

1. The Holy Spirit Working Through History: From the Beginning of Time to the Gospel of Matthew

Introduction

Many people think of God's revelation as beginning with Abraham or Moses, but the truth is, **God has been present and active since the very beginning of time**—not just with humanity, but with all of creation. The Holy Spirit has been stirring in human cultures long before the biblical narrative begins. By recognizing this, we can see how God's work is **not limited to one nation or time period** but extends to all people and civilizations.

1. The Presence of God in Creation

- **God as the Creator of All Things** – Genesis 1 teaches that God created the universe, the earth, and humanity. But God's presence and guidance **did not begin with Israel**—He has been walking with all of creation from the start.
- **The Holy Spirit Moving Through History** – The Spirit of God (Ruach Elohim) is described as moving over the waters in Genesis 1:2. This same Spirit has been at work **guiding, inspiring, and revealing truth to all people throughout history**.

2. Early Civilizations and the Stirring of the Spirit

Before Israel became a nation, other great civilizations flourished, leaving behind stories, laws, and traditions that **echo themes found in the Bible**. This suggests that God was already at work in humanity's quest for truth, justice, and meaning.

Sumerian Culture and Parallels to the Bible

- **The Flood Narrative** – The Epic of Gilgamesh (c. 2100 BC) contains a story of a great flood, similar to the one in Genesis. The presence of such stories in ancient cultures suggests that the experience of a divine warning and salvation was not unique to Noah but a theme God allowed different cultures to perceive.
- **The King's List & Hammurabi's Code** – Ancient Sumerians recorded their kings and laws in a way that mirrors biblical genealogies and legal codes, showing how early civilizations sought order and divine justice.
- **Abraham's Roots in Mesopotamia** – The biblical figure Abraham came from **Ur of the Chaldeans** (Genesis 11:31), a major Sumerian city. This means Israel's story begins in the very culture where some of these ancient narratives originated.

3. God's Revelation as a Gradual Process

- **Progressive Revelation** – God's truth did not appear suddenly in a vacuum. Instead, He gradually **prepared humanity through different cultures, ideas, and historical events** before fully revealing Himself through Christ.
- **The Inclusion of All People** – By recognizing God's work in pre-Israelite civilizations, we see that **God's plan has always been for all of humanity, not just one group**.

4. Common Religious Themes Across Cultures

Many ancient civilizations shared **universal religious themes**, which can be seen as evidence of God planting spiritual truths in the hearts of all people. These include:

- **A supreme divine being** – Even in polytheistic cultures, there was often a “high god” or ultimate creator.
- **Sacrifice and atonement** – Practices of offering sacrifices to maintain divine favor are common across cultures.
- **The struggle between good and evil** – Many traditions reflect a cosmic battle between light and darkness, good and evil.
- **Life after death or divine judgment** – Beliefs about an afterlife or a final reckoning echo biblical themes.

5. Jesus as the Fulfillment of Ancient Longings

- **The Answer to Humanity’s Deepest Questions** – The Gospel is not just a new religious idea; it fulfills the ancient longings for redemption, justice, and divine connection that have existed across cultures.
- **A Universal Savior** – Matthew’s genealogy and Gospel emphasize that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel but also the answer to the hopes and needs of all humanity.
- **A New Creation** – Through Jesus, God’s plan comes full circle, bringing renewal and restoration to all creation.

6. Implications for Understanding the Gospel of Matthew

- **A New Beginning** – Just as Matthew begins with a **genealogy**, linking Jesus to history, we see that God’s plan is **not new**—it is the fulfillment of something long in motion.
- **The Virgin Birth and Other Themes** – The concept of a **miraculous birth** is found in multiple ancient traditions, but in Jesus, it becomes **the true and ultimate fulfillment** of God’s direct intervention.
- **God’s Kingdom for All** – Recognizing that God has worked through all cultures helps us see that **Jesus came not just for the Jews but for the whole world.**

7. Reflection Question

- How does recognizing God’s presence in all of history change the way we see His work today?

Conclusion

The Bible does not exist in isolation from history. **God has been working through human civilizations since the beginning, guiding them toward truth.** The Holy Spirit has been present, stirring in different cultures, and preparing the way for Jesus. Understanding this helps us appreciate the Gospel of Matthew in its **broader, universal context**—as the culmination of God’s ongoing revelation to the world.