



LUTHERAN HOUR MINISTRIES
People Of Christ With The Message Of Hope

Share His Story

GROUP BIBLE STUDIES 2009-2010

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Session 1

It was God's Idea!

Read Genesis 12:1-9

God put it together perfectly. Adam and Eve, for at least some period of time, existed in perfect harmony with their God and in perfect harmony with His world. Then it fell apart. Eve believed the serpent, ate the fruit, and Adam was only all too willing to join her in this ultimate foolishness. And things haven't been the same since. The first sin in Genesis 3 is followed immediately by God's promise to do something about this eternal tragedy—see Genesis 3:15. But sin wasn't confined to the garden. In Genesis 4, fratricide (or murder, if you prefer) entered the picture. By Genesis 6, sin so permeated all relationships that God decided to start over with one family—Noah's. But by Genesis 11, humanity had forgotten its Creator again and God scattered those so intent on making a name for themselves that they've ignored His command to them.

Out of this sin-induced mess, God chooses one man—Abraham. Abraham's selection is recorded in Genesis 12:1-3.

Why would God choose Abraham?

Does reading Joshua 24:2 and Joshua 24:14-15 change your answer to the above question? Note Abraham's *religious affiliation* prior to being called by Yahweh (God's personal name—usually written as LORD in most English versions).

God promises Abraham three things, and they really aren't contingent on any behavior on Abraham's part:

- Offspring (12:2)
- To be a blessing to the nations (12:3)
- Land (12:7)

In Hebrew there are really only two people groups—"Am" and "Goy." Am is usually translated "the people" and always refers to the children of Israel. Goy is usually translated "the nations," refers to non-Israelites, and is almost always derogatory. Somehow, Abraham would be a kind of blessing to all the goy out there. God's decision to set apart one man and one nation was really a move to bring salvation to all people groups—all goy!

Why would God be so concerned with those who had no knowledge of Him?

Is He still concerned about the goy today?

Who would you identify as the goy of our day and age?

You see, it was God's idea from the beginning to *share His story*. And Abraham is the beginning of that sharing process. Abraham's story runs through Genesis 25. Let's take a quick inventory of that threefold promise to Abraham at the end of his life:

- Offspring: at the end of his life, Abraham had at least eight sons (see 25:1), but only one son through whom the promise would be fulfilled—Isaac.
- Blessing to the nations (goy):
 - Skim Genesis 12:10-20
 - Skim Genesis 14
 - Skim Genesis 20
- How have surrounding nations fared through their contact with Abraham? Would you say he has been a blessing to the nations?
- Land: at the end of his life, Abraham owned only the Cave of Machpelah and the field containing the cave. This cave first held Sarah's body and became the family burial place for several generations.

None of these promises were completely fulfilled in Abraham's lifetime. In fact, it will take more than 400 years for the land and offspring promises to be fulfilled and almost 2,000 years for the blessing to the nations' promise to be ultimately fulfilled—in Jesus. What does this tell you about God's timing?

Knowing you are most likely part of the goy, what does this section of Scripture have to do with you?

How has He blessed you?

How is God blessing the nations through your life?

What is His story that you are sharing and with whom are you sharing it?

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, we thank You that You have come to be that blessing to the nations so long promised. And we especially thank You that You have included us in that blessing. We know that it is by grace—we don't deserve it—that we can call You our Savior and friend. Lead us to willingly and gladly share Your story with the goy in our world who don't know what they are missing. Amen

Session 2

Being the Blessing

Read Genesis 41

We already saw that Abraham was promised he would be a blessing to the nations. And we saw fairly clearly that this promise never really came to fruition in his lifetime. In fact, when we look at the history of Israel throughout the Old Testament we are hard pressed to find more than a handful of times when Israel had some positive impact on the nations around her. In reality, the opposite was more often true and Israel allowed herself to be negatively influenced by the pagans that surrounded her. When reading the Old Testament narrative, one could come to the conclusion the promise that somehow Abraham's descendants would be a blessing to the nations—that they would represent Yahweh before the world—seemed pretty unlikely.

However, early on there is an incident in which this chosen family would have a positive impact upon a pagan nation, though we don't know if this positive impact actually resulted in the worship of Yahweh. Abraham's son of promise was Isaac. Isaac married Rebecca and had two boys—Esau and Jacob. Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, had 12 sons who became the ancestors of the 12 tribes of Israel. One of those sons was Joseph. In Genesis 41, Joseph is in Egypt

How did Joseph get to Egypt? If you don't remember, you might want to skim Genesis 37, 39, and 40.

Where in Joseph's discussion with the Pharaoh does he *share His story* with the Egyptian leader?

What impact do you think this may have had?

Joseph was both a blessing to his own family (“the people”) and to Egypt (“the goy”).

How did both groups benefit from his presence in Egypt? How was God blessing the nations through Joseph?

Four hundred years later, there would be a major change in circumstances for the descendants of this chosen family—Jacob's family. Read Exodus 1:1-10. Remember that there is 400 years between verse 6 and verse 8.

What hints do you find here as to the long-term impact that Joseph had both on his family and on the nation of Egypt?

Joseph clearly recognized God's grace and God's providence in all of this. He realized that God even made the evil his brothers had planned work out for the benefit of many people. Read Genesis 45:4-11.

God's Holy Christian Church—you and I—are the New Israel. What circumstances is He using to be a blessing to the nations through us?

What is happening in your community that might put you into contact with people from other ethnic groups and nations?

How can your congregation live out His call to *share His story*?

How can you live out your call in your community to *share His story*?

Closing Prayer: Gracious and loving heavenly Father, we don't always see what You are trying to accomplish around us or through us. Yet we know You are very much at work in the lives of Your people and working to draw others into Your forever family. We want You to use us to get Your work done—to bless the nations. Help us to seek out and seize those opportunities You place in our paths to tell others about what You've done for all of us in Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. It is in His Name that we are bold to approach Your throne of grace. Amen.

Session 3

David & Bathsheba – The Rest of the Story

Read 2 Samuel 11:1-12:14

How many things can you mess up? How many of God's Laws can you break at one time and still be considered a man of God? It may be that David doesn't set the record for the total number of trespasses in one instance, but he certainly sets the bar pretty high. Let's check out the infractions in this story:

- v. 1 – The king should have been on the battlefield with his troops, not remaining in Jerusalem where he could get himself in trouble.
- v. 2 – David is reduced to becoming a peeping Tom. It was entirely proper for Bathsheba to bathe in her walled courtyard, but not proper for David to be gawking.
- v. 3 – Gawking gives way to lust. Enough said.
- v. 4 – David commits adultery by sleeping with another man's wife.
- v. 4 – A somewhat lesser known fact is that, in so doing, David jeopardizes the war effort being led by Joab. The rules of Holy War God handed down demanded that all involved refrain from sexual activity while waging Holy War—war on God's behalf. (See 1 Sam. 21:4-5 for example.)
- vv. 6-13 – David then gets involved in a cover-up hoping that Uriah (a Hittite, not an Israelite) will believe the child is his. However, Uriah the Hittite is more upright than David, the King of Israel and Uriah refuses to jeopardize the war effort by sleeping with his wife.
- vv. 14-21 – David involves his general in the cover-up.
- vv. 14-21 – David commits de facto murder.
- vv. 22-27 – David assumes the King of Israel is above the Law, takes Bathsheba to be his wife, and goes on with his life.
- vv. 22-27 – In flaunting the Laws of God publicly, David violates the sacred trust he has as the leader of God's people.

Which of the above violations of God's Law on David's part do you think the most serious?

Which of these violations of God's Law are common in our world today?

How do you think Uriah, a Hittite, came to be more godly than David, the King of God's chosen people?

What evidence do you see here that, in some small way, Israel must have been a blessing to the nations?

Once David goes back to his life as if nothing had happened, a new character walks on stage. God calls on a prophet by the name of Nathan to confront David about his sin. Let's see, David had just violated at least a dozen of God's Laws—including murder—and now Nathan is to confront him about his sin?

How do you think Nathan felt about this assignment?

Why do you think Nathan opts for an allegory in confronting David about his sin?

How could David have responded to Nathan's confrontation?

To *share His story* involves the proclamation of both Law and Gospel. What words of law did Nathan bring to David?

What Gospel message did Nathan bring to David?

If David was forgiven, why does the baby still die?

When we *share His story*, why is it important to differentiate between the consequences of sin and the punishment for sin?

In the U.S. alone, there are over 700,000 listeners to **The Lutheran Hour** every week. Why is it important that every broadcast clearly proclaim both Law and Gospel?

Closing Prayer: Both Psalm 51 (psalm of repentance) and Psalm 32 (psalm of thanksgiving for God's forgiveness) relate to this incident in David's life. You may want to use Psalm 32 or Psalm 51:10-17 as your closing prayer.

Session 4

A Maid Shares His Story

Read 2 Kings 5:1-19

On the old Sunday school leaflets that some of us brought home after church during our childhood, she was always a little girl. Chances are she wasn't as young as has often been depicted in art. But her circumstances were certainly less than she would have hoped for as she grew up. Here, probably in her teens, she finds herself a slave in a foreign land. She had no doubt been taken captive in some skirmish or war between Israel and Syria (Aram, in some translations) and she is in the service of a commander in the Syrian army, a man by the name of Naaman.

What was Naaman's problem?

What part of God's story did this nameless maid share with her mistress?

Why might she have been tempted to keep this news to herself? Why do you think she decided to intervene with some good news?

In what way was the time right for her to do this?

Naaman first encounters the King of Israel. The king is in a bit of a panic when Elisha intervenes.

What does Elisha tell Naaman to do?

Why does Naaman balk at this?

After he is cleansed, Naaman returns to Elisha and asks for a load of soil from Israel so he can worship Yahweh, the God of Israel. At that time, it was assumed the gods ruled particular pieces of real estate and, therefore, had to be worshiped on their own soil. By requesting the soil, Naaman is reflecting that understanding, but in taking it back to Syria he is also acknowledging the supremacy of Yahweh to his own Syrian gods. By the power of God's spirit and because a young captive maid and an old prophet were willing to *share His story*, a Syrian military leader (and enemy of Israel) became a worshipper of Yahweh.

How do you feel about the compromise to his culture that Naaman describes in verses 15-19a?

Are there compromises that we modern, Western Christians make to our culture?

Are there compromises that Christians in other parts of the world must make?

Both the maid and Elisha must have compromised some of their nationalistic feelings to *share His story* with Naaman. It might have been the easier thing just to let the man die who had certainly—and would most probably—lead armies against Israel. When you think about it, it appears that both the maid and Elisha were pretty godly in this situation. God, in the person of Jesus, stepped into history to provide the cure for world's ills—a world that had turned its back on God and become His enemies. Now *that's* grace!

Naaman must have been a difficult individual for both the maid and for Elisha to care about. What kinds of people do you find tough to love?

What people groups would we classify as our enemies?

How can we *share His story* with even those who are difficult to love and with those we may see as enemies?

Which programs of Lutheran Hour Ministries do you see as helping reach those who might be difficult for you to reach on a one-to-one basis?

Closing Prayer: Lord God, Creator of all people, You have placed people in this world that are difficult to care about, and we confess we are often uncaring people. Forgive our tendency to pick and choose the kind of people with whom we will share Your story and enable us to find ways to bring that Good News to those who don't know Jesus. In His most holy Name we pray. Amen.