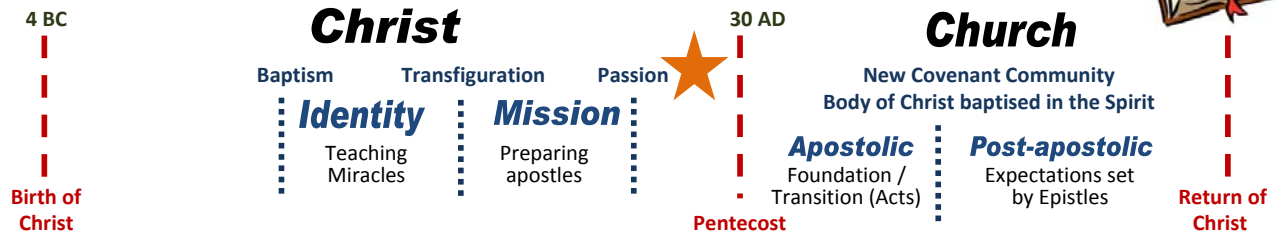


GOD'S BIG PICTURE, Part 5

Christ & the Church



CHRIST (Matthew-John) – *The physical presence of the Redeemer; Hope through Him*

Jesus was born around 4BC and died, rose again and ascended to His Father's side around 30 AD. In around 27 AD He was baptised by John the Baptist and began His public ministry, which can be divided into two halves:

- a) *Jesus' Identity* – in the early stages the key question was “Who is Jesus?” Jesus was hugely popular and many people followed Him with mixed motives. He performed miraculous signs pointing to His identity and taught about the Kingdom of God.

TURNING POINT: Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son (Mark 8:27-30), and the Transfiguration, which confirms the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah to whom the Old Testament pointed (Mark 9:2-13).

- b) *Jesus' Mission* – the question becomes “What kind of Messiah will He be?” Jesus begins to speak to His disciples about his coming death (Mark 8:31-38; 10:45). He spends a greater amount of time speaking privately to the disciples and preparing them for their future leadership of the Church. He increases the demands of discipleship and many people turn away from following Him.

Jesus Fulfilled the Old Testament

- a. **He was the seed of Abraham through whom all nations would be blessed** – He was descended from Abraham (Matthew 1) and redefined who was a child of Abraham (Matthew 3:9; Luke 13:16; 19:9; John 8:40). He was greater than Abraham and Abraham had longed to see His day (John 8:53-58).
- b. **He fulfilled the Law of Moses** (Matthew 7:17) – in three senses:
 - In His teaching He explained, restored, and even intensified, it (Matthew 5:21-42; 22:34-40)
 - In His sinless life He met its standard of righteousness fully (II Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15)
 - In His sacrificial death He fulfilled the meaning of the priesthood and sacrifices (Hebrews 9-10)

Jesus said those who listen to Moses would believe in Him (John 5:46) and Moses appeared at the Transfiguration (Luke 9:30-31).
- c. **He was the King in David's line who will reign forever** – He was descended from David (Matthew 1; Luke 3) and was called the “Son of David” (Matthew 9:27; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9). He, the Messiah, is David's son yet also David's Lord (Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1 to illustrate this fact – Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:356-40; Luke 22:41-47).
- d. **He was the Messiah promised by the Prophets** – John the Baptist was the last of the OT prophets who prophesied up until Christ (Matthew 11:13). Jesus fulfilled the prophetic hope (Luke 1:68-79). He understood Himself to be both:
 - *The Suffering Servant* – He would lay down His life as a ransom for His lost sheep (Mark 10:45; John 10:11,17-18) and His death would initiate the New Covenant (Luke 22:20). He was obedient to His Father even to death (Philippians 2:8).
 - *The Conquering King* – He spoke of His future return in glory when He would judge (Matthew 7:21-23; 25:31-46; 24:30). He spoke about God's Kingdom as a present reality that would be fulfilled in the future (see below), but He refused to be made King of Israel at that time (John 6:15). He had to fulfill His mission as Suffering Servant first.
- e. **He fulfilled the Wisdom and Poetic books** – He was the Word and Wisdom of God incarnate (John 1:1-18; I Corinthians 1:24)

Jesus and the Kingdom of God

- Jesus began His public ministry with the declaration: “*The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!*” (Mark 1:15)
- The Kingdom of God is a present reality that is inward and spiritual, not on earth (Luke 17:20-21; John 18:36)
- The “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5-7) is the manifesto of the Kingdom, describing how its citizens should like.
- Jesus' parables generally describe aspects of the Kingdom (“*The Kingdom of God is like ...*”). They speak of a present, unseen, growing dimension and also a future perfect revelation of the Kingdom when Christ returns in glory as judge (e.g. Mark 4).
- To enter the Kingdom we must: be more righteous than the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20); do the Father's will (Matthew 7:21); humble ourselves like little children (Matthew 18:3, Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17); repent (Matthew 21:32); be born again (John 3:5).

Is the Old Testament Law Relevant to Christians?

The Law was intended to lead people into a deeper relationship of dependence on God. It prepared us for Christ, as a tutor prepares a child for adulthood (Galatians 3:23-25). Christ is the “*end of the Law*” (Romans 10:4), meaning that He fulfilled it and that the Law as a whole is no longer binding for Christians. It is impossible to neatly divide the OT Law into neat categories, as it came as a whole to Israel and was to be accepted as the rule for individual and national life. We can however, clearly see from the NT that:

- *Ceremonial* aspects of the Law (e.g. festivals, sacrifice, Sabbath) no longer apply to Christians. These things have no place in Christian spirituality (Colossians 3:16-17) and have found their fulfilment in Jesus (the message of Hebrews).
- We are not expected to make the OT Law the *civil* law of the countries we live in, but to submit to the authorities (e.g. Romans 13). For now Christ's kingdom is not of this earth and Church and State should be separate.
- The core *moral* expectations of the Law (including nine of the 10 commandments) are repeated in the NT. These reflect God's character, and His ideal of perfection. The big difference under the New Covenant is how we are expected to meet this standard.

The New Covenant

The New Covenant promised by the OT prophets (Jeremiah 31:31-34) was initiated through Christ's sacrificial death (Luke 22:20; I Corinthians 11:25). Hebrews presents Jesus as the antitype of the OT system of worship. The Temple was an image of the Heavenly dwelling place of God and the sacrificial system was a type of the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. Chapters 8-9 focus on the New Covenant. The Old Covenant is said to be "obsolete" and soon to disappear (8:13). Christ is central to the New Covenant as He is its:

- **Mediator** (8:6; 9:15; 12:24) – He sets people free from the sins committed under the Old Covenant through His death as a ransom and enables them to receive the eternal promises.
- **High Priest** (7:25; 8:1-2; 9:11) – this High Priest is different from the priests of the Old Covenant because He lives eternally, and so the covenant is eternal. Christ fulfils the meaning of the OT priesthood.
- **Sacrifice** (9:12,26-27) – the sacrifice He brought was not the blood of a goat of calf, but His own blood. He is the sacrifice of the New Covenant, and His one sacrifice has finally done away with sin. Christ fulfils the significance of the OT sacrifices.

The New Covenant includes three promises, each of which reveals its superiority to the Old Covenant:

- 1) **Transformed hearts and minds** – The Law was written on tablets of stone. It was an external standard that people had to learn and commit to obeying. Under the New Covenant, the Spirit writes God's standard of holiness on our hearts, and He empowers us to obey His leading. In II Corinthians (3:4-18) Paul contrasts the New Covenant to the Old. The distinctive reality under the New Covenant is the work of the Spirit, who enlightens us to understand the true meaning of Moses (removing the veil) and transforms us "into His likeness with every-increasing glory" – He makes us like Christ so that we think and act like Christ.
- 2) **Personal knowledge of God** – Under the Old Covenant the people could only come to God through mediators. Priests would teach the people and would offer sacrifices on their behalf. Under the New Covenant, every believer has a direct relationship to God and therefore direct access to Him. Every believer is a priest, and we do not need a professional priesthood to mediate for us.
- 3) **Assurance of forgiven sin** – Under the Old Covenant people hoped for forgiveness of sins on the basis of sacrifice. They knew that sin deserves death, but that an animal had died in their place but they didn't have assurance that their sins were forgiven once for all, and they had to continually bring new sacrifices. The New Covenant has the final perfect sacrifice of Christ's death that really dealt with sin so that we can have assurance that our sins are truly forgiven and will never be held to our account in judgement. OT believers were forgiven on the basis of Christ's death, but they lived before the cross and so could not have this assurance.

CHURCH (Acts – Revelation 20) – *the Redeemer present by the Spirit; Hope through the New Covenant*

The Church was born on the Day of Pentecost through the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This baptism is mentioned three times in the NT:

- John the Baptist promised that Christ would baptise people in the Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16)
- The baptism as a historic event that happened at Pentecost (see Acts 2 in the context of Acts 1:5)
- Paul describes this baptism as the defining event that includes all Christians in the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-13)

The Church is, therefore, a radically new organism in the NT period that consists of believers in Jesus Christ who have been included in Him and in whom He dwells through His Spirit (Romans 8:9). The work of the Holy Spirit in the NT is different from the OT. In the OT the Spirit anointed leaders to serve of God, but there was no concept of the Spirit permanently dwelling in God's people.

The Church is the body of Christ and He is its head and Saviour (Ephesians 5:23). He promised to build His Church on the foundation rock of the apostles, beginning with Peter who was the first to confess faith in Jesus as the Messiah (Matthew 16:8). All those who subsequently have come to the same position of faith have become living stones and are built into the spiritual Temple that is the Church (I Peter 2:5). This Temple is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:22). The mission of the Church is to continue Christ's work on earth in His power and authority (Matthew 28:18-20) – it is His spiritual presence. This reality is expressed in local gatherings of Christians who are committed to meeting together and serving one another in love ("local churches").

There are two key questions relating to our understanding of the Church that a good grasp of salvation history can help to answer:

- **Does the Church replace Israel?** Israel and the Church parallel each other before and after Christ. There are similarities in their function as the "people of God", especially in terms of their purpose as a witness to the nations, so that similar language can be used of each of them (see I Peter 2:9-10 compared to Exodus 19:6). It is not, however, helpful to speak of the "Old Testament Church" as this does not do justice to the distinctive nature of the Church in its relationship to Christ and the Spirit. Furthermore, it would be unwise to assume that all God's promises to Israel have transferred to the Church (for example, Romans 11 speaks of future plans for Israel). Serious problems may arise for the Church if we confuse the Old and New Covenants and transfer ideas about Israel to the Church (e.g. who is a member of the Church, relationship of Church and State, role of clergy, status of church buildings etc.).
- **How do we read Acts in the context of salvation history?** Acts should not necessarily be read as normative for local churches today. It is an account of the birth and infancy of the Church in the foundational apostolic era. In particular, it details the inclusion in the Church of distinct groups of people under the authority of the apostles (Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles). The normative pattern for the local church is to be found in the Epistles which were written by the apostles to provide a firm foundation for local churches, especially in the post-apostolic period (this is anticipated, for example, in Jude).