

Covenant & Kingdom (Mike Breen, *Covenant and Kingdom: The DNA of the Bible*, 2010)

[Jacob Haasnoot, Kampala, 2016]

Covenant & Kingdom form the spiritual DNA running through the Bible, a double helix of relationship (covenant) & responsibility (kingdom).

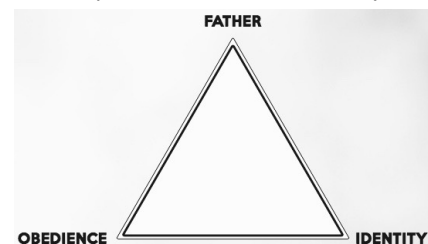
Covenant is the way in which the Bible describes and defines **relationship**: first our relationship with God, and then our relationship with everyone else.

In the beginning, when we lived in **perfect union** with God, the only thing necessary was to maintain the “oneness” that God had already created. Sadly, the story tells us that human beings became **alienated** from God. However, the story also tells us that time and again God took a gracious initiative toward them. Beginning with Abraham and Sarah, God **reconnects** with humankind.

In the New Testament we see that **Jesus reveals his relationship with his Father**. He invites his followers into a depth of Covenant relationship not seen before. He invited them to experience the same depth of relationship that he enjoyed with his Father.

There are **three aspects** to covenant:

1. God is our **father**. He is our creator, and we live our lives under his loving and generous gaze. Jesus is the model of how to live in covenant with God. We want to live life the same way, and God wants us to acknowledge him as our *loving* father.
2. We have an **identity as children** of the father. This flows from our relationship with God. Our identity and therefore our sense of security and confidence come from outside ourselves as God tells us that we are his children.
3. As children of God, it's important for us to be **obedient** to the voice of our father. We choose to obey him because this is the most consistent way of expressing who we are as children of God. The New Covenant means that the laws are now written on our hearts, and the Holy Spirit fills us and gives us freedom to obey God.

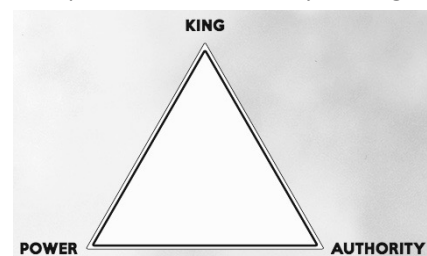


Kingdom is the way in which the Bible describes and defines **responsibility**: first, our responsibility to represent God to the people we know and then to everyone else.

Human beings, as well as losing their relationship with God also lost their ability to represent him as King. When the relationship through Abraham and Sarah was restored, the process of rebuilding our capacity to **represent** him also began. First, with Joseph and later in numerous other women and men, God's Kingship was expressed in his Covenant partners. In time, the Kingship would be seen most perfectly in the life of Jesus.

There are three essential aspects to a complete understanding of Kingdom.

1. There is the **King** himself. God is the majestic ruler of heaven and earth, and he seeks to extend His *loving* rule through the lives of all people.
2. **Authority**. As King God clearly has the authority to act, but remarkably He expresses His authority through people who choose to carry the responsibility of representing him. With this we have *hope* that we are now carrying His authority with us.
3. **Power**. As the Creator and sustainer of the universe, God holds incredible power. He chooses to use this to express His love to people and, more surprisingly, through people who carry his authority as King. We now must act in *faith* with this power so that we can make a difference in our world.



Study 1: Abram & the Covenant

Read: GENESIS 15:1-21

Questions:

1. What is God giving/promising to Abram here and what does God want from Abram?
2. What is the meaning of the (strange?) ritual in verses 9-17?
3. What in this passage speaks to you or challenges you the most?
4. In what ways has God confirmed His relationship with you, assuring you that He is near you?
In what ways would you like Him to do this?
5. In this story where do you see a. Love b. Faith c. Hope?

Study 2 – Joseph & the Kingdom

Read: Genesis 39:20-23 & Genesis 45:3-7

In the story of Joseph's life we see lots of ups and downs. But God clearly had a plan for Joseph.

QUESTIONS:

1. How would Joseph have felt to be locked up (again) (39:20)?
2. Mike Breen: God wanted to see *humility* in Joseph (and in us as well). He had to completely depend on God in order to get a position where he could act on God's behalf. That was a hard path. Do you recognize this pattern in the lives of other and/or your own life? Explain.
3. Mike Breen: Having received the authority from God to do the work for which he had been designed, Joseph learned the connection between power & authority. It is the power to *forgive* (45:14-15). Breen: If we choose to judge others and withhold forgiveness, we are asserting our own authority rather than surrendering to God's. How do you respond to this?
4. We find *God's purpose* in all of this in 45:5 (cf. 50:20). Why is it sometimes (often?) hard to see God's purpose for this world or for your own life?
5. Breen: What is required for God's Kingdom to be revealed in/through us? Look at the life of Joseph and it is even more perfectly portrayed in the life of Christ. Our feelings of self-importance have to die, so God can be enthroned as the King and his vision for our life can live. If we surrender to him, we will see his Kingdom breaking in (cf. Luke 12:32). Do you recognize this? Explain.

Study 3 – Discipleship: following Jesus

Jesus was constantly inviting his disciples into a deeper relationship (Covenant) and continuously challenging them to represent him as the King (Kingdom). Invitation and challenge build on the understanding that a disciple is basically one who imitates the life of the discipler.

Read: Matthew 16:21-28

In the passage before (13-20), Peter has confessed Jesus to be the Christ and Son of the Living God (16). Peter receives a new name. This is all about identity (i.e. covenant). Now the challenge follows (21-28). Breen: The level of challenge brought to Peter is almost brutal. But this challenge is equal to the level of invitation Peter had received.

Questions:

1. Why didn't Peter want to hear about the suffering of Jesus (21-23)?
2. How do you understand the contrast between verse 16 and verse 23?
3. What does it mean for you to deny yourself? Give examples.
4. Are we able to do this (24-25)? How?
5. Breen says: "Jesus invites us to share deeply in a relationship of love with him. But at the same time, he challenges us to represent him in ever-widening spheres of influence". That means: the deeper the relationship, the more challenging his call on our lives. Do you recognize this? Explain.

Study 4 - Our mission: Live the Gospel

Reading: James 2:14-17

Introduction: Our actions speak louder than our words. People know if we do not do what we say. We need to do like Jesus did.

Questions:

1. What do outsiders say about the Church and about Christians? Are they correct?
2. Why should we put our faith into action (verse 15-16)?
3. James talks about a dead faith (verse 17). How can we have a living faith? (Consider Breen's covenant & kingdom).
4. How can you show the love of Christ in your community? How do we do it in practice?