

The Gospel in Advance (Genesis 11:27-12:3)

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Date: 29 May 2022

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[0 : 0 0] today. So reading from chapter 11 verse 27, you'll notice it starts with a new section and it says this, this is the count of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran and Haran became the father of Lot. While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans in the land of his birth. Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah. She was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren, she had no children. Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram. And together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. Terah lived 205 years and he died in Haran. The Lord had said to Abram, leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you.

I will make your name great and you'll be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray and ask him to help us. Dear Lord, we thank you for just this journey we've been to the earliest parts of the Bible, really digging deep into who we are, who you are, and how we can find a way back into relationship with you. So help us now as we look at this last portion of the first few chapters of the Bible. So do be with us as we hear from you now through your word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I wonder how this series has been for you, what it's been like to go through our origin story according to scripture.

Chatting with some of you over the past week, some of you have found it eye-opening, right, to go beyond Sunday school stories, to really just behold and worship a God who is there, who rules, who made everything, who crafts us in his image, who judges sin, and yet shows mercy to the undeserving. Others of you, I've heard you just reflect on your identity and how actually now you can root it in something bigger than yourself. Not what in things that you've done or achieved, but just to be able to rejoice as someone who bears God's image and likeness. One of you I was chatting with, you know, you were challenged to keep going as the odd one out in your family or generation like Noah was. Some relatable characters that we've met so far in the Bible's earliest chapters. And then some of you have been really encouraged to hear your heart for the nations, just like God's heart for the nations grow. So thank you so much for your questions and feedback. And again, it's been a privilege to journey through this part of the Bible with you. And yet I know for some others you've been discouraged. This, you know, we sit here and listen to Genesis, but to be honest, maybe you've been thinking about hard things, right? Big issues in your life, maybe health concerns, maybe there have been dramas at home, maybe there are relationships and regrets.

Some of you have journeyed through

Genesis, really just groaning through it, as it were. And I can sympathize with that. And in fact, I think Genesis can sympathize with that. Because actually, you know, when we heard the account of terror, right, I think we see, first of all, a broken family, a broken family. There's the usual list of names, right? God is still faithful to bless and multiply generation after generation. But I think what we see here, right, we can skip through these slides, is a broken family, first of all.

Because I want you to zoom in with me again to the verses we just read. Have a look in your Bibles at verse 28. And it says this, while his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans.

[4 : 2 5] In the ancient world, every man's hope is to live to see your children and your grandchildren. Haran's life, though, is cut short. You read the next two verses, what do we learn about Abram and then his wife Sarai? Verse 30 says, now Sarai was barren. She had no children. Again, in that world, right, to not be able to conceive a child was like to have a death sentence

almost.

And then finally, verse 31, here's a group of wanderers. And yet, when they came to Haran, they settled there. And look where they come from, though. Together they set up from Ur of the Chaldeans. These may sound like random place names until you realize that Chaldeans here is simply just another way to say the Babylonians. Does that ring a bell, right? Last week we heard about Babel's judgment, right? Them trying to make a name for themselves. And Terah and his clan are living under the shadow of Babel's judgment. They're living amidst a culture bent on making a name for themselves. It's almost like they're just wandering from town to town while all around them things are falling to pieces. So I don't know about you, how you feel, but maybe you can relate to this group of people. An untimely death, an unwanted barrenness, an uncertain journey, right? Genesis 11 ends, it seems, with a broken world where fathers bury their sons, where a woman can't bear children, where families feel like wanderers. And left to themselves, actually, Terah's family have no hope. They are unable to change their future. They are stuck in endless hurt and heartbreak.

Perhaps if we were to hear Terah pray for his family, maybe he'll be praying something like this. God, where are you? What will you do about all this brokenness around us?

And it is in this helplessness that God speaks a big promise. A big promise. That's what we see in Genesis 12, verse 1, 2, and 3. And so, very familiar with this now. Thank you for memorizing it so well, Jensen, and others. All I want to do is just show a couple of things about this big promise.

[7 : 03] All right? I have five. You might notice more. But firstly, I want you to notice that it begins with a call to go, right? The Lord had said to Abram, right? First word, go or leave. It's an interesting way, actually, how the Lord actually starts to speak to Abram, right? In the original text, actually, in the Hebrew, it actually reads something like this, go you or go yourself. Abram's told to be the odd one out, to leave his country, his people, his father's house, to go alone, as it were. And you notice, actually, Abram doesn't get a full, you know, GPS, blow-by-blow account. He just gets told, go, where? To the land I'll show you. Sometimes journeying by faith means going yourself, when no one else around you does. There's no guarantee others will follow. Sometimes journeying by faith means not knowing your final destination. As a Christian, the way forward for us may be clear only to a point, perhaps to the next bend on the road. And yet God still calls us by faith to journey to the place He will show us, where He will bless us, as we will read. Next, notice verse 2, right? It's actually more about what God will do rather than what we've already done.

Right? What has Abram done so far in the story? Zero. But look how in God's, yeah, words, His own words in verses 2 and 3, He repeatedly says what He will do, okay? If you're the underlining type, you want to underline that. I will show you. I will make you. I will make you. Bless you. And so on.

He's using this kind of language over and over again. Yes, the chapter starts with Abram's call to go. But I think the emphasis is far more on God and His promises, isn't it? You see, Abram has done nothing to deserve the blessings God's going to pour out on him and his family. Can we flip that and think about our own stories? What have we done, PCBC, to deserve the blessings that God has given us?

Safety, security, the ability to meet here week after week, or journey along with a God who loves us. Every journey of faith is only possible because God has blessed us first. God has reached out to us first. You are here perhaps because God put that friend in your life, or because He gave you that high school friend that kept in touch and is a Christian. Or maybe you have a Christian co-worker who has encouraged you to consider Jesus. Or maybe you had a persistent parent, an auntie, who kept praying for you, who kept dragging you to church. Whatever it is, every blessing that you have right now. We need to remember God moved first. God gave you what you have first. It came through His initiative. He will, He will, He will do great things in us. And so likewise, if there's to be hope for our world, if there's to be hope for the brokenness around us, it must come from what God will do, first and foremost. I think sometimes it's easy to think, all right, we live in a secular country, that we will discover something. We will advance something that will fix the earth on our own. We'll discover how to shoot better. Oh, that will fix and end all wars. Hang on, it has. We will discover a scientific discovery that will, you know, stop the need to do something, and yet it has unintended consequences. These verses emphasize that the blessing comes from one direction.

[11 : 08] It is God who will. God who will make a people who will bless, who will do everything that Abraham was about to receive. Thirdly, notice actually one of the things He says, I will make. He

says it twice.

And then I will bless. He says it twice as well. Where have those words come before in our journey through Genesis? Right? In the beginning, God made the heavens and the earth. And what was one of the first things He said? He blessed His people. Right? He said, be fruitful and multiply. You see, the Bible began with the universe empty and void. Here, we're using creation language again. Right? At a time when there's emptiness in a woman's womb, and a void in Abram's own families of life.

You see the contrast. Genesis 1 to 2, God speaks and creates heaven and earth, man and woman. Genesis 12, God speaks again to create the people of God through whom blessings will flow. This is far more than just a call to a desert wanderer. This is a new creation account. New life, new blessings promised through the blessed one.

[12:31] New life, new life, new life, new life, new life, new life, new life, new life, new life. So maybe if God had a job title, right? If He could hand out a business card, it would perhaps say a new creation specialist. Because that is what He is in the business of doing.

All right? Time and time again, He's bringing order and purpose out of chaos and brokenness. You need to believe that, friends. And we see that at creation. We see that with Abram and Sarah and, you know, their later life. And countless other times through history, we will see God is a creative God. He will create life where there is none. He will create hope where there is none. That is the kind of God He is. And because God is powerful enough to create, He is powerful enough to save, to heal your brokenness, to restore those tough relationships. He can do it. Remember that.

A fourth. Notice that the word bless comes a lot, right? I counted five times. All right?

So again, if there's a personalized plate from this chapter, it would read, you know, bless with a five. Okay? Someone drove past early with like a nick minute with a three. But I think this one's better. Okay? I think this one's better. So, you know, if you're the investing type, go for this one. Blessing. Blessing pours out from the Lord. Time and time again, look, humans, we suffer. We have sinned, right? We've heard about this. The sin that began with our first parents led to death, disaster, despair, cursing. And actually, you know, thinking about the word cursing, from Genesis 3 to 11, the word for curse shows up in the Bible, guess how many times? Five times. And yet now in just two verses, God repeats the word bless five times in two and three. Can you see what's going on? Just in this concentrated account, God is undoing the curse with blessing. This is God promising to restore what He intended a creation. But now He is going to do it through one man and His descendants.

Seems like yesterday, I'm at every business in school and church was sending out emails about, you know, here's our COVID response. Or, hey, William, you know, just like to let you know our COVID response. Okay? Here, too, God sends a message. His response. More than a COVID response. Genesis 12, 1 to 3 is God's response to the curse of sin and death in our world. And His response is this. He will bring blessing through one man and his family.

[15:23] And since the number five is so significant, let's look at one more thing, I think, about this passage. Finally, I think we want to notice we cannot escape the fact that God's promise is to bless all peoples on earth. Notice, Abram wasn't just to receive a blessing.

I will make your name great and you will be a blessing, it says in verse 2. To whom? Verse 3 tells us, I will bless those who bless you and whoever despises you, I will curse and then all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. So the plan that God wants to set up for Abraham, through Abraham's family, right? A plan to make God's people in God's place under God's rule. This plan is actually a cosmic plan that extends far beyond just one family having a bit of land and being able to set up camp in Israel. God's plan is that He wants to bless all peoples through this one family. And if we recognize that, then actually we want to reflect on how we respond when God blesses us. We don't want to be greedy or stingy. If we've been blessed so much here, we should not just be content with a holy huddle at PCBC English. If, for example, you know, our financial accounts show that we're in surplus, we shouldn't just hoard it up. What can we do to not just be blessed but to extend that blessing to all peoples on earth that can be blessed through us? I mean, all over the world as we've prayed, people are hurting and anxious. Nations are at war. Families are under pressure. How will you and

I bring God's blessing not just to our backyard but to the ends of the earth? What will that look like? Because even here in Genesis 12, the promise of blessing of good news is not just to one family. It goes to the whole earth. And so we must be as mission-minded as God Himself.

If we could sum up this Bible verse of the month, we could simply say this, God has a plan to bless the world through one family, right? Or God has a plan to bless the whole earth. This is good news in a broken world. I want us to remember that. It is good news that carries Abram and his family into a journey of faith, which we won't go into because we're finishing our series. But if you want to read on yourself, the next 14 chapters of Genesis, we see him learn faith as he follows and receives God's promises and sees them fulfilled. It's good news here that keeps Sarah trusting God, right, to change her barrenness. Yes, from her and Abraham, God will keep His promise. There will be descendants that they cannot count as countless as the sand and the sea, the shore and the stars and the sky because God has a plan to bless because Abram one day will, as promised, become the father of many, Abraham. God has a plan to bless and it continues. Isaac and Jacob, they will fix their eyes forwards to a place that God will build for them. And then it keeps going. Joseph will serve faithfully in a foreign country while all the earth actually comes to him for blessing in times of need. That's what happens in a famine. And this kind of theme keeps going and going. God has a plan to bless all the earth. Whether it is Moses or Joshua, right, whether it's Rahab, whether it's David or later on other heroes, Hannah or Samuel, everyone is just receiving God's blessing and seeing fulfilled God's plan to bless the whole earth. And every generation is called to live by faith and to trust, keep trusting that God has a plan to bless the world. And this good news carries forward all the way down Abraham's family tree down to a particular son of Abraham that matters most. And that is our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Christ, God has a plan to bless the whole earth. In Christ, we see Genesis 12, this big promise, fully realized. This is actually how Matthew, one of the gospel writers, thinks, actually. Who remembers one of the very first sermons we had at PCVC English together? It was Matthew 1. There's a whole bunch of names, right? Why? To show that Jesus fulfills the promise of God's plan to bless. And that genealogy started with Abraham. In Jesus' perfect life, in his sacrificial death for sins, in his glorious resurrection, praise God, our Lord Jesus has poured out his blessings over all the earth, as far as the curse of sin and death is found. You need to know this if you don't. Christ is the blessing that Genesis 12 points forwards to a blessing for all the earth. When we sing, the Lord bless you and keep you, it eventually must lead to Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

[21 : 01] The world deserves nothing less. Because, let me share two applications for our hearts. One is this, because we live in a time of immense suffering, do we not? I feel it. This week, I've been so, so aware of my own brokenness and the brokenness in the world around us. Perhaps now, more than any other time in recent history, people know that this world is stuffed up and people know how much we need blessing. We need God's blessing. If that's you today, please know that you're not alone.

Because I find it striking how, actually, the early church, our earliest brothers and sisters, look back to, actually, Genesis 12 for comfort and strength, for good news in their broken world. Have a look at Acts chapter 3, verse 25. So, great news that, you know, we'll be looking at the book of Acts, second half of the year. But let's have a sneak preview, because, actually, you know, there's a scene where Peter, he's preaching boldly about Jesus, and he's just done amazing things. And he gathers the crowd, shows Jesus' authority through a healing, and then he says to them who have gathered, indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days.

And he says to them, this is a Jewish group of people, you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, through your offspring, all peoples on earth will be blessed. And then, this is the important part, when God raised up his servants, he sent them first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.

Can you see this? Peter's declaring that those who have seen the risen Lord Jesus, have heard about him, have been blessed, have been blessed with this blessing that was promised to Abraham.

[23 : 01] Jesus is the seed who blesses the seed of Abraham. And remember, straight after this, this is a church that gets persecuted hard. This is them being pressured, living in a broken world.

And yet for them, remembering this is good, it's good news. God's plan to bless is good news, holding on to. And whatever trial you're going through, it may not be the same as the early church. Remember that God's plan to bless can be a balm, a healing for your suffering.

You need to know this. If you put your trust in the Lord Jesus, you are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. You're part of a new people by the Savior. You are God's dwelling place by the Spirit. You belong to a new kingdom by the Father. And so can I encourage you, no suffering, no sorrow, no sadness can tear that blessing away from you ever.

The Apostle Paul put it this way, Galatians 3.13. He said, Christ became a curse for us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles, that's us, through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

So don't believe the lie, perhaps, that the world tells you, or that you're just reverberating through your head. Don't believe the lie that your suffering is the worst thing ever, that no one else understands. Don't believe the lie that your suffering must be endured on your own.

[24 : 43] Go back to the blessing that we've been thinking about, the blessing of Jesus. Only Jesus got the worst. And because he got the worst, he gets you right now. Whether it's depression, whether it's relationship breakdowns, whatever issue it is, he sympathizes with you, the Bible says.

Literally, he suffers with you. He is your way through the darkness. And if you are united with him, your suffering might even bring blessing to others. That's how God works. So I want to encourage you, let God's plan to bless be something you hold on to, especially when you are struggling. And suffering. And finally, if God's plan to bless is a balm for our suffering, it should also be a break to our self-justifying. It should also put a stop to us feeling like we have done it all.

Let me ask you a question. Actually, let me ask you, how would you answer this question? I'm a Christian because... Have a think about that in your head. I'm a Christian because...

All right, fill that blank. I'm going to tell you a few ways to answer that wrongly. I'm a Christian because I grew up in church. I'm a Christian because I grew up with a Christian family.

[26 : 22] I'm a Christian because I live a good life. I'm a Christian because I love my kids. They're all wrong answers. That is not what makes you a Christian. And actually, the Apostle Paul, when he confronts a church that was starting to put something else in the place of what makes you a Christian, he actually brings up the same passage, Genesis 12, into the mix. He's writing to the Galatians, right?

The Galatians, they're a church he planted previously, and they seem to have got to a crisis point. Their crisis was not that they had dwindled in numbers. It wasn't that there was a big debate about who to elect or what leaders to have. It was something far more basic. The Galatians had turned, Paul says, to a different gospel.

You see, they'd stopped living under the grace of Jesus Christ, and they'd turned to a life that included rules and regulations as the basis of who they are, as a basis for being accepted in Christ. And in the midst of Paul's argument, he points them back to this text, Genesis 12, 3. He says, have a listen. Galatians 3, verse 7 says this, Understand then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announce the gospel in advance to Abraham. All nations will be blessed through you.

So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. Why should we memorize Genesis 12, 1 to 3 and think about it, invest our time reflecting on it?

Because, as Paul's words say, Genesis 12, 3 is the gospel in advance. God has a plan to bless the nations through his promised seed, Jesus Christ.

[28 : 23] And what Paul understands, we need to understand too. Blessing, if it comes through Jesus, does not then come through anything we contribute or we put out, we achieve.

When Abraham heard, all nations will be blessed through you, he didn't then go, Oh, goody, must have been all the hard work I'd done up to this point. I've been blessed by my busyness.

No, he didn't say that. He had to hope. Actually, he had no hope, and he had to go in hope. That God has blessed him already. He had nothing to bring to the table at this point in time, right?

And so we need to remember this. We need to remember this. We can only be a blessing to others when we remember that our identity should be rooted in what God has done for us first.

How God has blessed us first in Christ. If God has a plan to bless all people in Christ, then here's one way to answer the question from Genesis 12.

[29 : 27] I'm a Christian because God has blessed me of all people through Jesus. Don't we dare add anything else to that. It does not work.

It is a different gospel. I'm a Christian because God has blessed me of all people through Jesus. He's blessed me through Jesus by him living the blessed life I could not live.

By him dying on the cross in a cursed death that I could not die. By him rising again on the third day and sending his spirit to bless the nations with good news.

I don't know where you are at this moment. Some of you, you may still be reflecting and thinking whether you'll be a Christian, whether you want to follow Jesus, the right answer to the phrase, I'm a Christian because dot, dot, dot, there's not anything we do on our own to make us righteous. I'm a Christian because a savior, a seed, Jesus Christ, died for me, rose again for me. Nothing else. And the Bible promises, if you put your faith and trust in this, if you shape your life fixed on God's promised future for you, then you are a child of Abraham.

[30 : 48] You are part of God's special people. And if you're here struggling to find hope, purpose, if you're here and you feel lost and abandoned, I want to encourage you, come to the good news, the gospel in advance from Genesis, and preach it to yourself.

You could be a Christian for many, many years and still need to preach this gospel to yourself. God has blessed me of all people through Jesus Christ. Well, are you here?

Are you finding it hard to experience grace in church right now? Do you sometimes feel valued only for your serving? I mean, some of you do. Do you feel like you're only blessed through your busyness?

It's the opposite of what Abraham was told. Then don't take up the false gospel of do more and you'll be blessed. Don't believe the lie that if you achieve something, you'll be more welcomed, more blessed.

That is not how the Christian life should work. You and I need again and again the good news of Genesis 12. Right? Abraham goes, not because he has to, he gets to, because he knows he is blessed.

[32 : 09] He is blessed to be a blessing to everyone, far beyond anything he could achieve on his own. So friends, remember, God has a plan to bless in Christ.

Let there be no other firm foundation that we hold on to. Dare not, we dare not shape our church, PCBC, under any other way, any other gospel.

This gospel in advance frees us to live by faith in the God who blessed us first. Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for the opportunity to practice the faith of Abraham.

Not knowing where he was going to go. Not knowing the final destination. Yet being told, being given a big promise, that through him all nations will be blessed.

Our Father, would you bless us to be a blessing to the nations? Would you not help us to recognize our state and then sit on it?

[33 : 25] Help us be like one of your servants who, like Abraham, has the faith to go, knowing that you have blessed us with far more than we deserve. And Father, would you continue to remind us of the city that is waiting for us, the new heavens and earth that we are working towards, that we are fixing our eyes on.

There, we will see our Jesus face to face again. Father, we pray all these things, thanking you for the good news of Christ. In his name we pray.

Amen.