

**God's Story, Our Stories**  
**Redemption: Era of Promise, Part 2**  
**Genesis 12:1-3**

*Redemption: Era of Promise (Genesis 4 through Remainder of Old Testament)*

God created a world that is “very good”; human beings broke relationship with God leading the world into decay and death. Most of the Bible is about how God acted in history to reconcile humanity to himself, and thereby restore the world to its intended glory. The story of Redemption has two eras: Promise (Old Testament) and Fulfillment (New Testament).

1. From 2003 to 2005, sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Denton conducted the largest study to date<sup>1</sup> of the religious beliefs of American teenagers (which were indicative of the religious beliefs of Americans at large. They concluded that a large majority of Americans – although they may think of themselves as Christians – subscribe not to historic Christianity, but to a belief system they named “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism”. They summarize MTD as follows:
  1. A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over life on earth.
  2. God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
  3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
  4. God is not particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem
  5. Good people to go heaven when they die.
- a. What aspects of these findings surprise you?
- b. What about MTD is consistent with historic Christianity?
- c. What about MTD is incompatible with historic Christianity, to the point where it cannot be considered a “flavor” of Christianity, but a different religion altogether?
- d. In his letter to the Colossians (chapter 2:8-23), the apostle Paul criticized the thought systems of his day (“philosophies”) that claim to provide the answers to human longings and needs, but at the end of the day cannot deliver as promised. He commanded the Colossians, writing, “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.” (verse 8), then went on to explain that these things indeed have an *appearance* of wisdom, but lack any power to transform and heal us. (verse 23) In what ways does MTD have an *appearance* of wisdom, but ultimately lack the power of Christ and His gospel?

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<sup>1</sup> The National Study of Youth and Religion, a collaborative study between Notre Dame and UNC / Chapel Hill.

2. In Genesis 12:1-3, God's redemptive mission takes a big step forward. He calls a particular individual (Abram), promises to make him into a great nation (numerous descendants with a land of their own) for the purpose of advancing his redemptive mission to all peoples. God will strategically "plant" this nation at the crossroads of civilization so that they can be a cultural force that attractively demonstrates the wisdom, justice and beauty of the one, true creator God.
  - a. In what places are you "located" to demonstrate and commend the wisdom and beauty of YHWH to our contemporaries?
  - b. In what ways does the image of being an "ambassador" for Christ create a helpful picture of how you might faithfully and respectfully represent Christ to others – without falling into either the error of being a pushy salesman for Jesus, or the error of being a secret agent for Jesus?
  - c. In what ways might you grow in being an intentional "ambassador" for Christ right in the place you are? What obstacles prevent you from doing so?
  - d. A friend of yours (knowing you to be a "religious") person comments that Mormonism really seems to work. Every Mormon they know is successful, has high moral standards, and has well-behaved and accomplished children. How is this radically different than the manner in which the Christian community is called to embody and demonstrate the wisdom and beauty of Christ? To what degree do you think that Christians communicate that following Jesus is the same sort of avenue to 'success'?
  
3. The Bible holds up Abraham as "the man of faith", being in some sense an example for us to follow (see Hebrews 11:1-20). However, when we look at Abraham's life, we see that he was a mixed bag of faith and unbelief, wisdom and folly, obedience and rebellion, courage and cowardice. In what ways does this inform your understanding of what it means to follow Christ "in faith" (see Hebrews 11:1)? In what ways is this encouraging (or discouraging) to you?