



Part 3: Why would God restore us?

Quick Review:

- Christian history shapes Christian hope.
- If we know not only what God is doing and will do, but what he *has done* – then and only then can we live a life based on real hope – not just blind optimism.

“Optimism believes in progress; that circumstances will get better. Hope, however, is built on the conviction that another reality, another Kingdom, **already exists**. And so hope endures when hype fades.” (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

We asked 2 of our 5 questions:

1. What is humanity?
2. How did the relationship go bad?

When we went all the way back historically to Eden, we discovered that a relationship God created crashed. And God set out to restore or redeem that relationship even as Adam and Eve were being expelled from the garden. That is, as we said, the central theme of the story of Christianity – redemption or restoration.

So, why did God want to restore the broken relationship?

Because of who he is. The “WHO” answers the “WHY” question.

God is...

1. **Love.** He’s a Father and he is pure, unconditional love revealed. In fact, love that is conditional is not actually love. God loves all that he has made, regardless of the separation.
2. **Just.** He’s also a morally perfect and just God. The people he made to bear his image and likeness could not do so with a prideful, lustful, abusive and dishonest agenda. So God maintained the necessary separation between himself and the human race while simultaneously building a bridge.

Justice requires the distance. Love demands the bridge.

The OT serves as the beginning of God’s self-revealing. That’s why we call the Bible and Jesus himself the revelation of God. The OT shows us in detailed fashion that the separation is severe, but God’s love is patient and purposeful.

Life in a distant country...

Just as the picture darkened for the wayward son in Luke 15, humanity had to be confronted by the darkness of sin and pain of separation. At the same time, the son's perception of the father and his homeland became refined. He came to his senses. While the human race was living in a distant country, God was on a quest to make his goodness, faithfulness and love clearly seen against the backdrop of evil – all the while maintaining his integrity and upholding his word that **sin equals death**.

Fresh Facts: The Old Testament

1. *Testament* means "covenant" or "agreement."
2. 39 books composed between 1400 & 400 BC.
3. Called the "Tanakh" by Jews – an acronym for Torah, Naviim, & Kethubim
 - a. Law – First 5 books by Moses
 - b. Prophets – 4 historical, (J, J, S, K) 3 longer prophets, 12 shorter
 - c. Writings – Wisdom and historical
4. Divided into chapters in 1228 AD and into verses in 1448. First published with chapters and verses in the Geneva Bible of 1560.
5. Longest word: Maher-shalal-hash-baz (18 letters - Isaiah 8:1)

Discussion Question:

What are your impressions of the OT as you've read it or heard about it?

We have to zoom out to see the significance of each detail!

If you zoom out on the Old Testament, you're going to discover some major themes: We're going to summarize them with an alliteration tool:

5 P's of the Old Testament

- Preservation
- Promises.
- Provision.
- Prostitution.
- Prophets.

Preservation

Not surprisingly humanity became more sinful the further away from Eden it got. Traveling "east of Eden" proved to be synonymous with deeper rebellion. Even during this first period of shattered relationship, God is preserving people to ultimately restore his rebellious creation to family status.

Some key events:

- **Cain kills Abel**
 - Adam & Eve's first two sons are the big picture. One wants to honor God, one wants to honor himself. Classic.
- **The Flood** (Genesis 6:5-8)
 - God destroyed a civilization that was defiling itself beyond recognition.
 - Seth's descendents married Cain's and the "thoughts of their hearts were only evil all the time." The earth was "corrupt" and "full of violence."
 - God's responded with grief & pain, not cold judgment (v.6)
 - "But Noah found favor..." (v. 8). He was "righteous" (v.9)
- **The Tower of Babel**
 - Eastward migration away from Eden (symbolic)
 - Attempts to grasp the good on their own.
 - Make a "name" (shem) for themselves instead of the name God will make for them.
 - They wanted to homogenize humanity instead of "fill the earth" as God commanded.

Yet God preserves humanity on all counts:

- Ancestry
 - 10 faithful generations from Adam through Seth to Noah
 - 10 faithful generations from Noah through Shem to Abraham (8), Isaac (9) and Jacob or "Israel" (10).
- Noah's great-great = Eber ("Hebrew") – Peleg – ancestor of Abraham.
- God bypasses and judges the family lines of sin – Cain & Ham

Discussion Question:

Why do you think these specific genealogies matter in the plan of God?

God is personal. In carrying out his plan, God is mindful of people on an individual level and is determined to make relationships the basis of transformation and restoration. Even though God sent Jesus as a "blanket" provision of salvation for us all, he has still come to live within us personally. To engage us and the details of our lives. He has always been this way. He confronts the issues of nations at ground zero – the individual heart.

Promises

From Babel (cursed) to Canaan (blessed). God's plan included setting apart one man > one family > one people group > through whom he would restore humanity. And he would do so by showing who he is to this man and his descendents. The man was Abraham. His story begins at the end of Genesis chapter 11.

- 7 promises – Genesis 12:2-3
 1. I will make you into a great nation
 2. I will bless you
 3. I will make your name great
 4. You will be a blessing
 5. I will bless those who bless you

- 6. Whoever curses you I will curse
- 7. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.
- o Abraham was the first missionary
 - The mission was not initiated with just a command, but a promise
 - God goes before us, God goes through us, God goes in us.
- o Canaan was the "promised land" which was filled with descendents of Noah's son, Ham. They were wicked and idolatrous people. God intended to purge the land and give it to Abraham, a descendent of Noah's faithful son Shem.

Provision

How does one family become a nation? With help! Abraham's son, Isaac, and grandson, Jacob, would experience God's direct provision for them that often came wrapped in adversity. They had only the option to trust God to fulfill his promises. And he always came through. Unfortunately, as we will see, gratitude was in short supply. And where gratitude is absent, faithfulness dries up.

Key points:

- God is in the details!
 - o Into Egypt > Because of a famine, Jacob and his family found themselves at the mercy of the greatest nation of the time. In 430 years time, they went from a few hundred people to 660,000 men, not including women and children.
 - o Out of Egypt > Moses, God's deliverer, leads them out with Egypt's wealth.
- Wandering: 40 years in the desert to go roughly 90 miles.
- A Covenant with some necessary specifics.
 - o The Law meant...
 - Specific ways to remain distinctive in a sinful world and avoid idolatry at all costs.
 - Being, not just doing. (Marriage analogy)
 - A suspension of God's judgment, looking ahead to Jesus.
 - A way to divert death through sacrifice and access life through obedience.
 - A constant declaration that sin equals death & must be dealt with, if only as it occurs.
 - The constant cost of real separation.
- They finally made it to Canaan...
 - o To face "7 nations stronger than you" (Deut. 7:1)

Prostitution

In the language of redemption, there is the idea of buying something back. We can think of God as the rightful and worthy object of people's affections whose initiative to make them his own should be enough. Yet, there always seem to be competing suitors. The attraction of power, money and prestige have always and will continue to try to lure us away until God finishes his plan.

This 5th theme covers a period in redemptive history marked by a roller coaster relationship with God. It dives to the depths of the Israelites' greed, entitlement and idolatry every time they begin to think God's blessings are more important than God himself. It reaches amazing heights as God remains patient, preserving some faithful people to carry the torch while always letting the weight of justice nearly crush the unfaithful among them. All the while, God remains faithful to his promise, preserving and providing hope by way of the prophets, which is a theme to come.

Key points:

- Same old cycle: Apostasy, Oppression, Distress & Deliverance
 - After they settled into Canaan, they cozied up to other cultures instead of being a stark contrast. This syncretism, or blending of religions, stunk in God's nostrils.
- Kings replace Judges (& God) - 1 Samuel 8:19-20
 - Judges were military and diplomatic leaders set apart by God at key times in Israel's history in Canaan. In essence, they were civil servants for Israel.
 - Some notables: Gideon, Deborah & Samson
 - Proved the inadequacy of monarchy, agendas and ego.
 - Even Israel's most faithful king, David, fell prey to his own ego and agenda. God had warned them.
- Wars were a way of life
 - Proved that conquest is frail & control is an illusion.
- Riches polluted
 - Proved the ultimate worthlessness of material wealth and its tendency to become a god.
- Still, we see the thread of provision woven through the fabric of prostitution.

Prophets (17 books).

Prophet means "one who speaks for another." In this case, a prophet was not only God's messenger to the people, but the unknowing people's representative before God. About half of all the Old Testament are books written by or about prophets who plead on behalf of the idolatrous people and who remind the people who they are and who God is. And this was a scary notion in light of the fact that they were most often defying both.

Prophets served to:

- Judge "prostitution"
- Invoking promises
- Seek provision and mercy on behalf of the people.

The last OT words leading to Jesus (Malachi 4:5)

- Fathers & children

Conclusion: 400 Years of Silence

... would pass until Jesus came on the scene. Life in a distant country for the wayward son would prove harder than expected.

Discussion Question:

How would you describe the God of the OT?

In all of this, we see the contrast of who God is and who humanity is not. We see a clearer picture of a Father who is making it possible for his people to return home loved and cared for, despite their antics in a "distant country." And we'll see that the heart of the Father is to simply embrace his children, no strings attached. Jesus has made that possible.

Read & reflect:

Genesis 6, Hosea, Malachi 4, Romans 3:21-26, Hebrews 2, Hebrews 11

Next lesson: "What has God done for us?"

Now we're ready to get our minds around how incredible Jesus really was and is. Next time we go headlong into the life, ministry, death and resurrection of God's son. We'll never make sense of God's relentless love, but now we can understand better what Jesus really means.