

“Good News for the Nations”

Genesis 10 & 12

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Just recently in the state of Gujarat, India a missionary from another country and his two sons were killed by a crowd who saw him as a threat to their Islamic religion. If he was unwelcome, why was he there?

Just recently we saw pictures of the living conditions of one of our missionaries in another country in central Asia. For several days they had to leave their home and wait in another city while religious unrest swept through their area. The wife and her children have been house-bound for days at a time because of the customs in that country that make it virtually impossible for a woman to leave her home without certain conditions being met. Why would they live that way?

Another of our missionaries is in another country in Central Asia where until just recently getting enough heat and electricity was a major concern for them and their two preschool children. They are attempting to learn the language, struggling with just the routines of daily living. Buying food and other normal activities are time-consuming and frustrating experiences.

Yet another is in Macedonia and keeping their bags packed with a ready evacuation plan because the ethnic fighting in near-by Kosovo and Albania constantly threatens. Why would they stay under those conditions?

Now I know I have painted a fairly bleak picture of life for these missionaries and others, and I know they also experience some very good times – but nonetheless the question must be asked, “Why are they there?” “Why live that way?”

These are all very capable and highly educated people. They had occupations and professions here in the states that were earning them good incomes with excellent prospects for more. Why would they go to some disadvantaged and even dangerous backwater of the world to live? I have read some of the letters and e-mails written

during their first months – I heard the pain of separation from family and friends, the discouragements in just making it through each day, and even the doubts about their choice. Why are they there?

I've talked with the parents and grandparents of these young adults and their children and again the appropriate question is "Why?" You spend much of your life trying to protect and prepare your children for life. You grow to like them, not just love them. You enjoy being with them and then they go to a place where you can only seldom be with them and you can't even have the privilege of watching your own grandchildren grow up. Why are these parents willing to send them and even encourage them in their going?

Why are family and friends willing to make significant contributions to support these missionary families? Many families each gave over \$5000 last year to the ministries of Southern Gables including our missions support. Many families give 10-20% of their income to help support these efforts around the world. Many pray not just for minutes but hours each month for these missionaries. Why? Why would people make such an investment of their money and time? Let me show you why!

*According to the Bible, from the very beginning, when God first created the world and humanity, it was his intention to bless them. It was never his intention to create men and women and then lose them – to watch unmoved and un-acting as they destroyed themselves. As we have already seen in the first 11 chapters of the book of Genesis, God refuses to give up on humanity. Adam and Eve were blessed beyond description – we call it the Garden of Eden. They were given the privilege of being the means whereby **many others** would know the same blessing of God on their lives as Adam and Eve enjoyed. But they sinned against God – desiring to lead their lives by their own rules instead of God's – and God expelled them from the Garden.*

*But God didn't give up – he gave them a new beginning. From their son Seth and other children, people began to spread out over the earth. **They were enjoying the blessing of God.** But they sinned against God until God said of them "every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts were only evil all the time." And so God judged them – the flood came and destroyed them all - except Noah and his family.*

With Noah's sons God gave humanity a new beginning. But the blessing God wanted to bestow on people they rejected – deciding to build their own significance and security as we saw last week from Genesis 11. And so God judged them – they were scattered over the earth when their language was confused at Babel.

But still God was not done – God reached down into that sea of humanity and selected one man through whom God would begin again – the man, Abraham.

And so we come to Genesis 12:1-5

“The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.”² “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”⁴ So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

*Later in this series we are going to look more closely at this man Abram and the specifics of this text but this morning I want you to see the context. When we come to Genesis 12 and following there is a definite shift in the focus of the book of Genesis. Prior to this (Genesis 1-11) the whole of humanity is written about. We see the growth of the human race from Adam and Eve to the time of the flood – all humanity is in focus. Then again after the flood we see the growth of the whole human race up to the time of the scattering at Babel – again all humanity is in focus. But at Chapter 12 and following we see that the focus of the book turns to **one family** and eventually just **one group of people** – the descendants of Abraham's grandson Jacob otherwise known as Israel.*

*A casual look at the rest of the OT would seem to indicate that God had turned his attention **away from** the world **to** just one people - as if the OT was largely a book by the Jews, about the Jews and for the*

*Jews. But while the rest of the OT **is** mainly by the Jews and largely about the Jews it is definitely **not only for** the Jews. Something very significant happens here in this section of Genesis (Genesis 10-12) for here God declares his agenda for the rest of history.*

*Listen to it again from Genesis 12:2-3. “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” From the beginning, God’s intention had been to bless the **whole** world – to create for himself a people from all the peoples of the world – “And **all** the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

God’s agenda has not changed; it still includes people from every nook and cranny of the world – the “shepherd” people of Central Asia, the Kyrghese, the Albanians, the Navahos, the tribes of S/E Asia, etc.

Let me show you how Moses, the author of Genesis, makes that so apparent not only by this powerful 3rd verse of chapter 12 but by the way he sets this up in chapter 10. The chronology of events in Chapters 9-12 of Genesis is different than the order of the chapters. Chapter 9 ends the flood with God’s promise of blessing on humanity as they obey God and increase and fill the earth. Chapter 10 demonstrates how the descendants of Noah spread out over the world. But in Chapter 11 Moses does what many authors do, he does a kind of “flash-back” and describes why the people spread out over the whole world. Then we come to chapter 12. If the chapters were in chronological order they would be 9,11,10,12.

*It’s chapter 10 that sets the context for the significance of Genesis 12:3 – Who does God intend to bless through Abraham? **All the peoples of the world.** Look at the effort Moses goes to in chapter 10 to demonstrate the various people groups of the world. He takes the time to mention each of the three sons of Noah and what people are descended from each one. **In mentions many of the descendants of Japheth: indicating his sons and some of his grandsons: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Mesheck, and Tiras (7)***

Gomer

Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togarmah (3)

Javan

Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, Dodanim (4)

He writes of Ham again mentioning sons and grandsons:

Cush, Misraim, Put, Canaan (4)

Cush

Seba, Hvilah, Sabtha, Raamah, Sabteca (5)

Raamah

Sheba and Dedan (2)

Mizraim

Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, Partrusites, Casluhites and Caphtorites (7)

Canaan

Sidon, Hitties, Jebusites, Amorites, Girschites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites Hamathites. (11)

Lastly he writes of Shem from whom Abraham himself would

come: *He mentions sons and grandsons and other heirs.*

Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, Aram

Aram

Uz, Hul, Gether, Meshech (4)

Arphaxad

Shelah

Eber

Peleg, Joktan (2)**Joktan**

*Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth,
Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal,
Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, Jobab
(13)*

But when these names are studied it becomes obvious that Moses is not just drawing up the family tree. He is describing entire clans, people groups, nations that have descended from these three sons of Noah. Now obviously Moses doesn't mention every people group in the world but he does mention 70 which in other places in the OT as here is meant to indicate a very large number and a complete number. And by using the literary device of naming 70 he indicates all the people groups of the world. Just as significantly, the 70 he mentions come from all over the world. If you look at a map of the

then known world – what Moses does is he mentions people groups covering the whole known world.

*So when we come to Genesis 12:3, who does God have in mind when he says, “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”? **He has in mind the whole world.** God’s agenda, set right here in Genesis 12, is not just for Israel but that through Abraham God will reach out to bless the whole world – which was his intention from the very beginning of creation.*

Now look with me through several passages of Scripture that drive home this point so well: Isaiah, in 49:6, said, “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant ... I will also make you a light for the gentiles that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” This was written over 1000 years after Abraham and again God’s agenda through Israel is outlined – “that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

In the NT, in Acts 3:25 the Apostle Peter addresses a gathering of Jews and he says, “And you are heirs of prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. God said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all the peoples on earth will be blessed...’ Here the same promise, made to Abraham 2000 years earlier, is reiterated.

And it was not only Jews from all over the world that God would reach. In Galatians 3:8, the apostle Paul wrote, “the Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham, ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’”

And by the time we get to the NT we find that Jesus and the apostles are referring to the church as the spiritual descendants of Abraham. No longer is God’s method for reaching the whole world just one ethnic family – the Jews – now God is using his Church.

And in I Peter 2:9, using language strikingly similar to the language used of Israel when she had been called to be God's light to the nations, The Apostle Peter tells the purpose of God's church on

earth: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light... Vs 12 "Live such good lives among the pagans (the nations) that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" - that is when Jesus comes again.

And because the whole world is on God's agenda, this is what Jesus said to his disciples: Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the **ends of the earth.**"

And in Matthew 28:19 "Therefore go and make disciples of **all** nations..." And in Matthew 24:14 "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached **in the whole world** as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

And I think it is very significant that when Peter and the other Apostles begin to obey Jesus and tell the good news – the first audience is the one described in Acts 2. "Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven... Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome; Cretans and Arabs..." When we compare that listing of the nations with the one in Genesis 10, 2000 years earlier, we find striking similarities – meaning that both speak of the entire known world.

God's agenda has never changed in 4000 years – he is reaching all the peoples of the world. And when the Bible speaks of that time when the peoples of the world will stand before Jesus, after he comes again, this is what it says: Revelation 5: 9,10 "... (Jesus) You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth."

God is still working the plan he established 4000 years ago with Abraham. The only question is "will we believe?" "Will we believe

that that is what he is doing – still doing? Even after all these years will we believe God is still working his plan? The agenda God set for the world back in Genesis 12:2-3, he is still working today.

*In 2000 B.C. Abram believed
 Jacob believed
 In 1500 B.C. Moses & Joshua believed
 In 1000 B.C. David believed
 Jeremiah believed
 0 B.C./A.D. When Jesus came, Mary & Peter believed.
 In A.D. 400 Augustine believed
 In A.D. 1500 Calvin & Luther believed
 In A.D. 1700 Whitefield & Wesley believed
 In A.D. 1900 Spurgeon & Moody believed
 In A.D. 1999 Haleys & Bolthouses believe*

Do you believe?

Why do we go to India, to Spain, to Kyrghystan, to the rest of the unreached peoples of the world? Why do we send our young families to the other side of the earth? Why do grandparents willingly give up their families - and friends sacrifice financially to send missionaries? Because we believe that what God started with Abraham he is still doing today – and we desperately want to be a part of what God is doing.