

Genesis 12.¹⁻³

Nations

Background

These 3 verses at the start of Genesis 12 are key to the whole Biblical revelation. They mark a turning point in the book of Genesis, and a foundational statement of the great promise which comprises the gospel.

From this point on in the Old Testament, with this extraordinary promise made by the Lord to Abram, the focus of God's dealings with humanity is largely (though not quite exclusively) centred on one people from whom in the fulness of time would come the one person, the Messiah (the 'anointed one', or 'the Christ').

The promise of blessing made to Abram anticipates, therefore, the coming of Jesus; but it also amplifies the promise first made in the garden of Eden ([Gen.3.15](#)), sometimes described as the 'protoevangelium' ("the first good news").

It's important to see both that the blessing of God will issue in this childless man and woman being made by God into 'a great nation'; and that God's blessing on this man would issue in blessing being experienced by 'all peoples (nations) on earth'.

Nations, in other words, provide the context for this foundational promise of blessing. That's the reason why, prior to Genesis 12 and the concentration thereafter on this one family line, space is carefully given to the emergence of the different nations: the promise of God has the nations in view.

And that, of course, is also the reason why, in the immediate aftermath of the fulfilment of the promise in and through Jesus, the great commission which He gives to His followers embraces very specifically all nations ([Matt.28.19](#)).

The early chapters of Genesis, accordingly, far from being merely an interesting prelude or 'appetiser', are actually a hugely important part of the revelation of God, underlining the significance for Him, and for the gospel, of the 'nations'. And those early chapters of the first book of the Bible are matched by the picture given in the Bible's final book, the book of Revelation, where we read that the multitude (so big that no one could number it) which gathers round the throne to rejoice in God's salvation through Jesus – that multitude is comprised of those 'from every nation, tribe, people and language' ([Rev.7.9](#)).

The passages in this study, therefore, lead up to the great promise of God to Abram in Gen.12.1-3, and provide the chance to explore the background to the emergence of the 'nations' who will be the recipients of the promised blessing.

As well as '**day**' (7), which deals directly with the promise of God to Abram, it might be most useful to concentrate on '**days**' (4) and (5). As ever, there are additional questions in relation to these 3 'days'.

1) Monday 2nd May – mandate

Read [Genesis 9.1-7](#)

“.. be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth ..” (Gen.9.1)

God’s judgment through the flood brought a new beginning: the command to Noah mirrors [that](#) to Adam and Eve. Similarly, the judgment of God born by Jesus on the cross brought a new beginning – and a new mandate to ‘fill the earth’ ([Mt.28.18-20](#)).

God’s blessing issues in growth (v.1): in what ways have you seen growth in your life under the blessing of God?

Why is it so important that human beings are viewed always as people made ‘in the image of God’?

Prayer: Thank You, O God, that You give a new start to all who trust in Jesus: help me to enter each new day mindful of that grace, and eager to fulfil His mandate.

2) Tuesday 3rd May – covenant

Read [Genesis 9.8-17](#)

“.. ‘My covenant between Me and you and all living creatures ..’” (Gen.9.15)

There’s a generosity in the heart of God, expressed in this covenant, established with Noah and embracing ‘all living creatures’: the same generosity lies behind His love **for the world**, and the gift of His Son that those who trust in Him may live ([Jn.3.16](#)).

Why was the rainbow such an appropriate ‘sign’ of this covenant on the back of the terrible flood?

To what extent should this covenant with ‘all living creatures’ inform our perspective on environmental issues?

Prayer: I’m glad, Lord, that You have compassion on all that You have made ([Ps.145.9](#))! May there be that same generosity of spirit in all my attitudes and actions today.

3) Wednesday 4th May – peoples

Read [Genesis 9.18-27](#)

“.. from them came the people who were scattered over all the earth ..” (Gen.9.19)

The new, postdiluvian world was populated by the sons of Noah. The conduct of those sons shaped the experience of, and the relationships between, the generations of their families, and served to create the emergence of distinct ‘people groups’.

What was the sin of Ham and what lessons can you learn from that?

Ham's conduct impacted his son, Canaan: how might your bad choices have a lastingly negative effect on those nearest to you?

Prayer: Keep me, today, O Lord my God, from disrespectful words and deeds, especially when confronted by the fallibility and failures of those around me.

4) Thursday 5th May – nations

Read [Genesis 10.1-32](#)

".. by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations .." (Gen.10.20)

The larger part of the chapter is given over to what is not so much a genealogy as a table of nations. Though the Lord will from this point on drive His purposes forward through just one people, He always has the nations in His 'rear-view mirror'.

Three broad lines of descent from Noah are listed in this table of nations: does each broad set of 'nations' have distinctive characteristics?

What bearing does Noah's pronouncement ([Gen.9.25-27](#)) have on the experience and characteristics of the three lines of descent

How do distinctive 'national' characteristics come about, and how do they play into the divisions and tensions between nations?

Nations can become 'kingdoms' (v.10): what light do vv.8-12 shed on the distinction between a nation and a kingdom?

The nations are spread out (10.5, 32), divided (10.25) and scattered (11.4, 8, 9) – sin is disintegrative in its effect: how is that seen in the world today?

Prayer: How I long for the day, O Lord, when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of Your Son: help me by my living today to hasten the coming of that day!

5) Friday 6th May – technology

Read [Genesis 11.1-4](#)

".. a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves .." (Gen.11.4)

Technology went to their heads! Security (a city), identity (a name) and unity (not scattered) were the issues with which they preoccupied themselves. But a presumptuous DIY way of pursuing these things is never the approach to adopt!

In what ways do you see these three – security, identity, and unity – being pursued by society today?

What part do each of these three concerns (security, identity, unity) play in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine at present?

The same Babel 'mind-set' can easily creep into the perspective of the church: how might a local church be found unwittingly to pursue these same concerns by their own means?

Are we, without ever realising it, too much reliant on strategies and 'tower-building' rather than evidencing a clear reliance on the Lord in prayer?

How have advances in technology today made us presumptuous and proud?

Prayer: You, O God, are my refuge and strength, my strong city! Help me throughout today to trust You fully, to fix my eyes on Jesus, and to know Your peace.

6) Saturday 7th May – scattered

Read [Genesis 11.5-9](#)

".. then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them .." (Gen.11.6)

God knows better than any the 'power of one'! His scattering the nations was a judgment on their presumptuous sin, and at the same time a mercy on His broken world: their being scattered put a limit on the damage which their sinfulness could do.

Many of the world's challenges today need coordinated action on the part of different nations: are steps in this direction to be welcomed, feared, or both?

Does the unity of the Spirit in the life of a church create huge potential for doing the impossible?

Prayer: In a broken, fragmented world, Lord, You have given Your people the ministry of reconciliation: help me today to be an instrument of peace in all I do and say.

7) Sunday 8th May – blessing

Read [Genesis 12.1-3](#)

".. all peoples on earth will be blessed through you .." (Gen.12.3)

Over against the scattered nations, God would build a very different nation, whose twelve tribes under one king, however fragile that kingdom was, would point forward to the 'holy nation' of King Jesus' followers, enjoying at last, to the full, God's blessing.

How do you balance your loyalty to the 'holy nation', of which you're a part, with your loyalty to the nation to which by birth you belong?

How important is it, as a testimony to the truth of the gospel, that a local church be comprised of people from different nationalities, backgrounds, personalities, stages of life?

As you gather for worship today, how will that gathering give expression to the fulfilment of this promise to Abram in Christ?

Prayer: *How grateful I am to You, my God and King, for Your great mercy towards me in bringing me into this new great nation in Jesus Christ. May Your Name be praised!*