

META | Redemption Initiated

Introduction

Grab your Bibles and open them up to Genesis 12. We have spent the last two weeks digging into God's story, what we call the meta-narrative of Scripture. What we are trying to do is tie together the many little pieces of the story that can sometimes overshadow THE STORY. So in the first two weeks we plowed through the first 11 chapters of Genesis, today we are going to cover the rest of the Old Testament. If you have spent any amount of time studying in the Old Testament, you will no doubt recognize that I am not going in depth on everything, but please withhold judgement until the end. Without wasting any time, let's start by reminding ourselves of where our story has been thus far.

Review

When we started I told you that there were two concepts that we would trace through the Bible: KINGDOM and COVENANT. In Genesis 1 and 2, we see God create a kingdom (the world) and we see that this world is held together through covenant (the relationship between God and His people). In this relationship, we see God giving His creation the authority and ability to be part of this kingdom, and He tells them: *be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the animals.*

God's kingdom was good. It was complete. Adam and Eve decide that even with everything at their fingertips, that God is still holding out on them, HIS KINGDOM WAS LACKING, somehow not giving them something that would make them happier and better. So they do the one thing that God commanded them not to, THEY BROKE THE COVENANT, and they open the doors to sin coming into the world. As sin mixes with God's creation, it twists and taints everything and destroys the goodness that is present when we are in relationship with God. BOTH THE COVENANT AND THE KINGDOM ARE NOW BROKEN. Adam and Eve no longer have a proper view of themselves, each other, the world.

We see the world falling apart. It starts with Cain killing Abel, and gains momentum to Noah, where God decides that He is going to make a statement to His creation, showing them the right punishment for their rebellion. THAT BREAKING THE COVENANT DESERVES DEATH. So God destroys the whole world in a flood. This flood does not cleanse the world of sin, and as the earth is repopulated, we see that people still want God to answer to them at the Tower of Babel. This world, including the people that God had created to be IN COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM AS PART OF HIS KINGDOM, were now at war with Him. HUMANITY HAVE NO DESIRE TO RESTORE THE COVENANT, AND ARE MORE CONCERNED WITH BUILDING THEIR OWN KINGDOM.

We ended last week seeing that in all of this downfall and carnage that God's grace was present, and hinting towards a greater grace to come. He doesn't destroy Adam and Eve, but instead makes a promise to them. He sends a new son to Adam and Eve to replace Cain and Abel. God rescues Noah and his family and promises that He will not destroy the world in the same way again (though the world deserves it). At Babel, we see God spreading the people out across the world to have dominion of it.

ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Today, the future grace is going to begin to get fleshed out. I said week 1 that this story is going to unfold like a 3 act play, and today, in act 3, we get to see REDEMPTION INITIATED. The word redemption means to buy back, or repurchase. The drama of the rest of Scripture is the story of how God plans to bring His people back into COVENANT relationship with Himself (redeem them). His plan begins with a man named Abram.

Abram just some guy. We are introduced to him as the son of Terah, husband of Sarai, brother of Nahor and Haran, uncle of Lot. This is basically just like showing us his name in a phone book, it isn't a description of who he is, and it certainly isn't trying to show us that he was some holy man. What makes him important to the story is that God chooses him, comes to Him and makes a remarkable promise, **Genesis 12.1**, it says this:

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. 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. 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."

One word stands out in this promise and that is the word BLESS. God has come to Abram, owing him nothing, but promising to bless him in numerous ways. This is a direct contrast to the Tower of Babel, where the people had sought God's blessing based on the greatness of their work. They were scattered because of it, and now God's blessing is poured out freely on Abram. He is made great because of God's loving grace, nothing else. In the promise, God says that He is calling Abram out to be in a special relationship with God, that will be used to bless the whole world. GOD MAKES A COVENANT WITH ABRAM AND GIVES HIM THE PROMISE OF A FUTURE KINGDOM (that he gets to be part of revealing).

God goes on to solidify this pact with Abram, changing his name to Abraham and revealing how this blessing is going to work out. In Genesis 15, God gives more detail into this promise. He promises Abram that he will be with Him (relationship with God). He promises Abraham that his descendants will be like the stars in the sky. He promises Abram the land that God has sent him to. These are the three aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant:

1. Relationship with God.
2. Descendants
3. Land

What we see is that the kingdom that God is promising to Abraham has the same qualities of Genesis 1...creation. It is dependent on COVENANT (relationship with God). It is built through descendants (*be fruitful and multiply*). It is for the purpose of living as stewards of God in a specific place: Promised Land (*fill the earth and subdue it*). See what God is doing here. He is going to redeem His creation, to make it what it was meant to be.

There is a slight hiccup in this plan, Abraham's wife Sarah (she got a name change too) is barren, can't have kids. Abraham decides to solve this problem for God by establishing his line through his wife's servant Hagar. I am not going to spend a lot of time on why he thought this was a good idea, but I will be clear: this wasn't God's idea. God was going to honor His promise through the barren woman. She gives birth to a son, and name him Isaac. The promise of God to Abraham is passed down to Isaac.

Isaac grows up and marries Rebekah, and they have twin sons named Jacob and Esau. Esau is the oldest which means he is entitled to the birthright, but he sells it to his brother for a bowl of stew. He then loses his father's blessing when Jacob manipulates his father into blessing him instead. Esau is not happy (what he lacks in wisdom he makes up for in strength) so Jacob runs away. But God is with Jacob, even though he is the lying, scheming brother.

But Jacob gets a taste of his own medicine as he is tricked by Laban into working 14 years in order to marry Rachel. Part of this manipulation gets him a second wife, Leah, and between them (and a few more servant babies), these ladies have 12 children. Two of these children belong to Rachel, and they are the two youngest: Joseph and Benjamin.

Jacob loved his son Joseph in a special way, and it was obvious to the rest of the brothers, to the extent that they got jealous, faked his death and sold Joseph as a slave to Egypt. As Joseph famously remarks at the end of Genesis, *they meant evil against me, but God meant it for good*. Joseph's life, with all of its ups and downs, including slavery, imprisonment, honor, and success, is a picture of God working in all manner of situations to provide for His people. GOD HAS MADE A COVENANT WITH THEM, AND HE IS WORKING TO REVEAL HIS KINGDOM THROUGH THEM.

Jacob's whole family moves to Egypt to be with Joseph (as God has given him the wisdom to stock up on food for the famine). God uses Joseph's life to keep His people alive during the famine and bring them to where they need to be for the next part of the story. The book of Exodus opens with the Egyptians seeing God's blessing on these people, especially in number, and deciding to make the Israelites their slaves. God does not intend to leave His people in this situation forever; He uses their slavery as a setting to REintroduce Himself to His people.

MOSAIC COVENANT

God raises up Moses, an Israelite baby who gets adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. He is frustrated by what is happening to God's people, and after seeing an Egyptian kill one of God's people, he retaliates and kills the Egyptian, gets scared and flees to Midian. God calls him back to Egypt, through a burning bush, and calls him to be the mouthpiece for God.

His mission is simple: Go to Pharaoh and tell him to let the people of God go. God gives him a sidekick and some special signs and wonders, but Pharaoh is not convinced. But freeing them is just part of what God is doing through Moses. More than that, God is introducing Himself to both His people and to the Egyptians. Through a series of 10 plagues, God reestablishes His control over the world. He declares His lordship over His kingdom. HE MAKES IT CLEAR TO ISRAEL THAT THEY ARE THE COVENANT PEOPLE THROUGH WHOM HE WILL BRING HIS KINGDOM TO REALITY.

After all of the firstborn Egyptians die, Pharaoh has had enough and he sends the Israelites away, carrying all the treasures of Egypt that they can carry. They come to the Red Sea, but before they get too far, Pharaoh has a change of heart and sends his army to go get them. God protects them by opening up the sea so that they can pass through, and bringing the waves down on the Egyptian army destroying them.

Israel sets off across the desert, led by God. He leads them as a pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night. Every few miles they come up with something new to complain about, and God, over and over again, blesses them. He makes bitter water sweet and makes a stream come out of a rock. He turns the dew into bread and sends quail to them to eat. He leads them to the foot of a mountain, the same mountain where he had called Moses, and there he makes another covenant with His people.

This covenant is initiated by God in **Exodus 19.4-6**, it says this:

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now 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; and 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."

God begins by referring to what he has done. Basically to say: I have upheld the promise that I made to Abraham. God then calls them to respond to His work. THEREFORE, he says, you must obey. If you do, he says, you will be my treasured possession among all people. Then He clarifies how they will be treasured by Him: as a kingdom of priests; a holy nation. So as we saw in Genesis, being chosen by God and given freedom brings with it responsibility. In this case, Israel had been chosen by God, had been freed from the bondage of Egypt by the hand of God, and

they are now to be missionaries to the rest of the world. As God is holy and completely other, the nation of Israel was to be different than all other people on earth. Their lives are meant to display what it looks like to live in proper relationship with God, self, others, and the creation. THEY ARE TO EXIST AS A PICTURE OF THE COMING KINGDOM. But how are they supposed to know what this kingdom looks like? God gives them the law. The law given at Sinai is meant to be a revelation to Israel about who their God is, as well as a revelation (blessing) to the world. THROUGH HIS COVENANT WITH ISRAEL, GOD WAS MAKING HIS KINGDOM KNOWN TO THE WORLD.

The rest of the Old Testament is the story of how well Israel accomplishes their God-given vocation. God leads them across the desert, to the edge of the Promised Land and even after all that they have seen and experienced, they trust what they can see rather than what they know to be true. They send 12 spies into the land and 10 come back with the report that the people are too big to conquer. So God makes them wander in the desert until an entire generation dies off. But they do get to enter the land, and under the guidance of Joshua, God once again opens up a large body of water (this time the Jordan River) and they cross into the land that God had promised Abraham so long ago. But this land is not just a gift to reside in; it is to subdue it...to establish this land as a picture of God's kingdom. So God commands Israel to purify the land, their land, by wiping out everything and everyone who reside there.

Things start well, but eventually the people start thinking again, questioning God and choosing to do as they see fit. God's kingdom is not about doing what seems good to us, but about keeping the covenant. The covenant is about responding to God as God, doing what He commands whether it seems right to us or not. The definition that the Bible gives us of Israel is one of unfaithfulness: 'they did what was right in their own eyes.' As they possess the land, their decision to only partially follow through on what God called them to leads them into constant trouble.

God has not left His people. He raises up Judges to continually rescue them from oppression. But every time they are free, they respond, not as God has covenanted with them, in worship, but they respond by neglecting Him. Over and over again. In this, rather than being a kingdom of priests, preaching the greatness of God to the nations, Israel looks just like the nations around them.

DAVIDIC COVENANT

In spite of all of this, God is still going to use Israel as a light to the nations, and so He calls Samuel, literally, to be His servant. God uses Israel's sinful desire to be like the other nations to paint a picture of the coming Messiah. They ask for a king, and God says that He will give them a one, but he writes the terms of kingship. God alone gets to choose their king. In this, the king is never an absolute power, but a steward of God...KINGSHIP IS SET UP AS THE NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE (COVENANT) WHICH GOD WILL USE TO PROVIDE A PICTURE OF THE COMING KINGDOM.

The first king, Saul, fails miserably at leading in faithfulness. He does not uphold the covenant of Sinai or the rules of kingship. In many ways, he is a reminiscent of Adam. Saul represents the wisdom of sinful man. He was the kind of king that Israel wanted: tall, strong, but his unwillingness to submit to God leads to his downfall.

So God selects a new king, David. David is not what is expected. When Samuel goes to anoint him king, his own father does not even call him in from the field as a possible choice. But what makes David worthy is the heart that God has given him. God makes a covenant with David in **2 Samuel 7.12-13**:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

GOD'S COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH DAVID PROVIDES THE FRAMEWORK TO REPRESENT THE ETERNAL KINGDOM OF GOD.

Through the early part of David's reign, God shows Israel what it looks like for them to live in a kingdom that submits to God. There is a relational peace. There is a great blessing. God's people enjoy Him and enjoy the world that he has created. Just like the garden, sin comes in and corrupts. David has an affair with Bathsheeba and then has her husband killed. Then everything falls apart. We see that no earthly king, even the man after God's own heart, as God refers to David, can escape the destructive force of sin in this world. What Israel needs is a perfect king, which is exactly what God promises David.

David's throne gets passed down to his son Solomon, who is given the gift of wisdom by God. Solomon is given the task of building the temple, God's dwelling place in Israel. The temple is the representation of God being amongst his people. For this short moment, all seems to be well:

1. There is a wise king, whose leadership is grounded in the 'fear of the Lord'
2. God is present in the Promised Land with His people, dwelling in His temple

But once again it will not last. Solomon begins to trust his knowledge over the fear of the Lord. He marries foreign wives and begins to worship their gods. He builds himself a house that dwarfs the house of God. By the end of his life, God is furious with him and idolatry. So God rips the kingdom of Israel into two pieces: The Northern Kingdom (Israel) with King Jereboam and the southern kingdom (Judah) under King Rehoboam (Solomon's son).

Divided and embracing idolatry, fighting for power, these two kingdoms fall into the hands of foreign nations. It takes about 200 years for the Northern kingdom to be conquered by Assyria, and Judah lasts a bit longer, but Babylon comes along to about 150 years later and all of God's people are taken from their home into foreign lands.

While Ezra and Nehemiah give some hope, with some of the Israelites returning home and rebuilding the temple and the walls, the reality is, the Old Testament ends with a very depressing picture for Israel. BOTH THE COVENANT AND THE KINGDOM ARE NOW BROKEN. We're basically back where we started. The story of Israel's rise and downfall shows us that it does not matter how much spirituality you have, or how many religious activities you engage in, or even if you happen to belong to the people of God...what you need is a proper relationship with God. He is not your mentor, or life coach, or your co-pilot, or your homeboy. He is:

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.

That is how God proclaims His name as He reveals Himself to Moses. He told the people of Israel that if they continued to seek their joy elsewhere and give their worship to the creation, that he would eventually stop blessing them. At the end of the OT, we see them spread out all over the Middle East and under foreign rule. The prophets make it clear that the reason why they are in this position is because of their sin. They turned from God and He is now turning away from them.

But the prophets make something else very clear: that even though the situation of Israel is bleak, God will still be glorified. God's covenant will be fulfilled and His kingdom will come, but His kingdom is going to look different than all of the images He has put forth. It will be LIKE these things, but it will also be different. The prophets announce the judgment of God on Israel, but they also give hope that the kingdom that they have been promised will be complete.

I am going to end today by reading **Ezekiel 36.22-27**, one of these bridge passages from the OT to the NT. It says:

Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Ezekiel is clear that Israel has failed to be what God called them to be, but He is going to use them to establish His kingdom in spite of them. He shows us that God will have true covenant relationship with his people, but it won't be by any earthly means, it will be by the work of God making them new. Finally, he reveals to us what we already know, but often forget, that God works for the glory of His name. THE COVENANT AND THE KINGDOM ARE NOT ABOUT SALVATION FOR THE SAKE OF SALVATION, but they are to make great the name of the Lord. Israel's history does not exist to justify Israel, but to declare the holiness of God, so that the nations will know that he is the Lord.

We are recipients of this history. We gather together to declare what the Lord has done.