

The DNA of the Bible Covenant and Kingdom Genesis 15:1-18

Abraham
January 24th, 2016

For the next two Sundays my messages are based on Jesus' parables of the Kingdom. As I thought of this I realized I needed to introduce the concept of Covenant & Kingdom in order for those messages to be more understandable. This is the first message in a series of 6 that I have done in the past that addresses the DNA of the Bible: Covenant and Kingdom. I will give this message this week and finish out the series after Easter.

This series is inspired by a preacher named Mike Breen. His way of understanding the overall content of the Bible deeply resonated with my own understanding and faith lived out in this world. It is also the underlying theology for building a discipling culture within a church.

DNA is a double helix structure that gives guidance to all that makes us human in a physical sense. It's in every cell of our body.



Within the Bible is a double helix of DNA one strand of which is Covenant and the other strand is Kingdom. Taken together these make up the relationship we see in the Bible between God and human beings. Taken and understood together they will give you understanding of the Bible and guidance to your life. Today I will concentrate on Covenant, next two weeks Kingdom. You can see these on our sermon note page.

Covenant	&	Kingdom
Relationship	&	Responsibility
Invitation	&	Challenge
One with God (atonement)	&	what we need to do for God

“Covenant is the way in which the Bible describes and defines relationship: first our relationship with God and then our relationship with everyone else.” Covenant and Kingdom Mike Breen p. xv

“Kingdom is the way in which the Bible describes and defines responsibility, first, our responsibility to represent God to the people we know and then to everyone else.” Covenant and Kingdom Mike Breen p. xvi

What is going on in the story just read is very remote to our experiences and shocking to our modern senses. But we need to understand this bloody ritual to understand much of what the Bible says about Covenants.

Now our story begins when the Lord appears to Abram and says, “I am your shield and your very great reward.” Now the word shield in Hebrew is the same word as sovereign. So Abram responds to the Lord, “Oh, Sovereign Lord!” He’s hearing what God is saying and understands that the Lord is saying he will shield him as a King shields his subjects.

And so Abram responds to the Lord, “O Sovereign Lord I’ve been waiting for years for you to make good on your promise. What can you give me since Eleazar of Damascus is going to inherit my estate?”

Now this is the normal exchange of oriental bartering. The Lord comes to Abram who has been promised by the Lord that he will have children more numerous than the stars in the sky.



These children will bless all humanity. But if you don’t have any children, you wonder!

So Abram is seeing whether the Lord is open to negotiation and fulfilling his promise at this time. And the negotiation is only going to be settled and sealed if they have a Covenant between them. Which means, whatever has been spoken about, is secured and given permanency.

That happens when the two people who are negotiating become one. They make a covenant.

When this happens they give up their independent identities and their new identities are tied with one another. And this is symbolized in the death of a substitute who is killed, which means the old life and identity is gone. A new life is then taken up, which is bound up in relationship with their new Covenant partner with whom they now share a new Identity forever.

Now if you share an Identity with someone, that means everything about them, everything that they have, all of their resources are no longer just talked about as something that is possibly yours, but you have access to them because they are yours.



Now the last vestige of Covenant making in our society is in the marriage covenant. In a marriage covenant independent identities are given up and they find a common identity that they share together forever: a Shared name, Shared families, Shared home, Shared bank account. In fact one of the questions I ask couples in premarital counseling is if they are going to share a bank account. Are they truly committed to being “one” or just saying that?

*Now God had spoken, the promise had been given, but it hadn't been ratified in a Covenant, it hadn't been ratified in blood. Abram looked for certainty. Certainty cannot come in words alone in his thinking and his culture. He needed the word to become flesh. So they continue to talk and then God says the words Abram's been longing to hear, “**Bring me a heifer.**” Now that doesn't mean much to you. But it meant everything to him. It meant God was ready to “Cut a Covenant.”*

So he found a heifer and all of the other animals, he killed them, cut them in half from nose to tail and puts their halves in the field. He then walked between the pieces himself, which is how he ratified the covenant. And as he killed those animals he has made the commitment

to give up his life (to become dead like those animals) if he should break his part of the covenant and he has written that promise in the blood of the substitutes that now lay in the field dead. And he waits.

He drives off the vultures.

As darkness fell he was overcome with exhaustion. It's an incredibly hard job slaughtering that many animals yourself even with modern tools. I know. I helped field dress two elk late one afternoon and was exhausted. So as the darkness fell, he fell into a deep sleep and in the darkness, the Lord appeared. And He appeared as a smoking firepot. A firepot was so you could light fires in the future. There were no lighters or matches in those days. All you had was this pot that had the burning embers of the last fire. Fire was the symbol of God's presence like the tongues of fire at Pentecost.

But God's presence isn't just a smoldering presence. It's a living, active presence. And so alongside the firepot there was the blazing torch. And the blazing torch and the smoking firepot passed between the pieces, suspended in space. Beneath the great arch of heaven where God indicated how many descendants Abram would have. And God said in that action, for God speaks both by words and by action, that forever he would be one with Abram. They had a covenant!

This occurred in a Covenant making society, a Covenant making culture. So when people heard this they understood immediately what was going on. They understood that there were two leaders. There was a greater leader and a lesser leader. And the greater leader conferred by grace, upon the lesser leader, the capacity to come into relationship.

You see, here is the Greater conferring upon the lesser a relationship. Here is the stronger conferring upon the lesser the right to relationship. So Covenant has always been crafted in grace. It's always required the initiative of the great one, the strong one. And God, the strong one, conferred grace upon the weak Abram, the right to relationship.

It's not the relationship that a slave would have with his master. It's not even a servant who is free to do their own thing. It's not an

employee/boss relationship. It's not a contract relationship. It's the relationship of oneness.



And the best way we can express that is in family language, the language of the oneness of marriage. They become one. God confers upon Abram this astonishing gift, which is that he is now one with God and can meet God eye to eye and though God remains the greater and the stronger Abram can speak to God as if they were one.

*Now what are the symbols here?
The symbols are death and birth.*

The symbol of death is represented in the death of the animals. They say I've died to my individual identity, I've walked through the corridor of blood and have gone through to the other side where my Covenant brother is waiting for me and his identity and his people and all that he is now becomes mine and I become tied up with them forever.

And so God passed between the pieces and choose to give up a degree of his freedom by choosing Abram. God chooses to embrace a degree of restriction. He's now restricted by the identity he now shares with Abram and his people to be. He is the God of Abram. Now God didn't have to do that and Abram, of course, he got a great deal! They both gave up their old identity to take on their new identity, new life.

Now the corridor of blood can also symbolize a birth canal to a new life for Abram. He in fact got a new name, Abraham. And eventually God got a new name Jesus, the Word become flesh. Abraham got a scar, circumcision. And God received scars on his hands and his feet, symbols of the New Covenant. Here in this story we begin a series of Old Covenants, (The Old Testament) that brings us to the New Covenant in Jesus' blood (The New Testament).

Now, we know what it meant for Abram. He entered the Kingdom of God here on earth. But I wonder whether Abram wondered what it meant for

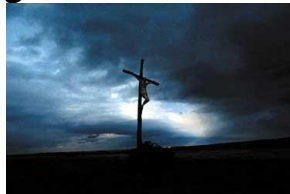
God. How could the God of the universe give up his life for me? How could that be? How could he be so committed to me that he says he's prepared to die for me? How could the God of the universe somehow be born into my identity and become ONE with me?

How could the one who created the universe come through a birth canal? How could that be? But that's what was being said through this bloody ritual. Think about that for a moment.

Isn't that amazing? Think of the goodness of God? God at the very beginning he committed himself to die for us? That at the very beginning he committed to going through a birth canal, weak, vulnerable, in our place as one of us, Emmanuel God with us.



Don't you find that astonishing? That at the very beginning of the story of Covenants God commits himself to something that will inevitably cost himself great, tragic, suffering and loss.



And he does it for the people who will be called the Children of Abraham. You. It's amazing!

Here is God saying that he is now ONE with us. And let's be clear on what that means:

Everything that God has now is yours. Everything that God has access to, you now have access to and you have complete freedom to talk to God about whatever He's doing.

We see this in the next chapter in the story of Hagar and Sarai. Abram and Sarai got tired of waiting on God and decided to do things their way and Sarai gave Abram her servant Hagar to have children by. Hagar had a falling out with Sarai and was sent away. Abram interceded on

behalf of Sarai, Hagar and her son Ishmael and himself; and God forgave them all and blessed them all.

When we are in covenant with God or another person it means that they will overlook our faults and sins and stay in relationship with us no matter what for we are one.

It means we can address God boldly like Abram did when he interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah. As a child I always wondered how Abram could get away with speaking to God as he did and the answer is they were in covenant. They were one and they could address each other and reveal their hearts to each other. We can do the same.

*We can be a covenant partner who recognizes that the other Covenant partner, God, has conferred upon us **a Covenant of ONEness** even though God is the greater! Speak to God in that same bold way!*

And when you do, what you'll discover is that you now have much greater confidence to ask for the resources you need that are his that are also yours! The reason you're able to do that is because you bear his name. You have his Identity. You're one with him. Let's look at that a little further.

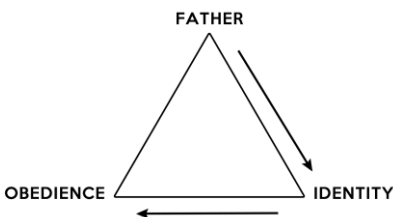
In the beginning of Genesis it said we were made in the image of God. Here through covenant with God that image is renewed. The lost image of God is restored through our oneness with the Lord that covenant brings both old and new.

Now we receive our image our identity from God the Father as God's sons and daughters in Christ. I happen to proudly be the spitting image of my father. My son is the same to me. When we stand or sit together there is no missing the family resemblance.

*In verse one of Genesis 17 God says to Abram, **"I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless."** Live before me, live in connection with me as I intended for Adam and Eve. **In other words, allow your identity to be reflected in your behavior.***

You can't put behavior before identity. You can't prove to God that you're his child by doing good things. You do good things because you are his child. You do good things because they reflect the identity of the one who is your Father.

One thing I have always striven for is to make my parents proud. I haven't chosen the course I have in life to prove that I am my parents child and that they love me. I chose to do what I have done because I reflect their identity in Christ and their love for me.



On the screen right now is a triangle with various corners marked. If you follow the flow of the arrows it shows how this works. From God we receive our identity as God's children. From our identity flows our works, what we do for God. **From Covenant flows Kingdom. From Relationship flows Responsibility. This is the DNA of the Bible.**

Covenant	&	Kingdom
Relationship	&	Responsibility
Invitation	&	Challenge
Identity	&	Obedience
One with God (atonement)	&	what we need to do for God

As we all live out our covenant with God, the covenant in Jesus Christ, we have access to all the wisdom, power, knowledge and resources that come from God that is God. We indeed enter the Kingdom of God.

And the challenge here today is to reflect on the oneness with God our covenant brings and the power that brings to living the Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.

In Jesus' name. Amen.