

Lesson 5—Scene 1 Review/Scene 2

So, up to this point, we have examined the first 11 chapters of the book of Genesis and I have suggested to you all that they serve as the ‘Prologue’ to the story of what God is doing on this earth to glorify himself by redeeming his fallen creation. This prologue sets up this story for us by showing us the great need we now have after falling from perfect fellowship with God and into sin, bringing death and all of sin’s other consequences into this world with it. The greatness of this need is then only amplified by the reality that we cannot save ourselves from sin and its consequences—we need to be rescued, we need to be redeemed.

Then, we get to Genesis 12 and God begins to act redemptively, I believe, for the first time, and he begins this grand act of redemption by calling one man, Abraham, and making him a promise: **Genesis 12:1-3** tells us how God promises to make this one man into a great nation and then how He will use this great nation to bless the whole world. Here we see the initial seed of God’s redemptive plan on this earth; God is going to use a particular nation—the nation that springs from Abraham—to bless the whole world, or bring about redemption for all mankind.

Note: I also suggested to you all that God chose to start with Abraham and Sarah and to make this particular promise to those particular people—Abraham being old and Sarah being old and barren—to clearly display, from the start, that he was the one who would be doing the work of redemption

We then see God begin working to fulfill this promise to Abraham, despite the seemingly unconquerable obstacles: He miraculously provided a child to Abraham and Sarah: a boy named Isaac; Isaac eventually fathers two boys, Jacob and Esau, even though he too married a barren woman; then, Jacob eventually fathers 12 sons even though he too married a barren woman (we see again that God is giving us ample evidence that he is the one at work to bring about the

redemption of mankind). These 12 sons of Jacob then begin to serve as the seeds for the 12 tribes of Israel—from these 12 sons would spring the descendants that comprise each of the 12 tribes of Israel. Then, one of the 12 sons—Joseph—was sent by God ahead of his brothers to Egypt in order to preserve them and save their lives during a time of great famine. Under Joseph's leadership in Egypt, his remaining 11 brothers and their families were transplanted into Egypt where the people of Israel (Sons of Jacob) began to thrive and multiply greatly until all of Egypt was filled with the family and descendants of Jacob's 12 sons.

However, after Joseph died, a Pharaoh of Egypt rose to power that didn't know Joseph or his family, and so he enslaved the Israelites out of fear since they had grown so numerous. The people of Israel then suffered for many years as slaves in Egypt until God raised up a man named Moses. God specifically called and enabled Moses to deliver his people, Israel, from Egypt and to free them from slavery. Through Moses and other miraculous events—the sending of the 10 plagues and the parting of the Red Sea—God then displayed his mighty power and commitment to Israel by delivering them out of the oppression of Egypt.

Once freed from Egypt, God spoke to his people from atop Mount Sinai and through his servant, Moses. As God spoke, he established his covenant with Israel (he confirmed his commitment to them and theirs to him) by giving them the Ten Commandments. This law that God had given them provided the Israelites with a culture, with a way of living that allowed them great progress towards becoming an established nation—the very thing God promised to Abraham over half a millenium ago (if my math is correct).

Unfortunately, though, the people of Israel rebelled in the wilderness after being delivered from slavery in Egypt. Consequently, the entire generation that disbelieved God was led to wander around in the wilderness until they all died off—they were not allowed to see the

land that God had promised to give the people. Eventually, the entire generation died along with Moses, and a man named Joshua took Moses' role as leader of the people of Israel. Under Joshua's leadership, this new, faithful, generation was given the Promised Land of Canaan as they conquered it bit by bit. Once the land was conquered under Joshua's rule, it was divided up and assigned amongst the various 12 tribes of Israel.

The 12 tribes then took possession of the land assigned to them and began to live in it. However, after the death of Joshua and the elders of his generation, there was no ruler or king and so the people began to do whatever was right in their own eyes. They rebelliously abandoned their God and devoted their time, energy, and affections to worshiping countless idols, including themselves; the behavior that resulted was remarkably repulsive and God began to punish Israel. The surrounding nations were used as tools of discipline in God's hands to show the Israelites how wrong they were. Israel would cry out to God after years of punishment and discipline, God would show pity on them, and he would raise up a man or woman to deliver his people from their troubles: the Judges. During this period of the Judges, Israel continued in this cycle of faithlessness and rebellion followed by punishment followed by repentance followed by deliverance followed yet again by more faithlessness and rebellion. Without a doubt, the nation of Israel was in desperate need of godly leadership.

Enter Samuel; God established the office of prophet and christened the office with a man named Samuel. As an established prophet of God, or God's chosen spokesman to his people, Samuel worked effectively to unite the people of Israel again under the leadership and guidance of God. Once reunited, the people begin asking for a king just like the nations around them, and God delivered to them this king in the form of a man named Saul. In the beginning, Saul seemed like a great king, but he eventually began to rebel against God and his reign over Israel caused

more harm than good. God used this man and his time as king to show the people that the desires of their heart were evil; by asking for a king like all the other nations around them, Israel rejected their identity as the chosen people of God, and therefore rejected the very God who had chosen them. They got what they wanted, and they regretted it.

Fortunately, though, God never fails to keep his promises and his commitments to his people, even though we are so quick to fail God: He promised to make Israel into a great nation and that he would use this nation to bless the whole world. Therefore, Saul and the stubborn people who asked for him could not derail God's plans. God instructed Samuel to anoint David as King of Israel instead of Saul, and David proved himself to be a man after God's own heart. David trusted God completely, as displayed in his triumph over Goliath, and God gave David victory wherever he went. It was to David that God makes another promise: God promised that a descendant of David's would sit on the throne of Israel forever. This incredible promise of God is a major turning point in the progress of redemption so far, but not because God is changing directions.

Up until this point, all that God had done was to fulfill his promise to Abraham: to make him into a great nation and then to use that nation to bless the whole world. With this new promise to David, God did not nullify the promise to Abraham, but rather he added greater specificity to it; now, instead of observing a nation at large to watch how God will bless the whole world, God focuses our attention in on the lineage of kings and specifically that from David. This is a remarkable bit of revelation from God, and it helps to explain why the story of the Bible seems to focus so heavily on the kings of Israel after the life of David: those who were writing those books—mostly prophets—were looking to see how God would fulfill this new

promise; they were watching the kings from the line of David and waiting on God to bless the world through one of them.

The first of these descendants of David to sit on the throne of Israel was his son, Solomon. As Solomon took the throne after his father, he was given tremendous wisdom, wealth, and honor by God and therefore, as he ruled over Israel, he saw peace on all sides as well as impressive prosperity within his own borders. During this time of peace and prosperity, Solomon fulfilled David's wish of building a temple for God, and when he did, the glory of God came and filled the temple, symbolizing that God was indeed present with his people and was blessing them according to his promises. It was at this point that we see, I believe for the first time, an established place on earth where people can come and find redemption. God has, at least symbolically, localized his presence with his people, Israel, and so if you came to the temple in Jerusalem, you could meet with God and consequently find redemption.

It is at this point in the story that Solomon writes in **Psalm 72:18-19**, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!" Do you recognize Solomon's desire for the whole earth to be filled with God's glory? Solomon's heart here echoes God's heart in that it is God's goal to fill the earth with his glory. Remember the story that unifies the Bible as a whole? The Bible is the story of what God is doing to glorify himself by redeeming his fallen creation; we just saw the introduction of the first established place on earth where mankind can find redemption, and it is in the capital city of the nation of Israel—the very nation that descended from a man named Abraham over hundreds of years as God protected them and guided them. Can you all see how God is working to fill the earth with his glory by redeeming his fallen creation? However, God is clearly not finished, but what we do have at this

point is yet another seed: Israel seems to be a seed of the final picture of all nations painted for us in Revelation; the temple has been filled with the glory of God, just as the whole earth will one day be, and it is surrounded by the 12 tribes of Israel, representing the vast diversity of every tribe, tongue, and nation that will be present in heaven, and all those present are under the leadership of one man (David/Jesus).

We have just seen how God is capable of bringing about much progress from small seeds like individual men such as Abraham and the 12 sons of Jacob. Imagine with me where this story is going to take us as we move forward from the seed of the established nation of Israel; So, let's jump into Scene II of Act I and continue to see how God is working to glorify himself by redeeming his fallen creation. Unfortunately, as many of you already know and you could probably see coming even if you didn't know already, this blissful state Israel found itself in did not last very long, relatively speaking; Scene 2 is radically different than Scene 1: it's relatively quick, it's very dark, and it's harder to understand. King Solomon made some rather poor choices in direct disobedience to God, one of these choices being the collection of 700 wives and 300 concubines. Not only that, but a large portion of these women were foreigners, which made this sin doubly heinous in God's sight—not because God is a racist and thinks that non-Israelites are lesser people and therefore not worthy of marrying his people, but because these other nations and people groups worshiped all kinds of other gods, many of whom demanded terrible things of their people in worship, including child sacrifice; God did not want his people, Israel, to fall into worshipping these false gods and so he commanded them not to marry people from other nations. However, Solomon obviously did not listen and found himself under the intimate influence of nearly 1,000 foreign women and their false gods. So, Solomon's heart eventually went astray and he abandoned his God and began to worship these false gods.

So, in **1 Kings 11:9-13** we read, “⁹ And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice¹⁰ and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the Lord commanded.¹¹ Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, “Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. ¹² Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. ¹³ However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen.”

As a consequence of Solomon’s disobedience and rebellion against God, He promises to tear the kingdom away from Solomon, except for one of the twelve tribes, Judah, and this all for the sake of the promises he had made to David and the promises regarding Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah. Then, in **1 Kings 12:19-20**, we read, “¹⁹ So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.²⁰ And when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. There was none that followed the house of David but the tribe of Judah only.” So, we see that the tearing of the kingdom is now complete: Israel and Judah are now two separate nations, with Israel comprised of the 10 northern tribes of Israel and Judah comprised of the southern 2—Judah and Benjamin—since the tribe of Benjamin joined Judah shortly after the kingdom split.

Then, we read **1 Kings 14:15**: “¹⁵ the Lord will strike Israel as a reed is shaken in the water, and root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their fathers and scatter them beyond the Euphrates, because they have made their Asherim, provoking the Lord to anger.” Due to continuous and unrepentant sinful rebellion against God, He promises to uproot

the northern Kingdom of Israel, forcefully sending them out of the land he had given them and scattering them among foreign nations. **2 Kings 17:6-7, 18** shows us the fulfillment of this promise: “⁶In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods...¹⁸ Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. None was left but the tribe of Judah only.” So, the northern kingdom of Israel was uprooted and sent into exile in Assyria, being scattered among various cities and regions of that nation.

Then, when it doesn't seem like things can get much darker, **2 Kings 21:10-15** reads, “¹⁰ And the Lord said by his servants the prophets, ¹¹“Because Manasseh king of Judah has committed these abominations and has done things more evil than all that the Amorites did, who were before him, and has made Judah also to sin with his idols, ¹² therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such disaster that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. ¹³ And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria, and the plumb line of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. ¹⁴ And I will forsake the remnant of my heritage and give them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies, ¹⁵ because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.” King Manasseh is spoken of in the Scriptures as the most evil king in all of Israel's history, and because of his outrageous sins

against God as well as his leading of Judah into sin, God promises to do to Judah what he already did to Israel.

2 Chronicles 36:15-21 shows us the fulfillment of that promise: “¹⁵ The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. ¹⁶ But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until there was no remedy. ¹⁷ Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. ¹⁸ And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. ¹⁹ And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. ²⁰ He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹ to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.”

So, God destroyed Jerusalem and sent the kingdom of Judah into exile in Babylon, and thus we enter probably the darkest period in Israel's history as the people of God find themselves scattered all over the earth and under the punishment of God as the only channel of God's redemption on this earth is destroyed. God has just taken what he took centuries to build and he destroyed it and scattered it all over the earth. This does not, in the least, seem like progress. What in the world is God up to?

We must know and remember that there is no act of God in history, with regards to his people, that is simply punitive (or just for punishment's sake), but there is always a step forward in progress. It is too small of a view to see the exile into Babylon as only Judah's punishment; it was, indeed, punishment, but it was also God acting progressively to bring about His ultimate goal on the earth. God's end goal is to fill the earth with his glory, and when we keep that in mind, we don't gain perfect clarity just yet, but we can start to see that this exile isn't just simply punishment—even though it is, indeed punishment—but rather it is also something much bigger than that as God uses this exile to make progress towards filling the earth with his glory by redeeming his fallen creation. The question, then, as we end Scene 2, is “how is this remarkably dark period in history used by God progressively to bring about redemption for mankind and glory to God?” That is a great question, and we will begin to chip away at that answer next time.