

ReGroups 9/24/23

Origin Stories: Starting Point - Genesis 12

Over the first portion of Genesis, God's response to sin and humanity has been well documented. It's obvious that God was not willing to give up on us. He wasn't about to consider the world a lost cause. He showed mercy to the fallen Adam, He protected the disgraced Cain, and vowed to spare Noah's generation though it full of evil and wickedness.

While one takeaway may bring emphasis on how far the world had drifted away from God, it cannot be ignored how far-reaching the grace of God has proven up through Genesis 11. This push and pull between our sin and God's grace and how one is always trying to override the other is found throughout the Scriptures. Perhaps **Isaiah 59:1-2** summarizes it best... **Read** these verses and **describe** the two extremes explained here.

As gracious as God is, sin is relentless in its efforts to retain us. However, sin's hooks are not more powerful than God's grace. One truth doesn't negate the other, but they both remind us that there are two opposing forces at work in our world.

Checkmate

God wasn't content with the future of the world being stuck in this back-and-forth pattern. He wanted to provide a lasting means of redemption, one by which sin could be overcome in full and that people could be completely restored to Him.

This wouldn't be an overnight fix. It would take centuries for just the ground work to be laid. However, eventually the seeds planted in Genesis 12 would lead to the Christian faith and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Between here and there, there are many stories about heroes, nations, laws, and miracles - but none of these things offer what Jesus ultimately provided.

Everything from Genesis 12 to Malachi 4 is merely a stepping stone and a preview of the full and final provision of Christ. Every element of the story is an essential piece on the chessboard, as God worked towards Redemption, but only through Christ is the victory achieved and offered in full.

It's important to preface the whole story with this, since we have the benefit of knowing where the story is going. When the page turns from Old to New Testament, it quickly becomes clear that all that preceded it was building up towards a final act. If the previous chapters and books were all *pawns, bishops, rooks*, the New Testament wastes no time to introduce us to our Messiah and God's final and forever *King*: Jesus Christ.

- **Matthew 1:1** - introduces us to Jesus by making it clear that two main characters of the Old Testaments were a means to an end - that is, all about bringing Jesus into this world.
- **Matthew 5:17** - Jesus says regarding the Law and Prophets (the entire Old Testament), that they are unfulfilled and unfinished part from Him. We need Him for the whole story to make sense.
- **John 1:17** - Moses may have given Israel God's Moral and Civil Law, but only Jesus provides the complete revelation of God. We need more than just rules to be saved. We need a total resurrection and restoration from the inside-out.
- **Romans 3:21-24** - This passage perfectly punctuates the previous points we've made. By all means, the Old Testament reveals God's heart and reflects His nature, Jesus is the *complete* picture. As great as the previous stories are in and of themselves, they only breath life into our hearts if we understand them through the lens of Christ and under the Gospel's better promises.
- **Galatians 4:4-5** - All of the historical figures and moments recorded in the Old Testament were key steps in the journey towards Jesus' life and work. Beginning with Abraham, the backdrop starts to take shape and the stage is set for many more big moments to come.

Do these verses help add the proper framing around the stories in the Old Testament, so that you can see them as previews of the person and work of Jesus? Do you understand why its so important that we keep the endgame in mind when reading about the early stages of the Redemption Story?

What questions do you have about how everything pieces together when you consider the Bible as a whole?

Genesis 12 is one of the most important records in *all of human history*, all the more in the Bible. It was important we understand how this text and its promises are *the first steps* in the greatest and most important story ever told...

First Steps

Beginning in Genesis 12, the long and winding road towards Redemption begins. While we've gotten hints of God's plan throughout the first eleven chapters, **Genesis 12:1-3** spells out the first act of His plan in pretty specific detail. **Read** this introduction and **share** your initial thoughts about God's instructions to Abram and how this would go on to shape the reality we now live in.

Before diving too deep into this, you may be wondering: *Who is Abram? And why did God choose him?*

We can learn about Abram's family history in the previous chapter, but it's pretty bare and doesn't add much texture to the story. We know from last week's study that Abram was a descendant of **Shem** and **Eber**, which are where the labels Semitic and Hebrew come from. As far as accolades or insights into the kind of person Abram was, we just don't know.

We do know from historical context, that the land of Sumer (pronounced *Soomer*) where Abram came from was the epicenter of all the world's activity in this time. Part of the larger Mesopotamian region, this area had been built up into the world's first empire under Nimrod. The Akkadian Kingdom, at this time ruled by Ur-Nammu, was home to millions of people all who were crammed into tiny little villages.

One of the major cities of that kingdom, Ur, was where Abram called home. This city had a temple built by King Ur-Nammu dedicated to the moon and stars. The people of this generation were the world's first astrologers and stargazers. They studied the heavens, especially the brilliant Arabian night skies, hoping for a sign from the gods.

It could be just a coincidence that Abram heard from the Lord in such a sudden, unexpected way. Considering that he was part of this culture, all longing to hear from Heaven, it's fitting that God chose someone like him and revealed Himself through such a supernatural way.

Knowing these extra-biblical facts are not essential, but those from the ancient world would've known these details by virtue of being immersed in a similar culture. No doubt, it helps us get a clearer picture of the world that was.

While God surely doesn't approve of many of the similarly pagan practices that our world today partakes in, the story of Abram should give us hope. God met the world on its level and began calling people to Himself.

What stands out to you from these points of interests regarding Abram's generation? Does this help explain the nature of God's call over Abram?

Three Promises

God made Abram three promises in **Genesis 12:1-3**:

- 1) He would become a great nation**
- 2) His name would be great from then on**
- 3) His people would bless the world**

We know that this "*Great Nation*" would soon be known as Israel. Israel continues to be a testimony to the world of God's sovereignty. Back then, every nation had its own god and each supposed the gods to be dueling in the heavens to see which nation could become dominant. As God considered how to re-reveal Himself to a world that was now full of people, scattered across the globe, He chose to start His own nation and use that nation to convince people of His superiority.

All throughout the Old Testament we see how God would do great things through Israel and it would cause people to marvel at the God behind all of these great things...

- **Exodus 7:5** - God tells Moses that Israel's bondage in Egypt was all about showcasing His power to the strongest nation of the world. When Israel and its God would go on to topple this empire from within, the world would come to know who the true and greatest God was.
- **Joshua 2:8-11** - A citizen of Jericho confesses how Israel had gained a great reputation and convinced many that its God was the greatest of them all
- **1 Kings 10:9** - The queen of Sheba marvels at Solomon's kingdom, and is convinced of the greatness of his God
- **Daniel 2:46-47** - Israel is taken captive into Babylon, but this leads to the King of Babylon issuing a decree that Israel's God is greater than his own.

Do you see how God used Israel to exalt His own name? Do you see how Abram's legacy was a means to creating one of the one, true God?

Eternal Implications

It's undeniable that Abram's name is great in all the world. It's obvious how the world has been blessed by all the descendants of Abram. From modern medicine, to most of our science and mathematics, to our means of transportation - all of these innovations come from Abram's children.

However, the full extent of these promise are found in Jesus Christ. He is the means by which God has brought true blessing to the whole world. In Him, we find more than just worldly blessings - through Christ, we obtain favor and salvation from God!

On every level, Genesis 12 has implications that have been felt and will be by every generation. We should marvel at these humble beginnings of our Redemption Story and be thankful that Abram responded as he did in **Genesis 12:4-9**.

Abram went as God told him, and the rest is history. It's not a stretch to say that we are reading this very lesson tonight because Abram first followed God and began worshipping him at Bethel. Before you go, **consider** the implications of this story and **reflect** on what it means to you.