

**Reading the Bible for Deep Delight**  
First Methodist Church of Tulsa  
Spring 2024

## **The Stone of Stumbling – What is the Bible?**

**What is the Bible? (You can write it here or in your Kingswood Notebook)**

Gen. 11:31-12:3

Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. 32 The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran.

12:1 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."

**What do you notice about God in this passage?**

**The Bible is *revelation*. What are some things it reveals about the nature and character of God?**

## Chapter 2 – The Stone of Stumbling

I called this session "The Stone of Stumbling" because I think, at the very introductory stages of our acquaintance with the Bible, we sometimes get tripped up because we don't know what it is. Let me list a few things about what the Bible is, some of them very obvious, and let's fill in some others:

- 1) It's a book.
- 2) It's a collection of books.
- 3) It's a collection of words and sentences.
- 4) It's literature.
- 5) It's history, poetry, theology, a manual for life together, and apocalyptic literature.

Now, those are some of the bare bones facts about the Bible, and certainly not all of the relevant facts, but a handful. But there are lots of books out there. There are lots of words, sentences, chapters, and compilations in the world. What makes the Bible stand out from what "The Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye (1912-91) wrote of the Bible: this huge, sprawling, tactless book sit[s] there inscrutably in the middle of our cultural heritage... frustrating all our efforts to walk around it!"?

It is... what? When Jesus asked the disciples, "who do people say that I am?" there we're a lot of answers offered, so what do you say the Bible is?

This is an important question as we get to the point of actually reading the Bible. If it's just like any other book, /yawn/ okay. There's some good stories in it and some weird rules. Who cares? What is this Bible that we actually sit down and read it, sometimes many times over in the course of a lifetime?

Turn to the end of Genesis 11. Let's read.

Gen. 11:31 Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. 32 The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran.

Gen. 12:1 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."

Over 1000 years from Babel to Abram. Not much happened after the confusing of the languages except a long genealogy of a specific family, Shem's descendants. Shem was the son of Noah and the one from whom we get the term Semitic. It's a people group. This

*toledot* hones in on Shem's family until we get to the end of chapter 11 and we pick up with a story about Terah and his family. Then the passage moves into chapter 12 and we get something new happening. For the first time since Noah in chapter 9, we get this phrase: "Now the LORD said..." And he doesn't just say it into the void, he says it to a person. Abram. "Now the LORD said to Abram..."

Now, if I speak to you, you can and probably will learn some things about me and I'll learn some things about you. Why? Because we're sharing information about who we are as we speak. We'll learn not just from words but also from tone, accent, and all that stuff. And the learning is for a purpose: so that we have a shared encounter that is imbued with meaning and that meaning affects the way we interact with the world and one another.

The interesting thing to me about Genesis 12 and onward, is that we get a story of Abraham and his descendants. If we just read at a surface level, that's what we see. But what we really get is a story of Yahweh interacting with his creation. So, in a sense, the Bible is a story. The story of what? That's the crux of the matter. When I read books on the Bible, they will inevitably say that the Bible is a story and that's true, but that doesn't get near deep enough to hold the enormity of what the Bible is.

So, it's a story about God, which is great because God is great and God is good and it's a profitable thing to read about and learn about God. That's kind of phase 1-level reading. At the beginning of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* he says that this theological science "presupposes that the true content of Christian talk about God can be known by man." And that it must be known by man. Can and must. That means we can know God and, not only that, we must know God. Talking about presuppositions, it's presupposed that God is *worth* being known. We would say the answer to that, is God worth being known?, is a resounding yes. But why? Not because of our experience, though our encounters with God confirm it, but because what we read about God in the Bible is either true or it isn't. There's no gray here. We may not understand all the facts or even if they're presented as such, and translations can muddy the waters a bit, but when we read the Bible, it's either true or it isn't. If it isn't, then there's no point in reading it. If it is, then we must become like John Wesley who said, "I want to know one thing, the way to heaven--how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! ... Let me be homo unius libri. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his Book; for this end, to find the way to heaven." (SoSO).

Yes, it's a story. But it's more than just a story and this is the point I wanted to come back to from the reading about Abraham. the Bible is revelation. Do you know what revelation means? It's unveiling. Seeing clearly. The Bible is revelation of God. A revelation that helps us to know God. You hear that? Not know about God, but KNOW GOD.

Let me share with you three quotations from Eugene Peterson that drive home for me the importance of coming to the Scriptures and recognizing them for what they are, which is revelation:

The challenge--never negligible--regarding the Christian Scriptures is getting them read, but read on their own terms, as God's revelation xi

What I want to call attention to is that the Bible, all of it, is *livable*; it is *the* text for living our lives. It reveals a God-created, God-ordered, God-blessed, world in which we find ourselves at home and whole. 18

It is entirely possible to come to the Bible in total sincerity, responding to the intellectual challenge it gives, or for the moral guidance it offers, or for the spiritual uplift it provides, and not in any way have to deal with a personally revealing God who has personal designs on you. 30 (All from *Eat this Book*)

What does this look like?

Ex. 33:7 Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. 8 Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. 9 When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. 10 And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. 11 Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

Karl Barth says, "the Bible is the concrete means by which the Church recollects God's past revelation, is called to expectation of His future revelation, and is thus summoned and guided to proclamation and empowered for it." 111 I.1 Church Dogmatics

So the Bible helps us to remember who God is and out of what we read anticipate what he *will* do, not just in the future but right now so that we can live in trust and obedience.

Let's look at a passage and see what it tells us about God in a way that we can know.

Deut. 30:1 "And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, 2 and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and

with all your soul, 3 then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. 4 If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. 5 And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. 6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. 7 And the LORD your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you. 8 And you shall again obey the voice of the LORD and keep all his commandments that I command you today. 9 The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, 10 when you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that are written in this Book of the Law, when you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

What do you notice about God? Who is he? How does he act?

How are we summoned and guided not just for proclamation, but to love and adore a God who speaks to us as a friend?