

# GENESIS 12

## THE PROMISE OF BLESSING AMIDST THE BACKDROP OF CURSE

The story of Genesis takes a dramatic turn in Genesis 12. The people, after having sought to make a name for themselves (11:4), have been scattered upon the whole earth as a judgment by God—a byproduct of the curse. But now, God is beginning to undo the curse and replace with blessing. He will take a specific family and make a name for them (rather than them doing so themselves, 12:2), and he will shower them with blessing. The call and promise of blessing is completely by God's grace—not at all based on works—as we see that Abram's family was devoted to other gods before this (Joshua 24:2). God could have stood distant and aloof after mankind rebelled in sin. Genesis 12 tells us the opposite: he was still committed to his promise to bless humanity.

God's gracious call of Abram (soon to be known as Abraham) centers around three parts. First, the land promise. God was calling Abraham to enter Canaan, what would come to be known as the promised land. This wouldn't be easy, and it would only come after enslavement in Egypt for 400 years and a long exile in the wilderness—but God would ultimately give his people the promised land. Second, God promises in 12:2 that he would make of Abraham a great nation—such that they would be as numerous as the stars (15:5) and make Abraham to be the father of a multitude of nations (17:5). Through the miraculous birth of their son Isaac, and God's providence even as they are in captivity in Egypt—the people of Israel would increase and multiply such that they would become a numerically great people.

Finally, the third aspect of this call of Abraham is that of blessing. The word “bless” is mentioned five times in 12:1-3, which is probably strategic to show how God is reversing the curse—a word which appears five times in Genesis 1-11. Here's what we notice about this blessing God announces. Verse 2, “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great...” God is going to bless Abraham and his family. But then we get a purpose clause that gives the reason why God is going to bless them. “...so that you will be a blessing.” This is specified further in verse 3: “and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Ultimately, God is blessing Israel not so they would remain insular and enjoy God's blessing themselves—but that God would use them as an instrument of his blessing that would then be received by the nations.

What does this mean in the storyline of Scripture? First, this looks beyond Abraham, even beyond Isaac to Jesus. This promise builds off of Genesis 3:15, and coming texts like Genesis 22:17-19—that there is a coming offspring, one, singular, who will be the one to bless the nations. “And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” God tells Abraham in 22:18. In Galatians 3, Paul does nothing less than apply this to Jesus—saying he was the promised offspring who would bring blessing to the nations (Galatians 3:7-9). Paul also says that this was an early gospel message—looking forward to the salvation that Jesus would bring through his death and resurrection.

Second, this tells us that God's purposes have always been global, extending to the nations. Even as he was covenanting and blessing a particular people group—the Israelites—his intentions were always that his blessing would extend to the nations. Combine these points and we see: God's purposes were always that the promised Savior would come to bring the blessing of salvation not only to Israel, but to the world.

We live in a world that wants to be blessed. People want to receive blessing—whether they rightly understand it and see God as behind it, or not. Genesis 12:1-3 prepares us to see what true blessing is: it is to know God through Christ, the promised offspring who would come and save the world. As we continue on in Genesis, look for how this plays out: God promising and bringing about blessing in the midst of a cursed world.