

4. How does God spell out the privileges of being in covenant with him?
5. What do you think it means to be “God’s treasured possession?”
6. How does God spell out the responsibilities of being in covenant with him?
7. What do you think it means to be a “kingdom of priests?”
8. What do you think it means to be a “holy nation?”
9. How would Israel fulfill the promises God made to Abraham?
10. How would Israel fulfill the Creation Mandate given to all humanity?
11. How does God’s Covenant with Israel inform how we should live and thrive under God’s gracious rule?



We began our exploration of the Kingdom of God in the gospel of Matthew. John the Baptist and Jesus arrive on the scene proclaiming an identical message, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near (3:1, 4:17).” Matthew captures the heart of Jesus’ ministry a few verses later when he tells us, “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people (4:23).”

When Jesus opened the Scripture he taught about the kingdom, when Jesus performed miracles he demonstrated the restorative power and presence of the kingdom. Matthew’s neat little summary forms an outline for the next section of his gospel. In chapters 5-7, Jesus teaches us about the heart and the character of the kingdom in “The Sermon on the Mount,” and in chapters 8-9 he demonstrates the restorative power of the kingdom by healing the lame, the blind, the mute and even raising a little girl from the dead and giving her back to her parents.

The kingdom is a big deal in Matthew’s gospel. We are taught to pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven (6:10),” and then we are instructed not worry about what we will eat or what we will drink or what we wear.. “but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness knowing that all these things will be given you as well (6:33).”

While the Kingdom of God may be a novel concept for us, it was deeply embedded in Israel’s history and imagination. Every little Jewish boy or girl grew up dreaming of a coming King and a Kingdom that would change everything. Jesus’ message was that the kingdom has come near. Very near. We defined God’s kingdom as “God’s reign through God’s people over God’s place (Jeremy Treat, *Seek First: How the Kingdom of God Changes Everything*).”

We see the kingdom established in creation—especially at the climatic point when God creates mankind. “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27).” From the outset we learn that we were created to live and thrive under God’s gracious rule, reflecting his heart and character to the rest of the world as we steward his good gifts for his glory and the common good (Creation Mandate).

No sooner had God entrusted us with his kingdom, then we forfeit its blessing. In the biblical narrative, it is just that quick. Rather than choosing to live and thrive under God’s rule, we choose to go our own way. The very first sin, and by the way your very last sin, have very little to do with taking a bite from an apple and some little ticky tacky thing you did wrong. They have everything to do with dethroning God, enthroning ourselves, living life on our own terms, and reserving the right to choose for ourselves what is best and good for us rather than trusting God. Every sin is an act of cosmic treason.

When Adam and Eve did what they did, when we do what we do, we throw our world into chaos. Granted the world was messed up when we got here, but don’t think we haven’t contributed to the chaos. Our sin should have been the end of the story. We rejected the king and forfeited any and every right to live in his presence and enjoy his blessing. We had our chance. We blew it. Game over. But it's not. God refuses to allow our sin to be the end of the story. The rest of the Bible is a daring rescue and recovery mission as God pursues us all the way to the cross. God is working in the world to restore everything we lost to the ravages of sin, and to bring us into the kingdom of the Son he loves (Col 1:13).

It is a story that begins with Abraham, is fulfilled in Jesus and continues with us. The story unfolds in a series of binding promises the Bible calls covenants. This morning we will look at God’s Covenant with Abraham, and his Covenant with Israel. God’s Kingdom is slowly but surely restored and finally realized in and through these biblical covenants.

GOD’S COVENANT WITH ABRAM

GENESIS 12:1-3 The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. ² “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

GENESIS 18:18-19 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.

1. When Adam and Eve rejected God’s rule and were expelled from the Garden, the language of Genesis shifts from “blessing” to “curse.” Rather than living under God’s blessing (Genesis 1:28), they now incurred God’s judgment as set forth in the curse (Genesis 3:14-17). The word curse appears five times in the text from Genesis 3 through Genesis 11 (Genesis 3:14; 3:17; 4:11; 5:29; 8:21; 9:25). In Genesis 12:1-4 (the initial expression of God’s covenant with Abraham) the word blessing appears 5 times. God is reversing the effects of the curse through Abraham.

What are some of the significant features of God’s Covenant with Abraham?

2. The Creation Mandate tells us, “We were created to live and thrive under God’s gracious rule reflecting his heart and character to the rest of the world as we steward his good gifts for his glory and the benefits of others.”

How would Abraham fulfill the creation mandate?

GOD’S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

EXODUS 19:1-6 On the first day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on that very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai.² After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.

³ Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴ ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’

“These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

1. Several significant events take place between God’s call to Abram and the rescue of his greater family (the Nation of Israel) from Egypt. What are some of those key events?
2. Exodus 19:1-6 serves as the preamble or the introduction to God’s Covenant with Israel. What are some of the key features of this Covenant?
3. Many times we think of the “Old Covenant” as a “Covenant of Works” and the “New Covenant” as a “Covenant of Grace”. What gracious action(s) on God’s part set this covenant in motion? What role would “works” play in the covenant?