

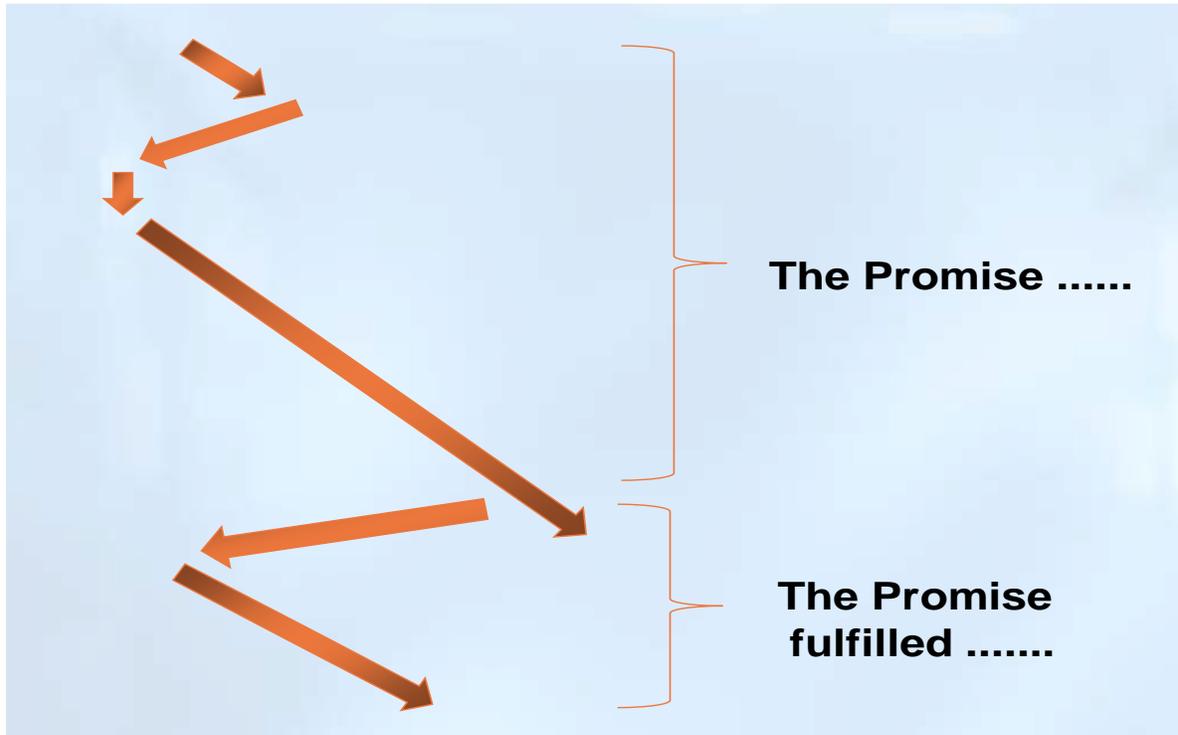


## **BIGGER TENT!**

### **A big family and a big wedding!**

The purpose of this article is to explore, albeit briefly, the Lord's Salvation strategy as opened out in the Bible, in particular that aspect of enlarging His family through adoption of those "outside". Most people are at least vaguely aware that the Bible is divided into the so-called "Old Testament" and its counterpart the "New Testament". Neither title in fact is found in the Bible itself, and a growing band of Christians today wonder just how "helpful" these two terms really are. Are they in reality confusing, tending to divide what God has given as a unified whole? Is there indeed a seamless story from Genesis to Revelation that God intends to be seen and understood in precisely that way? Again many Christians would give an emphatic and enthusiastic "yes" in response to that last question, as it has long been understood that God's overall plan is "worked-out" over millennia, first through God's relationship with His Chosen People and latterly (and in addition) through God's "chosen people" which He graciously incorporates within "true Israel" by election. We could back up the foregoing with a range of Bible studies that would help to illustrate this subject, but rather than dive straight in to a deep "study", it is helpful to paint the background in broad brush strokes, only turning to particular Bible portions to reemphasize the points being made – and of course to justify them directly from Scripture.

Can we “map” the Bible’s overall message? What is the “shape” of the Bible in summary? The following illustrations were first explored in “The Prince of Peace – Finding True Peace in a World that Wars”<sup>1</sup> Whilst this can never be the final word on the over-arching message of Scripture, never the less some readers might find this illustration workable and helpful. The Bible’s “big picture” can be plotted in this way:



In the above we might say that The Promise is the promise of the Messiah, Whom God patiently and pains-takingly sets out as His permanent solution to Mankind’s permanent and eternal problem – the problem of sin. The solution upon which God settled (and how He settled on this is not explored anywhere in Scripture) was to send His Holy One, indeed correctly titled “The Holy One of Israel”<sup>2</sup>. That was the fulfillment of the earlier promise – Jesus the Messiah fulfils all the

<sup>1</sup> “The Prince of Peace” by Peter Sammons, Glory to Glory Publications 2015, ISBN 9780992667436, page 43 – diagram titled “Salvation History – The Call to Peace”.

<sup>2</sup> A title used frequently in the Old Testament – but a key recognition of Jesus in the New Testament e.g. Mark 1:24 – notable that the demonic forces felt compelled to acknowledge Whom Jesus is .....

requirements of the “person specification”<sup>3</sup> and “job specification”<sup>4</sup> set out in the Tanakh. So the above illustrated ‘pattern’ reveals Almighty God’s purposes in this way:



The key contours of God’s salvation plan (above) involve a Chosen People, or Nation, that were tasked to be THE People from amongst whom God would provide His Messiah, and through whom He would provide His pattern for living – His “teaching” or “Torah”. The fact that this Chosen People would not always cooperate with their God (nor follow His ways) was never going to defeat God’s ultimate purpose; indeed it was to achieve this purpose that God first chose His People and later allowed them to spurn their own Messiah. I should immediately qualify the foregoing – we should say that *most* of the Hebrew people spurned their Messiah; there has always been a remnant that both acknowledge Him and seek faithfully to follow Him.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, “The Messiah Factor” by Tony Pearce, New Wine Press 2004, ISBN 1903725321 which looks at this subject exhaustively

<sup>4</sup> See for example, “Derech Yeshua – The Way of Salvation” by Daniel Nessim, Chosen People Ministries UK 2013, ISBN9780956645722

Today we call these faithful Jewish people “Messianic Jews” and one of the wonderful things to emerge in the last 70 years has been a global resurgence amongst Jewish people in understanding the destiny of their Land and the reality of the Saviour Who fulfills all the Messianic credentials (to the letter!). In saying this we have opened up huge area of biblical controversy and the associated need for faithful and prayerful exploration. This article will only scratch the surface of this magnificent story. Again without being definitive, we can never the less illustrate our broad-brush diagram with some specific supportive Scripture references, as we see here:

## The Bible’s “Big Picture” – selected readings

1. Gen 1 - 2; Ps 33: 6-9; Isa 50: 2-3; Job 38: 1 - 18
2. Gen chapter 3
3. Gen 12: 1-9; Gen 15: 1-21; Gen 17: 1-14
4. Gen 12: 2 -3; Ps 33: 12
5. Ex 1 – 12 inclusive
6. Josh 1: 1 – 9; 12 inclusive; 13: 1 – 7; Ps 105: 6; Isa 41: 9
7. Throughout Old Testament (Tanakh)
8. Jeremiah 31: 31 – 33;
9. Judges / 1 Samuel 1 – 7 inclusive
10. 1 Samuel 8 inclusive; 1 Sam 16: 1 – 13; 1 and 2 Kings inclusive; 2 Chronicles 36: 5 – 8;
11. 1 and 2 Kings inclusive
12. 2 Chronicles 36: 13 – 23; [Babylonian 1] Jeremiah 52: 1 – 34 [Babylonian 2]
13. 2 Chronicles 10: 1 – 19
14. Roman occupation is not explained in Scripture, although there are allusions to it
15. Exile under Rome is not recorded in Scripture. Exile is alluded to by Jesus in Matthew 24. Revelation 16: 1 – 7 may prefigure the Roman exile.
16. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John gospels inclusive
17. 1 John 2:2; 1 John 1: 5-7; Coloss 2: 9-15; Philipp 2: 6-11; Coloss 1: 15 - 23
18. Matt 26: 26-30; Luke 22: 17-20; 1 Corinthians 11: 23-25; Rev 5: 6-14
19. Matt 6: 33; Matt 12: 28; Luke 11: 20; Matt 8: 11; Acts 1: 6-8. There are several levels of meaning to “Kingdom”.
20. Romans 9-11 inclusive; Romans 11: 11-24 especially; Galatians 3: 26-29; Ephesians 4: 4-5; Rev 7: 8-10; Rev 14: 6-7
21. Rev 19: 1 – 9; Rev 21: 1 – 7; Rev 22: 7 – 17; Acts 1: 11

All this is by way of introduction to our main theme in this article. God was never going to be satisfied with “just” the Chosen People. His purpose was always that through them the *entire* World would be blessed. That truth is clause No 2, if you like, in the Covenant which God “cut” with Abraham in Genesis 12: 2-3. God’s purpose was that “all peoples” would be blessed through this new Nation that He, God, was inaugurating. Some commentators have observed that God’s ultimate purpose is to build a family that love and serve Him, by being

disciples of His Son. Not a family that slavishly follow Him because they must, nor a family that sullenly serve Him for the simple purpose of achieving eternal life. No. God wants neither of these outcomes. Rather, He wants a family that love each other as much as they love His Son. That, perhaps, is why following Jesus in this life inevitably entails a cost to the disciple, irrespective of all the wonderful blessings that discipleship also bestows. The fealty of the enlarged and chosen family is demonstrated through their suffering and rejection by the world at large. God's loving family continue to love Him and to serve Him no matter what the world, the flesh, and the devil can throw at them. That is the sort of family that is worth having! That sort of family, ultimately, that is worth dying for! I have no special scripture 'portion' to 'prove' the above; I would just suggest that this seems to capture God's heart as the loving God who seeks a Bride for His Son. It is notable that the Bible ends with a wedding feast (Revelation 19: 6-9; Revelation 21: 17) with the Bride rejoicing in the approach of her Groom.

## The Chosen People

The following study notes are taken, with permission, from Study # 47 in "The Bible Student"<sup>5</sup>. They help to fill-in some of the theological realities that underpin the truth that God has a plan for ALL those He has chosen to be a part of His family. The understanding of 'a chosen people' is rooted in the Biblical teaching of God's election (calling) of Israel. Moses sings of Israel as 'the apple of God's eye' (Deuteronomy 32v10) and Israel is declared time and time again in the Bible to have a special/chosen relationship with God (Exodus 4v22, Jeremiah 31v9 Hosea 11v1, Psalm 105v6)

The term Israel (often interchangeable with the term Jew) was given to Jacob after he wrestled/strived with "God" (Genesis 32v22-32). Later Jacob's descendants became known as *bene Yisrael* (*sons of Israel*). However, the blessing of Israel predates Jacob and is initially linked to God's call of Abraham and His faithful covenantal promises to Abraham (Genesis 12). These promises are renewed and enlarged

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<sup>5</sup> "The Bible Student – Fifty Key Themes Explored Through the Holy Bible", Edited by Peter Sammons, 2012, ISBN 9780956783165

in the subsequent biblical covenants with Moses, David and the New covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31v31-34 and Hebrews 8). The understanding of election and covenantal faithfulness is central to God's purposes and promises. Paul explores carefully this understanding in Romans 9-11 and affirms that the gifts and calling of God to Israel are irrevocable (Romans 11v29) and looks forward to the day when all Israel will be saved (Romans 11v26). Paul understands that the promises to Israel have been confirmed and not revoked in the ministry of Jesus the Messiah (Romans 15v8, 2 Corinthians 1v20).

In the New Testament it is affirmed that Gentiles (i.e. non-Jews) through faith in Jesus also become part of the elect of God (Ephesians 1v4, Ephesians 2v11-22, 1 Peter 1v1). It is also worth noting that in the New Testament the term Israel is used in three main ways. It can refer to ethnic Israel (Jacob's decedents) or the faithful remnant within Israel (Romans 9v6 and Romans 11v2-5) or to the church (the community of Jews and Gentiles who love and serve Jesus Christ as Lord).<sup>6</sup> The church is both the called-out (ecclesia) community – (called out from the sin and unbelief of the world to witness and serve God's purposes) and the grafted-in community. Grafted in to the faithfulness of Israel (see the olive tree teaching in Romans 11) to be built into a spiritual people and to serve as a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2v4).

Sadly ideas about election and those of "a chosen people" can be misused. It is important to stress that God's election of Israel is primarily a gift for service and witness. Israel is to serve God as a distinctive (holy) community (see Deuteronomy 7v6 and Joel 3v16). This very point is made powerfully by the Prophet Isaiah who states; *"It is too small a thing for you to my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and to bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."* (Isaiah 49v6). As we reflect and explore God's faithful love for Israel and His purposes for the whole of His creation we should be moved to echo Paul's own sense of mystery, awe and joy as expressed in Romans 11v33 and v36: *"Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his*

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<sup>6</sup> See "Israel In the New Testament" by David Pawson

*judgments and his paths beyond tracing out.....For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen”.*

Amen indeed! Hopefully the foregoing provides a suitable backdrop to the remainder of this article, as we explore God’s purposes to enlarge the extent of His family across planet Earth. In Genesis 35:10, just after re-naming Jacob as Israel, God is clear that through Jacob (now Israel) both a nation and a community of nations will emerge from him, and that “kings” will come from his body – i.e. as his descendents. Whilst this is certainly true and traceable in the Bible, it is King Jesus whom most Christians today “see” as being referenced here. King Jesus, David’s Son Who reigns forever on David’s throne<sup>7</sup>. In Isaiah chapter 54 we see a prophecy of the future “glory” of Zion, this nation that is Holy to the Lord. The prophecy is specific, that Israel will (verse 2) enlarge the place of her tent. The prophecy is: *“Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities.* (Isa 54: 2-3). Whilst some understood that as simply the enlargement of the lands of Israel at the expense of her immediate neighbours, it seems that the real prophecy relates to the expansion of Israel to be a “blessing” to all the nations across the face of this planet. The theme reemerges in Isaiah 55: 5 where Zion is told *“Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.”* This theme is continued in Isaiah 56 where, having already stated that hugely famous verse *“my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations”* (verse 7 – which was quoted so devastatingly by Jesus in his confrontation with the Temple authorities of His day – see Matthew 21: 13 and Mark 11: 17) so in

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<sup>7</sup> Jesus confounded the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees by asking them to explain the meaning of the title by which so many Jews were recognising Him – Jesus the Son of David. Jesus challenged the Pharisees: how could it be that the Messiah is the son of David when David himself refers to Him as “my Lord” (Mark 12:35–37; cf. Psalm 110:1)? The teachers of the Law could not answer the question. Jesus thereby exposed these “teachers” ineptitude as teachers in their ignorance of what the Old Testament taught as to the true nature of the Messiah. Jesus’ point in asking the question in Mark 12:35 was that the Messiah is *more* than the physical son of David. If He is David’s Lord, He must be greater than David. As Jesus says in Revelation 22:16, “I am the Root and the Offspring of David.” That is, He is both the Creator of David and the Descendant of David. Only the Son of God made flesh could say that.

verse 8 the prophet is specific: *“The Sovereign LORD declares — he who gathers the exiles of Israel: “I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.”* We can say emphatically, that God’s plan is to enlarge His “house” and to expand it across all points of the compass. And we praise God for that!

Let us remain with Isaiah for a little longer. In chapter 52 the spiritual triumph of Zion is flagged up. vv7 – others will declare “your God reigns”. vv10 – salvation is for “all the nations” whilst vv 13-15 introduce us to the suffering servant (Jesus) whose crucifixion is so compellingly foretold in Isaiah chapter 53, that harrowingly clear statement of the penal substitution of Jesus for all mankind (53: 4-6 in particular). So the crucifixion leads naturally into the reality that Israel’s tent shall be “enlarged” (54: 2-3). Perhaps in today’s politically correct world, the obvious spiritual interpretation of Isaiah 54:3 may jarr with some. But for others it is a simple confirmation and affirmation of the reality that Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19-20 (the so-called *great commission* to His church); the reality is that true biblical Christianity has indeed “dispossessed” the pagan religions of so many pagan nations, where those nations have in large measure turned towards Jesus the Messiah. So we can say that in Isaiah chapters 52-56 there is a congruence of themes: Jesus is at the centre of everything. God’s eternal love for Israel is re-stated, yet the efficacy of the sacrifice of the suffering servant spreads far and wide. God’s TRUE family is to be enlarged – across all nations.

## **Enlargement Theology**

*Enlargement Theology* as espoused, particularly, by Rev Alex Jacob<sup>8</sup> is more than simply a recognition of the thorough inadequacies of both *Replacement Theology* and its ugly twin *Two-Covenant Theology*; *Enlargement Theology* is in the end a useful explanation and a clear and compelling nomenclature of God’s covenantal purposes – to enlarge the Abrahamic covenant (which promises that

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<sup>8</sup> Rev Alex Jacob is a UK United Reformed Church Minister and, at the time of writing this article, is the CEO of CMJ (The Churches Ministry Among Jewish People). His seminal work “The Case for Enlargement Theology” (which David Pawson endorsed as “a fresh, stimulating and necessary contribution to the contemporary debate on Jewish-Christian relations”) is published by Glory to Glory Publications and available internationally.

Abraham's offspring will become a great nation to the blessing of all Mankind) and to enlarge the Moses covenant (which promises that the Hebrews will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation) so as to cover ALL people who will become grafted-in to God's elect by placing their trust and faith in Jesus the Hebrew Messiah. Once again we are compelled to say "praise God!" *Enlargement Theology*, whilst emphatically not a systematic theology in its own right, is first and foremost a helpful exploration of the reality that a small 'tent' is enlarged to become big enough to accommodate all those chosen; whilst Alex Jacob intends his term to be usable in contradistinction and in opposition to "Replacement" and "Two Covenant", his term surely has wider applicability as it also reflects God's ultimate salvific purpose – that of bringing-in those who are outside. Scripture certainly backs up this theme of enlargement – but always remembering a simple truth: God's family is enlarged by those who place their trust and faith in Jesus, with all that this implies in terms of lifestyle, witness and practical service. Witness not backed by reformed lifestyle and practical service is meaningless. Practical service not backed by witness and reformed lifestyle is equally useless. We might add for completeness that a reformed lifestyle not backed by love discipleship of Jesus will also ultimately fail. God first and foremost expects love of His Son, Who died that we might thereby be saved.

In Alex Jacob's book the author explores the truth that in God's purposes there are three inter-connected communities that live, to a large extent, in ignorance and mistrust of each other. The true disciples of Jesus we today call, collectively, "Christians", although we should note that this was not the earliest, nor the preferred, term of those earliest believers in the Messiah. They called themselves *the people of the way* – surely a subject for a future article! The three interconnected communities that live, spiritually speaking, adjacent to each other are:

- "Christians" (true believers in Jesus the Messiah)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Sadly, not all that styles itself as "Christian" is a part of the Lord's people. For a serious exploration of this subject see "Rebel Church" by Peter Sammons. Published by Glory to Glory Publications in 2013. ISBN 9780992667405.

- Jews (those who are culturally and ethnically Jewish – howsoever defined, but whom by and large have not received Jesus (Yeshua) as Lord)
- Messianic Jews – ethnically Jewish and sometimes culturally Jewish too, who have placed their trust in Yeshua and received Him as Lord.

Alex Jacob affirms that whilst Messianic Jews are certainly a part of the true church, there is no necessity for them to style themselves as “Christians”, especially as the term “Christian” to most Jews has a single and clear connotation – persecution<sup>10</sup>. Alex Jacob depicts these as three overlapping circles, where Jews and Christians as defined above live in isolation and – it must be said – with a degree of mutual suspicion which is damaging to both communities. Messianic Jews provide a potential “bridge” between the two, and enable a richer and more nuanced understanding of God’s salvific purposes, to enlarge His tent to accommodate people from every tribe and tongue (Revelation 5:9 and Revelation 7:9). We might add that, whilst the “bridge” suggests a fluidity between the communities, in terms of the clear teaching of the apostle Paul, the relational flow for Jews needs to be towards Yeshua as they, too, come into His Kingdom and take their place as His people – ethnically different, culturally different, but exactly the same in terms of their relationship to God as sinners saved by grace.

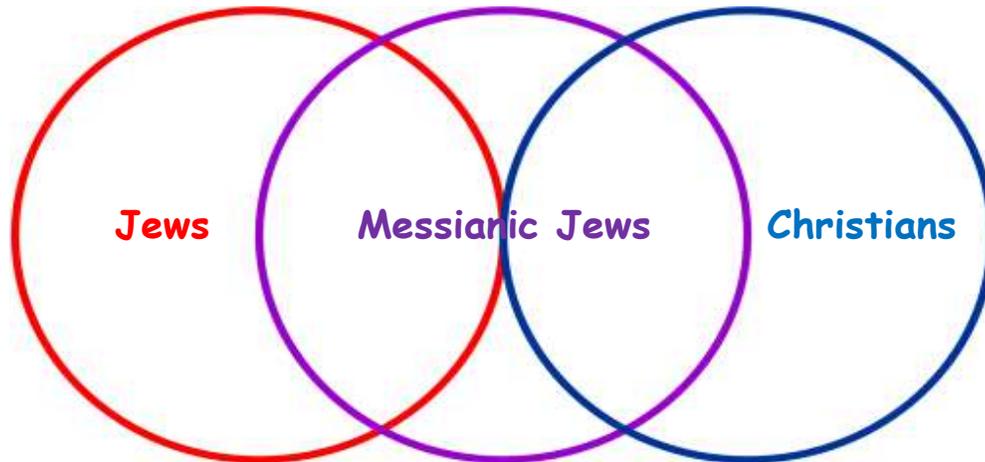
As we look at the simple diagram below, with its three overlapping circles, we need continually to ask ourselves:

- what do these groups share in common?
- what are the ‘points of departure’ for these groups?
- how can “Christians” better present Jesus to all Israel – that is yet to be saved (Romans 11: 26)

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<sup>10</sup> Whether this is a reasonable connotation is of course debatable. But it is there never the less in the minds of the majority of Jews.

## Three Related Communities



“Enlargement” is a rich theme throughout Scripture. Arguably it is found on every page, precisely as we find Jesus on every page. But the “high points” of this topography are found in these scriptures:

- The Abraham Covenant – Genesis 12: 2 - 3
- The Moses Covenant – Exodus 19: 5 - 6
- The “great commission” of Jesus – Matthew 28:19
- Jew and Gentile tread the same path to salvation – Romans 10: 8 -13
- Gentiles grafted-in to Covenantal promises – Romans 11: 11 - 21
- In the New Jerusalem are found those from every nation – Revelation 7: 9 - 10

## The other side of the coin .....

There is a real sense that we can discern an enlargement theology relating to Hell. Isaiah chapter 5 speaks of the laying low of Israel, as the prophet foretells national disaster awaiting the chosen People who have chosen to rebel against their God. That is the primary message of the chapter. However I believe we are not stretching the point too far when we apply Isaiah 5:14 to the wider world and to its eternal destiny: 5:14 *“Therefore death expands its jaws, opening wide its mouth; into it will descend their nobles and their masses with all their brawlers and revelers”*. Eternal destruction makes no distinction between the ruling classes and the “masses”. Sadly death can always make room for more! It can expand its realm seemingly without limit. The ubiquitous “grave” or its associated “hell” will be enlarged to accommodate all those who reject God’s ways – who refuse, indeed, to be the people of THE way! God’s ways are summarized in one word – Jesus. Reject Jesus and you expand, by one, the number of souls in Hell. The prophet Habakkuk seems to echo this theme. This prophecy is a discourse between Habakkuk and God, as the prophet asks God why He seems to tolerate evil, where amongst the Chosen People unrighteousness seems to prevail. (We should note, however, that this prophecy relates to the wider world as much as it does to Israel). Habakkuk seems to complain to God about the injustices in the world and God’s apparent slowness in executing judgement – a theme as vital today as it was 2,400 years ago when this prophet struggled with these huge questions.

In Habakkuk 2: 5, the prophet reflects upon the injustice of the ruling classes. In 2: 5 God provides an interim answer as He reflects back the truth of Habakkuk’s complaint. God notes that “he” (presumably the rulers and the unrighteous of society) is “puffed up” (verse 4) and is all too full of himself. This arrogant ruler is never at rest, and he is “as greedy as the grave”. What a true phrase! In full: *“He is arrogant and never at rest; as greedy as the grave. And like death he is never satisfied. He gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples”*. Perhaps in this passage there is a sub-text – perhaps the “he” that is referred to here is in reality Satan himself; the devil who wants us to live in his ways, in contradistinction to Jesus the Messiah Who commands that we should live in His ways. But God emphasizes that there will be an end-time (2: 3) and that those who

are “puffed up” (verse 4) and the arrogant” (verse 5) are followers of another, who gathers to himself victims from “all the nations” and “all the peoples”. The devil’s greatest triumph is to fill the grave (Hell). In a very real sense, to follow the devil, whether wittingly or unwittingly, is to conspire in a death cult.

That is the bad news, but the good news trumps it! The good news quite simply is that God is on your side! His first purpose and His primary objective is salvation, not damnation. God desires that we shall live in righteousness (Romans 1: 17) and this is a “gospel” or a “good news” of righteousness. Jesus’ death on the cross enables us to live for Jesus (2 Corinthians 5: 14). As if to answer completely Habakkuk’s impatient demand for action, so Paul reminds us that there is a reason for God’s delay in executing judgement and His enforcement of righteousness. It is quite simple. 2 Peter 3: 9 *“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance”*. Once again we have to say Praise God, as we also reflect that one day time will run out. Whilst God is patient with us, He will not tarry forever. One day He will return again not as Savior but as Judge. And for any one of us, this same God might return – not at some indeterminate or vague point in the future – He might well return for you or for me this very night! And so we must finally echo the words of Paul in his second letter to the Corinthian church. *“As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For He says: “in the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you”. I tell you, now is the time of God’s favour. Now is the day of salvation”*. (2 Corinthians 6: 1-2).

Yes. We can be assured that God’s plan was always to enlarge His tent, to make it big enough for all who will own His Son as Lord and as Saviour. Genuinely, there is a theology of enlargement at work here. For those who do not yet know Jesus as Lord, as savior and as friend, we should make the urgent plea – THIS is the day of salvation; delay today carries the potential for eternal loss.

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