

From False Gods to Following God

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[0 : 00] What a blessing. What a blessing. I'll invite you to turn to Genesis chapter 12.

! We'll take a brief look at a few things in Genesis 11.! And I want to introduce you to the text this morning.

We'll read it again and do some more with it, obviously. But let's begin in chapter 11 with verse 27. Now these are the records of the generations of Terah.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth.

That is, in Ur of the Chaldeans. Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah.

[1 : 21] Sarai was barren. She had no child. Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife.

And they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan. And they went as far as Haran and settled there.

The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran. Now the Lord said to Abram, Go forth from your country and from your relatives and from your father's house to the land which I will show you.

And I will make you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great. And so you shall be a blessing.

And I will bless those who bless you. And the one who curses you, I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

[2 : 27] And so as we come to this particular section in Scripture, we're seeing the Bible make a thematic shift and very important change.

And we're going to talk more about that and outline what's happening here in Abram's life because now a single individual becomes the focus of God's grace rather than a group of people or necessarily a line of people.

We have it moving down into and focusing on one man. And I want to begin this morning with this. And I want to ask you, who do you think said this?

There were two pervasive ways in which humanity... No, that's not it. Wait a minute. Hold on. How did that get up there? Let's try it again.

Wow. Hold on, guys. Let's look back. Is there something else? I should have a lot before that. Oh, my goodness.

[3 : 32] That one slide. Where's Suzanne? Where's my wife? She's the purveyor of the slide thing. All right. Well, I'll just read it to you and then we'll get to that one. She had added it later, so maybe it just didn't get loaded up.

Technical stuff. That's okay. Hang with me. It's all good. Let me read this to you and then I'll ask you, what do you think? Those powers that do not abide by God and who choose to follow evil are the main source of all the current problems of mankind.

All right. Listen to that again. Those powers that do not abide by God and who choose to follow evil are the main source of all the current problems of mankind.

That was said in August of 2006 by Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

And when I read that, it shocked me. Now, look, I don't know Ahmadinejad's concept of God.

[4 : 48] It's probably the Islamic God, right? Nevertheless, what I do know is he did not invent this wisdom. The God of Genesis teaches what that man said.

Listen to it again. Those powers that do not abide by God and who choose to follow evil are the main source of all the current problems of mankind. That's right. That's absolutely true. And if he is a pagan and an idol worshiper, he is speaking the wisdom of God without probably knowing it. Now, as we survey the first 11 chapters of the Bible, we can clearly see the despicable history of mankind's repeated failure to abide by God, to follow the Lord, to subscribe to God's wisdom, and then the consequent compounding evil following in the wake of that disobedience. Don't we have a record of that? But for 11 chapters, we've seen this going on in the lives of different people. And yet, we've also seen God focus his attention on one little line of people that have remained faithful to the truth of the Lord, following in the wisdom of God and trusting God. And we give God all the glory for that, don't we? Not mankind. Because left to themselves, that line of people would also have fallen away in their sin and selfishness.

[6 : 19] Now, we can bring in what I was going to pull up earlier. There were two pervasive ways in which humanity filled the void when they turned away from God and his ways after the flood.

Now, we could make a list of things that are going on, but let's focus on these two pervasive and mainstreamed ways. The first was by turning to each other. That is, they turned to kings and kingdoms and societies.

We've seen that recorded for us in Scripture. And then by creating false religion. Gods, goddesses, priests, and temples. And we're going to look at that in more specific terms today.

People then looked to each other. They turned in. They looked to their own ingenuity, their own imaginations, and to creation itself.

So they didn't just stay within themselves. They then turned outward from each other and began to worship and serve the creature rather than the creator. Romans 1. Remember that? And all of this took place in replacement of God and his truth and his wisdom in their lives.

[7 : 31] And in doing so, in making that trade, here's what happened. This is the consequence of what we've been talking about. They cursed themselves to be like their false gods.

Now friends, remember there's a principle in Scripture we have repeatedly taught. Not just on Sunday mornings lately in Genesis, but on Wednesday night as we've talked about this.

You will become like what you worship. You will become like your teacher. So whatever it is or whomever it is that you're looking to, to define you and help you establish your values in life, to help you establish your priorities, whatever it is that you give yourself to, this is what will come to define you.

This is what you'll be loyal to. And you'll increasingly look like what it is that you're bowing to in your heart. What you're learning to trust in.

Now I need to head nods here. Does that make sense to you? Okay. That's the wisdom of Scripture. When we turn away from the object of our faith, because that was a faith response that I just described, when we turn away from God as the object of that faith, that trust, that loyalty, that worship, we turn away from God.

[8 : 52] Because the Lord made us worshipers, what are we going to do? Fill the void with something to worship. We have to worship every day. We do it every day. The question that we deal with is, what are we giving our worship to or to whom?

And that's what we're facing as we look at this today. Especially as God begins to work in the life of this man, Abram. What is that all about?

Now look, long before Genesis was written by Moses, and perhaps within one or two generations of the flood, people began to concoct their own versions of their origins.

Remember, you turn away from the Lord, you've got to fill the void with something. And so where's our arch enemy? He's standing right there ready to give you whatever you need to fill the void with falsehood.

Right? And that's exactly what's happened in their lives. These falsehoods, these misrepresentations of God's actual dealings with humanity, found expression and an ongoing life of their own in the lives of their own.

[9 : 58] In the lives of these people and in the versions of our origins. False teaching, false doctrine about our origins. These misrepresentations of God's actual dealings with humanity, finding these expressions, began then to develop as the false religions of the world.

And so here's what we have. You have the Bible helping you understand where false religion originated, where false religion came from. It came from human beings being taught the doctrines of

demons.

That's 1 Timothy 4. Being taught the doctrines of demons as they turned away from the wisdom of God and the truth of God about our origins. And now false religion begins to take blossom.

And boy, the limitless nature of the creativity of human beings to come up with stuff that is so bizarre. Right? If you've ever studied, I had to take false religions.

Well, they didn't call it that. They called it the religions of the world in college. And I had to look at this and write papers and stuff. And I was amazed. I was a brand new Christian at the time.

[11:08] I had just come to know the Lord as I studied these things. So I'm trying to learn what it is to follow God and know who God was and how to read the Bible. And at the same time, I'm studying these religions of the world.

And I'm finding already there's a huge contrast and a lot of bizarre stuff out there that people have come to believe. And some of it is so creatively deep in the sense of the strata, the levels of belief that they have about these false gods and what they do and how they operate.

This is what's beginning to happen now as we come to this place of Nimrod's rule and God calling Abram out of all of this. Of course, we have false religion and we have self-made wisdom with us today as it relates to our origins and to what God did and didn't do in creation.

Right? That stuff didn't just die with antiquity. It has carried over into our modern times, has it not? Let me give you a little bit of an example of this.

Let me offer you a few perspectives from some students in a college literature class as they were asked to discuss topics from the book of Genesis.

[12:26] So this is not a Christian university. This is a real story. This really happened and these things were really said in this class. All right? So here's the topic that's being put out for discussion in the class at that particular moment.

The topic is, let us make man in our image male and female. Comments, please. And so, one transgendered person said that what it means for man to be made in our image male and female was that God was both male and female Himself.

Another person spoke up on that topic and said this, Adam and Eve did not grow reproductive organs until after they ate of the forbidden fruit.

And how did they come to this wisdom? Well, they didn't know that they were naked until after they ate. So obviously something changed. I know.

You laugh and we would laugh if it wasn't so sad because we know where this is coming from ultimately. These are the doctrines of demons working in people's minds, right?

[13:37] And in their hearts to come up with stuff like this. So the spiritual element never even occurred to this person that what changed was this spiritual reality, the spiritual death that the Bible teaches.

All right, next topic. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The first person to comment said this, The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was split with one side good fruit, the other side bad fruit.

Eve had a 50-50 chance of picking the right fruit and she chose the wrong one. No, I'm not making this up. The first sin ever committed was by God Himself.

Because God lied about Adam and Eve dying if they ate from the tree. Next person commented on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God was cruel for having set them up for failure by putting the tree in the garden at all. And finally, the last person to comment, the best thing that ever happened to mankind was eating from the forbidden tree.

[14:51] Why? Because it opened their eyes and gave them free will. It allowed them to experience life. Before they sinned, they were just God's playthings.

His puppies. We don't laugh, do we? That's tragic. One of Ham's sons, Cush, raised up his son, giving his son a name meaning, let us revolt.

What was his name? Nimrod. Nimrod. So at the Tower of Babel, Nimrod led people to abandon God's truth and to order their lives around their own wisdom and the gods of their own making.

Now this is what we saw in the last couple of sermons for those of you who've been here. We covered Nimrod in one sermon just devoted to understanding his influence the way the Scripture singles him out in this list.

These people formed themselves, now hear this, this is very important for what we'll say later. These people formed themselves into rebellious enclaves against God's command to scatter around the world.

[16:10] And this is what they did. They began to build a great temple as a monument to their pride. That is, to make an enduring name for themselves.

For those of you who've been here, you remember that? And we will make a name for ourselves. And that was a lot of the reason behind, the rationale behind, building the Tower of what we call Babel at this particular juncture in history.

Now this was very interesting to me because this temple tower, known to us as the Ziggurat, or the Tower of Babel, this was built as, by their own admission, a gateway of access for their false gods. So they were building a stairway to heaven, but the stairway was built for their gods to use to come down and be among the people.

So they had to build their gods a way to get down to them. And that's what this Tower of Babel was most likely about. In other words, and this is very important, so I'm going to put it up here on the slides.

[17:14] In other words, the Bible tells us that the people of this day banded together around a shared system of religious belief aimed at expressing their pride in their autonomy and prowess as a people.

Now this is the teaching of Scripture. What brought these people together as a community and what propelled them forward and defined them as a culture and as a society were their shared beliefs in these false gods that they invented to give them rationale and justification for rebelling against the one true God, abandoning the truth of their origins and adopting their own stories.

They just made it up as they went because they didn't want to abide by the truth of the authority of the God who made them. Now does that sound familiar to anything maybe we're struggling with today in our society, in our culture, around the world, huh?

Not much has changed in that regard. Now this false worship obviously took them away from God and in moving away from God, here's what happened.

They divorced themselves from any ability to rightly understand who we are, what this world is all about. So under the direction of Nimrod, this first tyrant, this first dictator, who's bringing all these people together under this common banner of selfish pride and rebellion against the Lord, under Nimrod, they became very industrious and organized in their efforts to propagate their false religion.

[19:01] But keep in mind that this industry and organization, according to the Scripture, is all about these people making a name for themselves as they build this religious icon for them to bow down to, worship, and believe in, put their faith in.

So, again, the Bible is telling us all of these resources these people are bringing together as these cities and the archaeological evidence I showed you the last two sermons support all of this.

We don't need it to confirm the Bible. We believe the Bible by faith. It's true. But the archaeological evidence shows all these cities in this area popping up about the same time.

They just come into existence. We begin to see the evidence of this worship starting to take place and become more important.

That's what's going on in all of this. And so, folks, I can say it this way. It was a very, very great mercy of God that He stopped the people from this evil and foolishness.

[20:07] And when I say that, I don't mean He saved everybody. That's not what happened, is it? What did God do to stop this industrious, organized way of building these religious centers around false gods?

What did He bring to them? A confusion of language, didn't He? And that dispersed the people.

Now, they took this false religion into different places of the world, didn't they?

And I showed you the evidence, the archaeological evidence, of all of these ziggurats about, coincidentally, the same time in history popping up all over the world, built almost looking identical to one another in different cultures all over the world.

Right? And isn't it amazing? The common explanations for that commonality in the evidence is beyond the scope of explanation for secular people.

They don't try to tie all that together. Nevertheless, we are seeing in Scripture why that has happened. Now, here's what we're going to do. Genesis 1 through 11 teaches us foundational truth about God, ourselves, and our world that you cannot learn anywhere else.

[21 : 26] Did you hear me? There is no other literature in the world where you can know these truths about human history concerning who made you, concerning who you are, concerning where you were made at the beginning and why you came here, the purpose that you have.

You can read all kinds of accounts about what people think it all got started from, but there's only one eyewitness account. There's only one person who's still surviving today that has given us an eyewitness account of what happened during that time.

And his name is Jesus. And so we go and we read what he says and we say, okay, we'll just take that on faith. And that's what we're doing. Beginning in chapter 11, verse 10, Moses gives the Hebrews a genealogy of the line of promise.

And so you have to keep this in mind as we study this together and it bears itself out in the scriptures. Keep it in mind that this is the line of people God is protecting and providing for because this line is leading to God's promised one.

This is Genesis 3.15 promise being carried out by our faithful, steadfast, and loving God. He's going to bring his Messiah, the one who will overthrow the power and penalty of sin against God's people and he's going to bring that Messiah from this line of people that Satan wants to corrupt.

[22 : 57] He doesn't want that to happen. Satan wants to corrupt the line to keep the people in the way of Messiah saving them from experiencing that in the Lord.

And so he's pledged to war against God fulfilling his promise to overthrow the power of sin and death. You remember in the time of the cursing what he said to Satan, I'm going to put war between you and the woman and between her seat and your seat.

That's what we're seeing right here in the way of these false religions. You have to remember what the Bible teaches us about where this all started and why. This is all spiritual warfare.

Every bit of it is founded on spiritual warfare. So even the plans of man and the false religions and the tower and all their building, they may not recognize or realize where all of that's coming from but it's coming from our enemy, Satan.

He's establishing and founding the falsehood that's going on behind these people's industry and organization and efforts. Where else do we think mankind would get these ideas and false notions of false gods?

[24 : 05] This is what's going on. Now again, if I could draw your attention to chapter 11, I want to make a quick note before we jump into a verse by verse in chapter 12. If you look over in this list beginning in verse 10 of chapter 11, you go down to verse 18 and just a quick note, I'm not going to spend much time here.

It says in this list that Peleg, we come to Peleg, he lived 30 years and became the father of Reu and Peleg lived 209 years after he became the father of Reu and he had other sons and daughters.

All I want to point out to you is based on, go back to chapter 10 if you would, verse 25, two sons were born to Eber.

Remember Eber is where Hebrew, the name for the Hebrews came from. The name of the one was Peleg for in his days the earth was divided and his brother's name was Jocton.

So what we have in Peleg in this list over in chapter 11, verse 18 is an identification of when Babel happened. So it was during the life of Peleg that Babel took place.

[25 : 23] The confusion of the languages most likely took place. There are different dates depending on who you read and study out but everybody lands around the date, a median date of around 2200 B.C.

Somewhere around in there is when Babel took place. It was during the life of Peleg because it is described as him being named as a time of division. Division.

So that's about the halfway point. Alright? I just wanted to point that out to you to let you know what's going on. Now what we're going to do is revisit from verse 27 in chapter 11 down to 12 verse 3.

We read that earlier and so I'll just give you some notes on it. In Genesis 12 1 through 3 I'll put this up here for you. We see God's next step in the what?

In the process of His grace giving hope to humanity. God is carrying forward the hope of humanity and Messiah. He keeps His promise through four, I'm going to call them four acts of His saving grace.

[26 : 30] That saving grace of course brought salvation to Abram and his household eventually and which stand as God's acts of grace to bring all His elect people to salvation in Christ.

It's no small thing that we're seeing God act faithfully in the life of Abram and God making a promise to Abram in a little while we'll see it toward the end of the message where He says I'm going to bless all the families of the earth in you.

Do you realize that even means Gentile families? Even though we're not Jewish nationals? Yeah. This is what this promise holds.

Alright, so the first thing that we're going to deal with is this first act of God's grace, this first step of this process being fulfilled in the promise that He's making. God's gracious initiative.

That initiative that God makes begins with now the Lord said. How appropriate. God is speaking truth. God is establishing His word as the truth carrying forward the promise that He's made from Genesis 3.15 to bring this deliverer.

[27 : 38] Now interestingly folks as you see that in the text now the Lord said to Abram and then He gives him some commands. God hasn't spoken in this way since Noah.

So God's voice God's voice breaks the silence and pushes back the darkness which covers the world in the wake of the tower and the confusion of the languages.

Jesus. Alright? Now notice this too the Bible explicitly says He spoke to Abram. To Abram. Now why not any of the others who were in the line of Terah?

Or why not somebody else? And the Bible has a very straightforward answer to that question. The answer is that Abram was God's choice. So do you see this for those of you who are on our Wednesday night study?

One more evidence of God making a sovereign choice. We don't have to make a great big deal of that but we do need to note it because it's there in the Scripture for us to see.

[28 : 44] It pleased the Lord to single out Abram and get this an idol worshiper a sinner in the midst of worshipping false gods God calls him out and gives him direction.

And he says that I will bless you and I will use you as my servant. Again there was nothing in Abram to commend him to God but God by his mercy came and spoke and initiated saving grace to this man who did not deserve it any more than we did.

You see we can trace this all the way back to the different lives of the people who were saved by grace through faith and we're going to see this develop in Abram's life as well especially as we get into chapter 15 where we're told that he is justified by faith just like we are the same way.

So he's speaking to Abram he's singling him out. Now Abram is steeped in idol worship he's not seeking after God so God seeks Abram and he does that to impart these life giving words to him and we need to heed this hear this folks we must heed God's word to own God's promises.

It's one thing to say out of the sight of our mouth I believe in God and then not to live in love for the Lord by keeping his commandments. Now that won't work. We must heed God's word to own God's promises.

[30 : 25] So Abram's going to need to learn to obey God in order to experience the blessing of God's promises on his life just like we do. To be blessed by the wisdom of God we need to take that wisdom into our heart don't we?

And then we need as we heed we need to obey and live it out to be doers of the word and not hearers only. And so what happens? Abram listens to God.

Abram listens to God and it changes his life. That brings us quickly to this next point God's gracious instruction. We move from the promise to the preparation.

Still in verse 1 you'll see this. God's instruction is go forth from. Now that's not a small thing. Go forth from your country and from your relatives and from your father's house.

Wow. In other words leave everything you know you love and is familiar to you. Is that cruel? Is that unfair?

[31 : 35] When we think about what God is delivering this man from and bringing him to. God is very wise. That doesn't mean that following God doesn't sometimes hurt.

But it's the hurt of fatherly love. It's the hurt of fatherly discipline and care. It's the hurt of fatherly wisdom. For those of you who are parents have you ever had to discipline your children and say things to them where they look at you like yeah whatever.

Just get it over with. I remember my mom my dad never said this to me but my mom said this is going to hurt me more than you and I'm like yeah whatever. I didn't say that out loud. I was smarter than that.

But I thought it. But I thought it. This is fatherly love man. This is God taking the initiative in the life of a man who never would have sought the Lord and in fact was going as far away from the Lord as he could.

And what does he tell him? Leave your country, your relatives and your father's house. I want to show you what I've said about this.

[32 : 50] Your country, leave your language, your culture, your customs but most of all your false gods of your country. Your relatives, extended family and their false gods. Your father's house, your father's authority and his false gods.

This is what we're talking about. Now please keep in mind, it's a little bit of a caveat here. Please keep in mind that God is not only calling Abram to a place or to a land.

That's true and that land's going to be very important, in fact vital, to what God's going to do in raising up a nation of people. But even more so, he's being called into a relationship with God as Abram's savior.

That's what we want to remember. Now, why is God requiring Abram to leave all that is familiar and important to him? Why is he doing that? Well, folks, this is a command to repent.

It's a command to turn away from sin and disobedience and especially from false gods. The false gods that Abram has bowed his heart to.

[33 : 55] So when God tells him, go forth from, what I want to do is pause for a moment and I want to give you some insights into what that means for Abram.

As he tells him, go forth from your country, go forth from your relatives, go forth from your dad's house, your father's authority. What was kind of bound up in that? You know, just do some research, dive into this, peel back some of the layers and we can gain some further insight into this and we can begin with God telling Abram to leave his country.

What was involved in leaving his country? What was it about his country that God was concerned about? Well, the first thing I want to let you know of Haran and Ur.

Those are the two cities that have been prominently mentioned in scripture related to Abram's life. He was born and raised in Ur, apparently. Remember that Ur, as you look at Mesopotamia, that fertile crescent where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers come together, Ur is way down here and it's right in the vicinity just a few miles from Eridu.

Do you remember Eridu? And what I told you about Eridu in that sermon? You go from Ur, Nimrod established all these cities. The Bible lists them.

[35 : 17] Then what happened was Nimrod went north and west and he settled up into what we call Assyria, ancient Assyria, and he established the cities of Nineveh and other cities in that area.

Right in that area is the city of Haran. And why does that become important? Listen, Haran and Ur were famous for the same thing in this time.

And what was that? Each of these cities were centers of worship of the Macedonian moon god named Sin.

Sin. You can't make this up. But I know who did. Haran and Ur were centers of worship of the Macedonian moon god Sin.

Each of these cities had temples to this false deity. Temples that we have been able to see in the archaeological evidence. Now what I want to do is just refer to a couple of articles that I dug out and I want to offer you some further insight into this.

[36 : 28] Listen to this. The great mosque of Haran where Terah took all of these relatives to include Abram too with the intention of going further from Haran and moving this way to settle in the land of Canaan.

Right? He would have left Haran and moved over and settled down from Ur where they moved. He stopped in Haran and stayed there and eventually Terah died in Haran.

The great mosque of Haran had been built during the early Islamic period on top of a pagan temple where the Mesopotamian moon god Sin was worshipped.

Beside the now vanished mosque stands a, wait for it, 110 foot tower which it is believed was used for astronomical observations.

It is also believed that the original inhabitants belonged to another faith Sabianism. They worshipped the sun, the moon, and the planets. Sound familiar?

[37 : 37] Sin, the moon god, Sin, was revered as the father of the gods, the creator of all things, and the lord of wisdom.

That is not a coincidence folks, that sin, S-I-N, is taking the place of G-O-D as little god, and he is the one offering these people the wisdom that they're seeking and chasing in place of the lord. He is the one taking the place of god as creator in their life. He is the one taking the place of father. They're going to call sin father. This is what is important about Haran. Sin was revered as the father of the gods, the creator of all things, the lord of wisdom. He rode on a winged bull. This winged bull would later become the symbol of Assyria. You've probably seen him. Matt has traveled to that area and gone to these places. Do you remember seeing the winged bull with the heads of humans with the beards? And the Ishtar Gate, I think, has two of those there.

[38 : 53] Matt's done a lot of travel by government expense, getting a tan over in the Mid-East. Listen to this. From the top of a mound in Haran, gazing at the northern horizon, one spots a low range of mountains, and in these mountains lies the amazing, unbelievably ancient site, Gobekli Tepe.

It is the oldest recognized monumental architecture in the world, and it is right near Haran. Now, listen to this.

Bless you. So, forgive your pastor for what did you call it, nerding out, geeking out about the history. Just bear with me, all right? You guys know that I really appreciate how God pulls all this together. Listen to this. High on a windswept hill. This is the relationship between Haran and Gobekli Tepe. High on a windswept hill in southern Turkey, archaeologists unearthed something that could change how we understand the origins of civilization.

civilization. Now, this is a secular writer writing this article titled Why the Origins of Civilization Might Lie in a Forgotten Turkish Hill.

[40 : 19] Known as Gobekli Tepe, this site challenges everything we thought we knew about the early steps humans took toward organized society.

When does the Bible tell us what was going on? The Bible tells us people first began to organize themselves into cities and societies. Babel.

Babel was where God came and confused the languages because prior to that they started organizing themselves around these religious beliefs based in these false gods and they became industrious under Nimrod and started to erect cities and temples built to their false gods.

So what was the organizing principle for these people? Religious belief. That's what the Bible teaches. So we're not confused about how this started, where it started, and why it started. We just believe what the scripture tells us.

This guy is writing and saying, hey, pause, finding Gobekli Tepe means we might have to rewrite how we understand when civilization started and why. You see, in secular archaeology and secular history, they say that civilization started in the same area, in Mesopotamia, same area, we agree on that, but they say that it all began to organize into civilization in cities and societies around farming and the invention of the plow.

[41 : 41] So the invention of a tool and farming kind of brought everybody together in this one industrious effort to organize themselves. That's not what the Bible says.

Not in terms of the start, right? Listen, he goes on. First, oh, let me put this up there. There it is. that's just beginning.

I'm going to show you some more. First discovered in the 1990s, Gobekli Tepe predates, listen, you're hearing this, writing, cities, and even agriculture.

So this site goes back to prior to the confusion of languages. Around the same time that Nimrod was building Ur and Nineveh, until its discovery, most scholars believe the origin of civilization began only after humans settled down and started farming.

Gobekli Tepe turns that idea upside down. the site features massive stone pillars arranged in large circular structures.

[42 : 59] Some of the stones weigh over 20 tons apiece. Folks, that's over 40,000 pounds per pillar. And they're decorated with carvings of animals, abstract symbols, and humanoid figures.

What's remarkable is that experts believe that people with no permanent homes or domesticated crops created these structures. I personally beg to differ, he says, and believe that history as we know it is incomplete, you think, and that the site was in fact built by a highly organized and structured civilization.

Yes, it was. It's purpose remains uncertain, but many believe it played a spiritual or ceremonial role.

Now, here's something very, very interesting. This is what finally caught my attention about this. Even more mysterious is the fact that Gobekli Tepe was carefully buried by the same people who built it.

They filled the enclosures with dirt and debris in a deliberate act, possibly to mark the end of a cycle or to prepare for new construction. This unusual behavior preserved the site and its artwork for thousands of years.

[44 : 27] He asked the question, why did all of the sudden they bury it? All of the sudden, with no explanation, they filled everything in with dirt and debris and walked away.

And didn't come back. I wonder when that happened. I wonder why. I know some of this is speculation. The Bible doesn't say Gobekli Tepe was part of the dispersion, but it all fits within the archaeological framework.

A deliberate act. This is known as pillar number 43. This is one of the most important artifacts that they have unearthed. You can see the detail of this all these thousands of years later.

Pay particular attention to that bird looking structure in the middle holding that sphere. I'm going to tell you about that in just a minute. So they've got pillars like this.

You can see another partial one in the background all around this place. Very interesting. Its preservation allows us to glimpse not only the creativity of its builders, but also their shared values and beliefs.

[45 : 47] These early humans may have gathered seasonally to participate in rituals, reinforcing community bonds. Listen to this. That social unity could have laid the groundwork for the origins of civilization.

Yes, he got that one right. a growing puzzle beneath the soil. Only a fraction of the site has been excavated.

They have used ground penetrating radar and found out that they've only excavated about 10% of the site. They have 90% of this left to unearth. That's how vast this place is.

There's no telling what they're going to find. I love this. This is fascinating stuff to me. New discoveries nearby. Such as Karahan Tepe.

Suggest this region may have hosted a network of early ceremonial religious centers connected to the same mysterious tradition. Could the origins of civilization involve spiritual gatherings rather than just farming villages?

[46 : 51] Could belief systems have shaped social order before tools and trade? The origins of civilization are usually traced to Mesopotamia.

with its early cities and irrigation systems. But Gobekli Tepe predates all that. It suggests that people were organizing, building, and creating meaning in their lives long before traditional signs of civilization appeared.

And this forces a major shift in how we define progress. But it also opens the door to the idea that religion, storytelling, and art may have been just as important in shaping our world as the invention of the plow.

Look at this now. If we truly want to understand the origins of civilization, we may need to stop looking at the first cities and start looking at the first shared beliefs.

That is exactly what the Bible says and teaches. Look at this last picture. The picture on the right is pillar 43 and that is one of the images on the pillar.

[48 : 01] So that is Gobekli Tepe in Turkey. Gobekli Tepe means pot-bellied hill. So there is one of the images. The image on the left, the image on the left, same image, both of those they believe to be images of vultures doing something with a ball or a sphere.

The one on the right, Gobekli Tepe in Turkey. The one on the left, northern Australia. How in the world did that happen?

I wonder. God is working. This was the time when Nimrod and his followers were building these cities and organizing them around idol worship and in this case around the moon god that they named sin.

This paganism had a heavy sinful influence on Abram's family. So that even Joshua speaks to this and this is why I took time to show you this.

Not to wow you, not to try to use it to prove the Bible. We don't need to do that, but to show you how what we are doing in the way of archaeology and other things are supporting the biblical case for how this impacted these people's lives.

[49 : 30] Even Joshua spoke to this issue. Look at this. Joshua said to all the people, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, from ancient times, hearkening back to the time we're studying, your fathers lived beyond the river Euphrates, namely Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and look, they served other gods.

That's all related to Abram turning away from his country and his culture, but wait, there's more. There's more. As to Abram leaving his relatives and his father's house, we talked about his country. What about his relatives and his father's house? What can we glean here? Well, look, the name Terah can mean moon. Abram is to leave his father's pagan religion and that authority to embrace and obey the true God.

Also, while Sarah means princess in Hebrew, Sarai is a form of the Chaldean word Saratu, and Saratu was the wife of the moon god, Sin.

Milcah, the wife of Abram's brother means queen in Hebrew and is a form of the Chaldean word Malkatu. Malkatu was the daughter of the moon god. Are you seeing a pattern here?

[50 : 56] It seems that Terah's family was very devoted to the worship of these false gods, particularly the moon god, Sin. sin. And so in Abram's case, there needs to be a clean break with this old life and its falsehood.

So he's turning from a life of self and rebellion and idol worship so that he can then turn to the God of life and truth.

Same thing. Do you hear those themes in our life of repentance? Our following of Jesus? Has anything changed? What does it take for us to be faithful in following the Lord?

Repentance. Turning away from self and sin to the truth. Embracing in obedience the truth of the Lord. It's always been this way, folks. The New Testament didn't come along to rewrite the Old Testament and replace all of that with some new religion.

It's the same faith in the same God. But now he's acting revealing the mystery that the Old Testament held. And what was that mystery?

[52 : 06] The gospel of Jesus Christ. And now we see in true form who Jesus is. And God's bringing all that to bear for us. Notice where he's to go.

To the land which I will show you. So the command to go forth is from sovereign to servant. The sovereign speaking to his servant.

And this is the core of Abram's call to faith in God, I believe. There's nothing magical or spiritual about the dirt or the geography, the land of Israel itself.

No, that's not what we're talking about. What are we talking about? The land is very important. The land is special because it showcases God's grace to undeserving sinners.

In other words, look, it's important. The land is important because it's sacred in the sense that it's being set apart, made holy by God for the special future of his chosen people.

[53 : 07] This will be the geographical place where they will then erect eventually a temple and that temple will recognize where God meets with his people. And so God is taking this paganism and turning it on its head as the true God and establishing a people for himself around the truth.

Now look, as God does this for Abram, realize Abram didn't have all the answers. God isn't spelling out for him all the details of what's about to happen in his life, is he?

That's not what's happening. Humanly speaking, Abram could not have possibly formulated a way to realize all that God was telling him to be and to do. Abram had to trust what God said.

And what did God tell him? I will show you. Isn't that how we live? You see, it's the same thing. I will show you. I will show you.

What Abram did have was what God made clear to him. So armed, armed with God's clear truth, Abram was to go forward doing what? Repenting of his old life, embracing his new life with God, and trusting in God for all his needs, and then obeying the Lord.

[54 : 21] Again, does that sound familiar to you in terms of what Paul and Peter and James all teach us in the New Testament? Yeah. And I want you to have that encouraged faith that from page one to page last, this is the revelation and truth of the Lord God.

And it's all a testimony of how God is faithful to us in his Son, calling us to that, to a life with him of that. And I say this to myself, every idol worshiper on the planet needs to hear this gospel message. Amen? Amen. This is what's inherent in God's command, God's invitation to life. He's saying, leave what you know and have lived in and what you've trusted in and put your faith in so that you can come to know me and experience life with me.

Now look, to break with all of that, to break with all that is familiar, to embrace all that is unfamiliar, that's a terrifying proposition.

One of the things that I've heard in dealing with people in the past as I've shared the gospel with them or as I've tried to help them in counseling, is to move them from one place where they have fixed themselves in trusting something that is not helping them, trusting in something that is actually working against them, walking with the Lord.

[55 : 42] It's very hard for them to let that thing go and then replace it with another. The put on motif of the New Testament. That's a difficult process that can't be done apart from the power of the Spirit of God.

Amen. This is what Abram's facing as well. God's preparation of this man hasn't been wasted. It will have its godly effect on Abram and it will affect millions and millions of other people.

So in verse 2, the Lord God will build on this instruction with Abram. He will speak to them about his investment in Abram as his chosen vessel. And I will make you a great nation.

I will bless you. I will make your name great and so you shall be a blessing. God's gracious investment. This is the preparation of Abram.

Just real quickly now, God took away what Abram was pursuing but what was also imprisoning him. And sometimes this is hard to get across to people when they've been loyal to some sinful aspect in their life.

[56 : 47] Sometimes people say, you know, I'd rather have what's familiar. I'd rather keep my crutches and crutch my way through life, trusting in these crutches even though they hold me back.

Because to let go of those crutches and let them fall leaves me standing there unstable. What they don't realize is that God's got you. God's got you and he'll show you how to walk with him. You'll learn how to walk with the Lord without those sinful crutches.

You see? But the aspect of letting go of those and let them fall away because they're familiar, it's hard. And we need to be compassionate about that and patient, merciful about that.

And we need to walk with people in it. But now I'm going to tell you the truth. After 30-something years of doing this, unfortunately, many, if not most, of those people will not embrace the truth and let go of those crutches.

If they do, they just pick them up again or they find some more. Just some different ones. They turn from alcohol to. They turn from drugs to. When they should be leaving that and turning to the Lord.

[57 : 50] Alright. But that's a process. Not everybody has a testimony that one day I was a drunk and the next day I wasn't. It'd be great if everybody had a testimony like that who suffered with those things.

But most people have a testimony of up and down. But eventually the people that deal with that kind of stuff have to choose. They have to make a choice. Am I going to walk with the Lord or am I going to walk with sin?

That's where Abram is. What is God promising? I will make you. I will bless you. I will make you a blessing. Abram will be the father of the nation of Israel.

In fact, Abram, his name in Hebrew means exalted father. When he's changed to Abraham, it means father of a multitude. Isn't that cool? What a faithful God. God's guiding Abram.

He's comforting him. Abram's going to feel the loss. He's going to feel the loss of these familiar habits. But God will show him a way of life that will far and away exceed what he's lived to this point.

[58 : 54] God's going to give Abram a purpose beyond himself. And that purpose is going to be in faithfulness to God. He's going to know great things in his faithfulness to the Lord and in God's faithfulness to him.

folks, sin hides this truth from us. When we sin, we're guilty of pursuing personal pleasure at some level.

Have you ever sinned in a way where you walked away and said, you know, I really didn't want to do that. Well, that's a lie because you did want to do it and you did it.

Now, let's tell the truth. When you sin and when I sin, we do it because that's what we wanted in the moment. Now, we may step back from it and look on it and say and regret it and repent and come to the Lord and say, Lord, please, please help me with this.

This is weakness in my heart. This is not what I want to define me, Lord God. I want to please Jesus. I want to love you with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength, and I want to live for your glory, Lord.

[59 : 58] This is who I want to be. See, that's how we come before the Lord and depend on him, right? This is a heart crying out that loves the Lord and is loved by God. Right? That's what that looks like.

But in the moment when we sin, we sin because that's what we want in the moment. It's not about pleasing the Lord in that moment. It's about self-pleasure. And that's why I did it.

Now, is that true? Yes, that's true. So we are guilty of pursuing personal pleasure rather than personal peace for our souls and the personal pleasure of Jesus when we sin.

Our hearts and souls are restless. They're self-seeking. They're disturbed in some way within us. So what do we do? We seek out some desire of our heart that isn't about a desire to please Jesus in that moment.

If it was, we wouldn't do it. The sin. If I'm more concerned about pleasing Jesus in that moment, then I'm not going to choose sin. Do you see how all this boils down to, are we going to look to and follow the Lord, or is it going to be about me in that moment?

[61 : 00] Isn't that where we are? That's where Abram is. That's where Abram is in his life. What are you going to do, Abram? Well, look at this.

The I will promises. That God makes to Abram. In contrast to all of that, Jesus Christ promises something to us that mirrors God's heart in the promises he's making to Abram.

What I'm not saying, church, is that we are like Abram in what God is going to do with him. What I'm saying is the heart of our God toward Abram is the heart of our God toward us as sinners.

I will bless you. I will make you. I will give to you. I will be for you. This is the heart of our God. Now, I don't want you to miss that in the life of this man.

And so I want to just show you real quickly a couple of I will promises from your Lord and encourage you in this. Look at this. Jesus said, peace I leave with you.

[62 : 08] My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled nor let it be fearful. These things I've spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling.

These things I've spoken to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage. I have overcome the world.

Isn't that beautiful? This is I will make. I will bless. I will give. I will do. And I will be for you. And so what does he say?

And so you shall be a blessing. People that live under these truths that you see up here on the screen that we're rehearsing from the Bible. They're a blessing to other people.

You become a channel of blessing to the people closest to you. And the opposite is true as well.

You turn your back on this and you follow personal pleasure and you'll be a curse to the people around you.

[63 : 09] Is that not true? And it's not pretty when that happens. This all boils down to whether or not you're going to be faithful to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and commit your heart to him.

Saying no to self, denying yourself, taking up your cross and following the Lord. Living for God accomplishes this in a person's life.

So Abram's godly life is going to be a conduit of God's blessing to all of the people around him.

Look, folks, let me say it to you this way, pastorally, and then I'll move on to this next point.

Look, if you were to ask me in light of the convicting truth of this passage, Jeff, what is your greatest legacy as a pastor?

Here's how I would answer. My greatest legacy as a pastor is currently looking back at me right now. It's you.

[64 : 10] Because you are what Greg and I have been called to serve. We are called to serve you in your heart of following the Lord, believing the Lord, struggling against sin in your life, fighting discouragement, disillusionment, distraction, deception.

And we're here to be part of that equation of God's love calling you constantly back to serving the Lord. I heard John MacArthur say one time we were out there sitting under his preaching and teaching.

I heard him say that he was the jerk that God used to jerk them back into spiritual reality every Sunday. And I thought, okay, John didn't do much of that.

So to do that was like, wow, he actually used a little levity there. Let me give you this one. God's gracious insurance. God's gracious insurance.

Insurance is the promise of protection from the degradations brought on by human hardships, the tragedies of life. And so this protection is only as good as the person or the company standing behind the promise.

[65 : 24] So who stands behind the promise to protect Abram? Protect you? Yeah. So the insurance has to be specific to the need of the situation if it's to be effective.

And that's exactly what we see here. What does God say? And I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse. It's better rendered up there. You see it on the screen. And the one who treats you with contempt, that is dishonors you, I will curse.

That last word curse, that's stronger than the other word that's used for dishonor or contempt. The NAS uses curse both times in the sentence.

But the word curse at the end is a stronger word and means exactly that. I will curse them.

Shoo-wee. Now this curse motif is really strong.

It's a very strong warning. I'm only bringing it up because look, we've seen it before in these three instances. With Satan, with Cain, and with Canaan. It's serious business to set yourself against the things of God and the people of God.

[66 : 33] Particularly against the people of God who are living to do God's will. Folks, I'm telling you and I want to warn us all. When people set their hearts against you as you seek to serve the Lord and exalt the name of Jesus, you don't need to be about revenge.

You need to be about trusting the Lord in realizing that God has promised to hold those people accountable for thwarting the work of God in their lives or attempting to.

This is super serious business. And then finally, I'll end with this. And in you, all the families of the earth, the text says, in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

So from Abram and his line of descendants, God's Messiah and our deliverer will come. And he did come. We know that this promise extends God's saving grace to people of every tribe, tongue, and nation, all in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the groundwork being laid here. And we're the better for it, right? Amen. Will you bow with me in prayer? Father, as usual, we covered a great deal of territory in your word today as we tried to better understand the workings of the Holy Spirit in the life of this ancestor we know is Abram.

[67 : 57] We thank you, Almighty God, for the truths of your word that transform transform us and translate across time and culture so that we can know these truths in our lives and follow you even as Abram did.

We can look to you and trust you to be our God and our King. And to the degree that we are willing to heed the word and obey that word, you have promised to bless us.

You have promised to walk with us. And God, in the times that we stumble in our striving, in the times that your people have in this room have found themselves in this past week stumbling over sin and seeking to repent, my prayer for them is that they would know the great love with which you love them, the steadfastness of your commitment to help them as they struggle and to be faithful to them as they call out to you and trust you.

God, thank you for being patient in our weakness and thank you for giving us hope in the Lord Jesus and in the truths of your word, even as we seek to follow you stumbling along, but striving in the holiness, the power of the Holy Spirit.

We thank you for these blessings in Jesus precious name. Amen.