through his sufferings.”⁹⁹

The glory of suffering with the Messiah

Peter was one of three disciples who ascended a mountain with Jesus and saw him transformed, exhibiting brilliant, radiant splendour and actually heard the Father speak:

⁹⁶Isaiah 53:2-3

⁹⁷John 1:14

⁹⁸2 Corinthians 4:6

⁹⁹Hebrews 5:8

We saw his majesty with our own eyes...we were there when he received honour and glory from God the Father and the voice came to him from the grandeur of the Sh'khinah, saying 'This is my son, whom I love; I am well pleased with him!'¹⁰⁰

Yet, Peter also saw Jesus completely abased, humbled to the point of a despicable death on an execution stake—and was almost certainly changed more by the latter than the former. Peter thus presents this aspect of God's 'glory' to his readers: the willingness to be completely humbled and to suffer in the pursuit of serving God's eternal purpose.

If you are being insulted because you bear the name of the Messiah, how blessed are you! For the Spirit of the Sh'khinah, that is, the Spirit of God, is resting on you...if anyone suffers for being Messianic, let him not be ashamed; but let him bring glory to God by the way he bears his name.¹⁰¹

Peter carefully subverts the traditional notion of the Sh'khinah presence, transforming it to include the resting of the Spirit of God upon those who suffer for following the Messiah.

The essence of this subversive message is, in reality, the core of the Good News: the immense paradox that true life, eternal life, real, restored, abundant human life comes through embracing death. Not primarily the final death, but a life of 'sharing in the fellowship of the Messiah's sufferings'. Thus, Paul writes of his own apostolic experience:

We have all kinds of troubles, but we are not crushed; we are perplexed, yet not in despair; persecuted, yet not abandoned; knocked down, yet not destroyed. We always carry in our bodies the dying of Yeshua, so that the life of Yeshua may be manifested in our bodies too. For we who are alive are always being handed over to death for Yeshua's sake, so that Yeshua's life also might be manifested in our mortal bodies. Thus, death is at work in us but life in you.¹⁰²

Paul also declares "I die every day,"¹⁰³ in speaking of the surrendering of his life to serve God, in spite of abasements, hardships, persecutions, hunger, danger ... It was because of him that I gave up everything and regard it all as garbage in order to gain the Messiah and be found in union with him...I gave it all up in order to know him...to know the power of his resurrection...the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings as I am being conformed to his death.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰2 Peter 1:17; cf. Matthew 17:6

¹⁰¹1 Peter 4:12–16

¹⁰²2 Corinthians 4:8–12

¹⁰³1 Corinthians 15:31

¹⁰⁴Philippians 3:8–11

Paradoxically, Paul explains, those who suffer with the Messiah are being transformed into his likeness through an experience of ‘dying to live.’ They are highly honoured—blessed—yet willing to lay aside honour, wealth, acclaim in order to reach out to others: to be a blessing to the all the *ethnos* of the world. The glory manifested in those who so live, invisible in this life, will prove of immeasurable worth in the age to come:

Our light and transient troubles are achieving for us an everlasting glory whose weight is beyond description.¹⁰⁵

Effectively, within the new covenant matrix, for those “with an ear to hear,”¹⁰⁶ a new subtle, form of honour is ascribed to those willing to “take up their cross” in following the Messiah along the narrow road of living an intercessory life on behalf of others:

By his knowing pain and sacrifice my righteous servant makes many righteous; it is for their sins that he suffers. Therefore, I will assign him a share with the great...for having exposed himself to death...interceding for the offenders.¹⁰⁷

Those willing to travel this road will share with the Messiah in his glory:

We are also heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with the Messiah—provided we are suffering with him in order to be glorified with him. I don’t think the sufferings we are going through are even worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us in the future.¹⁰⁸

Thus we understand that suffering means sharing in the intercessory life and spirit of Jesus, the Messiah—this is true covenant faithfulness.

The glory of resurrection with the Messiah

The New Testament presents the Messiah’s glorification-through-resurrection as the ‘first-fruits’ of a new creation, which ultimately in the *olam-haba*, the age to come, will be consummated in a regeneration of creation that effectively marks a reuniting of God’s glory with the whole of creation:

¹⁰⁵2 Corinthians 3:17–4:17

¹⁰⁶Revelation 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 13:9

¹⁰⁷Isaiah 53:10–12

¹⁰⁸Romans 8:17–18

The creation waits eagerly for the sons of God to be revealed; for the creation was made subject to frustration...but it was given a reliable hope that it too would be set free from its bondage to decay and would enjoy the freedom accompanying the glory that Gods' children will have.¹⁰⁹

In the Regeneration, the Sh'khinah presence will dwell continuously amongst human beings, his glory covering and reigning over the earth, filling it with his shalom.

We, following along with his promise, wait for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness will be at home...¹¹⁰ I saw a new heaven and a new earth...I heard a loud voice from the throne say, See! God's Sh'khinah is with mankind and he will live with them. They will be his peoples and he himself, God-with-them, will be their God.¹¹¹

At that time, God's covenant people will be glorified—restored, through their resurrection from the dead, to the absolute fullness of life and humanity, as manifested by the Messiah. Not an ethereal escape to a celestial paradise dislocated from this earthly creation, but inhabiting a glorious spiritual body fitted for life within a renewed creation:

There are heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies, but the beauty and glory of the heavenly bodies is of one kind, while the beauty and glory of earthly bodies is a different kind. So it is with the resurrection of the dead...As surely as there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.¹¹²

This spiritual body is not simply about being alive forever. Rather about liberation from the curse of corruption, death, disease, mortality. Receiving the fullness of life, of true humanity, united with and formed into the character, the image of the Messiah; having the capacity to fully live, on earth, sharing in the olam' haba—the world, the age to come—as God intends human beings to live: Created in unhindered fellowship with Creator—this is the eternal purpose of God.

¹⁰⁹Romans 8:19–23

¹¹⁰Peter 3:13, citing Isaiah 65:17 & 66:22

¹¹¹Revelation 21:1–3—evoking Leviticus 26:11, Isaiah 7:14, 8:8; Jeremiah 31:34; Ezekiel 37:27

¹¹²1 Corinthians 15:40, 44 (Amplified Version)

Discuss Topic 2: New covenant glory

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God's eternal purpose

Topic 3

This topic examines

Completing the big picture

In conclusion, the final elements can be included in the schematic biblical panorama constructed by this thesis: the incorporation of the messianic gentiles, the great commission and new covenant 'ministry of reconciliation' and the final culmination of the Messiah's return and the resurrection of the dead in the renewed creation completing God's eternal purpose: to bring many people to his glory.

Fig 6: God's eternal purpose

Getting on board

Discuss Topic 3: God's eternal purpose

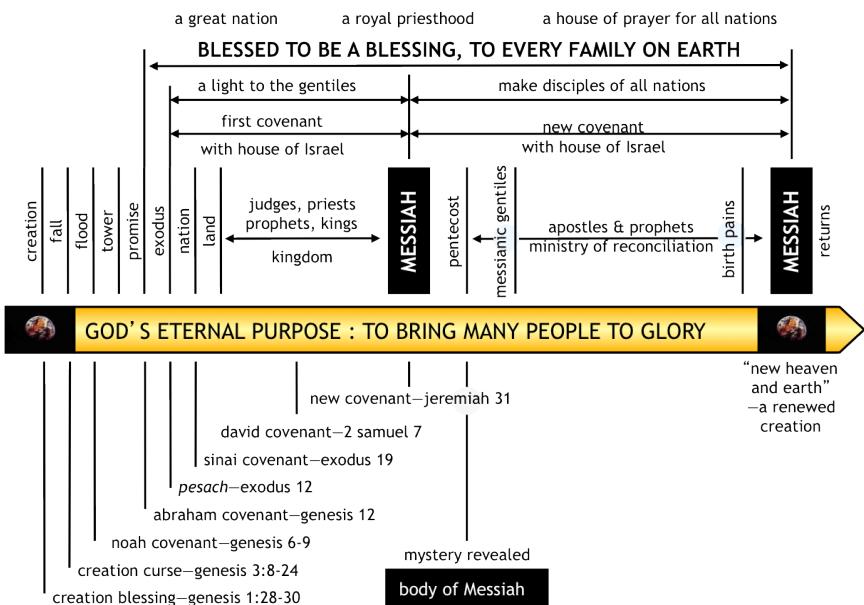
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Summary: Study I

This concludes Study N, **, which:

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In summary, the study revealed how:



God's eternal purpose



Getting on board?

Bonus discussion

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