

## The Kingdom and Covenants (Jeremiah 11:1–8)

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### Introduction

1. In the last two messages on Jeremiah, we considered the term translated “*backsliding*” in the KJV and “*faithless*” in the ESV.
  - a. The term is almost exclusively used in Jeremiah to describe the condition of the people of Judah in their failure to keep covenant with Him.
  - b. The covenant established, defined, and governed Israel as a kingdom.
  - c. The Lord entered covenant with the nation on Mount Sinai after their deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 19 and 20). The people agreed: “*All the people answered together and said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do’*” (Exodus 19:8, 9).
2. Yet, before Israel received the tables of the law, they betrayed the covenant in the worst way—they made an idol and worshiped in violation of the commandments. Consequently, Israel was rarely free of this terrible sin throughout her long history.
3. The text before us (the fourth sermon) documents Judah’s breach of covenant for which they were delivered into the hands of the Babylonians.
  - a. This message deals with *covenant*, not explaining the text before us, but developing the concept of covenant that is necessary to understand the text.
  - b. It is very important that NT believers understand *covenant* and its relationship to the kingdom of God.
  - c. Why is a breach of the covenant so serious?

### I. Covenant

1. A covenant is simply a commitment to someone by promising something, often expecting a return.
  - a. Nehemiah Cox defined a biblical covenant as “a declaration of Sovereign pleasure concerning the benefits He will bestow on mankind, the communion they will have with Him, and the way and means by which this will be enjoyed by them.”
  - b. Biblical covenants are gracious, being the kind condescension of the Holy One designed to bridge the Creator-creature relationship broken by the creature’s sin and rebellion.
  - c. They also demonstrate the Creator’s free initiative to do good to the rebel and reestablish relationship for the glory of God.
2. There are no covenants mentioned in the first five chapters of Genesis covering the first two thousand years of human history. Left to themselves, human sinful rebellion reached the critical mass (Genesis 6:5, 11, 12).
3. The first mention of covenant is Genesis 6:18: “*Everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you [Noah].*”
  - a. Noah and His family were delivered through the flood in the ark Noah constructed in obedience to God, and after the flood God laid out the terms of the covenant that saved him (Genesis 9:1–17).
  - b. From this point on, God establishes a series of covenants with various people, all of which are designed to deliver them from judgment and advance God’s kingdom purpose on the earth.

### II. Kingdom

1. The whole purpose of covenants is kingdom building.
  - a. The original kingdom established on earth for humans was the garden of Eden, which was lost when Adam sinned. The Garden of Eden was technically a kingdom of heaven on earth where God dwelt with His image bearers. In fact, the unseen spiritual realm overlapped the natural world so that spiritual be-

ings co-existed in glorious harmony with corporeal beings, that is, until sin drove Adam and Eve from the garden.

- b. In the creation, God purposed that His image-bearers would have kingdom dominion over the works of His hands as they walked in fellowship with Him, beholding His glory in worship and admiration (Psalm 8:6).
  - c. The Tower of Babel was an effort to reestablish the Edenic kingdom in rebellion by constructing a *mountain*—“a tower with its top in the heavens.” This project was in violation of the Noahic covenant, as stated, “*Let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth*” (Genesis 11:4). In opposition to God, Nimrod established his human kingdom beginning with Babel (Genesis 8:9, 10).
2. Genesis 3:15 was the declaration of God’s intention to build His kingdom on earth and establish His covenants as the means of this restoration. Through covenant, Abraham was called as the source of the seed of the woman, which is nurtured in the kingdom of Israel established on Mount Sinai. Each succeeding generation moved the plan closer to the goal, even though the nations, including Israel, persisted in covenant rebellion.
  3. Covenants require *sanctions* because casual commitments have no teeth and are, thus, not covenants. Even in unilateral covenants (in which the covenanter carries the sole responsibility), obligations, being enforced by sanctions making them legal and formal, are required of all parties. This presents a puzzle: if covenants are intended to be gracious, why do they require sanctions and threats? The answer is twofold: (1) The creature is sinful and rebellious. God permitted Israel’s obstinance because His ultimate plan involved a greater kingdom with a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31). (2) Biblical covenants require sanctions against the *covenanter* (Hebrews 9:16, 17).

### III. Christ

1. A glorious fact revealed here (largely ignored due to our ignorance) is that the death of the covenanter must first be pledged so that the covenant’s goals can be fulfilled. Otherwise, the covenant has no power or validity.
  - a. The first mention of covenant with Noah reveals that God was beginning the process of bringing in the second Adam who would fulfill the original dominion mandate (Genesis 1:28).
  - b. As the second Adam, Jesus died to establish the covenant of life with those chosen by God in eternity past. Christ died a covenant death, was buried, yet rose again, and is alive and reigning at the Father’s right hand.
2. This brings us to Israel’s covenant failure. God chose the nation to be the savior of nations through her obedience to the covenant so that she might exhibit the blessings of the covenant before the nations (Deuteronomy 4:1, 3–5, 6–8). Israel failed (Jeremiah 34:18–20).

### What to Take Away

1. The glory of the New Covenant is that Christ can die no more. He is alive, and able to save His people, having taken all the sanctions on Himself. We worship at the table memorializing this great accomplishment and we rejoice in the new life that now sustains us while we anticipate His return to establish His kingdom on earth forever.
2. We are also tasked with the covenant obligation of being the light of the gospel to the world (Acts 1:8; 14:16, 17; Matthew 28:18–20).