

THE GOD WHO PURSUES (5)

The New Covenant

"I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God."

A. Introduction

1. God is a God who desires to be in a relationship with the people He has made in His image.

This desire is seen in a series of FIVE covenants (Creation, Abraham, Moses, David, New Covenant), that God made with people, which together express and explain the ONE eternal covenant.

Each covenant comes with the promise of relationship with God and eternal life in His presence.

2. The problem is that people could not and have failed to keep the covenants.

Adam broke the covenant when he sinned in the Garden.

Noah broke the covenant when he got drunk and exposed his nakedness.

Abraham broke the covenant when he failed to trust God to provide a son.

Israel broke the covenant when they worshipped the Golden Calf.

None of the kings of Israel could keep the covenant.

3. So within each covenant was the promise that Christ would come and He would obey the demands of the covenant and pay the penalty covenant breakers deserve.

He is a serpent-crushing Saviour who would take the penalty of death and undo the curse of sin.

He is an Ark that takes the bow of God's wrath keeping His people safe.

He is a Son who would be cut off and bring blessing to the nations.

He is a Lamb whose blood would cause God's judgment to pass over His people and who would perfectly keep God's law.

He is an everlasting King who would rule over and change the hearts of His people.

4. God's people are those who trust Christ.

"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.'" (John 14:6)

Adam trusted Christ.

"Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man." Later she gave birth to his brother Abel." (Genesis 4:1-2)

"Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD." (Genesis 4:25-26)

Noah trusted Christ.

"Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God." (Genesis 6:9)

Abraham trusted Christ.

"The Scriptures foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." (Galatians 3:8)

"Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6)

Moses trusted Christ.

"He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward." (Hebrews 11:26)

David trusted Christ.

"David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." (Romans 4:6-8)

"Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you." (Psalm 51:13)

5. The eternal covenant, explained by the historical covenants, is the promise of relationship with God and eternal life through faith in Christ, who has obeyed the demands of the covenant and paid the penalty covenant breakers deserve.

The message of each covenant was "You can't keep the covenant but One is coming who will and He will pay the penalty for your covenant breaking, so trust Him!"

6. But then the exile happened!

The kings of Israel rejected the King and led the people to worship idols.

The kings of Israel ignored the warnings of the prophets calling them back to covenant obedience.

God's response was to send His people into exile.

Exile was like the world had returned to how it was before creation.

"I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens, and their light was gone... I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger." (Jeremiah 4:23, 26)

With no king and away from the temple, it looks like all hope has gone.

"How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:4)

7. God pursues a relationship with people by making a new covenant.

God promises that He will bring His people back from exile.

"However, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when men will no longer say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' but they will say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' For I will restore them to the land I gave to their forefathers." (Jeremiah 16:14-15)

This will include bringing the nations back from exile. (How were they in exile?)

"This is what the LORD says: "As for all my wicked neighbours who seize the inheritance I gave to my people Israel, I will uproot them from their lands and I will uproot the house of Judah from among them. But after I uproot them, I will again have compassion and will bring each of them back to his own inheritance and his own country. And if they learn well the ways of my people and swear by my name, saying, 'As surely as the LORD lives' – even as they once taught my

people to swear to Baal – then they will be established among my people. But if any nation does not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it," declares the LORD." (Jeremiah 12:14-17)

Even when Israel returned to the land during the reign of King Cyrus, they still seemed to be in exile.

"Though we are slaves, our God has not deserted us in our bondage. He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia: He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem." (Ezra 9:9)

Why? Because they are still covenant failures – *"You can take the people out of Babylon, but not Babylon out of the people!"*

"What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, you have punished us less than our sins have deserved and have given us a remnant like this. Shall we again break your commands and intermarry with the people who commit such detestable practices? Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivors? O LORD, God of Israel, you are righteous! We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence." (Ezra 9:13-15)

The hope lies in a coming King.

"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land." (Jeremiah 23:5)

"I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken." (Ezekiel 34:23-24)

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God." (Isaiah 61:1-2)

And a coming new covenant.

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD." (Jeremiah 31:31-32)

B. The Promise of a New Covenant

1. God promises His people A NEW HEART.

God's people could not keep the covenant because they had hearts stubbornly bent on sinning.

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure." (Jeremiah 17:9)

Even the good kings of Israel could not bring about a permanent heart change.

Something needed to be done about the heart.

God promises His people a new heart and His Spirit that will enable them to keep the covenant.

"I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose hearts are devoted to their vile images and detestable idols, I will bring down on their own heads what they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD." (Ezekiel 11:19-21)

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts." (Jeremiah 31:33)

2. God promises His people A NEW RELATIONSHIP.

God's people were a mixed bag with some trusting Christ while others rejecting Christ.

It was possible for believers to feel alone in the midst of God's people.

"I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." (1 Kings 19:14)

There were times when some of God's people urged other members of God's people to know the LORD.

"I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD." (Jeremiah 31:33-34)

God's people will now be made up only of those who trust in Christ.

They don't need to be told to know the LORD because they already know Him.

Christ-rejecting Israelites will be removed from God's people, and Christ-trusting Gentiles will be grafted in to God's people.

"If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either." (Romans 11:17-21)

"And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again." (Romans 11:23)

"His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." (Ephesians 2:15-16)

3. God promises His people A NEW FORGIVENESS.

Sin will be fully and finally dealt with.

"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:34)

No longer will there be the need for further sacrifices to be made.

"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (Hebrews 10:1-4)

4. God promises His people A NEW LAND.

A great nation cannot exist apart from a place to call home.

"They will say, "This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited." (Ezekiel 36:35)

"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy." (Isaiah 65:17-18)

C. The Beginning of the New Covenant

1. Jesus is coming King.

He is the serpent-crushing Saviour.

He takes the bow of God's wrath.

He is the Son who will be cut off and bring blessing to the nations.

He is the Passover Lamb who causes God's judgment to pass over His people.

He perfectly keeps God's law by loving God and His neighbour – only He is truly human.

He is the everlasting King.

2. Jesus initiates the coming New Covenant as He dies on the cross.

"And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:19-20)

The promise of a new heart, a new relationship, a new forgiveness, a new land is for those who trust in Him.

3. God's people are those who trust in Jesus the Promised Christ.

Baptism is a sign of entry into this covenant relationship – only believers should be baptised.

"Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

Lord's Supper is a sign of ongoing trust in Christ – church discipline involves withholding the bread and cup to believers who are rejecting the covenant.

"Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 11:27)

4. We could not keep the covenant, but Jesus has in our place, and He died to pay the penalty for our covenant breaking, so that now by His Spirit we are able to.

Trust the God who Pursues.

Obey the God who Pursues.

Share the God who Pursues.

Praise the God who Pursues: The Father who pursues a covenant relationship with people; The Son who keeps the covenant and pays the penalty covenant breakers deserve; The Spirit who enables us to be who we are in Christ – covenant keepers!