

Message Notes January 10th, 2021
The Bible in One Year Week 2: The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
(Genesis 12:1-3; Psalm 8:1-5; Matthew 5:13-17)

• **A Quick Detour to Address this Present Moment**

- Before we get in to the second week of *the Bible in One Year* and talk about “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” I think we need to take a detour to talk about the events of this week in our nation. I’m not here to provide political commentary, because you can find plenty of that on your own.
 - I will say this: I hope and trust that there are parts of what happened on Wednesday that *all of us* can agree are wrong and ought to be condemned as actions of hatred and violence that are not the fruit of the Spirit and do not align with Christ. And for the other aspects of what happened on Wednesday that we can’t agree on, I hope that we have the maturity and the grace to be able to *agree to disagree* where needed.
- But here is what I want to focus on with you right now:
 - *Please don’t be deceived.* In the wake of this moment—and *all that has happened this year*—the Enemy wants to divide God’s people. The Enemy wants to fan the flames of chaos and discord. Where the Church is supposed to be the light of the world, a city on a hill, the Enemy wants us to be an amplifier of the world’s chaos. Where the followers of Christ are to be peacemakers who act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8), the Enemy wants us to follow the same script everybody else. Where God wants us to be a Spirit-empowered, countercultural community that reflects *Jesus* in this world, the Enemy wants us to be a mere echo of the ugliness in this world—rendering our witness powerless. The Enemy is content to watch us seek more and more knowledge in attempt to justify our rightness and other peoples’ wrongness, and seek less and less wisdom.
 - What I want to encourage us to do—what God’s Word encourages us to do—in this climate of chaos, *is seek wisdom. Seek God’s wisdom.* Slow down, walk away from the news, walk away from social media, walk away from your inner knee-jerk reactions and *seek the heart of Christ.*
 - This past week and next week, our Bible readings have us going through the first chapter of Proverbs. In that chapter, Wisdom is personified as a woman calling out to people in the busy streets: “*Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square; on top of the wall she cries out, at the city gate she makes her speech...*” (Prov. 1:20). In all of the noise, are we listening for the voice of Wisdom? Are we looking for the presence of Jesus?
 - James, the brother of Jesus, wrote powerfully about the wisdom of God; please listen carefully: “*Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*” (James 3:13-18)
 - Whatever your convictions and whatever your stance on the many issues of our day, I challenge all of us—myself included—to look at our activity online, our conversations, our contributions to the world, even our own thoughts, and ask: *am I engaging this world with the wisdom of heaven? Or is something else working in and through me?*
 - This should be obvious, but let me make it clear: there are people in this church whom you will disagree with. Right or wrong, good or bad, you will encounter people whose convictions and viewpoints frustrate you. But we are going to arrive in heaven one day to find people who voted differently from us, people who occupied different sectors of the political spectrum than us, people who thought differently than us about the problems our time. (*Not to mention people of every nation, tribe, and tongue!* Read Revelation 7:9.)

- But what brings us here together is not the fact that we all think the same thing about this world's problems and how they should be solved. What brings us together is the fact that above all of those affiliations, our allegiance is first and foremost to *King Jesus*. Higher than the flag of any nation and the banner of any political party, we all choose to raise the banner of Christ, the flag of his Kingdom! Because we know that the kingdoms of this world will come and go, but the Kingdom of our Lord is *forever*. *That's what unites us*. And if that doesn't, nothing else will.
- It's not that all viewpoints are equally right. We each have to be willing to submit our biases and viewpoints to Jesus, to his Word, and allow him to challenge and transform us with his truth. But no matter how differently we see certain issues at this time, we hold in common our love for Jesus and our desire to follow his Way in this world. Do not let the "Father of Lies" disrupt the work of God in us! Do not let the Enemy divide you from your brothers and sisters in Christ!
- By the grace of God, we commit to being the body of Christ together. By the grace of God, we commit to agree to disagree where we need to, to have hard conversations, speaking the truth in love where we must, and to move forward seeking *God's Kingdom* together. Amen? So, let's pause for a moment and pray together, and then we'll take a brief look at today's Scriptures...
- **The Torah**
 - ...Alright. Deep breaths. Now that we've got that out of the way, let's talk a little more about *Genesis*. We've begun our journey through the Bible in a year. I hope you've enjoyed the readings and reflections so far—a lot of people have told me they love the app and the commentary. It's good stuff and we're just getting started!
 - Last week, we began by laying some foundations and providing a few insights to help us read God's Word. And we talked about the very beginning in Genesis 1, with God's creation of all things and how He continues to bring order out of chaos and light in the darkness. If you missed it, I encourage you to go back and check it out.
 - Each day your readings take you through a passage from Psalms or Proverbs, a New Testament passage, and an Old Testament passage. But over these next three months between now and Easter, on Sundays we're just going to focus on the Old Testament portion, because it's leading us through a very important part of the Bible: **the Torah** (in Hebrew), or the Pentateuch. This Torah is **the first five books of the Bible**: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. We're also going to take a look at the book of Job, because it falls in that same general timeline. After that, we'll spend a while in the New Testament. And we'll keep alternating through the end of the year to work through the main parts of God's great Story.
 - (By the way, if you want a great overview of Genesis, the Torah, and the Old Testament, checkout the YouTube videos from The Bible Project we linked in today's Study Notes!)
 - Back to today: **Torah means "instruction."** Many times in the Bible, in the Old Testament and New Testament, you hear phrases like "The Law and the Prophets." Jesus said that the Great Commandment to love God and love others sums up "all the Law and the Prophets." When the Bible says, "The Law" it's usually the word "Torah," but because we hear the word "law" we think it just refers to all the rules and regulations listed in Leviticus. Actually, when Scriptures talk about "the Law" it's referring not just to these rules, but to the *whole Torah*.
 - "The Law," the Torah, is the whole narrative and teachings contained in the first five books of the Bible. For the Jewish people of Jesus' day, the Torah was the most important part of the Scriptures; everything else flowed out from this foundational part of the Scriptures.
- **God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**
 - That's why we're going to focus on these first five books of the Bible in the next few months: It's foundational to the whole story. And the chapters of Genesis we read last week and this week are foundational to the Torah. Here, after the ancient stories of God's Creation, the Fall of humanity, Cain killing his brother Abel, the flooding of the world, and the tower of Babel in Genesis 1-11, we're introduced to these characters, Abram and Sarai (whose names are eventually changed to Abraham and Sarah), and their descendants, Isaac, then Jacob. For the rest of the Bible, God often introduces Himself as "*The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*." **We who are in Christ also worship and walk with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.**

- If you follow the story of Genesis 12 through the end, you will see that there are a lot of messy moments. This is a family that knows plenty of imperfection, human mistakes, sin, and dysfunction. Not only that, but they encounter plenty of messiness in the world: enemies, battles, sin, brokenness, judgement and deception. By His grace, God chooses to use them in spite of their flaws and walk with them in the journey of life.
- The journey of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob mirrors our journey: it's not a linear path of gradual progress—it's a roller-coaster of ups and downs and everything in between, yet still overshadowed by the grace and the faithfulness of God. Can you relate?
 - You know, Abraham was 75 years old when God came to him to make a covenant, telling him he would be blessed and multiply to have descendants more numerous than the stars of the sky. But he and Sarah were childless! Abraham followed God's invitation and left home to journey wherever God would lead him: but he and Sarah waited *25 more years* until God finally fulfilled that word to them and miraculously gave Sarah a son, Isaac, in their old age. And from there, the path doesn't get any easier for their family.
 - **The story of this covenant family, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is full of battles and blessings.** It reminds us that God is powerful and mysterious beyond our comprehension, and God is also personal and faithful beyond our imagination. Walking in the Blessing of God doesn't mean your life will be free from trials and struggles: in fact, you might at times experience even more testing because of it. But it's a good journey to walk with God.
- **Blessing**
 - Today, I just want to focus on this common thread from the creation story through the stories of Abraham and his descendants: *blessing*. In Genesis 1, each day that God created something, God says that it is *good*. But when God creates living creatures—in the seas, in the skies, and in the lands—God *blesses* them and says, “be fruitful and multiply.” And He does the same thing for humanity, God *blesses* humanity in a special way. God's blessing on humanity and creation means flourishing, thriving, and goodness.
 - **Blessing happens in the context of relationship: we were created to live in harmony with God** and to live in God's blessing. But when that relationship breaks, so does that blessing. And yet, the story of Genesis and the Bible shows that God is continually moving, in spite of our rebellion, to bring us and creation *back* into that place of blessing. God is not out to *get us*, God is out to *bless us*—even though we bring on curses, God's desire is to *bless*. After the great flood, God reaffirmed the blessing to Noah. Evil continued to spread.
 - The next step in the path of redemption began in an unlikely way, with an unlikely person: God formed a relationship, a covenant with this obscure person, Abraham. Imagine the God of the universe, the God of Genesis 1, saying things like this to you: *I will bless you; all the nations of the earth will be blessed through you; I will be with you; do not be afraid, I am your shield.* Imagine the God of the universe coming to you and saying, *I will bless you, I want you to walk with me.* These are all things that God said to Abraham, and his son Isaac, and his son Jacob.
 - God's desire from the beginning was to be in relationship with His creation and to bless them. God's plan to save the world that had spiraled into the darkness of rebellion was to walk with a special family, who would multiply, and *ultimately be a blessing to all the world*. They would be a people who walked with God, and through them would come the King and Savior.
 - And because of that King, the promise and blessing God gave to Abraham extends to us, by grace. Our God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We are a part of that “city on a hill,” the light of the world, the salt of the earth—blessed by God to bless the world. To restore, to transform, to reconcile the relationship that was broken.
 - Ephesians 1:3 says, “*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*” **Because we are in Christ, we are part of the promise.** And that is the greatest blessing: to know and walk with God. You are blessed. By grace, through faith, in Christ, *you are blessed*. So, walk in the blessing, walk with God—like Adam and Eve before the fall, like Enoch, like Noah, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Walk with God. Amen.