

TRINITY LECTURE 2 - God, Israel and Future of the Nations in Biblical Perspective

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[0 : 00] What made him think that God had any interest in the nations and the Gentiles, given that he himself was a Jew and grew up with a very deep-seated distance from those people?

Indeed, in some respects, probably a hatred of them. So where did he get that from? And the answer, of course, is he got it from the scriptures, his scriptures, the scriptures that we now call the Old Testament. But what I want us to do this evening is to recognize, as those of us who are Western Christians, which we are, I think almost all of us here this evening, we tend to think in very individualistic terms.

We tend to think of me and my salvation and going to heaven when I die, and that's really what it's about. And a few other people coming along with me, the more the better. But basically, it's all about me and my salvation.

And we neglect what I think is a major theme in the whole of the Bible from beginning to end, which is that God deals with nations. Indeed, I would argue that if you start at Genesis 10 and 11, you find the nations there and scattering across the face of the earth after the flood.

And then the story of the Tower of Babel. And then at the very end of the Bible, you have the nations gathered before God in Revelation, people from every nation, tribe and tongue and language gathered there to worship God.

[1 : 18] And in a sense, the whole of the rest of the Bible is how God gets from A to B and brings that story from the scattering of the nations and the division of the nations in Genesis 10, 11, to the healing of the nations and the gathering of the nations in Revelation 21 and 22.

And what fills the gap is the mission of God, God bringing that to pass through the history of the nations. And within that story of God's dealings with the nations, which, of course, is what Paul is talking about also in Romans, within that story, the place of Israel in the Old Testament is of great significance.

So we're going to be looking this evening at the relationship between the nations and Israel in the Old Testament particularly. But it leads ultimately to exactly what Paul was dealing with in his Bible study.

What I want to do, first of all, as quickly as I can, really, is to look at the nations in creation and providence, first of all, simply to think about some aspects of this broad platform on which God deals with Israel and then with his people through Jesus.

I just want to fill in for you about four or five things that the Old Testament has to say about the nations in general terms. This is even before we think about the Israelites.

[2 : 39] We need to think about the nations in general. And I'm going to deal with this fairly rapidly because I want to move on to the more central aspects of the nations in relation to Israel and Israel in relation to the nations.

So I will try to be fairly rapid. And I hope that if you are able to take notes or listen to the tape afterwards, you'll be able to follow some of the references which will at least be on the screen.

And I'm very happy if people want to later to have a copy of the PowerPoint presentation, then just email me. You can have that and I'm very happy to send it to you if that would be helpful.

So here are then these four or five points. First of all, nations as such, our ethnicity, our national distinctiveness, are part of God's creation and will also be part of God's redemption.

There's nothing wrong with being ethnically distinct. Now, of course, we turn our ethnicity into a reason for sin and strife and violence and greed and everything else. But Paul tells us in Acts 17 that from one man God made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth.

[3 : 44] And God determined the time set for them, the places where they would live. He pulls that out of Deuteronomy 32, which says almost exactly the same thing. And when we come to the end of the story, the vision of the Bible at the end is that it will be not some great melting pot in which we'll all be exactly the same, but that it will be people of every tribe and language and people and nation bringing their wealth and their praises and their glory into the city of God.

So the Bible's final portrait is not a melting pot, but a salad bowl, as it were, in which all our ethnicities preserve their wonderful color and texture and taste in the great new humanity and God's new creation.

So ethnic distinctiveness, nationhood, is a good thing by creation. But secondly, because we messed it up, sinned and rebelled against God, all nations stand under God's judgment.

This is the default position of humanity. And God deals with nations, not just with individuals, in judgment. Again, that's a lesson that we would read certainly in the story of the conquest, but in many other stories in the Old Testament, that nations as a whole are raised up by God and are judged by God.

And we need to build that somehow into our thinking, even though it's not easy to get our heads around it. Thirdly, any nation can be used by God as an agent of his judgment on other nations, without necessarily making that nation that he uses in and of itself righteous or any more righteous than the other one.

[5 : 14] That's part of the mystery of God's providence. So God used the Israelites as the agent of his judgment against the Canaanites for their wickedness. That's the way the New Testament interprets it.

But then God told the Israelites, if you behave like them, I will bring other nations as agents of my judgment upon you, which he did for far more generations than he'd done on the Canaanites.

The Israelites suffered the hand of God's anger at the hands of the Syrians and the Assyrians and the Babylonians and so on. So God can use one nation against another as the agent of his wrath.

But, fourthly, any nation can be the recipient of God's mercy. Just as God says about individuals in Exodus, he says, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and compassion on whom I will have compassion.

So God extends that same principle, not just to individuals, but to nations. The most outstanding teaching about this in the Old Testament is Jeremiah chapter 18, the story of the potter.

[6 : 18] You remember that God sent Jeremiah shopping to buy a pot. And he goes to the potter's house and watches the potter at work and presumably asks the potter what he's making. And the potter tells him he's making a wine jar or something.

But then Jeremiah notices something happens in the clay which makes the thing not work the way the potter intended. So the potter forms a different pot. And Jeremiah says, what are you doing now?

He says, well, that didn't work. I'm making a teapot or whatever it was. Something changed from one to the other. An intention was declared. Some response was not the way it should have been in the clay.

And the intention was then changed. And the potter, in the end, did differently from what he said. If you read and read Jeremiah 18, the rest of it, God says, that's the way I run history.

We turn Jeremiah 18, sadly, into a piece of personal piety because we interpret the Bible as we so often do through our hymn book instead of through the Bible itself. And we've got that wonderful hymn, Have Thine Own Way, Lord, Have Thine Own Way, Thou art the potter, I am the clay.

[7 : 23] And we make it into a matter of personal piety, which is wonderful, very nice sentiment, but not remotely anything to do with what Jeremiah was talking about. Jeremiah was talking about God's international sovereign justice and the way in which God deals with nations and says that he may raise one up, but if they do wickedly, he will turn against them.

If he declares of another nation that he will bless them and they do wickedly, he will turn against them. It's God dealing with nations. And in the book of Jonah, we have the case study of Jeremiah 18, in which Jonah is sent to preach judgment against Nineveh and eventually gets right to doing it.

A rather circuitous route, as you know. But when Jonah preaches judgment against Nineveh, what happens? The king and everything from the king and the throne to the dog in the street, they repent.

I mean, they even clothe the dogs in sackcloth and ashes to make sure they got included. The whole society turns from its wickedness and God suspends his judgment and does not judge them. Much to Jonah's embarrassment.

Jonah's embarrassment, who, even though he's a prophet, quotes the Bible back at God and says, there you are, God. See, I knew you would do that. That's why I ran away. Because you are a merciful, compassionate and gracious God.

[8 : 35] And you go around forgiving people, which makes it rather difficult to be a prophet of judgment. And so Jonah is embarrassed by the grace of God. But Jonah is a case study in God declaring one thing and then doing something different because of the response of people.

Now, that's a case study in the way in which God deals with humanity at large in relation to nations. It's not easy for us to get our minds around what that means.

I'm just telling you what the Bible says. I'm not necessarily trying to defend or explain everything that's in it. So that's the fourth thing. Two sides of the same coin. God uses nations as agents of judgment and God responds to nations in his mercy.

And ultimately, fifthly, all nations and their histories are under God's sovereign control. The Bible affirms that so often that it's amazing that we miss it.

In fact, it's not easy sometimes for us to remember that when history seems to be out of control, as it usually does when you're right close up to it. It's easy to look back 50 years or 100 years and say, isn't it marvelous what God has done in China?

[9 : 44] You know, look at all this wonderful church growth in China. That's not what people were saying in 1950 when all the missionaries had been thrown out of China. And people were asking, what on earth is God doing?

How can this be happening? But now we can see something of the remarkable sovereignty of God in history. Well, the Bible affirms that already in a whole lot of places, some of which are on the screen in Deuteronomy and in the prophets and in the Psalms and elsewhere.

So that really is the first section that I wanted to bring to you. I wish I'd got, you know, a whole evening or lecture simply to talk through every one of those because they are profound truths.

But what I'm trying to do is to lay that as a platform, this wide, universal sovereignty of God within which he deals with humanity in the nations in which we exist, in our ethnicities and groupings and so on, as whole.

God deals sovereignly with all human history. On the other hand, God called Israel into existence. God chose Abraham, Genesis 12.

[10 : 52] And chose Abraham precisely in order that the nations should be blessed, which is pretty good news because the nations have been pretty unblessed up to that point, if you think of the story of Genesis 11.

And so what the Bible then tells us, and the Old Testament, of course, is even more emphatic about this, is that what God was doing in and through Israel had a particularity, a uniqueness, which was theirs and theirs alone.

Because God says that.

A stewardship or a stewardship or a possession of a unique experience of God's revelation and of God's redemption, which Israel in the Old Testament had and nobody else did.

So how do we put these together? Is the question I'm really addressing. How does God's sovereign governance of all the nations relate, on the other hand, to Israel's particular status as a unique people through whom God was acting in human history for the blessing of the world?

[12 : 22] How do the nations in general connect to Israel in particular? That's the question. And I want to suggest that that connection takes four forms, and I'll try to move through them reasonably concisely as best I can to help us to get some sense of this remarkable piece of biblical teaching, which we so often neglect and sometimes aren't even aware of.

Here are the four things. I'll give you them in quick order, and then we look at each one of them in turn. First of all, the nations are portrayed as witnesses or spectators, if you like, of what God was doing in Israel.

Secondly, the nations are presented as the beneficiaries of what God was doing in Israel. Thirdly, the nations are presented as coming, eventually, coming to worship God, to bring their offering to God, in a sense to be offered to God in worship to him, as Paul was saying.

And fourthly, and most amazingly of all, the nations come to be included within the identity of Israel as the people of God. In fact, nothing short that the nations become Israel in Old Testament perspective and future vision.

So let's look at each of those four perceptions as we go along. First of all, the nations are seen as witnesses of Israel's story, of what God was doing in the history of Israel.

[13 : 50] An analogy that I like to use here, which is not a biblical one, but I think it's a little bit helpful, is that of a theater. And imagine that the nations are presented, as it were, as the audience in the stalls of a drama that is happening on the stage.

On the stage is God at work in the story of Israel. And the nations see and hear and observe what's happening. They are spectators. Not just spectators.

The biblical word is witnesses. And when you witness something, it affects you. And to be a witness is a significant relational thing. So there's more than just watching, but there is certainly at least watching.

How do the Israel witness? Well, they witness three things about the story of Israel. One is that the nations witness God's mighty acts of redemption for Israel.

The first time we come across this particular dynamic is in the Exodus itself, the story of the Exodus. Because do you remember when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt and took them across the Red Sea, Moses breaks out into song.

[14 : 58] And what he sings is, among the rest of the song, is this. The nations will hear and tremble, and anguish will grip the people of Philistia and Edom and Moab and Canaan.

And all these surrounding nations will hear about what Yahweh, the God of Israel, had done for his people in bringing them out of Egypt. In other words, the Israelites were not living in a sort of vacuum-sealed thermos flask, not open to any other historical reality.

They were living on an open stage, and whatever happened to them was visible to the nations. And indeed, that song of Moses is proved to be true when the spies of Joshua ended up in Rahab's brothel, you remember, in Jericho, and go and we all sort of sharpen, take a breath, wondering what's going to happen next.

But amazingly, this woman, Rahab, who's the very first Canaanite we meet in the story, is a Canaanite who's been converted and gets saved.

This is a remarkable fact that the story of the conquest begins with the story of conversion and salvation, the story of Rahab. And why is that? Well, because she says, my people, we have heard what your God has done, and my people are scared stiff of what your God has done, and I want to be on your side, guys, is what Rahab says.

[16 : 20] And so she turns to the living God of Israel, and because she has heard what he had done. So Moses' awareness that the nations would witness and see is their truth.

So that's the first part of witness. Secondly, the nations witness Israel's judgment. That is, when God acts in judgment upon Israel, the nations would see. Whether it was God saving Israel or God judging Israel, it was on the open stage.

Moses uses this as an argument against God when he intercedes with God for the Israelites in Exodus 32 to 34.

You remember that occasion, the golden calf, and the Israelites had committed all kinds of sin and apostasy, and God was about to wipe them out and tells Moses to get out of his way. He says, I'm going to wipe these people out and start again with you.

And Moses says, excuse me, God, you can't do that. More or less is what he says. He says, one, you must remember Abraham. You can't go back in your promise. Two, these are your people, and you brought them out of Egypt.

[17 : 23] And so you can't just destroy them like this. And thirdly, what will the Egyptians think? See, you brought them out in the full sight of the Egyptians. Now, if you destroy them, they're going to be laughing up their togas or whatever they were.

They're going to be saying, what kind of God is this? He's either malicious because he brings them out and then destroys them, or he's incompetent because he can't take them any further. And so that's the kind of reputation you'll have, Lord, if you do this.

Is that what you want to happen? So the nations will see, they will witness what you do, whether in redemption or in judgment. And then, of course, when God did send the Israelites into the judgment of exile, the nations saw and laughed and mocked, and God could not bear it.

And so the third element of witness is that the nations become witnesses of God's restoration of Israel. When God brought the Israelites back to their land after the exile in 538 BC, and the prophecies about the return to the land are fulfilled in that historical return, Ezekiel makes it very clear that this was not just for the Israelites only.

Indeed, God says, in a very tactless kind of way, God says, Well, it's not for your sake, O Israel, that I am doing these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.

[18 : 42] Because when I bring you back and restore you, then the nations will know that I am the Lord when I show myself holy through you. So the nations would be persuaded of something true about the power and reality of the living God when they saw God restoring his people to their land.

So the nations then are witnesses. They are spectators. But the second thing that we need to say is that the nations are presented not merely in the passive role of spectators or witnesses of what God was doing in Israel, but as ultimately seeing that the whole story was for their benefit and for their good, that they, the nations, the Gentiles, will ultimately recognize that what God was doing in Israel would be for their benefit and blessing, as the promise to Abraham had said.

And this, again, I think is what the Apostle Paul was very aware of when he called upon the nations to praise God, as he did at the end of Romans in the preceding part of that chapter, which Paul was just reading.

Now here are two Psalms where this concept of the blessing of the nations through the story of Israel is shown. One is Psalm 47. And I gather that Paul was looking at Psalm 47 last night.

I think you just said. I'm not sure which bit of it you looked at, but here's my take on this Psalm. Psalm 47 invites the nations to give a round of applause to Yahweh the God of Israel.

[20 : 13] It starts like this. Clap your hands, all you nations. Plural. Shout to God with cries of joy. High awesome is the Lord most high, the King over all the earth.

Now when you clap or applaud somebody, you're appreciating them for something. You're thinking, that was good. I like that. I'm blessed by that. But it's been good for me to have seen or witnessed that.

That's why you clap. So why did this Israelite call upon the nations to clap Yahweh the God of Israel? Well, verse 3 says, because he, God, subdued nations under us, Israel, and peoples under our feet.

In other words, all you nations should be giving a round of applause to God because we beat you. Now either that is the most naked cynicism, and imperialism dressed up as worship, you know, you people that we invaded should really be jolly grateful that we conquered you.

Or, it is recognizing that in the long-term plan of God, the nations will have reason to give praise and thanks to God for the history of Israel even though it included that element of conquest, the historical defeat of the Canaanites.

[21 : 28] Or to put it another way, the defeat of the Canaanites by the Israelites in that generation of their history will be seen to be part of a story through which the blessing of God ultimately will come to the nations, for which they will have cause to praise God.

The history of Israel is ultimately for the nation's blessing and salvation. That's what Psalm 47 is affirming in that rather indirect way. But more obviously and somewhat more pleasantly, Psalm 67 speaks about the nations coming to share in the blessing of God.

Because you probably remember that the priests in Israel, one of their tasks was to bless the people. In those beautiful words of the blessing of Aaron in Numbers chapter 6, where they were to say, may the Lord bless you and keep you and be gracious to you and make his face shine upon you and lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Beautiful words. And some Israelite had heard those words so often he decided to turn them into a worship song, which he did in Psalm 67. And he says, may the Lord bless us and make his face shine upon us.

Why? Next verse, so that your ways may be known on the earth and your salvation among all the nations. May the peoples, praise you, O God, may all the peoples, praise you.

[22 : 54] Now is that missionary or what? I mean, here is a psalmist taking the Aaronic blessing, which is derived, of course, from the Abrahamic blessing, God saying, I will bless you and you will be a blessing, and turning it inside out and offering it to the nations in prayer to God.

Saying, God bless us so the whole world gets blessed, so that the salvation that we enjoy will be a cause of praise among the nations. Now that, I think, is very clear.

That what is happening there is that the psalmist is recognizing this dynamic. That the reason why God would bless Israel was ultimately so that the promise of Abraham could be fulfilled, which was that the nations of the world would be blessed through the blessing of this people.

It's a blessing to be shared, not a blessing to be hoarded. So that's the second main thing. The nations are not just spectators, they are also beneficiaries of what God was doing in the history of Israel.

And thirdly, the nations will come to worship the God of Israel. Now that is logical, because that's what it was for Israel too. Response to blessing, response to benefit, response to the good things that God does for you, has to be that you turn to God and worship and praise.

[24 : 12] That's what the Psalms do. That's what Israel was supposed to do. And so it's therefore natural to assume that if God is going to bless the nations of the world, the nations will someday, eventually, somehow, come to praise God for that and actually come to worship Him.

And so, again, I struggle with this because I would love to spend the whole of the rest of the night and all next week just taking you through the Psalms, just the book of Psalms alone, to notice those places where the nations are seen and spoken about as coming to worship the living God.

I say I'm so excited about it for precisely the reason that Paul is excited about the Apostle Paul. I mean, this Paul, your Paul, is excited about the Apostle Paul in Romans because this is what just, you know, really turned Paul on, the Apostle, and this one too, I'm sure, which is this vision of the nations of the world coming to worship with their offering and their praises the living God of Israel.

He quotes so many of these Psalms, but here are just a few. I trust that they're on the screen at the moment, but Psalm 86, for example, says, Among the gods there is none like you, O Lord, no deeds can compare with yours.

All the nations that you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name. Psalm 86, verses 8 to 10. What a vision that is.

[25 : 35] You know, sometimes I wonder what was going on in the heads or the minds of these ancient Israelites way, way back, a thousand years before Christ, and yet they could come up with the faith imagination to say, all the nations that God has ever created on this planet will one day come to worship the living God.

Of course, only revelation shows that they will. People from every tribe and nation and language. But the psalmist was already saying it. Psalm 96 and Psalm 98 invite the audience to sing a new song.

Say, Sing to the Lord a new song. So you all say, okay, teach us your new song. What's the lyrics? And he says, the new song is that we are to praise his name, praise his salvation, declare his glory and his marvelous deeds.

And we say, that ain't a new song. That's the old, old story of Yahweh and his love. We've been singing that song since we crossed the Red Sea. Ah, but what makes it a new song is that it's to be sung in all the earth and to be proclaimed and declared among the nations and declare his marvelous deeds among all the peoples.

This isn't just an Israelite song anymore. It's now going to be the song of the nations. All the choirs of the universe are going to be singing this song, says the psalmist. Jesus died with Psalm 22 on his lips, both at the height of his agony when he prayed verse 1, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[26 : 56] And in his moment of triumph when he quoted the final verse, God has done it or God has accomplished it. It is finished. And right in the middle of Psalm 22, in verses 27 and 28, we read, all the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord and all the families of the nations will bow down before him for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

The nations will come to worship the living God. That, I think, is one of the reasons why Jesus died in agony, yes, but not in despair because he knew what he was dying for and it was this.

Well, there we are. I've put on the screen also some passages from Isaiah, the prophets. You know about how Isaiah talks about the nations coming up to Jerusalem and bringing in their offerings in chapter 2 and in chapter 60 and in chapter 66.

The whole book is riddled with the theme of the expectation of the praise and worship of the nations ultimately coming to the living God and that was what so much inspired the Apostle Paul's missionary vision that he was the one who was being sent to the nations with the invitation cards come and worship the living God and to bring them and to gather them in to God.

But there's something even more wonderful that I can't really stop without sharing with you. If we go back to this theme of the theater and I've said that the Old Testament presents the nations as it were as the spectators, the watchers of the drama of salvation that God is accomplishing with Israel and then we see that they are clapping spectators who appreciate, who recognize that this story is for them for their benefit.

[28 : 36] But the Old Testament is not content to leave it there merely to portray the nations as spectators not even as cheering, clapping spectators. But what the divine director to continue the metaphor intends is eventually in time in his own time eventually to bring the spectators out of the stalls onto the stage to join the original cast of the drama and then to continue the drama with a vastly increased cast drawn from every nation so that the whole story becomes the most universal story imaginable in which people of every tribe and nation are now part of the story.

So it's no longer just a story with Israel an ethnic distinctive community as it was in the period of the Old Testament but has now become the story of all nations.

God will burst the boundaries of the theater as it were to use that imagery and bring the nations in to be part of the story. The very name of Israel itself will be extended to include the nations within it.

That's not something that we're just rationalizing because it's happened that there are Christians from all over the world. This is something which the Old Testament itself envisages as I will just show you in a minute.

The Old Testament makes it unmistakably explicit that God's intention always was that Israel should ultimately include the nations not remain forever distinct from the nations.

[30 : 12] Well, that happens in at least several ways which I'll quickly move through with you. In what way are the nations included within Israel? Well, here they are. The nations will come to be registered in God's city.

They will come to be blessed with God's salvation. They will come to be accepted in God's house to be called by God's name and to be joined with God's people.

You couldn't get more included than that. Let's go through those quickly. First of all, the nations will come to be registered in God's city. Psalm 87 is the psalm from which we get the first line of an old Christian hymn which I dare say some of you still sing.

You never know these days. But I'm sure we all remember glorious things of thee are spoken Zion city of our God. I see a few smiles so it's not totally unknown to the generations here gathered.

Well, of course, that's the opening line but sadly that particular hymn doesn't use much of the rest of Psalm 87 because the glorious things that are spoken of Zion city our God are precisely who's going to be there.

[31 : 24] Who's got a right to belong to Zion? And the answer is that God is going to register there all kinds of people. Listen to it. I'll just read it. I will record Rahab and Babylon Rahab means Egypt in Old Testament symbolic language among those who know me Philistia too and Tyre along with Cush which means Sudan black Africa.

They will all say this one was born in Zion. Indeed of Zion it will be said this one and that one were born in her. The Lord will write in the register of the peoples this one and that one was born in Zion.

In other words God is saying that Zion instead of being simply the capital city of one ethnic community will become the multinational community of people who will be counted as having been born there.

In other words enfranchised registered citizens of God's city and they will include arch enemies like the Philistines as well as far off people like the Cushites the Sudanese or the Ethiopians.

God says they'll all be part of Zion. So when the role is called up yonder says Psalm 87 there's going to be a few surprises. Secondly the nations will be blessed with God's salvation.

[32 : 40] This is Isaiah chapter 19. Now this is one of the most breathtaking chapters in the whole Old Testament Isaiah chapter 19. The first half is pretty easy to understand because it's an oracle of judgment against Egypt and that's familiar territory where we know that the prophets often pronounce God's judgment upon the surrounding nations and that judgment fell.

These nations were judged and they collapsed in one way or another. But then at the end of Isaiah chapter 19 we come to the most amazing passage in which and this is the best way to put it the Israelites sorry the Egyptians says God will ultimately experience for themselves all that God did for Israel when God rescued the Israelite out of the Egyptian oppression.

If you read from Isaiah 19 from about verse 16 down to the end of the chapter you'll see that what it is is Exodus reloaded turned inside out and the caste totally changed.

The Egyptians take the place of the Israelites because God says they will cry out to me from their oppressors and I will send them a savior and a deliverer to rescue them and they will know me and worship me just as the Israelites wanted to do and the Egyptians wouldn't let them.

God says they will be struck by a plague but I will heal them and they will be joined to me. So the Egyptians the enemies of God are now going to be drawn into the sphere of redemption just as the Israelites had in the Exodus.

[34 : 12] But as if that were not enough the chapter then goes on towards the end to say ah yes not just the Egyptians but the Assyrians also and it says the Egyptians and the Assyrians will join hands.

Oh that was always a dangerous moment for the Israelites if the Egyptians and the Assyrians had an alliance it was bad news for Judah. But no they're not uniting to attack the Israelites they're uniting to worship the Lord Egypt and Assyria the nutcrackers on either side of the Israelites.

In that day verse 24 Israel will be the third along with Egypt and Assyria a blessing on the earth and the Lord Almighty will bless them and will say blessed be my people Egypt and my handiwork Assyria and my inheritance Israel.

In other words the whole identity of God's people will now be extended to include even their arch enemies. This is the extent of this prophecy. Not only will they be blessed by God they will actually become a blessing on the earth so that the Egyptians and the Assyrians will inherit the Abrahamic promise and become the vehicle of Abrahamic blessing in the world.

That's what Isaiah 19 is saying blessed with God's salvation. Amazing words. Thirdly not only registered in God's city and blessed with God's salvation they're going to be accepted in God's house and we turn to Isaiah 56 which I think is one of the passages which probably underlies what the Apostle Paul was talking about in Romans 15 as Paul was explaining earlier on.

[35 : 51] Because Isaiah 56 is spoken to foreigners in eunuchs. People who were by the laws of Deuteronomy excluded from the sacred assembly of God's people when they would meet for worship.

There were laws about who was allowed in and who wasn't and among those who were kept out were certain categories of foreigner and men who had been castrated. And so such people naturally thought as they say in Isaiah chapter 56 the Lord will exclude me from his people.

And they were right. But God says no, no, not any longer. And God says to the eunuch who chooses me and accepts my covenant and to the foreigner who chooses to worship me and to hold fast these says God I will bring to my holy mountain which of course means Jerusalem and I will give them joy in my house of prayer.

In other words they will be welcome in the temple not in some court of the Gentiles but in my temple and their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar.

The unclean nations will be able to bring their offerings right up to the very altar of God and have joy as they do so because my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations says Isaiah quoted by a rather famous Jew some hundreds of years later Jesus of Nazareth when he was in the temple and said that's what the temple is supposed to be not a hotbed of Jewish ethnic nationalism against the Romans but the very place where God wants to gather and bring the nations to bring their worship into the house of God where they will be accepted at God's house.

[37 : 34] And I like to think that either God or Luke or possibly both had a sense of humor when Luke in the book of Acts records doesn't he that the very first person from outside the Jewish community to become a believer in Jesus was a foreigner and a eunuch and was reading the book of Isaiah remember the Ethiopian eunuch and I'm quite sure that after Philip had pointed him to Jesus through what we now call Isaiah chapter 53 which was where he was reading he turned the scroll one more column to Isaiah 56 as we would now call it and said look what it says here about people like you and then he was baptized and he went on his way rejoicing he found joy not when he had been to the temple in Jerusalem but when he found Jesus the fulfillment of the temple and everything else of the Old Testament realities.

So they'd be registered in God's city blessed with God's salvation accepted in God's house fourthly the nations will be called by God's name says Amos at the end of Amos in Amos chapter 9 where in a passage which is quoted by James in Acts chapter 15 when they had a council of the church to decide about this problem of Gentiles nations coming in to the people of God and James says brothers this is what has happened and he quotes from Isaiah chapter 9 verse 11 and speaks about all the nations who are called by my name I sort of picture Amos sort of just checking that out with the Lord Lord did I get that right you actually meant nations plural is that what I'm to write because it was so shocking you see because at that point in Israelite history there's only one nation on the planet that was called by the name of the Lord and that was the Israelites Deuteronomy speaks about the other nations as not called by the Lord's name in the way that Israel is called by the Lord's name the ark was called by the name of the Lord the temple is called by the name of the Lord but the other nations aren't and here Amos says they will be the day will come when the nations the Gentiles will come to be in exactly the same position of possessive covenant relationship with God such that they can be called by the name of the Lord as the Israelites were and finally the nations will come to be joined with

God's people and to me this is the most breathtaking of all Zechariah chapter 2 verses 10 and 11 now most of the prophet Zechariah is dealing with giving encouragement to the people of Israel after the exile when they were a small vulnerable community in Jerusalem and Judah just a tiny little province of the Persian Empire and so God encourages them constantly by promising that they will be secure from their enemies and that God will bless them and God will continue his covenant relationship with them and then he promises in chapter 2 these words shout and I'm translating more or less literally shout and be glad oh daughter of Zion which means Jerusalem Zion and Jerusalem for look here I am coming says the Lord and I will reside in the midst of you I will live among you which of course was God's great promise to his people declares the Lord and then verse 11 many nations will join themselves to the Lord in that day not just the Israelites but to the Lord and they will be for me a people that's covenant language and I will reside in the midst of you now this is most fascinating because first of all

God promises Zion that the king will come back he'll come to his people and take up residence again among his people then he says oh and also many nations will come and be joined to me on that day and they will be for me a people that's the language that God had spoken of to Israel at Mount Sinai you will be for me a people and I will be for you your God and God says that will be true for the other nations and I will reside in the midst of you and the you is still Zion because it's feminine singular but the you of Zion is now you that includes many peoples not just Zion versus the nations or Zion over against the nations but Zion as inclusive of many peoples the same way that the Israelites of old had done and that is the vision which so fired the apostle Paul and that is the Old Testament substantive undergirding of the New Testament theology of mission that is what we are part of in our generation if we are called to mission which we are because we're all part of this priesthood as Paul was reminding us as we are called into mission we are called into this big picture this is the scope and the scale of God's vision for the nations of the world and that's why when we come to that day that Revelation tells us about when there will be people of every tribe and nation and language and tongue that has ever lived on this planet or ever will do that will be gathered there cleansed and redeemed and purchased by the blood of the Lamb that God will turn to Abraham and say mission accomplished

I kept my promise I said all the nations of the earth will be blessed through you and I've done it through my son Jesus and his blood on the cross so that's the scope of God's purpose for the nations in its biblical perspective I think and I think it's a marvelous vision for us to take away and to praise God for let's just do that shall we just pray for a moment and then if there's time we could have some questions and discussion if you wish but I think it's right to end with prayer our Father God when the Apostle Paul thought about these things it led him to doxology and he would praise God and give thanks to you for your great and glorious wisdom and so we need to do the same and to acknowledge that you are a great and marvelous God far beyond our understanding we can't really get our head around some of these aspects of these great visions but we want to tell you Lord that we believe them and we trust you and we see ourselves as part of this great story of multinational salvation that you are accomplishing among the nations of this world through your son

[44 : 11] Jesus Christ through whom you are bringing to fulfillment what you promised to Abraham long ago so fill our minds with these things and lead us to worship and praise you with confidence afresh in Jesus name Amen