

God's Salvation Plan

SCOTT HOEZEE

Early in the Bible, God sends a flood to cleanse and punish a world that had deviated hugely from God's plans; but when the flood waters cleared, God realized that a flood like that was never going to do the trick in setting things to right again. So he put a rainbow in the sky to say: Never again. Well, if the flood was a sign of God's grief over sin, God decided that from then on out his response would be one, not of grief, but of grace. He would save his creation and his chosen people within it. Today on *Groundwork*, as we continue to look at some of the basic teachings of Christianity, we will consider the work of God unto salvation. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this is now our third program of a series we have been calling basic Christianity. On the first episode, we thought about the nature of God—how we know God through revelation, and then finally God as Creator and God is triune—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That was the first program; and then on the last program we looked at people—human beings—and we also noted we ruined and spoiled God's creation by falling into sin.

DAVE BAST

Right; and we touched again on that most basic of stories in Genesis Chapter 3; the story of the Fall, where human beings, our first parents, Adam and Eve, both equally involved in this, decided to choose their way instead of God's way. They turned toward self interest instead of obedience; and as a result everything was changed, everything was spoiled in one way or another; and humans, too, including each and every one of us, is born with that basic selfish or sinful disposition. So, none of us is innocent anymore. None of us is perfect. None of us can be good on our own. We are good as God created us. We are still valuable. We are still in his image, but we are deeply flawed; and yet, in that very story of the Fall in Genesis 3, there is also the first hint of a promise of salvation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so we get this. Immediately the dust of that first sin had barely settled, and God addresses the serpent, and that was the instrument of the devil to tempt Adam and Eve, of course. So, God addresses that serpent and says:

¹⁴Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals. You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.

DAVE BAST

So, that is what we call, to use a technical term, the *protoevangelium*, the initial announcement of the Gospel; the Good News that one day a child of the woman would be born who would destroy the power of the evil one; and of course, we know that is where the whole story is going to head; but meanwhile in Genesis there

are these other things that happen in those first few chapters. You mentioned, Scott, in the intro to this program, the flood, where God sort of wipes out sin and evil except for righteous Noah; but that doesn't really work because Noah's sinful himself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So as soon as he gets off the boat, you know, they were back at it with drunkenness and all sorts of things. So, really, it is Genesis 12 where the great story of salvation begins.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, God has promised it now. We know that God is intent on saving us, and in the meantime the story of the flood and the rainbow and God turning toward grace; and so now, God has to start someplace, and he starts with Abram.

DAVE BAST

So we read this in Genesis Chapter 12: ¹The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ²I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing."

SCOTT HOEZEE

³"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

So, we've got... As you say, Dave, we are out in the middle of nowhere; kind of out in the middle of Ur of the Chaldees; we are in the middle of Mesopotamia, and a person we have never heard of before appears out of nowhere in Genesis 12:1; and God is betting the farm on this guy. God is investing everything in this one man, who we will find out soon enough, is really old, and so is his wife; and they have never been able to have children, and yet God says: You look like a good candidate to build a nation out of; and someday the nation that is going to come from you will be a blessing to the whole earth. The whole earth will be saved through the nation I will build through you. So, it is an unlikely prospect right from the get-go, but that is kind of God for you.

DAVE BAST

Right; and there are two basic promises here that essentially the whole rest of the story of the Bible is going to be a development on these two promises. God promises him first descendents, and initially a son through whom these descendents will come; and then a land that will belong to Abraham and his posterity forever and ever and ever. They will never lose it; so it is the outworking of those promises to Abraham that initially starts the story of the Bible that will point toward the people of Israel; and we want to look at that later in this program, but first I think it is important to draw attention to the fact that God's purpose in choosing Abraham was never just for Abraham...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Or even just for his children.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Very important point. So, sometimes in war military strategists and generals will talk about forming a beachhead; and that is sort of...you take a little bit of ground so that eventually you can take all the ground; and that is sort of what it is. Israel will be God's beachhead—Israel will be God's starting point—you know, the nation that will come from Abram's descendents eventually. So, from that starting point, from that nation,

then God is going to... That will be like the launching pad, to use a different image, the launching pad from which salvation will go out to the whole world. Ultimately, of course, we know that that is going to come through the Savior and through Jesus; but in the meanwhile, the other really important thing is that this is a covenant relationship ultimately. You don't see that so much here in the verses we just read from Genesis 12, but other verses will say: Look, I am going to make a bargain with you, Abram (Abraham eventually). I am going to make a covenant with you. A covenant involves two parties. Both sides have to be faithful for it to work, but God promises that is how it is going to go.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and so, Abraham is invited to step out on faith, to head to this destination that is not made known to him immediately; and again, if you track the story carefully in the book of Genesis, he kind of has an intermediate stopping point at a place called Haran, which is today near northern Iraq—southern Turkey; and then eventually he swings...takes a left turn and heads west to Palestine—to Canaan—the land of Canaan, which will be the Promised Land; but in and through it all, as Abraham by faith is sort of stepping out and into the future God has promised him, there is that bottom-line promise that God has also given here in Genesis 12:3: Through you I will bless all the families of the world—all people on earth. So it is always, just as you say, a beachhead, this covenant that he makes first with Abraham and then with his physical descendants. God's purpose from the very beginning has been to be a universal savior, a universal blessing of the whole world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is all founded on that covenant—on that relationship that God founded first with Abraham and then would continue with Israel. God says: I will be faithful, you be faithful, and if we are both faithful we will change the world, but it never quite worked out from the human side; and so we will see coming up next how God responded to that.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today, in this third of a five-part series on basic Christianity, we are really tracing the story of salvation through the Bible—the story of grace—the story of God's plan to redeem fallen human beings, and ultimately the whole creation—the whole universe—as he steps out in mission, and begins with the call of this one man, Abraham, and his wife and household, and promising him a child and a nation someday to come from him, and a land where they can live; and that brings us to the story, really, of Israel.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so it starts small with Isaac, but then we move on to Jacob and Esau, and then we move on to Jacob's sons, one of whom is Joseph; and we remember the story from Genesis. The whole tribe ends up in Egypt. There is a famine, but Joseph had risen to prominence; so ultimately, as the book of Exodus opens, Abraham's descendants are in Egypt, and the book of Exodus begins with good news and bad news. The good news is, guess what? They are a nation. In fact, the Pharaoh of Egypt looks at the Israelites who are living there, and they have been enslaved by now, but he sees them as so large that they are a threat; because he uses the Hebrew word *am*, which is the word for nation, for the first time. It is like, wow, God started with just this childless senior citizen couple and it worked. They are a nation now. That is the good news. The bad news is, they are in slavery and they cannot get out.

DAVE BAST

Right; so you could say, I guess, Israel's spiritual fuel tank is on empty as Exodus opens. They are being hounded, persecuted. Pharaoh has forgotten all about Joseph and what he did to rescue Egypt in a time of crisis. Now something like 400 years have passed and there is a new Pharaoh who is ordering that all male Hebrew babies be drowned at birth in the Nile. He wants to exterminate them. Not for the last time would history see an attempt to exterminate the Jewish people. So, that is how Exodus opens...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And God seems absent.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and yet, we know the story, how he called Moses and sent Moses back: Let My people go; and by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm he delivers Israel through the plagues, through the Red Sea waters, into the wilderness years. He meets them at Sinai, makes a covenant, shows them how he wants to be worshipped, and they build a tabernacle according to the plan that God reveals; and something wonderful happens at the end of the book of Exodus with the tabernacle.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; this is the very end: Exodus 40: ³⁴Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁵Moses couldn't enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

So, Dave, if Israel's spiritual fuel tank had been on empty in Exodus 1, it is on overfull by Exodus 40. God has remembered his people; he wasn't absent after all; and now he has filled their tabernacle with his glory, which is a sign that God is making his home with these people. Again, this is going to be the future of all humanity—God living with us again the way he had lived close with Adam and Eve in the garden. That is the goal, and Israel is the sneak preview.

DAVE BAST

Right; and we should also maybe point out that that tabernacle contained an ark, a special box that God directed them to build; and on top of the ark was a lid that was known in our popular English translation as the Mercy Seat. So the way God could dwell with people, even though they were fallen and sinful, was by the sacrifice that he directed through the priests of the old covenant to apply that blood on the Day of Atonement to the Mercy Seat, and thus God had made a way; and again, this is all going to picture the ultimate fulfillment of these things—God's ultimate presence with his people, and his ultimate way of dealing with their sin.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And eventually that tabernacle would get replaced by a glorious Temple in Jerusalem built by David's son, Solomon; the first of two major kings of Israel...

DAVE BAST

And the same thing, incidentally, what happened; his glory would fill it, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right; and so that was God's home on earth; but after Solomon dies, things in Israel go downhill quite quickly. The nation splits, for one thing, but there are a lot of faithless kings, and eventually...we talked about that covenant relationship...Israel had to hold up their end of the bargain, and they didn't, and a holy God eventually decided: These people had become so unholy, I cannot stay here anymore. And so, in Ezekiel 10, we get the tape of Exodus 40 played in reverse.

DAVE BAST

Right; it reads like this: ¹⁸Then the glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold of the Temple and stopped above the cherubim. ¹⁹While I watched, (this is Ezekiel speaking) the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground; and as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the Lord's House, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

Yes, it is a haunting, chilling scene. This is taking place as the exile is unfolding.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God is leaving.

DAVE BAST

Yes; he is leaving the Temple, where he promised his name would dwell. They have been booted out of the Promised Land, which he said would be theirs in perpetuity; but it was all about their failure to keep covenant with him. God had promised: I will be your God. I have delivered you from slavery. You need to be my people. You need to live in such a way that the nations around can see my glory in your lives. I mean, ultimately remember that initial promise: All the nations will be blessed. So, Israel's calling was to be a blessing to the nations, and instead they kind of turned inward, got selfish, became idolatrous and disobedient.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And things fell apart; and then God started sending the prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Micah, Malachi...all the rest; and God kept saying: But it is not over yet; it is not over yet; I am going to find a way to keep this covenant; and you start to wonder: Well, how will he do that? Well, there was a hint. Rolling back now to Genesis; and in Genesis 15, some of us remember this very strange scene with Abraham. Abraham kind of goes into a mystical vision sleep one night, and here is what we read in Genesis 15: ⁹So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat, and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a pigeon. ¹⁰Abraham brought all of these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other. ¹⁷And when the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces; ¹⁸and on that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram. So, what is that all about?

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is a great and weird story. It is what is called in scripture: Cutting a covenant; and actually it was a common practice in the ancient world, not just among Abraham and the Hebrews. The whole idea was the symbolism of cutting these animals in two and arranging them in a line so that they created a path, and then the two parties to the covenant, each of whom had to make promises...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Would pass through there as if to say: Hey, if I don't keep my promise to you, let me be cut like these animals; or let me be completely destroyed. I will...you know; death is the penalty for breaking the covenant.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so, God made that promise, too; and when the covenant does fail and things do fall apart, somebody is going to have to pay—somebody is going to have to die; but how could God die? How can this covenant, where both a god and a human being said that they would die if it didn't... How is that going to happen? Well, of course, God did figure out a way to keep the covenant. God did figure out a way in his own self to take the death of the human part of the covenant and the divine part of the covenant into himself. We know what that is, but we will think about that next.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

Scott, you just read that wonderful story in Genesis 15 of the cutting of the covenant. The really interesting thing to me is...so, both parties are supposed to walk through this, but as you understand the story and read the details, Abram is just sitting there...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; yes.

DAVE BAST

He is just watching.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; only God went through.

DAVE BAST

And a smoking firepot and a torch passed through these animals down the lane; in other words, a pillar of fire—a pillar—a cloud. That is going to be evocative of the presence of God; as though God is saying: You know what? I will keep my end of the deal, and I will keep yours, too, for you because I know you aren't going to be able to do it.

So, the question is, how did this happen; and I think we, all of us, can anticipate the answer that would come in the New Testament.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and here is how it begins. So, I am just going to read two passages, and we will say where they are from in a minute, but I think most will recognize it.

Luke 1:30³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. ³¹You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David; ³³and he will reign over Jacob's descendents forever. His kingdom will never end.

DAVE BAST

Yes; a wonderful promise of the Son of the Most High; and then here is another passage, also from the opening chapter of one of the Gospels. This time the angel appears to Joseph in a dream and said, Matthew 1:20b^{20b}"Joseph, son of David; don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. ²²And all of this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. ²³"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel," which means God with us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, those are, of course, from Luke 1, Matthew 1, and it is the answer to the question: How is God going to do that thing he promised way back in Genesis 15; to take both the human part and the divine part of this covenant; and he will die to make it right if need be? Well, Jesus is the answer. God—the Son of God—becomes human. He is made flesh. The Word was made flesh, and we have seen his glory; that is from John 1; and so now all of the glory of God that used to dwell in the Temple and the tabernacle, but that left, as Ezekiel saw it; now it has returned, and John's Gospel makes a big deal of the Temple imagery and Jesus' body as the Temple, but all the glory of God has now returned to earth in the person of Jesus, and what he is going to do is going to bring that salvation that God promised way back in Genesis 3, in the garden, and reaffirmed with Abraham in Genesis 12.

DAVE BAST

Right; and in fact, John also connects Jesus to the tabernacle, because in that famous verse, John 1:14, the Word became flesh and literally pitched his tent among us, is the word John uses. So, there again, we can see

that from the standpoint of the Gospel message of the New Testament, that tabernacle and that Temple filled with God's presence—filled with God's glory—the Mercy Seat in it, where the blood of the atoning sacrifice was applied. All of that points toward a fulfillment in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior of the world, and the one whose death on the cross would actually pay for sin and make access to God's salvation possible.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, I was at a conference not long ago, and there was a lecture being given by a pretty well-known—decently known—scholar; an educated man, in any event; and at one point during his lecture he said: You know, I have come to realize just recently that the whole Bible tells just one story; and I was sitting there thinking: You didn't know that? I mean, I have known that since I was in Ada Christian School. Of course it tells one story. You have got to go back to Genesis 3, to the call of Abraham, and that funny story we read earlier from Genesis 15, that cutting of the covenant, it all...that is why Jesus makes sense. All of those threads come together in Christ.

DAVE BAST

Right; I will keep my end of the covenant and I will keep yours, too, because you won't be able to. So he becomes one of us; and really, in doing so, he reveals to us kind of the upside-down magic of God's grace, of God's salvation. I think, you know, in connection with those Christmas passages that we read, or those from Matthew 1 and Luke 1; a little poem by G. K. Chesterton: They all were seeking for a king to slay their foes and raise them high. He came a little baby thing that made a mother cry. That is the upside-downness of God's coming into the world. He comes in weakness and humility, not in power and, you know, with tanks.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God somehow knows that through his death, paradoxically...it won't be through Jesus' strength or power, but through his weakness and humiliation and death that death will be unmade.

DAVE BAST

Yes; he came not to be served, as he said, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many; that is Mark 10:45; and it is the secret of the Gospel—it is the secret, really, of the Church's life, because if there is one thing we are called to be and do, it is to follow the Jesus way; and if you look at Christian history, Church history, we have always done badly when we have had real power—real worldly power. We do much better when we are like Jesus: Humble, out of power apparently, and willing to suffer on behalf of the plan and purpose of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; as many thinkers have said, the disciples should not try to be wiser than the master. Jesus came as a humble servant of all, and the Church exists that way today. We are not out here to grab political power or to force people to do anything. We are here also, to be the servants of the Christ who, precisely by being weak—precisely by being one of us—fulfilled all those promises of God. He was the one would crush the serpent's head, to go back to Genesis 3, in the earlier part of this program; and the Devil would try to get him, but never could; and through sacrifice, through humility, through that little child born and laid in a donkey's feed bunk, salvation has actually come. So those are...and this is a basic Christianity series...those are the two big themes of all of scripture: Creation, but now also redemption.

DAVE BAST

And God is the one who does both. Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like us to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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