

## *Jesus: His Life & Times*

### Worksheet for Week 6

#### “Covenants” and “Isaiah & the Themes of Jesus’ Ministry”<sup>1</sup>

##### *A brief look at covenants*

Israel’s belief in one God was held alongside her belief that she was, in a unique sense, the people of this God. Though the word “covenant” is pretty foreign to us, covenantal ideas were quite common in biblical times. The basis of the God’s covenant with Israel was, of course, the set of promises to the patriarchs (set out particularly in Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22, etc.), chief among which was “blessing,” which focused principally on the Land and its prosperity. The compilers of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament; the Torah) saw the initial fulfillment of God’s covenant with his people in the events of the Exodus (Ex. 2:24), and thus understood the Torah as the covenant document which, grounded upon the faithfulness of Israel’s God, provided for his people the way of life by which they should express their own faithfulness to him. The OT Law is the concrete expression of this covenantal way of life.

The book of Deuteronomy is the major work of covenant theology which stands at the head of a long line of subsequent writings on this theme. The emphases throughout are on the promises made to Abraham, on “blessing” as the consequence of covenant faithfulness, on the land as the gift of Israel’s God to his people, and on Israel as holding the place of honor among the nations. For instance: “Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel and the ground that you have given us, as you swore to our ancestors— a land flowing with milk and honey....Today you have obtained YHWH’s agreement: to be your God; and for you to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, his commandments, and his ordinances, and to obey him. Today YHWH has obtained your agreement: to be his treasured people, as he promised you, and to keep his commandments; for him to set you high above all nations that he has made; in praise and in fame and in honor; and for you to be a people holy to YHWH, your God, as he promised” (Deut. 26:15, 17-19).

Deuteronomy closes with two dramatic sections: the establishing of the covenant (chapters 27-30) and the farewell words of Moses (chapters 31-4). The first of these enumerates in detail the blessings and curses which attend the covenant—the blessings which will follow obedience and the curses which will follow disobedience. Significantly, these chapters envisage the curse not just as a possibility but as a certainty. Moses, within this text, knows that Israel is going to turn away from YHWH and provides for this contingency: the ultimate curse will be exile (quite logically, since the promised land is the place of blessing), but after exile *will come* covenant renewal, the circumcision of the heart, the return to the Land, the perfect keeping of Torah.

For hundreds of years, Israel had awaited the “will come” renewal of God’s covenant, the true return from exile, the forgiveness of sins that is implied by the end of exile, the return of the Promised Land to its true owners . . . all this is tied up in the waiting that Jesus announces is over. Jesus is the true Israel, the remnant of one, who is able to live under the covenant in complete and utter faithfulness to God, thereby enabling God to fulfill his own commitments under the ancient covenants with Israel.

##### *Isaiah and the themes of Jesus’ ministry*

1. Jesus announces and enacts the kingdom of God, YHWH. He does and says things which dovetail very closely with the message of Isaiah 40-55, the great servant-poems, as a whole.
2. So, what is the message of Isaiah 40-55? The kingdom-program of Isaiah 40-55 as a whole is to be put into effect through the work of the servant, especially in his redemptive suffering.
3. Jesus acts symbolically as though he intends to put his kingdom-program into effect through his sharing of Israel’s suffering, and speaks as if that is indeed what Jesus intends.
4. One of the relevant sayings quotes Isaiah 53 directly (Matt 8:17), and others can most easily be explained by it.
5. It is therefore highly probable that, in addition to several other passages which shaped his vocation, Jesus regarded Isaiah 53, in its whole literary and historical context, as determining his own life.
6. Jesus therefore intended not only to share Israel’s sufferings, but to do so as the key actor in the divinely appointed plan of redemption for Israel and the world.

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<sup>1</sup> This material was taken and adapted from the study guide to a series by N.T. Wright, *Jesus: The New Way*. The guide was prepared by Denise George and is copyrighted by the Christian History Institute.

## Bible Readings for Week 6<sup>2</sup>

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in these readings?

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| <b>Day 1 Luke 9:51 – 11:54 On the way to Jerusalem</b>                                 | <b>Day 2 Luke 12:1 – 17:10 Teachings on prayer, hostility, vigilance, and the kingdom of God</b> |
| <b>Day 3 Luke 17:11 – 19:48 Responses to the kingdom; Jesus arrives in Jerusalem -</b> | <b>Day 4 Luke 20 &amp; 21 Jesus teaches in the temple</b>  |
| <b>Day 5 Luke 22 – 24 Jesus' suffering, death, and exaltation</b>                      | <b>Weekly Prayer Concerns</b>  |

<sup>2</sup> This outline is from Achtemeier et al's *Introducing the New Testament*, Eerdmans Publishing, 2001