

1. The Others (In this intro lesson, my desire is to set the stage for our yearly focus. Hang with me today as we take more of an overview—a broader look at what scripture has to say about the others. First though, let me better identify the others. In one sense we are all the others, that is, all at some point outside of the covenant of God—not in a saved relationship with Christ and this will be part of our discussion for sure. But as I speak of the others, I will be talking more about those who remain outside of a covenant relationship with Christ; those who do not know or follow him—included in this are folks displaced from the mainstream; those on the fringe; the poor; the overlooked; the ignored; the hurting; people in need of the grace and mercy of our Lord. Historically the others we will encounter in the Bible were mainly non-Jews—again those outside of God’s covenant. There was always tension there between the insider Jew and outsider others, but it was always God’s plan and desire for his people to consider the others and to ultimately include the others in his covenant—which he has done. Our beginning focus is to trace this—God’s concern for the others from the beginning of his revelation in order to understand his outreach to others through us—insiders now enjoying his covenant blessings—remains vital and urgent.)
2. God and Others—Genesis 3:15 (Thinking about this—it is quite remarkable that God would have ever bothered with us in the first place, but he did—desiring relationship with us, he set in motion his divine will from the start—to be fulfilled in Christ offering all the chance for full salvation. Genesis 3:15 offers the very first glimpse into God’s ultimate plan—others were always on his mind)
3. Abraham’s Children—Genesis 17:4; 22:18 (He begins this plan in earnest with the covenant he made with Abraham, who was the father of the Jews—but the covenant specifically states that Abraham would be the “father of many nations” and “though your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.” Even if contemporaries did not understand—something more was going on here—and it was not only about the Jews, but about the others also)
4. (Let’s connect some dots) “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to his promise.”—Galatians 3:29 (A baptism text here connecting everyone who comes to Christ to the promises God made to Abraham. From God’s perspective—but not of the Jews as the Galatian text addresses—it is all a seamless plan to include others into covenant relationship with him from Abraham to Christ he desires his people to always be aware of and reach out to others. In fact it was part of Israel’s purpose)
5. “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” Isaiah 49:6 (But they failed to shine that light; failed to have this vision of God and this passion to reach the others—the outsiders, but again this was never God’s design or will. Here was his desire)
6. Isaiah 56:6-8 MSG
7. (And one more word from the Lord) “I will say to those called ‘Not my people, You are my people;’ and they will say, ‘You are my God.’”—Hosea 2:23; also Romans 9:26 (So without any doubt—the others have always been in God’s heart—outsiders whom he seeks to be insiders—enjoying the blessings and promises due to all of Abraham’s heirs. Our challenge—which we will explore during this year—is unlike Israel—to take seriously our call as light to the world by becoming more sensitive to and sharing with the others the grace and truth of Jesus. See the story is not finished and we are living our part right now and it is an extension of what God started in the beginning. The others still remain all around us and we simply cannot hide our light in a bushel. That is the last thing God wants from us)