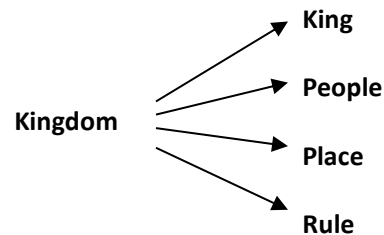


THE STORY OF THE BIBLE

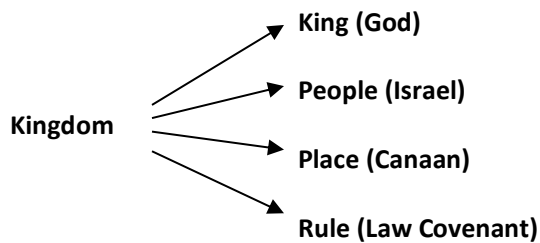
ACT 3: ISRAEL (THE OLD TESTAMENT)

ACT 1: CREATION (GENESIS 1-2)
ACT 2: THE FALL (GENESIS 3)
ACT 3: ISRAEL (OLD TESTAMENT)
ACT 4: JESUS
ACT 5: CHRIST'S CHURCH
ACT 6: NEW CREATION

The Story of God's Kingdom with Man



- **The Bible** is about God and his kingdom, where his people live in his place under his good and gracious rule.
- **Genesis 1-2** is about the King making a place to dwell among His people, where they enjoy Him and reflect Him.
- **Genesis 3** tells the tragedy of the King exiling His rebellious people, but the beauty of His mercy that outmatches their sin.
- **The Old Testament** is the story of God graciously choosing a people for himself (Israel) so He could be their God and they could be His people--walking in covenant-faithfulness to God and being a light to the nations. But Israel's sin and unfaithfulness to God leave humanity needing a righteous Israelite who could lead them into a New Covenant where the power and reign of sin is broken.



NOAH AND GENESIS 4–11

Genesis 4–11 summarizes humanity's earliest history and the tragic account of Mankind spiraling into sin and corruption, rejecting their mandate at Creation and choosing to pursue their own ways. Genesis 6 repeats just how widespread sin and corruption had become.

"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹² And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth." (6:5, 11-12)

God has favor upon Noah and gives him instructions for the building of an ark. This ark will be God's means of sparing Noah's family as God brings judgment upon the earth in the Flood. Noah models faith by obeying God's commands (7:5) and trusting in His promises, which God proves trustworthy and reliable. God makes a covenant with all living creatures—often called the Noahic covenant—that He will never flood the earth in judgment again (9:8-17). The rainbow is His covenant sign reminding us of this promise. God also recommissions Noah's family with the charge given to Adam and Eve in the Garden.

| | |
|---|--|
| God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). | Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth” (Gen. 9:1). |
| “Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground . . . And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it . . .” (Gen. 1:28, 30). | “The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you” (Gen. 9:2–3). |
| “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food . . . I give every green plant for food” (Gen. 1:29–30). | “Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything” (Gen. 9:3). |

From *Christ from Beginning to End* by Trent Hunter and Stephen Wellum

“But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.”⁵ And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.⁶ “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.”⁷ And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.” (Gen. 9:1-3, 4-7)

Though the language is very similar to Gen. 1:26-28, you’ll notice there are some changes due to the presence of sin (such as the existence of fear and dread from the creatures put under Man’s care in Eden). Mankind retains the image of God, which is why murder is forbidden. And we see the importance and sacredness of blood as representative of life itself. Noah becomes the “next Adam,” though we immediately see his sin and inability to the righteous representative and serpent-crusher humanity desperately needs (9:20-28).

The section closes with the Tower of Babel, a story summarizing Man’s resistance to God’s commands (go and spread) and bent to making their own name great rather than seeking to make God’s name great. This episode is set in stark contrast to both Adam and Even in the Garden—being commissioned to spread and take God’s image with them—and the story of Abraham—who God gives a name and makes great. As Genesis 11 closes, Abram/Abraham enters into the picture, a man God graciously chooses to bring His kingdom to the world. The rest of Genesis and the entire Old Testament will center on Abraham and his family. They will be the people God calls to a land to live in His presence and become a blessing to the nations.

“Make no mistake, what we see here in Genesis 12 is nothing short of a new beginning for mankind. In the first eleven chapters of Genesis, we observe the slow, steady, shocking spread of sin from its origin in the Garden of Eden. Five times in these chapters, God’s solemn curse is pronounced upon sin and sinners, replacing the original blessing upon life in the Garden. But now God begins the process of re-creating for himself a people by pronouncing a fivefold blessing upon Abram. God will bless Abram and turn him into the very embodiment of blessing, a living model of what blessing should be.... What the builders of the Tower of Babel sought to do in their own behalf and failed to accomplish—to establish a lasting city and thus make a name for themselves—God will do for Abram. God will make him into a nation and make his name great.”

Iain Duguid, *Living in the Gap between Promise and Reality*

ABRAHAM AND THE CALLING OF ISRAEL

The story of Abraham is a turning point in Genesis and the Bible. Genesis 1-11 tells the backstory of early humanity but also sets the stage for the rest of Genesis and everything that follows. In *Christ from Beginning to End*, Trent Hunter and Stephen Wellum write: “Set in the context of the Noahic promise never again to judge the world with a flood, God now promises that through Abraham and his offspring, he will bring salvation to the world.”

In Abraham, (and his seed) God will fulfill His promise to provide a son of Eve who will crush the head of the evil serpent (Gen. 3:15). God joins Himself to Abraham through a covenant and makes promises that He will bring to pass. God calls Abraham and his family (Israel) to himself so they can know Him, image Him, and dwell with Him in God’s place. Through the people of Israel, the world should see an image/picture of what God is like.

The Genesis mandate given to Man (Gen. 1:26-31; 2:15) is now given to Abraham and his offspring. God’s desire for a kingdom becomes clearer as he chooses who the people will be and where they will dwell with him in faithfulness and fruitfulness. God aims for his kingdom to be a means of bringing blessing to the world or the nations. Though we don’t yet know all the details of how life with God will look, there is clarity and focus on who God will work through and the place He calls them to make their base of operations as a light to the world.

“The promises to Abraham renew the vision for humanity set out in Genesis 1 and 2. He, like Noah before him, is a second Adam figure. Adam was given the garden of Eden: Abraham is promised the land of Canaan. God told Adam to be fruitful and multiply: Abraham is promised descendants as numerous as the stars in heaven. God walked with Adam in Eden: Abraham was told to walk before God. In this way the advent of Abraham is seen as the answer to the problems set out in Genesis 1–11: through him all the families of the earth will be blessed.” Gordon Wenham

God’s vision for humanity will take place through Israel. But Israel is sinful and often fails in her calling. She chooses unfaithfulness over faithfulness, chooses to reflect sin and idolatry to the world by choosing its gods rather than showing them what God is like. And because of that, Israel ultimately leads us to Jesus (the true Israelite and true Israel) who alone brings these promises to fulfillment, not just for Jews but for the nations.

The Abrahamic Covenant

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him...” (Gen. 12:1-4)

“Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴ ‘Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.’” (Gen. 17:1-8)

See also Gen. 12:1-4 and 15:4-6; the covenant is renewed with Isaac in Gen. 26:1-5, and with Jacob in 28:13-15 and 35:10-12 (where Jacob is renamed Israel).

- Notice the emphasis on God (King) making and accomplishing these promises to Abraham with the repetition of “I will”.
- God’s promises to his people becomes a key thread in the story, but also an essential aspect of how God relates to and acts for His people.

- The threefold focus is on land (place), descendants (people), and blessing (rule or way of life). Iain Duguid writes, “In large measure the story of the Pentateuch is the working out of these promises of blessing, descendants, and land.” Within this, you also see similar language to what was given to Adam and Eve in the Garden related to fruitfulness and multiplying God’s name/image throughout the Earth. “The land promise is God’s commitment to his creation purposes, established at creation to Adam. The land promise is also God working out his promise to turn back the curse through a son of Eve, and it will eventually reach fulfillment in a new creation, something Abraham himself longed to see (Rom. 4: 13; Heb. 11: 10). The land of Canaan functions as a type, a pattern hinting at something greater. God designed it to lead Abraham, his children, and you and me to its fulfillment in an entirely new creation.” Trent Hunter & Stephen Wellum
- Israel is called to be a nation of kings and priests (17:6) who know God (17:7) and bring the knowledge of God and blessings of God to the whole world (see 12:1-4). Israel becomes His image-bearer. Abraham, and Israel, show us “another Adam” (but like Noah, Abraham will still be a sinner who is unable to be all that they need in a righteous mediator). Abraham receives a new identity, a new community, and a new purpose through God’s gracious calling upon him.
- Many of the stories or episodes about Abraham are examples of threats to God’s promises, especially promises related to land, descendants, and blessing (such as the lack of an heir through Sarah for so long). Other texts are examples of how God is at work in and through Abraham to be a blessing to others (such as his intervention for Lot). When God gives promises to his people and calls them to follow him, the journey will immediately be opposed and full of threats putting those promises in question in our mind. It’s there we learn to walk by faith, and it’s there that God’s promises are shown to be true and kept by him alone. Hebrews 12:8-31 puts Abraham forward as a model of faith in God, and one who experiences God’s faithfulness. “The content of God’s revelation to Abram was slim. It consisted of a brief oracle, promising that the Lord would turn him into the embodiment of blessing, plus whatever had been handed down to him of God’s ancient dealings with his ancestors, generations before. It was not much, but that’s what it means to live by faith. God reveals himself to us, and we respond to him trustingly, taking him at his word.” Iain Duguid
- In the following verses (17:9-14), God calls Abraham—and his offspring—to keep God’s covenant. He gives Abraham the sign of the covenant in circumcision. The cutting away of the flesh should point to their need for a circumcised heart, but it also shows them as set apart and devoted to God alone. They belong to Him. They are to represent Him and reflect His purposes and character to the nations.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does God’s covenant with Abraham reveal about God?
2. What does God’s covenant with Abraham reveal about God’s desires for His people?
3. What does God’s covenant with Abraham reveal about God’s desires for the world?
4. How does the story of Abraham reveal the faithfulness of God to his promises?
5. Though Abraham is imperfect, how does he model trust and faith in God and His promises (see Gen. 12:4; 15:6)?
6. What are ways Abraham, his story, and the Abrahamic covenant point us to Jesus?

MOSES AND THE FORMATION OF A PEOPLE

Moses is the key figure following Abraham. God uses Moses to deliver his people, defeat Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and lead God’s people back toward the promised land. In the clash between the gods of Egypt and the one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob wins. Through the Passover event,

God spares and redeems his people while bringing judgment upon Egypt. With great power, God delivers his people. The Exodus out of Egypt becomes the great redemptive event in the Old Testament. The Passover meal, with the sacrificial death of a lamb, is integrally connected to the Exodus.

“When reading Old Testament narratives, it’s helpful to compare how a book begins with how it ends. Exodus opens with God’s people in servitude in Egypt, and it ends with them in service to God. It opens with God’s people building cities for an oppressor, and it closes with the building of a tabernacle for God’s glorious presence. It opens with the drowning of Israel’s children, and it ends with Pharaoh’s army drowned under the waters of the Red Sea.” *Christ from Beginning to End* by Trent Hunter & Stephen Wellum

The Mosaic (or Sinai) Covenant

A key moment following the Exodus is the Mosaic covenant at Mt. Sinai. This is the center of the book of Exodus. God gives His Law to His people, covenanting to be their God as they are faithful to His covenant. God doesn’t just redeem His people from slavery. He frees them and sets them apart to Himself so He can teach them how to live. God is their King or Ruler, with His Law being the rule of life that sets them apart from the nations and allows them to image God’s holiness, glory, righteousness, and justice the world around them.

“This covenant does not replace God’s covenant with Abraham; rather, it carries it forward, bringing focus and structure to Israel’s relationship with God now that Abraham’s family has become a nation. God’s covenant through Moses is God’s Law, his Torah for Israel, and we’ll refer to it as the Law-covenant, what the New Testament refers to as the old covenant.” *Christ from Beginning to End* by Trent Hunter & Stephen Wellum

As the above quote states, if the Abrahamic Covenant brings clarity on the people (Abraham’s descendants) and place (Canaan) of God’s covenantal-kingdom, then the Mosaic Covenant gives clarity about what the rule or way of life should be. It addresses the blessings and curses, privileges and responsibilities, and the rituals and commands given so that they can know, worship, submit to, and reflect their God.

“The LORD called to [Moses] out of the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ⁴“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.’

⁷So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸All the people answered together and said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do.’ And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. ⁹And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.’” (Ex. 19:3-9)

- Similar to what we saw in the Abrahamic covenant, we see Israel’s role as God’s image-bearer. Israel is to know and worship the true God, and then out of that relationship they act as priests and kings who

spread the knowledge of God to surrounding nations. They belong to God and bear His name. (The first two commands in Exodus 20 seem to echo both aspects.)

“Israel’s covenant has a profound purpose: she will become God’s “treasured possession . . . a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19: 5–6). In Israel, the world was supposed to witness humanity living in rightly ordered relationship to God, one another, and the rest of the world. This is how God’s treasure would look. This is how a kingdom of priests—those mediating God’s presence and fulfilling Adam’s role—was to live before the world. This is how a holy nation is to reflect God’s holiness back to him.” *Christ from Beginning to End* by Trent Hunter & Stephen Wellum

“This covenant will show them how to be his true humanity. It will direct, guide, and lead them to have a right relationship with God and a right relationship with everyone else in the covenant community. It will also teach them how to have a right relationship to all the creation, to be good stewards of the earth’s resources. We might say, then, that the Mosaic covenant is given at this time to administer the fulfillment of the divine promises to Abraham and to the nation as a whole, and through them to the entire world.” *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants* by Peter Gentry & Stephen Wellum

- God redeems people out of bondage and to Himself, but he then (1) teaches them how to truly live by following Him and (2) gives them the mission of bearing God’s name and spreading God’s fame to the world. Each aspect is an essential part of what it means to be God’s people living under his gracious rule. He brings us to Himself and grants His presence. Like a Father, He instructs us how to live. And He gives us an assignment. God’s glory is seen in His redemption of His people (a work which only He could do) and then God’s glory spreads as God’s redeemed and transformed people reflect and represent God.

“The final phrase designates Israel as a particular type of kingdom. Instead of being a kingdom of a particular king, it will be a kingdom marked by priesthood; that is, service of God on behalf of people and vice versa. It will be ‘a kingdom run not by politicians depending upon strength and connivance but by priests depending upon faith in Yahweh, a servant nation instead of a ruling nation’ (Durham). Israel will thus redefine the meaning of dominion—service. This will be its distinctive task, its distinguishing characteristic among the world of nations.” *Dominion and Dynasty* by Stephen Dempster

- With the Mosaic Covenant, the story shifts a bit from Abraham and Moses to the central role of Israel as a people. While Moses continues to operate as a mediator between God’s people and God, Israel as a whole becomes the “new Adam” put forward as humanity’s hope. This isn’t necessarily new—since it was present in the Abrahamic covenant—but is worth noting as a slight change of emphasis in the storyline. Much of what then follows in Exodus-Deuteronomy provides details on the covenant rituals and commands as well as the new religious life of Israel with its priesthood, sacrificial system, and festivals. These help answer both how a sinful people can worship and relate to a holy God as well as what this holy God wants His holy people to look like before the world.

“We see, then, that Israel, as another Adam, will belong to God as a people under his rule, and will exercise royal rule by spending the time in the worship of God so necessary for display of the divine rule in one’s thoughts, words, and ways. The tabernacle, the construction of which is the topic of the literary unit following Exodus 19–24, is in form a miniaturized and portable reproduction of God’s heavenly sanctuary, of which Israel has caught a glimpse in the covenant ratification ceremony in Exodus 24:9–11.” *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants* by Peter Gentry & Stephen Wellum

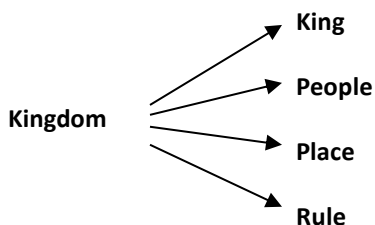
Summary

- **Genesis:** God’s creation of the world and Mankind, how it all goes wrong at the Fall through Sin, and God’s plan to restore what’s been lost through Abraham’s family-nation-people of Israel.

- **Exodus:** God powerfully redeems his people from slavery and leads them into freedom, forms them into a people who he calls to worship Him, reflect Him, and represent Him.
- **Leviticus:** God provides instructions for how a sinful people can worship a holy God and draw near to His presence.
- **Numbers:** God's presence with and provision for His people, and the fulfillment of His promises to His people in the wilderness (headed toward Canaan) despite their sin and unfaithfulness.
- **Deuteronomy:** A renewal of the covenant and a reminder of Israel's history to prepare them for entrance into the land.

Reading the Story of God's Kingdom through God's Covenants

Most stories either show God's plans and works to bring His promises to fulfillment and prove His faithfulness—however unlikely it seemed—or they highlight a threat(s) to God's promises, or they demonstrate in action what it looks like for God's people to live out His commands and rule.



If you think of our common rubric for understanding God's Kingdom, the threats often relate to one of these main areas. There might be a threat of God being the ruler of His people vs them turning to other kings, gods, and idols. There might be a threat to the "people" of God, often to their physical existence or the continuation of the lineage of Abraham. The threat can be the "place" promised to them and whether they will get to dwell in the land or not. And then the threat might be to the "rule" or way of life in the kingdom, including whether Israel will worship, follow, and faithfully reflect God as His people, or experience His presence, provision, and protection as King. The threats can come from enemies, circumstances, or (often) from their own sinfulness.

Consider the regulations in Exodus and Leviticus. Part of what all the rites, rituals, and rules related to priests, sacrifices, offerings, the tabernacle, and religious days is meant to address the issue of how a holy God could relate to and give His presence to a sinful people. Israel's sinfulness and impurity are the threat here, which very well could cause God to bring judgment upon them and separate from them. God's temporary solution and provision is the Levitical system that provides a means for them to approach, relate to, and be in covenant with God. It teaches them how to worship and approach God so they can enter His presence rather than be driven from His presence.

The keeping of promises often relates to how God mercifully and mightily intervenes for His people—despite them—to overcome obstacles and threats to bring His promises to fulfillment. He will be their King. He will ultimately preserve and protect His people. He will carry them to the place He promised to dwell with them as their King. And He will bless, lead, and care for His people, extending His rule in their lives to teach them how to live and flourish, both for their good and the good of the world.

Other sections offer examples of what life in the kingdom can, should, or does look like. It can explain God's desires for what the rule or way of life is or an example of it being lived out. This might include both how when God's people follow God's wise rule, it leads to flourishing where God is glorified, His people experience blessing, and it serves the good of those around them. But when people fail to submit to and follow God's rule, it ends up hurting and hindering those involved, as well as the people around them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do the stories of God relating to Abraham, Moses, and Israel in Genesis to Deuteronomy reveal some of these attributes of God: His patience, power, provision, mercy, righteousness and justice, grace, kindness, holiness, loving presence, faithfulness, etc.?
2. God chooses Abraham and Sarah (a couple too old from an earthly perspective to have children), Moses (a fugitive hiding in the wilderness), and the nation of Israel (a small and weak people) to accomplish His purposes, and continues to use them even after they fail and sin? Why should this encourage us that God can and will use us today despite ourselves?
3. Why is it important to notice that God calls and redeems his people both to free us from something and to enlist us to something? How does that remind us to live for God and as His representatives?
4. How do the stories of Abraham and Moses, or Genesis-Deuteronomy, pick up and develop some of the key themes from Gen. 1-3, such as temple, kingdom, image-bearing, God's promises, exiles or pilgrims, or the seed of the serpent vs the seed of the woman?

| GOD'S COVENANTS WITH ISRAEL THROUGH ABRAHAM AND MOSES | |
|---|--|
| (King) Who is the King? | |
| (People) Who are the people? | |
| (Place) What is the place(s)? | |
| (Rule) What's the rule, or way of life, between the King and the people to look like? | |
| (Identity) What is their identity now or how has it changed? | |
| (Purpose & Mission) What purpose(s) do they have or are given, and what mission(s) have they been called to engage and fulfill? | |
| (Promises & Privileges) What promises and privileges are they given by God as his people? | |
| (Threats) What do you foresee, think, or know will be some of threats—both threats to God's promises being fulfilled and them remaining faithful to God? | |