

Maize Plant Discipleship Module I

The Eternal Purpose of God

Version 0.1.1 Author's draft

John B Clements

Translated by:

PRE-PUBLICATION DRAFT

Not intended for wide distribution
Please exercise discretion

© Maize Plant Discipleship by John B Clements
Licensed under the Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0
International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>
Based on a work at <http://johnbrc.github.io/MPD-Distribution/>

Version: **0.1.1 Author's draft**

first draft, ch1

Generated 3:57pm | Wednesday 26th November, 2014

This handbook

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

Studies		
1	Covenant and Scripture	3
2	The New, Messianic Covenant	17
3	The New, Messianic Covenant Community	33
4	The Eternal Purpose of God	39

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.

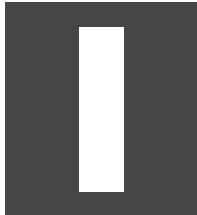
Maize Plant Discipleship Facilitators Handbook contains comprehensive guidelines on appropriately facilitating Maize Plant Discipleship learning groups and discussions.

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

Maize Plant Discipleship handbooks are available from the same source as this handbook or online, via: **www.maizeplantdiscipleship.info**



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

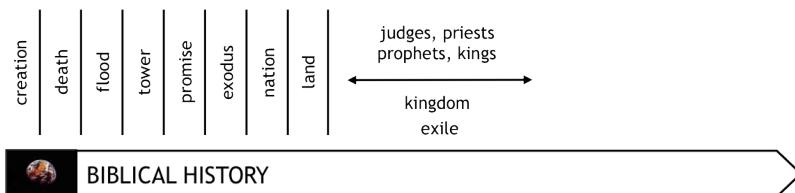
THIS TOPIC EXPLAINS how the books and stories within the Bible are bound together by a series of covenants. Without appreciating the significance of covenant, a faithful, holistic understanding of Scripture is easily missed. To illustrate this, the topic draws a contrast between *historical* and *covenantal* 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 appearance 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 are like trees growing upwards, while below, the covenants represent deep roots growing downwards, 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

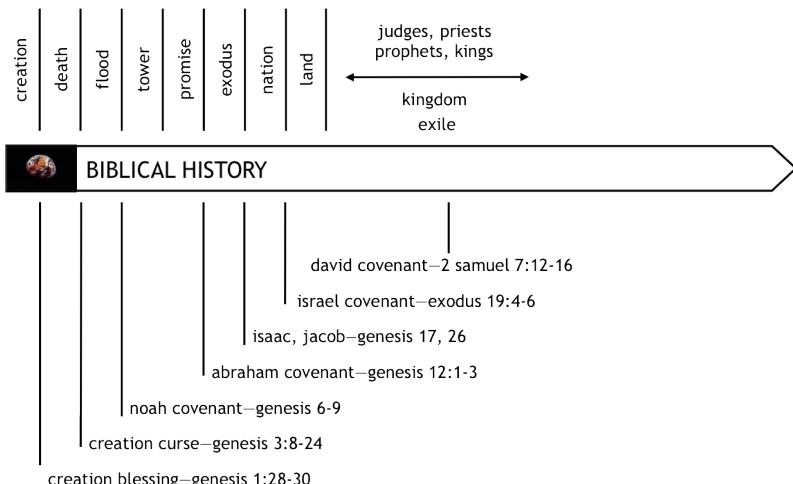
³Genesis 9:9–16

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 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:

1. 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

Hebrews 6.13–18. The writer explains that God's purpose in swearing an oath is to demonstrate the *unchangeable character of his intentions*. This confirms that 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.

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.

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

Each 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.

Covenant with Noah

God's covenant with Noah begins by reminding Noah that human beings are made ... *in his image*. It echoes 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* will serve 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, which are recorded in Genesis chapters 1–11. 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:

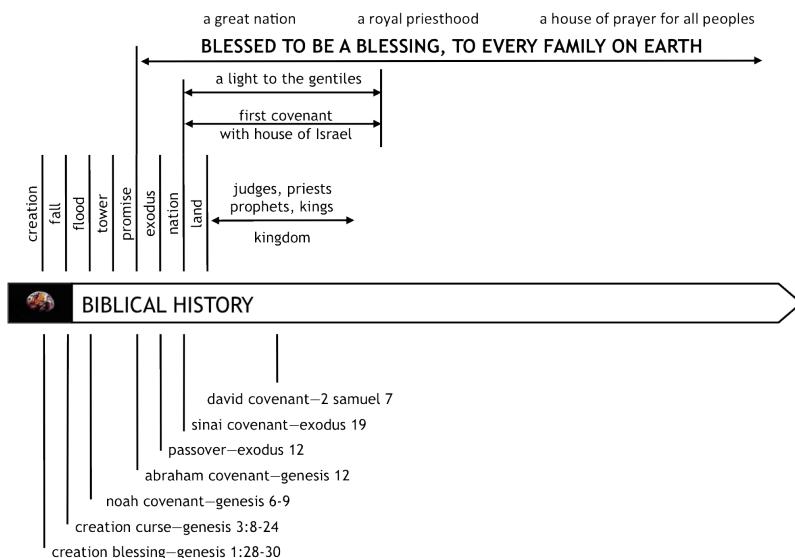
1. explained how biblical, historical events are bound together by a series of covenants
2. explored the nature of covenant
3. illuminated significant aspects of God's covenants

²⁰Jeremiah 23:5–6

- revealed how each patriarchal covenant points 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?

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. Mediation of the Messiah (part B)

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

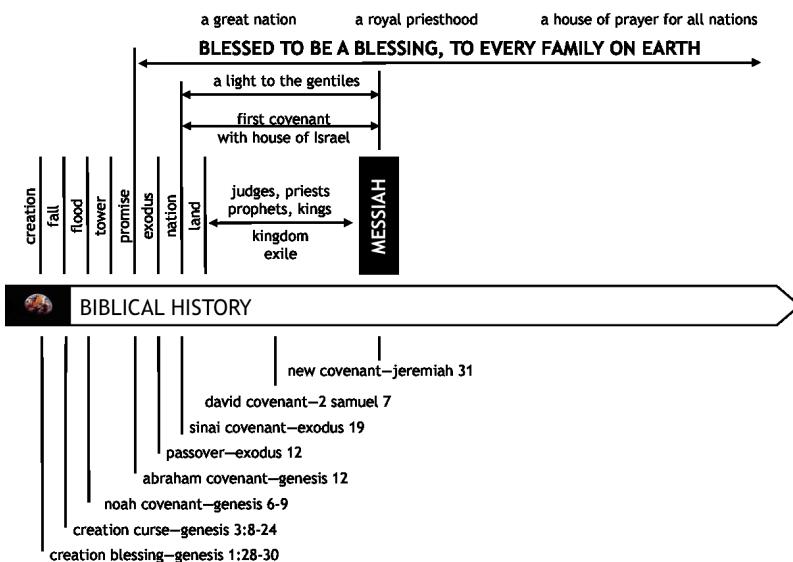
THIS TOPIC SUMMARISES the historical, covenantal background to the New Testament, focussing upon biblical prophecies of a new covenant and a priestly messiah.

²¹ Exodus 20:1–17

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 Messiah's identity, 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 The anointing represented the placing of God's Spirit upon these leaders.

Yet Jesus is not anointed by another human being. Rather, at his baptism by the prophet John, he is anointed 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 the apostolic epistles reveal a series of identities and roles relating to Jesus. Most notably as *prophet*, *king* and *high priest*.³³ The Old Testament records Israel's prophets, priests and kings holding different, yet complementary roles, each responsible for mediating a particular aspect of God's authority.

Prophets experience entrance into the heavenly council or presence of God; they hear and receive God's Word, enabling them to deliver that word to the people, to announce God's intention: *the coming of his kingdom*, which invariably includes judgement upon faithlessness;

exercise God's authority in anointing Israel's kings and in challenging them towards covenant faithfulness.

prayerfully intercede before God, on behalf of the nation and God's purposes. God works decisively, to affect the course of covenant history, through the intercession of prophets such as Samuel, Elijah, Daniel, Isaiah and Jeremiah.

- 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 receive 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^{Deuteronomy 33}.

³²Exodus 30:22–25

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

Speaking God's words faithfully, anointing God's leaders and prayerfully interceding for God's people are each a vitally important form of prophetic mediation between God and his covenant community.

Israel's Kings are metaphorically identified as being seated upon God's throne.³⁴ To the people, they represent God's government. To God, they are a representative of the nation.

Kings represent God in leading the covenant community into faithful service. David and Solomon are especially recognised for their skill in governing the people and for their prayerful intercession on behalf of Israel.

Priests intercede ritually before God, on behalf of the nation and individuals, in order to obtain forgiveness of sin and a restoration of the covenant relationship. Their role and responsibility is to approach God's throne, in order to obtain grace, mercy and forgiveness for others

The Jewish high priest, following in the ministry given to Aaron makes an atonement for the nation's sins, once a year, within the *Holiest Place*.³⁵

Each of these three roles 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. Prophet like Moses (item 3).
2. Branch of David (item 3)
3. Eternal High Priest (item 3)

Prophet like Moses

Within the gospels, *prophet* is the principal role with which Jesus is popularly identified.³⁶ As prophet, Jesus:

- Announces the arrival of the kingdom of God, declaring that God is about to act decisively in the history of Israel.³⁷

³⁴ 1 Chronicles 28:5 & 29:23

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

³⁶ Matthew 21:11, Luke 24:19

³⁷ Mark 1:14–15

- Calls the lost sheep of the house of Israel to repentance and a renewed covenant faithfulness.³⁸

Eventually, Jesus is identified as the Prophet—the promised one, who is like Moses.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰

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.⁴¹

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.⁴² Following Pentecost, the temple came to be identified with 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.⁴³

³⁸Matthew 10:6, 15:24

³⁹Deuteronomy 18:15–19; John 1:21, 6:14, 7:40, Acts 3:23, 7:37

⁴⁰Matthew 23:1–39

⁴¹Jesus 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).

⁴²John 2:13–22, 4:21; also 6:1–4; see also Matthew 27:51, Hebrews 9:3–9, 10:19–22

⁴³Deuteronomy 18:15–19; John 1:21; Acts 3:22–23 & 7:37

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?

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 done⁴⁴. Recognising him as Messiah is foundational to the apostolic vocation⁴⁵. Ultimately it forms the accusation against him that leads to his death⁴⁶.

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*⁴⁷. Later, a voice from heaven declares that he is God's only begotten ... beloved *Son*⁴⁸. *Son of God* and *Messiah* are essentially synonymous.⁴⁹

⁴⁴Matthew 8:4; John 6:15; though compare John 4:25–26

⁴⁵John 1:49, 11:27; Matthew 16:16

⁴⁶Luke 22:66–23:42

⁴⁷Luke 1:31–35

⁴⁸Matthew 3:17; Luke 3:22; John 1:14,18

⁴⁹E.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 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.

Son of David — a name by which Jesus is frequently identified⁵⁰, a recognised title of the Messiah, relating to God's covenant promise to raise up a deliverer from King David descendants.⁵¹ 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 himself⁵². It is apparently based on rabbinic interpretations of Daniel 7:13–14, thus possibly intentionally obscure to those other than Torah-teachers, Pharisees etc⁵³.

Good Shepherd — Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd, a messianic reference from the Old Testament, synonymous with Son of David⁵⁴. 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 work⁵⁵.

King of the Jews — A title used by non-Jews⁵⁶. 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 him⁵⁷.

Bonus discussion

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

Eternal High Priest

As a high priest, the Messiah:

⁵⁰e.g. Matthew 12:23, 15:22, 21:9 etc

⁵¹Acts 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

⁵²E.g. Matthew 8:20, 9:6, 10:23, 11:19, Luke 9:22

⁵³Luke 22:46–70

⁵⁴Matthew 15:24, Ezekiel 34:23, 37:24. See Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4; Psalm 23

⁵⁵John 10:11–14, 16, 27

⁵⁶Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26; Luke 23:3; John 19:19

⁵⁷By 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.

- 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*.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹

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*.⁶⁰

Being invited to sit at God's right hand constituted the Messiah's enthronement as God's vice-regent, or co-ruling Prince.⁶¹ 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—although Jesus demonstrates it is not truly blasphemous.

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. The book of Hebrews relates this aspect of his ministry to that of a high priest.

Jesus acts not a high priest of the order of Aaron and his descendants, who were priests according to the covenant with Israel. Jesus is instead identified as a high priest, of the order of *Malki-Tzedek*.⁶² The significance attached to this is two-fold:

⁵⁸John 1:29; see 1 Corinthians 5:6–8

⁵⁹Hebrews 7:27, 9:14, cf. Leviticus, Numbers

⁶⁰Matthew 22:41–46; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42*

⁶¹Matthew 28:18

⁶²Hebrews

- He is greater than Abraham
- He lives forever; eternally interceding

Greater than Abraham

Having already demonstrated that Yeshua deserves more honour than Moses,⁶³ 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*⁶⁴, priest of El 'Elyon, who receives a tithe from Abraham and blesses him.⁶⁵ Because the greater blesses the lesser*,⁶⁶ the writer of Hebrews establishes that Melchizedek is greater than Abraham.

Eternally interceding

The writer of Hebrews makes a *midrash* upon Melchizedek's lineage in order to draw attention to the reality that the Messiah became a priest by virtue of the power of an indestructible life⁶⁷. Consequently, he has an eternal intercessory ministry, advocating on behalf of human beings who come to the Father through him.⁶⁸

Bonus discussion

- What is significant about the role of priests?
- Why is it vital that Jesus' lives forever?

⁶³Hebrews 3:3

⁶⁴From *Malki* (King) of *Tzedek* (Righteousness); he is also King of Shalem (peace)

⁶⁵Genesis

⁶⁶Hebrews 7:7

⁶⁷Hebrews 7:16

⁶⁸Hebrews 7:24–25; 1 John 2:2; Romans 8:34

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?

Mediation of the Messiah**Topic 4**

THIS TOPIC COMPLETES the discussion

The final aspect of the Messiah's role is as Israel's true *high priest*, inaugurating and guaranteeing a new, superior covenant, which the writer of Hebrews identifies as both the new covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah, made with the *House of Israel and Judah*.⁶⁹ and the *eternal covenant*.

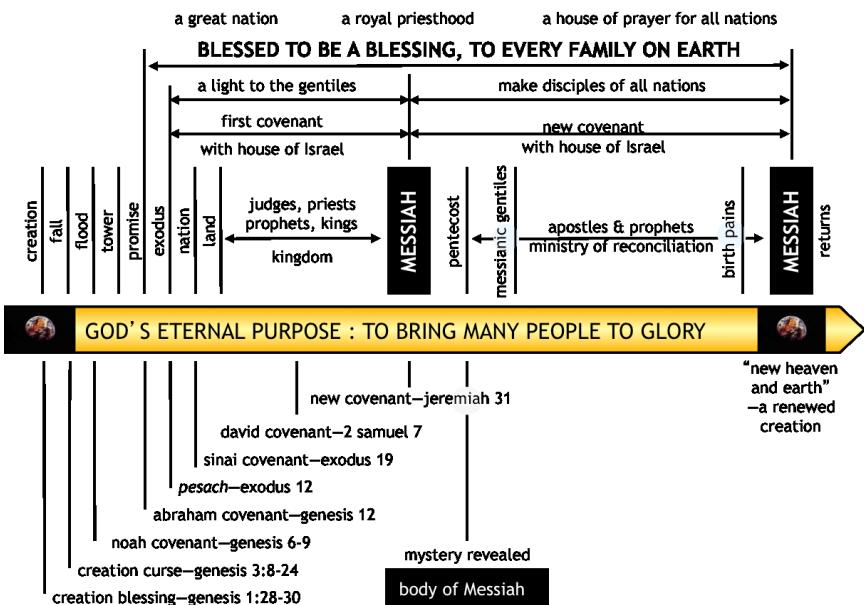
The Messiah mediates this new, eternal covenant as a sinless and eternal high priest, unlike the Levitical high priests who went before, under the terms of the Sinai covenant, whose own sin meant that they could only enter the earthly tabernacle once a year. Instead the Messiah, serves in...the *Holy Place*, that is, in the true Tent of Meeting, the one erected not by human beings but by Adonai ... this one, after he had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, sat down at the right hand of God, from then on to wait until his enemies be made a footstool for his feet.⁷⁰

Messiah: centre of new covenant community

- As **prophet**, Jesus called 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 formed 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,"⁷¹—the Gentiles, "all the families of the earth."

The *LisETsust land*

"



God's eternal purpose



Getting on board?

Bonus discussion

-

Author

Dr John B Clements

John was awarded a Doctorate of Missiology (Contextual Missiology), by *Fuller Theological Seminary School of Intercultural Studies*, in 2013.



John is married to Sarah, with four children. He is an avid bird-watcher and casual photographer; pastimes he combines with

his enjoyment of countryside and coastal walking in South West Wales.

Websites

- Vita <http://jbclments.wordpress.com>
- Social <http://about.me/jbclments>