

Session 3

June 16, 2024

GOD'S PROMISE OF BLESSING

Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5-7; 17:7-11

If Genesis 3 is one of the most tragic chapters in the Bible, Genesis 12 is one of the most promising ...literally! In it, we find the call of Abraham and the covenant God established with him and a new people: God's chosen people Israel. They were destined to be "a special treasure...a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6). From His people would come the Messiah, our Lord. In Genesis 3 and the chapters that follow, God stated His promise and the blessings that would accompany it.

A people (12:1-3). The previous chapter gave the barest essentials of Abram's history. I have often asked who Abraham was, or what he had done to win the favor of God. And the only answer I can come up with is "nothing." Abraham did not choose God...God chose him! Yes, he had some family connections; and yes, they came with some riches. But what is that to God? In reality, there was nothing about Abraham that somehow endeared him to God. He was one pagan among a nation of them! Yet God chose him to be the father of a new race. In verse 1, there is an undeniable call. The nineteenth-century American theologian Albert Barnes pointed out that there were "three ties to be severed in complying with this command - his country, in the widest range of his affections; his place of birth and kindred comes closer to his heart; his father's house is the inmost circle of all his tender emotions." But greater than the sacrifice was the promise! Abraham would be the father of "great nation." And they would be granted divine posterity (v. 2), security (v. 3), and influence. For reflection: *Genesis 11:31 says that Abraham was already headed to Canaan. What do you think God meant at the end of 12:1, "to the land that I will show you?"*

A possession (15:5-7). I am a literalist when it comes to the Bible. But even that has its limitations. I have always taught that Scripture should be interpreted *plainly*. When it can be taken as clearly literal, then we should take it that way. But when it is clearly figurative, we should take it that way. This text is a great example of that. In the first few verses of chapter 15, Abraham was bemoaning the fact that he had no children, and thus no heirs from which a nation would be born. In response, God "took him outside" to give him some assurance. What is more brilliantly abundant than the stars in the night sky? "Count them if you can." Obviously, no one can count the stars...and that's the point. Verse 6 is as simple an illustration of faith as we can find in Scripture: Abraham believed Him, and God *counted* it toward righteousness. Notice that Abraham did not *do* anything in terms of works, nor did he *earn* his favor with God. He simply took Him at His word. The interesting thing about verse 7 is the word "also." That indicates that the promise of a possession was not directly linked to Abraham's believing God. It's just another indication that this covenant was *unconditional*. For reflection: *There would be plenty of obedience required later on (and for a lot of things), but for now God let Abraham know that this was God's arrangement, and He was in charge of it.*

A promise (17:7-11). This restatement of the Abrahamic covenant is rich with meaning. Three key principles emerge. First, notice the *perpetuity*. Words like "future offspring," "generations," and "eternal possession," all indicate this covenant went far beyond Abraham's lifetime. Notice

as well the continued *pairing* of a “people” and a “land.” Israel was to be both: a distinct people uniquely dedicated to the one true God, but also a land; an inheritance that would give the nation both identity and stability. Third, notice the *covenant sign*. Genesis 9 introduced the idea when God placed a rainbow in the sky. That was a universal sign. The rite of circumcision was also universal (in that it was an indicator to all people), but it was also incredibly personal. Hence, the covenant was with the nation as a whole, but with individuals as well. For reflection: *Why circumcision? Of all the possible signs, why this one? What do you think?*