

Lesson 12

God's Great Wisdom

Introduction

It's amazing what you can find on the internet. Searching for information on this subject, I was amazed at the results of my google search on "God in the Old Testament." Page after page revealed articles and blog posts that either make or deny the assertion that God loved vengeance and death in the Old Testament and then somehow changed to loving grace and mercy in the New. How has this idea become so prevalent? Somewhere, it has been repeated enough that many people have come to believe something that could not be farther from the truth.

I believe our take on the Old Testament should come from the perspective of God's great love and care for mankind. Instead of always "zapping people" and glorying in bloodshed, our God was moving with zeal to get things ready for the arrival of His Son. From the very instant sin came into our world, God has tirelessly worked to restore the relationship that was lost. Working through fallible men and providence, *when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons, Galatians 4.4-5.*

Think of all the things that happened over the two thousand years between Abraham and Jesus. The twists and turns of Biblical history are amazing. God's word reveals that world powers come and go. In many cases, God used them as tools to discipline His people and further His purposes. Even in the darkest moments, there was hope. The Messiah was coming.

In this lesson we will take a broad look at the lineage of Christ and see how God moved with wisdom in executing His plan. His actions established undeniable facts regarding Jesus' authenticity as His Son, His rightful place as King, and His incredible desire to bring us salvation. What Jesus said in John 3.16 is undeniably true: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

Seeing God's Wisdom Through the Lineage of Christ

Tracing the events unfolded by the will of God to bring about the family from which would come this seed of woman is itself a fascinating study. The genealogies recorded by Matthew and Luke parade before us the cast of Jesus' ancestors. It matters that Abraham comes on the scene. It matters that God made the promises to Abraham concerning his seed. It matters that God made a promise to David, king of Israel. Why does it matter? Because God was selecting this family who would produce the Messiah. Had Jesus simply appeared on the scene there would be no physical evidence to verify He is the One nor would there be any way to expose the many impostors who had preceded Him. It was not a matter of happen-stance that Jesus was a Jew. **The history recorded in the Old Testament provided qualifications that only Jesus of Nazareth could fulfill.**

When the Jews questioned the Deity of Christ, Jesus said, *You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me*, John 5.39. Many Old Testament promises find their fulfillment in the genealogy of Christ recorded in Matthew 1.1–17 and Luke 3.23–38. Therein is proof that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Through the fleshly seed of Abraham *all nations of the earth would be blessed*, Genesis 12.1–3. The Messiah was not just to be a descendant of Abraham, but He would also be a descendant of Isaac, Genesis 21.12; Jacob, Genesis 28.13–14; Judah, Genesis 49.10; Jesse, Isaiah 11.1, 10; and David, 2 Samuel 7.12–16.

Let us take a close look at Abraham's importance in the lineage of Christ. In Genesis 12.1–3 is set forth the briefest outline of the Bible. In the first two verses is the theme of the Old Testament, and in Genesis 12.3 is the theme of the New Testament. *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.*

Three simple promises. First, **go to a land that I will show you**. Canaan was that land. Second, **God would make of him a great nation**. The Israelites were that nation, the family out of which the Savior would be born. Third, the seed of Abraham would provide the means of a spiritual blessing for all people of the earth. The promises to Abraham of a land and a nation were made in order that the third promise might be fulfilled, i.e., *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*.

Salvation Was Solely by God's Purpose and Grace

Abraham was seventy-five years old at the time he was told he would be the father of a great nation, but he had no children by his wife Sarai. How could a man of this age and without any children ever be the father of a great nation? Do you believe in God? Abraham did, but his faith was tested and proven in the birth and sacrifice of Isaac. Twenty-five years after the promise was made, when Abraham was a hundred years old and Sarai was ninety, God fulfilled His word by a miracle. We get impatient sometimes and want an answer now when we pray to God. We wonder why God doesn't answer right away. Be assured that "in the fulness of time" God kept His word to Abraham, and He will answer our prayers too. Surely one would expect that within the next nine months a son would be born. Merely from a point of view of human wisdom one could understand why, after ten years had passed without conception, Sarai told Abraham to go in unto Hagar, her handmaid. At age eighty-six years old, eleven years after the promise originally had been made, Abraham became the father of Ishmael. But he was not the one God promised; Isaac was, Genesis 21.12.

After such a lengthy wait for this son to be born, can one imagine what emotions must have been stirred in Abraham's heart when God told him to take Isaac to Mount Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice? Isaac had now grown to be a youth of some maturity, for as they went up to the place God designated he said, *Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?* See Genesis 22.7. Abraham answered, *My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering*. When Abraham drew back his hand with the knife to slay his son, the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven to do him no harm. In

heart and mind Abraham obeyed God even to the sacrificing of his son, James 2.21–24. While this story touches the heart of every parent who tries in his mind to walk in the shoes of Abraham, yet it does not begin to compare to the gift of God who sacrificed His Son to die for us.

The Sovereignty of God

The lineage of Jesus must come through Isaac, so as we trace that story we learn next that twins are born to Isaac and Rebekah, Genesis 25.24–26. Esau was the eldest and Jacob, the youngest. Ordinarily one would expect the lineage of the Messiah would come through Esau because the firstborn in Israelite tradition would have the birthright. But not so. Before they were born God made a choice that *the elder shall serve the younger*, Romans 9.11–13. Jacob was the son chosen through whose seed God would bless all families of the earth, Genesis 28.10–15.

The significance of the story of Jacob and Esau is explained in Romans 9.10–16 where it is stated that *though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls*, Romans 9.11. Here, the sovereignty of God is brought to light. The point is that God had the sovereign authority to choose the means by which one can be saved. God is not bound by fleshly tradition. *His ways are not man's ways, and His thoughts are not like man's*, Isaiah 55.8–9. By the time the letter to the Romans was written, the Jews thought their fleshly heritage assured them a place in God's kingdom. In fact, Judaizing teachers insisted that if a Gentile wanted to be saved, he must be circumcised in keeping with the law of Moses. The apostle Paul instructed in this letter that God had chosen a system of justification by faith and not by the works of the law of Moses. One is not a child of God simply because he is born a Jew in the flesh, but he becomes a child of God only if he submits to God's chosen plan of redemption, that is, by faith in Christ, Romans 9.6–9. The choice of Jacob over Esau was not a choice for salvation, for the firstborn had no more right of that than did the younger. What God elected was the family from which the lineage of Christ would come. God chose the plan, not the man!

When Jacob blessed his sons shortly before his death, again it was God who made the choice. Just as He made the choice through Isaac, not Ishmael; and through Jacob, not Esau; now He chose Judah to be the one through whom the lineage of the Messiah should come. He did not choose Reuben, the eldest, nor Joseph, the son of his beloved Rachel, but Judah, the son of Leah. When Jacob called Judah to him he said, *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be*, Genesis 49.10. The word Shiloh means "the one who brings peace." Shiloh, "the bringer of peace" is none other than Jesus. By delivering us from the bondage of sin, He has brought for us peace in our hearts. He is indeed the "Prince of peace." He promised peace, not like the world gives, John 14.27, but an inward peace through reconciliation with God and the hope of heaven.

Why is this genealogy so important? **The Messiah must be of the exact family line if He is to reign on David's throne.** This lineage is so critical that, frankly, there can never be another legitimate claim to be

the Messiah. At the destruction of Jerusalem, the Roman army destroyed all of the birth records of the Jewish people. Since the genealogy of the Messiah would be needed to prove His right to sit on the throne of David, there cannot be a Messiah yet to come because no one could prove himself by genealogical records to be a descendant of David.

Furthermore, definite conclusions can be drawn through tracing this lineage of Christ. For example, proof is given that the throne of Christ would not be on this earth. When God pronounced a curse upon Jeconiah (also known as Coniah), He said, *none of his descendants shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah*, Jeremiah 22.30. Since Christ is a descendant of Jeconiah, Matthew 1.12, He cannot rule in the land of Judah. The throne of Christ is in heaven, Hebrews 8.1.

On the other hand, the genealogy of Christ shows the importance of the Gentiles in God's plan. In Matthew 1.5 we read, *Salmon begat Boaz by Rahab; and Boaz begat Obed by Ruth*. Rahab had been a heathen prostitute in Jericho, Joshua 2.1. Ruth was a heathen woman from the land of Moab who became an ancestor of King David and Jesus. True, the lineage of Christ must come through David and Abraham, but significantly, it included two Gentiles, and women at that. God chose the lineage, not like man would have done it. He blessed them; He brought them together as a people and made them a great nation. But for what purpose? *To bless all families of the earth*.

How thrilling it is to read the connection of the Old to the New made by the apostle Paul when, by inspiration, he wrote how the purpose of God through Abraham is fulfilled in Christ. In Galatians 3.8 he wrote that the gospel was preached to Abraham when He said *In thee shall all nations be blessed*. And then in Galatians 3.16, Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. Finally, in Galatians 3:26–29, *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise*.

Forty days after His birth, Jesus was brought to the temple in Jerusalem to be presented unto the Lord. Simeon was there, a just and devout man, who *waited for the Consolation of Israel. It was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ*. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and said, *Now Lord, Thou dost let Thy bondservant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel* (Luke 2:25–32). What a marvelous story. The Old Testament resounds throughout: "the Messiah is coming!" We now can say, "He has come! Praise be to God."¹

For Thought and Reflection

1. Why are the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke's gospels of such great importance?

2. What was the purpose of the seed promise in Genesis 12.3?
3. How is Abraham such a great example of faith?
4. When we use the term *sovereignty of God*, what do we mean?
5. What does Romans 9.11-13 tell us about why Jacob was chosen over Esau?
6. Who is *Shiloh* in Genesis 49.10 and what is the peace *Shiloh* brings?
7. How do we know Jesus' throne will not be on earth? Why is this important to know? Explain.
8. Why do you think a few Gentiles were included in Jesus' genealogy?
9. In regard to God's preparation for a Messiah, what are some other facets of the wisdom He used to bring it all about?