

taking action!

small group material



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Labourers

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE I • Abraham

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Genesis 12

The Bible has many books, a lot of chapters, and an insane amount of pages, yet tells one unified story: God's great plan of salvation and redemption. The story begins in Genesis, comes to a climax in Jesus Christ and looks forward to resolution when He returns.

As one story it has many themes but a single plot. Here it is:

The expansion of the kingdom of God in this world and the proclamation of its king (Jesus) over and against the powers of evil that oppose the purposes, plans and reign of God.

If you tune into a TV drama in the middle of the season you both expect and need one of those 30-second reviews at the beginning to catch you up on what happened "previously on" 24 or *LOST*, or whatever. That review cuts out the other elements of the story and simply traces the plot. Once you're caught up, you can engage in the story.

Reviewing the plot of Scripture is what this 'Mission Impossible' series is about. Once caught, your group should see much better how they can engage in the story and play a role in God's global plan of redemption. Week One begins in Genesis, tracing the plot from its introduction.

Adam and Eve (Genesis 1-11)

Through the account of Adam and Eve, we learn that humankind is a unique creation. In being made in God's image we have an unusual capacity: we rolled off the assembly line with the option of free will. But with this capacity comes a liability: the power to sin, to make the alternate choice. The stage is set, then, and all the story needs is an antagonist. Sure enough, he slithers in on cue.

The appearance of Satan allows us to see that the origin of evil in the Garden is neither Adam or Eve, but rather a pre-existing cosmic struggle. With the sin of Adam and Eve, that struggle will bleed through into God's perfect creation. Though there are far reaching consequences to this sin, God immediately intervenes in order to preserve and expand His kingdom. The next chapters detail that salvage operation.

Salvage Operations (Genesis 1-11)

Though Adam and Eve fail, hope springs up through a godly son named Abel. But hope doesn't live long. In fact, hope is brutally murdered out in a field by his brother Cain, and the conflict continues to escalate. By only the sixth chapter of Genesis, we encounter God's evaluation of man, and it sounds a lot like a eulogy: "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become...The LORD was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain" (Genesis 6:5-6).

What's the Big Idea?

The Scripture tells a unified story with a single plot: The expansion of the kingdom of God in this world and the proclamation of its king (Jesus), over and against the powers of evil that oppose the purposes, plans and reign of God. Genesis 11 and 12 capture this struggle. In Genesis 11, Satan seeks to subvert God's Kingdom. Genesis 12 is God's response.

This is the first of a five-part study that will trace the story line of Scripture.

What's the Problem?

Man is utterly fallen and in need of redemption but cannot rescue himself. All human attempts are subject to corruption, energized by Satan and deteriorate into idolatry and self deification.





With sin having spread throughout the body of humanity, the only hope lies in an emergency operation: find an appendage where the cancer hasn't fully spread and amputate the rest. And so, Noah, a righteous man is found and he and his family are preserved from the flood. God starts rebuilding His kingdom, beginning with Noah.

While the immediate threat of evil is drowned in the flood, sin persists and proliferates through the descendants of Noah. In Genesis 11, sin once again coalesces, pools and stagnates – this time in the city of Babel. God's assessment of Babel's danger to the expansion of His kingdom is as follows: "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them"(11:6). So God splinters the human language at Babel and while sin will continue to spread, this merciful intervention dilutes its potency.

In these first chapters of Genesis, the action comes at us like the opening of a James Bond movie, and it's about to settle down to the pace of life. The plot, if you missed it, is that God is seeking to establish His kingdom and reign on earth. The enemy at first is Satan with his host of dark spiritual forces, but he is quickly joined by the majority of humanity who find greater pleasure in sin than in serving and loving God. However, in Genesis 12, God is going to unveil a new means by which He will establish and spread His kingdom in the world: a social experiment called Israel which will occupy the rest of the Old Testament.

Genesis 12

In the same way God used Noah to "start again" He singles out Abraham. He will grow this man (through his children and children's children) into a godly nation (Israel) and through it, God will advance and expand His kingdom on earth.

God makes three promises to Abraham. First, He will make Abraham into a great nation. Second, He will make Abraham's name great (God will bless Israel, give Israel favor, etc). Third, all of the nations in the world will be blessed through Abraham. (This third promise will see its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. He will come to the world through Israel and bless all nations of the world.)

If you locate Israel on a map, you'll notice it is a tiny freeway connecting two landmasses (Africa and Eurasia). This is no accident. God places Israel in the center of the known world so that they might be a light to the nations. Israel was God's missionary outreach, a gospel tract plunked down in the center of the world.

They were to demonstrate the glory of life lived under God's rule. But God's blessing of Israel was never meant to be an end in itself; they were blessed in order to be a blessing to other nations. They had a starring role, but the plot was not just about them.

It is interesting that with both Noah and Abraham, God seeks to create a new people for Himself from a single man. Though godly men, Noah and Abraham are still fallen men, and the seed of neither can ultimately produce a godly nation – if there's dirt in the ingredients, there will be dirt in the meal.

Yet these utopian templates do, as they were meant to, foreshadow God's final solution. In Christ, we have the ultimate Noah and Abraham. In fact, we have a completely new Adam, and from Him will spring "a chosen people, a royal priesthood" and "a holy nation"(1 Peter 2:9).

But in Genesis 12, Israel does not exist yet, the messiah has not come to Israel yet and the nations of the world have yet to be blessed through that Messiah. There is only Abraham and the promise that God will bring all of this to pass.

What's Our Response?

In understanding the plot of the Bible hopefully three responses will emerge:

1. *Seeing Jesus as the hero of the story.* The Bible tells one unified story of redemption with Jesus at the center of it.

Where's the Hero in this study? Twice, God creates a new people for Himself through the seed of a godly individual – first through Noah, then through Abraham. But as fallen individuals, the seed of neither could produce a godly nation. They do, however, point to our need for such a hero. And from Christ, will spring "a chosen people, a royal priesthood" and "a holy nation"(1 Peter 2:9).

2. *Seeking and saving the Lost.* In understanding the plot of Scripture and what God is doing in history, your group should see more clearly how they can engage and participate in the story through evangelism and missions.

3. *Living by Faith.* As we are still in the midst of the redemption story and not at the end, we live by faith. Trusting in God's promises, living in light of them and always looking toward their ultimate fulfillment at the conclusion of the story, when Christ returns.

What Are the Questions?

Genesis 12

LAUNCH

While the Bible contains many books and themes, it tells one story. What would you say the plot of the story is? The main characters? The antagonist? The hero?

EXPLORE

Genesis 1-12 gives us a God's-eye view of the cosmic struggle. As God seeks to expand His Kingdom, Satan looks to corrupt it; and as Satan corrupts it, God's redemptive plan always finds a way. In Genesis 11, Satan will storm the walls of God's Kingdom. Genesis 12 is God's response.

Read Genesis 11:1-9.

1. What conditions made it favorable for the different peoples to unite for this wicked project? Do you think we're at a point in history when the world could be united in some sense for a similar purpose? Why?
2. What do the following verses tell you about God's ultimate purposes in human history?
Isaiah 12:4
Psalm 66:1-4
Romans 1:5
3. What was inherently sinful about the plan to build the tower of Babel?
4. What would have been the outcome if they were successful in building the tower? How do you see evil working in similar ways today?
5. What do you learn about Satan's tactics, strategies and objectives from this incident?
6. Was God's judgment done in anger? Mercy? Justice? Or some combination of these?
7. Skim through the first 10 chapters of Genesis and record the major offensives and counter-offensives that have already taken place in this cosmic struggle.

God's Kingdom Strikes Back. Read Genesis 12:1-9.

8. In verses 1-3, how does God's plan accomplish similar objectives to Satan's plan at Babel? What's different?
9. What are the three promises God makes to Abraham.
10. How will the fulfillment of these promises accomplish God's objectives in His global plan of redemption?
11. From your knowledge of the Bible, how did these promises come to pass? Or did they?
12. By faith Abraham leaves his home believing that God will fulfill His promises. Why is the dynamic of faith such an important part of how God builds His kingdom?
13. If you were God, how would you have tried to draw mankind to yourself? How might you attempt it today?
14. How does the location of Israel itself shed light on how God would make His name known through Israel?
15. Describe in your own words God's plan to use Israel to fulfill His global plan of redemption?

APPLY

16. As you understand the plot of history, what role are we, as followers of Christ, to play in expanding God's kingdom? What role do you think God wants you to play in this present chapter of His story?
17. Abraham lived by faith in the three promises made by God. How do you live by faith? What are the promises of God to which you cling and order your life?
18. Christ was the ultimate fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham. What advantage do we have in knowing that, in walking by faith *after* His coming?
19. With Noah and Abraham, God sought to create a new people for Himself from a single person. Why does it not succeed? But what ultimate redemptive solution does this point to?

What Are the Answers?

1. They all spoke the same language. Discuss historical and current similarities/differences.
2. These verses describe God's purpose to make His name known on earth. God is drawing men and woman from every tribe and nation to worship Him.
3. Their plan was to glorify themselves and make their own name known: "Let us make a name for ourselves."
4. Allow the group to discuss.
5. To overthrow God, steal worship, corrupt man, empower pride...
6. All are a part of God's judgment, but make sure they see God's mercy in keeping mankind from corruption by disbursing them.
7. Skim the notes. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood.
8. Both would bring together a nation that would be known throughout the world. But God does not unite all nations into one.
9. Make his name great. Make him into a nation. Bless the world through him.
10. God's plan is to single out a godly nation that will be a witness for Him to the other nations of the world.
11. They became a nation. God made Israel's name great, and the world was blessed through Christ who, of course, came through Israel.
12. God is glorified through faith. He becomes the "doer" as we access His power and provisions by faith.
13. Allow the group to discuss.
14. It was on the thruway between two continents where many would travel, making Israel "a light on a hill."
15. Allow the group to summarize what they've learned in the lesson.
16. Like Israel we are to be a witness to others and take the gospel to the nations.
17. You want the group to see how they live by faith in God's promises: promises like our salvation, forgiveness, God's children, etc.
18. Discuss. Clearly there is a benefit.
19. See the last three paragraphs of the notes.

Memorize

Have the group read Genesis all the way through, taking note of the rivalry between God's kingdom and Satan's plans to destroy and corrupt His kingdom.