

PM Genesis 11:1-10,26-12:4

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Date: 11 May 2025

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[0 : 00] 1-10, and then skip to verse 26, and then read into chapter 12. So Genesis 11, verse 1.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

And they said to one another, Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of man had built. And the Lord said, Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language.

And this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.

[1 : 25] So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth. And they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth.

And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth. These are the generations of Shem. When Shem was a hundred years old, he fathered Apachshad two years after the flood. And Shem lived, after he had fathered Apachshad, five hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. And then there follows in the next few verses, just a genealogy down through many generations.

And we take up the reading in verse 26. When Terah had lived seventy years, he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran. And Haran fathered Lot. Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred in Ur of the Chaldeans.

[2 : 40] And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai. And the name of Nahor's wife, Milchah. The daughter of Haran, the father of Milchah and Isca.

Now Sarai was barren. She had no child. Terah took Abram, his son, and Lot, the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai, his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife.

And they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were 205 years.

And Terah died in Haran. Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

And I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you.

[3 : 47] And him who dishonours you, I will curse. And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. So Abram went as the Lord had told him.

And Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. May God bless to us that reading of his word.

Let's join together again in prayer. So I'd like us to turn back to the passage we read earlier, and particularly to Genesis chapter 12, verses 1 to 4. There's a story that's told about Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, who was a famous preacher in London in the middle of the 20th century.

And many people would go to listen to him preach. And one person went on a number of occasions and made this observation.

The first time they went, that Martin Lloyd-Jones would read the text and then begin his sermon by saying something along the lines that there's a sense in which this is the most important verse in the whole of the Bible.

[5 : 00] And then he'd preach very powerfully from that passage. And then this person went on another occasion, and Martin Lloyd-Jones was preaching on a completely different part of the Bible.

But he would introduce the text by saying, you know, there's a sense in which this verse is perhaps the most important in the whole Bible. And that happened again and again.

Now, there's some people in the congregation who heard Lloyd-Jones many times, so you can ask if this is actually true. But it's a good story anyway. And I suppose if it is true, Lloyd-Jones was so taken up with the wonder of the particular text that he was studying each week, that to him at that moment it felt like it was the most important text in the whole Bible.

Well, the passage that we've just read, Genesis 12, that we're looking at, Genesis 12 verses 1 to 4, really is a prime candidate for the most important passage in the whole Bible.

It is absolutely pivotal to the whole narrative of Scripture turns on these verses. If we just sort of look back as to what the Bible has told us so far, in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, God creates the universe, and he creates it at a perfect and harmonious place.

[6 : 29] It is under God's blessing. And then in chapter 3, we have what's often called the fall, where the God-appointed rulers over the rest of creation, the first humans, Adam and Eve, revolt against God, their maker.

And the consequence of that is a series of broken relationships, of discord and death and even a curse. And then chapters 4 to 11 of Genesis really sort of describe the outworking of that rebellion, of the fall, and the curse that came as a result of that.

And there's a progression of evil and of then the judgment of the flood. And it speaks of how the world descended into violence and corruption.

Now these chapters are fascinating chapters to read, but they are pretty bleak. There are occasional shafts of light where the grace of God sort of breaks through and shines on the world. But in general, these chapters from chapters 4 to 11 are quite dark, though they are extremely incisive and accurate in their description of humankind.

[7 : 50] But then we come to this passage here, Genesis 12 verses 1 to 3. And we come to a turning point, a turning point from curse to blessing.

Blessing to Abraham personally, but also through him, ultimately a promise of blessing to all the families of the earth.

Now, if you're not feeling well, you may be feeling some pain or discomfort, your body's just not working right, you go to the doctor.

And what he has to do first, or she has to do first, is to diagnose the problem, diagnose what your illness is. The doctor won't just sort of rush to a cure, they have to find out what the problem is. And only when they've diagnosed the problem will they come to a cure, a treatment. And our world is sick and diseased.

[8 : 53] There is something badly wrong with our world. That's felt very widely by people everywhere. Perhaps universally, everyone will say, yeah, there's things that are wrong, deeply wrong with our world.

And Genesis 3 to 11 really diagnose the problem, what is wrong with our world. It's a diagnosis. We have a very thorough kind of just description of human nature, of the human race, and of what is wrong with the human race. And then from Genesis 12 onwards, we really have God's treatment plan, what God is going to do, and does do, to cure the problem, to cure the disease, to heal our world.

In fact, the last line of verse 3 of Genesis 12 is quoted by Paul, the Apostle Paul, in Galatians chapter 3, verse 8, in the New Testament.

And he describes these words that all in you, that's in Abraham, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. He describes that as the gospel in advance, the good news in advance.

[10 : 13] So I want to look at just this passage under two headings. There's the call in verses 1 and 2, and then the promise. So first of all, the call.

So the Lord said to Abraham, go from your land and from your relatives and your father's house to the land. I will show you. So this call had come to Abraham while he was still in Ur.

That's his own country, his homeland. And there are two stages to Abraham's journey. First of all, from Ur to Haran, which is in the border area between Turkey and Syria today. And then from Haran to Canaan, which is modern day Palestine-Israel. And God calls him. It's an authoritative call, demanding obedience from Abraham. In fact, we could make a parallel with the call in the New Testament, the call that the Lord Jesus often made.

[11 : 13] So often, Jesus met people, and his words to them were, follow me. And that's kind of like the call that God, the Lord, issues to Abraham here.

And there's, I suppose, two elements to it. There's a leaving behind. He is to go from his homeland. And that for us too is a reality that the call of Jesus Christ, the call of God in our lives, there is a leaving behind.

A leaving behind of the old life with its priorities. Now for Abraham, that probably included other gods. In Joshua chapter 24 verse 2, we're told that long ago, this is speaking to the Israelites, long ago your ancestors, including Terah, the father of Abraham, and Nahor, lived beyond the river Euphrates and worshipped other gods.

And for us today, we are called to leave behind not necessarily geographic place, but we're to leave behind our old priorities. The things that maybe consume our thoughts, our lives.

The things that are our idols. The things that once held our attention and our first desire. And we're to leave that behind.

[12 : 36] And we're to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. We're to leave behind our sins. To turn from those sins. And we are to follow. And that's also in the call to Abraham. Go to the place, to the land, I will show you.

So Abraham was to follow where the Lord would lead him. And we too are to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. For us today, we are called by God, by Jesus Christ, to set out on a journey of faith in him. And the question for each of us is, have you set out on that journey? Jesus Christ calls you today, come and follow me. Well also, the call to Abraham is to be a blessing.

In verse 2, it says, I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

Now, that's one way of translating it, so that you will be a blessing. Or it can be translated just as an imperative. Be a blessing. You are to be a blessing. I don't think it makes much difference which of those is right.

[13 : 47] Because, basically, Abraham is being called to be a blessing. To be a blessing to others. others. So, first of all, God blesses Abraham and we'll come to look at that in a few minutes.

But, Abraham is blessed in order to be a blessing. Now, in Abraham's own lifetime, sometimes he was a blessing to others and at other times he failed in that.

And in fact, later on in this chapter, we see his failure in that, in his relationships with, in Egypt, with the Pharaoh there. And, there's a similar pattern with Abraham's descendants, the people of Israel. The Israelites also were called to be a blessing to the other nations. But, very often, they failed in that. And, we today, as God's people, are called to be a blessing to the world.

at one level, that's in the broader sense of the word. We're to make the world a better place. We are saved in order to serve, to serve the communities and the people that we live amongst.

[14 : 56] Both Peter and Paul in their letters urge believers to do good. So, in Galatians 6, verse 10, Paul writes, do good to all people, especially those of the family or the household of faith.

So, we are to do good to all people. Peter, in his speech, his sermon to Cornelius and his family, describes Jesus as the one who went around doing good.

And, if we follow him, we will also seek to do good in just the broader sense. So, in our own sphere of life and work, whether that's in health or education, in business, politics, agriculture, science, arts, whatever it is, as a mother, father, husband, wife, son, daughter, relative, neighbour, classmate, citizen, we are to seek to be a blessing to others that we come into contact with.

But, especially, we are to be a blessing for them spiritually to tell others the gospel, to introduce people to Jesus Christ and, also to live as a community of God's people, as a welcoming community, as a community that is a light to the world and that's salt of the earth.

We are to live to bless others. That was the call to Abraham, it's the call to us today. Then, secondly, we come to the promise and, it's in verses two and three, God says, I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

[16:39] I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonours you I will curse and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. So, I'm sure you've spotted the key word there which is the word bless or blessing which appears five times in verses two and three and blessing is a hugely important word in the context of Genesis.

God's blessing characterised the original creation in the creation account in Genesis chapter one. Three times we read that God blessed his creation.

The last of those is that he blesses the human beings that he has created. And that word blessing it has a meaning of wholeness of abundance of fruitfulness of harmony in relationships.

It comes under God's pronouncement about his creation that it was all very good. Physically and spiritually a whole creation that God blessed that was living under God's blessing.

Now as we've already noted Adam and Eve the first humans rebelled. They revolted against God their maker. And the result the punishment of their sin was a curse in particular a curse on the land a curse on man's relationship with his environment.

[18:13] Now the curse a curse is the opposite of a blessing. It's the antonym it's the opposite of a blessing is a curse. And now Abram is promised the opposite of a curse which is blessing blessing restored to Abram.

And it's interesting that when Adam and Eve sinned against God Adam was told cursed is the ground because of you through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. and in sort of contrast to that in the reversal of that God promises to to bless Abram in the land that I will show you.

So there's a kind of reversal there of that curse to Adam that God will bless Abram in the land he will show him. So it's the opposite of a curse a blessing a blessing restored to Abraham and also to those who bless Abraham and ultimately and finally to all the families of the earth.

So the ultimate blessing is that what was lost in Eden will be restored. Let's look at some of the details of God's promise. God says I will make you into a great nation I will make of you a great nation so there will be a new nation among the many nations of the world.

[19:51] Now that seemed really unlikely at this time because Abraham and Sarah were an elderly childless couple. But of course we know what happens miraculously Sarah conceives and produces Isaac and from his family emerges the people of Israel the Israelites.

When we come to the New Testament God's people are a spiritual nation. In Galatians chapter 3 Paul says that understand then that those who have faith that's faith in Jesus Christ they are the children of Abraham so God's people those who believe in Jesus Christ are the true spiritual Israel the true Israel of God that is the nation that God promised to Abraham and then God says I will bless you that's an individual and personal blessing for Abraham through giving him land offspring protection this covenant relationship with the living God and again that is the same for all believers again Galatians chapter 3 verse 9 those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham the man of faith so if we are believers if we have faith in

Jesus Christ we also this blessing that was promised to Abraham comes to us now for Abraham it was a very sort of there were very physical tangible blessings land offspring and that is also true for believers maybe not always in this life but the ultimate prospect the ultimate hope the ultimate promise for believers is resurrection the resurrection of the body in a renewed physical creation but of course also there are great blessings spiritual blessings the blessings of being right with God being in relationship with God which of course was also true of Abraham and then God says I will make your name great I wonder what people are great in your estimation who do you think of us as a great person and what is it that makes them great what does true greatness consist of for you well in the previous chapter in chapter 11 verse 4 the people of the tower of

Babel in verse 4 said come let us build ourselves a city in a tower with its top in the heavens and let us make a name for ourselves lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth so in that account we have an account of human centered arrogance and ambition of a society in revolt against God that sought to make its name great its own name great and it ended in humiliation but here it is God who makes Abraham's name great true greatness is conferred by God and God is the one whose estimation of true greatness is what really counts and then in verse 3 God says I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse so Abraham is under God's protection how people treat Abraham determines whether or not they receive or whether they receive blessing or cursing from God now although the promise goes on to promise universal blessing and is so inclusive inclusive of all the peoples of the earth people can still exclude

themselves from that blessing by rejecting God rejecting God's representative who is Abraham and that is still the case today God's representative today is Jesus Christ and how you respond to Jesus Christ is crucial as to whether you receive blessing or cursing from God and then the final part of the blessing in the end of verse 3 is that all in you in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed and this verse has immense significance it's the climax of

[24 : 46] God's promise and it's the pivot the hinge on which the whole narrative of scripture turns similar words of promise appear five times in Genesis this is the first time but there are another four times this promise is reiterated to Abraham on another couple of occasions and then also to Isaac and to Jacob and one development as it goes on is that it's not only through Abraham but through Abraham's offspring that this blessing will come to all peoples or all nations now again the background is significant the background in Genesis chapter 10 and 11 Genesis 10 is after the flood at the time of Noah and it begins with Noah's sons Shem Ham and Japheth and the family trees that were descended from them verse 32 of

Genesis 10 says these are the clans of Noah's sons according to their lines of descent within their nations from these nations spread out from these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood and that's quite a positive view of the different nations and then in chapter 11 we have the account of the tower of Babel and the division and the dispersal of the human population from speaking one language to speaking many different languages and so these two chapters record the origins of the great ethnic diversity that we find in our world today and that's vitally important when we look at God's words to Abraham in Genesis 12 1-3 so after the account of Babel in Genesis 11 there's a kind of narrowing of the focus out of all these different nations one group is selected the line of Shem or the

Semitic line and it follows the line of his descendants down through the generations to one man Abraham Abraham but then through him through this one man Abraham God promises that he will bless all the nations all the families of the earth it's kind of like the hourglass of the Bible all these different nations and it narrows down to this one solitary man Abraham but then through him the promise broadens out to include all the families of the earth and in one sense it's an exclusive promise the nations are not just they can't just be left to pursue their own way their own spiritual path any and every spiritual path will not do as we saw this morning it's only through Abraham through Abraham's offspring ultimately Abraham's offspring Jesus Christ that the blessing will come so it's exclusive but it's also widely inclusive it's for all the families of the earth and the rest of the Bible just really develops this promise

Abraham becomes the father of a great nation of the Israelites God's covenant people in the Old Testament who were called to be a light to the nations to be a blessing to the other nations and from that nation from Abraham's descendants would be born a king and saviour a man who would bring blessing not just to his own people the Israelites but to all the peoples of the earth and that is the Lord Jesus Christ it's significant that Matthew's gospel in fact the opening of the New Testament it begins by speaking of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of Abraham the son of David the son of Abraham and it's pointing to the fact that Jesus Christ fulfills this promise and the New Testament tells us that this blessing for all nations is ultimately possible because

God himself in the person of Jesus Christ took on himself the curse God's curse for our sin so that the blessing of God could come to us Paul in Galatians 3 13 says that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law that's not saying that the law itself is cursed but there were curses given within the law for those who broke the law who broke the covenant with God so Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us for it is written cursed!

[29 : 56] So Jesus Christ takes the curse on himself the curse for covenant breaking in order that the blessing of God may come to people from all nations who believe in him well these words can be viewed as God's mission statement today many organizations businesses charities institutions churches have mission statements which is just basically a brief pithy statement of what their mission their purpose is here's two or three examples trip advisor is to help people around the world plan and have the perfect trip Starbucks to inspire and nurture the human spirit one person one cup and one neighborhood at a time or

Facebook to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected and the free church has one which is a healthy gospel church for every community in Scotland!

Jesus Christ and we see the great and amazing grace of God in this the human race at this time and also still today is in a mess of its own making humankind is still characterized by violence and

corruption and idolatry and so we deserve God's curse but here we find that God's mission is to bless the human race and ultimately as we saw from Galatians 3 at immense cost to himself well let's briefly apply this to us first of all as the church and then as individuals first of all to the church as the people of God often we speak of our mission or maybe of missions in the plural and we pray that God will go with us in our mission perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of the fact that God has a mission and that he calls us to take our part to play our part in his mission which is to bless all the peoples of the earth through Jesus Christ Christopher Wright has written he says that it's not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world as that God has a church for his mission in the world mission was not made for the church the church was made for mission for God's mission God God God has God for God for God God has a church for his mission in the world mission was not made for the church the church was made for mission for God's mission but also individually I wonder how you see your life maybe you ask how does God's mission fit into my life how does my life fit into

God's mission how does my life how does my life how does it fit into God's great mission for the world well then lastly just want to look at the extent of this blessing and just the fact that it is all the families of the earth it's not that every single member of the human race comes under this blessing remember there is a curse for the one who dishonors Abraham or the one who dishonors Abraham is under God's curse although it's interesting that here that the ones who bless Abraham are in the plural and the one who curses or dishonors him is in the singular and I think that shows that God's purpose God's desire is to bless now this word families is the word is actually it's bigger than a nuclear family but smaller than a nation or an ethnic group it actually a good translation would be the word clan all the clans of the earth what come under

[35 : 11] God's blessing and that perhaps suggests that representatives from all the clans of the earth will come into this blessing of God through Abraham's offspring Jesus Christ and our concern should be should extend beyond our own people our own kind to all peoples to all clans all families of the earth in our own nation there are many different ethnic groups and some people see that as a problem but we should see it as an opportunity to be a blessing to all these peoples in any way that we can and supremely to pray for them and to work for their coming under the blessing that comes through Jesus Christ the blessings of forgiveness and peace with God and the presence of God's spirit of the fellowship of believers and the hope of resurrection to eternal life we talked about how the rest of the

Bible from here onwards really is the outworking of this promise and one of the final visions we have of the Bible is of a holy multi ethnic city the new Jerusalem and John in Revelation writes this is in chapter 7 verse 9 after this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation tribe people and language standing before the throne and before the Lamb the Lamb of course is Jesus Christ and they cried out in a loud voice salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb Amen may God bless his word to us we conclude our worship this evening by singing from the Scottish Psalter version of Psalm 72