

God's Multi-Ethnic Family, Pt 2 – God's Heart for Arabs and Muslim Nations (Gen 10-12)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on April 3, 2011

www.goldcountrybaptist.org

I don't know what you think of when you see an Arab in traditional dress, whether a man with a turban, or a woman with head-covering. I don't know what goes through your mind when you see someone of Arabian or Middle Eastern background, but I'm convinced that if we really had the worldview of Gen 1-12, we'd think "they're part of God's plan in Gen 12; these are peoples God promised to bless through the Jews/Jesus"! When you think of the Arab-Israeli conflict, have you ever thought "God's purpose for Israel is for them to bring salvation to Arabs"? Spiritual sons of Abraham should love Israel...and its neighbors! Our prayers for Middle East should include gospel prayers for all.

12:1 *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the **land** which I will show you; ² And I will make you a **great nation**, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so **you shall be a blessing**; ³ And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And **in you all the families [or nations] of the earth will be blessed.**"*

22:9 *Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." ¹³ Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered **him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son.** ¹⁴ Abraham called the name of that place **The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the LORD it will be provided."** ¹⁵ Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, ¹⁶ and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ indeed **I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.** ¹⁸ **In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed** ... [in context, beginning with Isaac]*

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants, the Jewish people, were promised to greatly multiply amidst many enemies and other nations. God promises thru Abraham's seed (here Isaac) and the nation to come through his line that God would use this new nation to bless all those nations of the earth around them and beyond. The family of Abraham will bless all families on earth with *salvation* blessings. The gospel is pictured here and is promised here for the nations. Turn to Acts 3. We know salvation blessing is in scope of this promise, because the NT quotes Gen 12:3 and says it was the gospel given beforehand to Abraham. The point and plan of this text was that the blessing of Abraham would come to all the Gentiles by faith in Christ (you can read about that more in Gal. 3).

What type of “bless” is the Genesis promise about? Acts 3:25 quotes this verse and v. 26b says “*to bless you by turning everyone one of you from your wicked ways*” (this is the blessing of conversion, repentance from sin, and it was first for Jews in Judea, then Samaria, then ends of the earth, 1:8, the Jews starting with Palestinian / Middle Eastern / Arab nations).

God is still on Plan A. Gen 12 is not cancelled out for the Jews or for us non-Jews, praise the Lord, God hasn’t rejected them or us. God still has a future for Israel, so they can bless all the nations, and God lets us spiritual sons of Abraham help reach nations who don’t look much like us, but neither did a middle-eastern Messiah or most of the people we read about in the Scriptures, but PTL He has a multi-ethnic family plan including Americans, Arabians, etc.

Keep your finger here in Acts and go back to Genesis. We could do a study on the Arab-Israeli conflict over the land of Israel, but it’s important we remember that unrepentant Israel is in need of the gospel, and so are the Arabs. The key words in Gen 12:1-3-*land, nations, families*-in context are first used in Gen 10 as background:

10:5:“*From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their **lands**, every one according to his language, **according to their families, into their nations.***” [same terms from Gen 12; lands, families, nations, that God will bless through Jews in 12:3]

And then there is a list of many nations, many of which were and are Arab nations, nations that became Muslim in more recent centuries, but when all these nations are listed and Genesis later says Abram and his seed are to bless all nations, in the original context, a big part is “*all Arabs will be blessed through Israel*”! As we pray for Israel, pray for the gospel there, Palestine, and beyond.

Let’s look at some of the nations in chapter 10, and let’s keep in mind that all these nations are to be blessed thru the Jews/Jesus.

- Gen 10:2 mentions “Madai” which as we saw last week became the *Medes*, or Persians (general area of Iran today, another people included in Iran were later called *Parthians*)
- In v. 22, Elam is mentioned, father of *Elamites*, who were also in the land that is now modern Iran. These from that nation were enemies of Israel who God promised to judge in Jeremiah 49, but the end of that chapter also promises God’s grace given to these people “*in the latter days.*” Paul Washer was telling us pastors over lunch yesterday that there are thousands of people coming to faith in the Lord in Iran right now, it’s all underground, pray for them, but PTL
- Last week we also noted Babel/Babylon in v. 10 in the land of Shinar or what was also called Chaldea or *Mesopotamia* (Iraq today). We know of God’s grace in the immediate context of Genesis, because God calls Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans in Mesopotamia, *from Iraq by saving grace*, and he would be the first of many to be saved from there. Abram is the first Iraqi convert, first among many brethren
- End of v. 14 mentions the “Caphtorim” which the Jews who translated the Septuagint called “the *Cappadocians*” – people group on the border of what was called *Pontus* in ancient times and border of Syria (Muslim world today)

³² *These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood.*

11:1 *Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words ...⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the **LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.***

12:3b *... in you all the families/nations of the earth will be blessed*

Acts 2:4 *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak **with other tongues**, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.⁵ Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men **from every nation** [same phrase from Genesis in original language, *all ethne*] **under heaven.**⁶ And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own **language**. [also word in Gen 11]⁷ They were amazed and astonished, saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”⁸ “And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?”⁹ “**Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus ... [now look at the end of v. 10] ...both Jews and proselytes,¹¹ Cretans and Arabs**—[noticed that before?]*

What does the word at the end of v. 10 mean? “Proselytes” were Gentile converts to Judaism, non-Jews who embraced the faith of Israel and could be welcomed into Israel once circumcised (what was unique about Acts 15 is salvation without the rituals). In Acts 6:5 when the early church selected the first “deacons” or the seven recognized servants to serve the early Jewish church and minister to widows, etc., one of the names it says was a proselyte. From the beginning of church history as well as Israel’s history, foreigners from other ethnicities who truly believed in the true Lord were in the family of faith as full-fledged members. The proselytes weren’t Jews, v. 10 distinguishes, but they were fully family members

Did you realize Jews travelled across the land of the middle East and across ocean in OT times and before the book of Acts to make converts to Judaism? That’s how these people from this little island of Crete in the Mediterranean were believers in Yahweh and had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. Jesus said this in Matt 23:15 to the Jewish leaders: “... *You travel around on land and sea to make one proselyte/convert...*”(Jonah’s an OT example)

Look at end of v. 10 again: **both Jews and proselytes,¹¹ Cretans and Arabs**—*we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.*¹² *And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”*

[In v. 17 Peter quotes OT] AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ *God says, ‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND ...*

...²¹ ‘AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’

*...³⁸ Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ “For the promise is for you and your children **and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.**”*

The Jewish apostles were not only obeying what Jesus told them to do while He was here on earth, they were fulfilling what Jesus told Abraham to be while Abraham was here on earth in Genesis! Jesus said in Lk 24 all things written in Genesis/Moses must be fulfilled, and day 1 of church history begins with Jewish apostles blessing Arab proselytes from Arab countries listed in Genesis 10 through Jesus, the son of Abraham, calling Arabs to saving faith in Christ, from all these nations around Israel, just as Gen 10-12 lays it out!

The beginning of the church and Israel's beginning has this theme. So let's go back to Genesis 10 and trace this out a little further. Maybe you never noticed that in the beginning of the church in Acts how God was saving Arabs as well as Jews from many Arab countries, but I think an even more overlooked fact is that God was bringing Arabs and non-Jews from those nations into the family of faith from the beginning of the Bible as well. God's multi-ethnic family plan did not begin in the book of Acts; it begins in Genesis!

For Gen 12:3, I don't want us to just jump from BC to AD, and say *after the time of Jesus, before the end of time*, Israel's descendants and Abraham's ultimate descendant Jesus will convert people from some of these nations. That's true, but I want us to understand this in a way I think very few pay close enough attention to, in the OT context, that is precisely what God is doing from the first book of the Bible, bringing Arabs into His multi-ethnic family of faith:

- *through missions* (like Jonah into the heart of Assyria)
- *through marriage* to faithful Jewish men whose Arab wives believed in Yahweh of Israel, and then ultimately finally...
- *through Messiah*, from His first coming and till His second (but thousands of years BC, Gen 12:3 began its fulfillment)

Let's look at the "all nations" of 12:3 again in context of Gen 10:

⁷*The sons of Cush were Seba and Havilah ...*

... *and Sabtah* – located in United Arab Emirates today

... *and Raamah* – located on border of United Arab Emirates

The end of v. 7 mentions 2 sons of Raamah:

... *Sheba* – southern Arabia

... *and Dedan* – Saudi Arabia

Jer 25:23 mentions Dedan again, and then the next verse adds:

"and all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the foreign people who dwell in the desert ..."

(Dedan clearly associated with Arabs)

Isa 21:13 *The oracle about Arabia. In ... Arabia you must spend the night, O caravans of Dedanites* [i.e., descendants of Dedan]

God also has a heart for these Arabs. In Jeremiah 49, God tells the inhabitants of Dedan to flee to protect them from judgment on their neighbor. The prophet Jeremiah tells these Arabs that God cares for their fatherless and will care for them, and the prophet says to the Arabs: *"I will keep them alive, let your widows trust in me."*

What about *Sheba* in the end of Gen 10:7? Can you think of any example of someone from Sheba that blessed a descendant of Abraham? Did the Gen 12:3 blessing come to any from Sheba? 1 Kings 10 gives an example of one from Sheba who was blessed.

The Queen of Sheba came to Abraham's descendant Solomon, and was blessed by his wisdom, and just like Gen 12:2 it says she blessed him, actually using the word "blessed" 3x. Sheba was in SW Arabia, some 1,200 miles from Jerusalem, and she comes all the way to Israel and to its capitol with a massive amount of gold, incense, spices, etc. Now listen to what 1 Kings 10 says, which I believe is at least in some way a partial fulfillment of Gen 12:2-3:

¹ *Now when the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon concerning the name of Yahweh, she came...[v2] When she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart ...*

[And the Queen of Sheba says to this son of Abraham in v. 9, after blessing him, using similar language to Gen 12, she says this, v. 9]

"Blessed be Yahweh [that's what LORD in all caps is, covenant name for Israel's God] God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because Yahweh LORD loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness." [and it says she gave the greatest gift ever in Israel's history of spices, and a great amount of gold, etc.] ... ¹⁵ *besides that from the traders and the wares of the merchants and all the kings of the Arabs ...*

... ²⁴ All the earth was seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart.

All the Kings of the Arabs, all the earth, all were seeking this Jew to hear what God had put in his heart, his wisdom, which Solomon explained *"the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom ..."* They wanted to bless him so their nation would be blessed (like Gen 12). In the process, they were blessed who blessed this son of Abram.

We don't know from 1 Kings 10:3 all that was in the heart of this queen that she talked to Solomon about, but it does say she came "concerning the name of Yahweh" and that Solomon answered all her questions. And she not only blesses him, like Gen 12 says, but she also blesses Yahweh by name in v. 9 and understood Yahweh's love for Israel forever was the source of these blessings, so she must have heard from him of Yahweh's covenant with Abraham.

Jesus said this Queen of Sheba will be there on judgment day and will stand up and rebuke the Jews who rejected Jesus in NT times, and He said in the next verse that people from Nineveh will also stand up to rebuke the Jews who did not repent and trust Jesus, these people who repented from the preaching of Jonah the Jewish missionary will stand up with this queen on Christ's judgment day.

Let's look at some more names in Gen 10. The Canaanites in v. 15-19 were the original Palestinians. Sidon in v. 15, one Canaanite line, was the people living in the area of modern Lebanon today. In 1 Kings 17, God tells the Jewish prophet Elijah to go to Sidon to a widow there, and as you read the passage, God's heart for this nation from Gen 10 is expressed through Elijah in his compassion to the widow, in raising her son, and it appears this non-Jew in this country that has many Muslims today, she becomes a true believer in Yahweh at a time when many in Israel worshipped Baal. Jesus reminded the Jews of that story in Luke 4:

²⁴ *And He said, “Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown.”* ²⁵ *“But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; ²⁶ and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, **in the land of Sidon**, to a woman who was a widow.* ²⁷ *“And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but **only Naaman the Syrian.**”* ²⁸ *And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; ²⁹ and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff.*

These Jewish prophets, descendants of Abraham, were used by God to bless a woman from Lebanon and a soldier from Syria, while many of the people in Israel rejected God and His blessing. See, even when the vast majority of Jews were in apostasy, God is still fulfilling His invincible plan of Genesis 12:3. Even when the nation of Israel was in such sin that they went in captivity, God was using Jews like Daniel to reach Iraqis like Nebuchadnezzar.

I have a good friend who from TMS who is with 2 other seminary graduates hoping to start a TMAI school in that country of Lebanon, to train Christian pastors in those Muslim and Arab areas in doctrinal gospel-centered ministry, expository preaching, PTL.

Not only was the Jewish prophet Elijah sent to Lebanon to bless a widow who it appears comes to faith in Yahweh, but the Syrian general Naaman, many believe was not only cleansed outwardly, but was blessed spiritually inwardly saving through the Jew Elisha. Genesis 10:22, is the first mention of the Arameans, later called Syrians ... these are part of all nations Israel would bless in 12:3.

In v. 23 it says the first son of Aram was Uz. Do you remember who is a famous person from Uz? Not the wizard, remember? Job. Job lived the same time as Genesis, maybe the middle chapters. He was not a Jew, but had come to know the worship of the Yahweh just like Melchizedek king of Salem in Gen 14, and both of these non-Jews received the blessing Gen 12:3 speaks of in salvation and both are spoken of in Old and New Testament with highest praise. God Himself says from heaven that Job is the most righteous man on earth and the greatest of the men in the East, which my Study Bible says is a term for the Arabs or men living in Arabia. Uz is a location in Northern Arabia today, and the story begins with other nearby Arab peoples stealing his animals. Job was a saved Arab.

How did these people of the East and others come to know the Lord? We need to realize that before Jesus was born, Gen 12:3 was going on in Middle East nations far more than we tend to recognize

Matthew 2:1 *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem ... **magi from the east** arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² **“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”** ... ¹⁰ *When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and **they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.** ¹² And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.**

When Moses ran away from Egypt to Midian, a place in Arabia, not too far from Uz, he meets Jethro, an Arab priest of God? In a similar way to Melchizedek, a non-Jew called “a priest of the Most High God” we have in early Israel’s history before the Exodus, the faith of Abraham being spread to people from Arab nations, who are not only being saved, but are sacrificing to Yahweh like Job, and are even priests of the Most High God. Before Aaron the Jew was ever a priest or the priestly line of Levi established, God was saving and sanctifying a multi-ethnic family of faith where even the priests did not have to be physical descendants of Abraham. In fact, in Numbers, as we may see next week, one of the great priests of Israel’s history, who is commended with language as high as the language of Abraham’s salvation blessing and covenant blessings, that priest within Israel may even be a black African convert to the faith, not a Jew, but part of God’s multi-ethnic family plan for all?

Genesis 25:1 *Now Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah.* ² *She bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah.* [Father Abraham had many sons, and the end of v. 6 says these went “to the land of the East” – the MSB says they became fathers of “various Arab tribes to the east”]

... ¹² *Now these are the ... generations of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s maid, bore to Abraham ...*

... ¹⁶ *These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages, and by their camps; twelve princes according to their tribes* [these became 12 Arab nations, in fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham to make this other son many peoples as well]

... ¹⁹ *Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham’s son: Abraham became the father of Isaac;* ²⁰ *and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah* [it says she’s Aramean]

Abraham’s son of promise married an Aramean, in other words a Syrian, she believes in Yahweh and is part of the family of faith. Jews and Syrians have been at war in recent decades, but from the beginning it was not so. Descendants of Abraham were bringing Syrians into the family of faith

CLOSE WITH WILL VARNER’S STORY OF JEW WHO CAME TO KNOW CHRIST IN A RESCUE MISSION AND ALSO LED SYRIAN MAN TO CHRIST. THESE 2 MEN FOUGHT EACH OTHER IN THE ARMIES OF THEIR COUNTRIES ON GOLAN HEIGHTS YEARS BEFORE, NOW THIS JEW WAS SHARING THE GOSPEL BLESSING OF CHRIST WITH HIS ONE FROM A NEARBY NATION IN GENESIS 10, IN FULFILLMENT OF GEN 12:3!

