

Knowing The Message

Week 2 - God Chooses Witnesses (6/8)

God chooses to work through people and groups who serve as his messengers and witnesses. These witnesses carry God's invitation for humanity to be reconciled to God; it is a message of love and salvation. When God chooses a person or nation, he binds himself to them in a covenantal relationship involving both promises and responsibilities.

Following the scattering of nations in the tower of Babel (Gen 11), God chose a man named Abram to be his special messenger to "all nations." God promises to make Abram a great nation and through him to bless all the nations of the earth. Abram is an unlikely choice because at the time that God selects him Abram is elderly, childless, and a homeless wanderer. Abram believes God and demonstrates faith in God by accepting God's word, despite his age and childlessness. God changes Abram's name to Abraham (father of many nations), confirms his promise three times and blesses Abram and his wife Sara with a child. (Gen 12:1f; 15:1f; 17:1f)

Abraham's son, Isaac, has two sons, Jacob and Esau. God chooses the younger son, Jacob, to carry the promise, changing his name to Israel. Israel (Jacob) has twelve sons who become the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. A famine forces Israel and his twelve sons to migrate to Egypt (Gen 46:5f) where God has placed one of the sons, Joseph, in charge of the distribution of food for Pharaoh. In Egypt the Israelites grew into a large group.

A new Pharaoh takes the throne in Egypt who does not trust the Israelites and forces them into slavery. (Ex 1:1f) But God raises up a leader for his chosen people, Moses, who leads the people out of Egypt into the desert where God cares for them. (Ex 6:1-11; 13:17-31)

Through Moses, God forms the Israelites into a nation with the special task of being a witness to the surrounding nations concerning God and his will for his creation. To help this new nation fulfill their role as a witness, God blesses them with laws (Ten Commandments) emphasizing justice, morality, and holiness. God also honors them by living among them. They were a nation ruled by God, different from other nations. Even their king was to be different from other kings. He was to rely on God rather than on political treaties, money, power, or armies to rule and protect. (Ex 19:3-6; Deut 4:5-8; 5, 7, 15-18)

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Discussion

- The context of God's selection of Abraham as a witness begins with the scattering to the nations at Babel (Gen 11). What is the purpose of Abraham's role to the "nations"?
- Instead of choosing a human witness, what other approaches could God have used to communicate with his creation?
- What does God's choice of using people as his vehicle for his message tell us about God?
- How would you summarize this story to someone in 5 minutes. What are the most important features?
- What kind of person did God choose to carry the message? What is surprising about his choice?
- What values does God demonstrate in his selection of Abraham?
- Based on the promises to Abraham, what is God's desire for man and woman?
- When did Israel become a "nation"?
- What kind of people did God choose to be "his nation"? What is surprising about this choice? What does this tell us about God?
- Based on the type of laws God gave Israel, what kind of nation did God ask Israel to be? What are God's greatest concerns for his people?
- What do we learn about God's character from how he deals with his creation?
- What do we learn about the kind of people, nations, community God desires?
- Based upon the kind of nation God asked Israel to be, what is the message that God was sending to the other "nations" through his witness nation?
- In what ways do you see yourself as a "witness" for God
- What are the parallels between God's selection of Israel as a witness nation and God's selection of the church as his witness community?
- What does your life communicate to the people around you? What would they conclude about God based on watching you?
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