

## Getting to Abraham: Genealogy of Blessing

Genesis 4-12 | Jonathan K. Dodson | June 7, 2013

We've seen the wonder, order, and purpose of creation. God created us with a mission—to *fill the earth with a culture-creating humanity that reflects his image for his glory*. Last week Justin showed us how conflict entered the story. The creation tried to usurp the Creator by taking judgment into their own hands. Instead of living according to God's wisdom, Adam and Eve choose their own way. As a result, they flip the created order, ending up in awe over themselves instead of God. This self-centeredness, this insistence that we call the shots, drives us away from God. It results in exile from the garden of his presence. And here we pick up the story, outside of Eden, separated from God. Adam & Eve must have grieved their loss, their rejection of God's protective authority, the warmth of his fellowship...but out of his grace, he sends them with the promise of a seed who will flip things right-side up. Adam and Eve move on with their divine purpose to be fruitful and multiply, rule and subdue the earth. Now the question, is *how*? How will the story unfold with fallen people? [Draw Chart] Today, we're tracing hope through the story, from Fall to Abraham.

### After Eden – A Mixed Bag

On the other side of Eden, we find a mixed bag. *Negatively*, mankind is unraveling. Spinning away from the Creator's presence, they destroy instead of steward creation. Cain murders Abel. Sexual perversion enters in chapter six, and God sends a flood to wipe out humanity and reboot his kingdom. *Positively*, humanity becomes quite industrious, creating music, clothing, culture, and cities. They multiply, which is reflected in the genealogies. But the increasing culture is shot through with corruption. We are left to ponder how wonder, order, and purpose will be restored? The genealogies offer more insight into God's plan than we might think. With Cain and Abel two lines or genealogies are created—Sethite and Cainite. In chapter 5, we find a **linear genealogy** where Seth is chosen to replace the slain Abel. We are told that his line begins to: "call upon the name of the Lord." Could hope be rising? Is there hope for humanity? After the Flood, God's purpose is reinstated (9:1) and Noah, the "perfect 10" from the genealogy, sits as a new Adam with a new land before him, given the Adamic mandate to be fruitful and multiply. In chapter 10, we find a **segmented genealogy**, beginning (Japeth Ham Shem) multiplying to create 70 nations marked by "their languages, their lands and their nations." So is it here that we are meant to see the fulfillment of Adam's commission? **Is this humanity recovering their purpose? After all chapter 11 shows us a flourishing humanity, building the city of Babel.**

### Babel – A People of Self Worship

But in Babel they speak one language; they gather not scatter. So God comes down and scatters them. **Is the scattering of Babel a judgment or a blessing?** I mean, what's so wrong with humanity sharing a language and building a tower? Didn't God tell us to make culture, build cities? Let's see. The story opens up by telling us that the whole earth was of "**one language and the same words**," literally, "one lip and set of words." Is this redundant? "Set of words" refers to the sharing of language. The Hebrew word "lip," however, is used for religious confession and worship. To be a people of one lip is to share a liturgy, a religious confession (Ps 12:2-4; 16:4). Peter Letham comments: "**What unified the men at**

**Babel was not merely language but a single liturgical confession.** So something more than mere urban growth is happening. They repeat, “Come let us” eerily reminiscent of God’s earlier statement when he made humanity. They proceed to build, not only a city, but also a tower. “City and tower” parallels “lip and words.” The city is cultural, and like language, it centralizes everything. It brings everyone together. The **tower** was most likely a ziggurat [slide], which traditionally served as steps for the God to descend to earth to meet man, but the people of Babel aspire to climb up the steps to God. **Why would they do this?** They are trying to ascend the ladder to God *instead of humbly waiting on God to descend to them*. Instead of his name, it’s their name. **It is a city of secular humanism where authority and wonder are relocated from God to man.** Where we marvel at our own accomplishments and reason and sideline God’s reason and his accomplishments. The people of Babel have lost their wonder over God and replaced him with wonder over themselves. To make a name for themselves (11:4), to take matters into their own hands, maybe even to right all the wrongs, but their end is themselves (better people, rules, culture, morality, but not *better worship*). We can’t get away from worship. We are created to worship God his nature. Where is your worship out of sorts? [DISCUSS]

- Security
- Success
- Spouse
- Second guessing God

The city of Babel is opposed to their divine purpose by centralizing, not scattering their efforts. **Fruitful multiplication is focused on human accomplishment and the aggrandizement of personal progress and wonder over self. Not on multiplying and scattering disciples across the earth, with awe over our Creator.** So what does God do with this bold idolatry? Does he judge or show mercy? He judges by confusing their language and scattering them, but in doing so, he blesses them, realigning them with their created purpose to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Can you imagine the world without our multicultural splendor? What would homogenous, cookie-cutter city say about God? He is intent on filling the earth with his glory. Like a good Father, his judgment is a mercy. If God didn’t stick to what’s right, the world would be so much worse. He comes down to discipline them for their good, to move humanity along in the proper direction, restoring some order, and displaying why he is worthy of our wonder. **Babel exposes our false worship.** Can things be put right? **It depends on the genealogy. What happened to the line of Seth, the line of promise?**

### **Abraham – A People of Blessing**

Let’s work backwards. How did a people of one language in chapter 11 emerge from 70 languages and nations in chapter 10? Impossible. The nations had to appear after Babel, which means that chapters 10 and 11 are out of chronological order. Switch them and it makes sense. If Tower of Babel comes first, then all the languages and nations can come second. Now why are they out of order? Genealogy. In chapter 11, after Babel, the line of Seth resumes with one of Noah’s sons, *Shem*. His line is chosen to continue to carry out God’s blessing and plan. Interestingly, unlike the prior genealogy, this one stops short of the perfect 10 at 9 generations. It’s a cliffhanger, leaving us in suspense about what God will do. **Any idea why?** It segments into three sons: “**When Terah had lived 70 years, he fathered**

**Abram, Nahor, and Haran”** (11:26). The tenth person in the genealogy lands on *Abram*, son of Terah, indicating that Abram will be the one who carries God’s line of promise forward. The compiler of Genesis wanted to put this genealogy right next to Abram narrative so it would be abundantly clear! Then, in chapter 12, we reach Abraham, the father of Israel. OT scholar Gordon Wenham notes: **“Within the book of Genesis no section is more significant than 11:27-12:9.”** *This section introduces a massive turn in the story, a turn from primeval history to redemptive history.* We are leaving the prehistory and conflict and are moving into some of the first big signs of redemption. We see Terah, Abrams father, adopts *orphaned* Lot. Abram marries a *barren* woman rejected in her society. God’s delight to redeem is embedded in the genealogy. He will secure the flourishing of humanity, restore our order, redirect our wonder back to him, so that we become truly human. Here’s where the hope of Abram comes in! God “appears” personally to Abram and promises him land, seed, and blessing. Here’s why the chapters are out of order—to show God restoring order to creation. In the line of Seth & Shem, comes Abram who will deliver the seed that will crush the serpent’s head and rescue man. In this special relationship—covenant—with Abraham notice three things. He obeys; he receives; and he blesses.

*He obeys God’s calling, regardless of the cost.* He leaves his country. He leaves his family. Much greater cost in the ANE because of economic interdependence and communal kinship vs. individualism of US. But we still feel this. New residents often attach to our church in search of new family. There are many more out there in search of a new family. Abram’s obedience, regardless of the cost, reminds us of Jesus words in Matthew 10:37: **Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.** What are you losing to gain people to the kingdom? How are you sacrificing for the good of Austin? You are here because, like Abraham, Jesus sent you here! John 20:21 as the father sent me, so I send you. You are sent to Austin with the purpose of making a new humanity that is fruitful and multiplying, discovering their humanity in worshipping God not self. Are you making disciples? Is there one person, just one, that you are praying for, hanging out with, serving?

*He receives blessing. I will bless you.* He receives God’s blessing. He doesn’t shoo it off saying he’s not worthy. He receives it, which alters his entire life and the history of the world. Most commentators that I read point out that God’s blessing is material, prosperity. Abram gets a lot. Similarly we seek a lot. We seek God more ardently when we want blessings: a child, a house, a career. But we’ve got blessing backwards. You see, the true blessing is God himself, his presence. God is blessing Abram to be a blessing. Does this mean God’s agenda is to give Abram wealth in order for him to give wealth to others. Perhaps in a minority way, but the focus of the blessing to the nations isn’t material; its theological. It’s God. **Blessing isn’t ultimately measured by stuff but by the Savior. It is the promise of God’s presence (vertical) not the promise of God’s plenty (horizontal).** We actually like Babelites, using God to climb the ladder and make a name for ourselves. Abram forsakes these things in pursuit of God’s mission and trusts that God will bless him, in his way and in his timing. **Instead of using God, he is found trusting God.** This is why

he is our forefather—faith in God not faith in God’s gifts. Both Abram and Israel face seasons of trial and drought, but the blessing in all of this was they had a God who would not abandon them. **The blessing of God is the presence of God. God’s agenda to bless you is much greater than your agenda to be blessed. This means he can sacrifice anything knowing that he has everything if he has God.** He leaves his country because he has received the promise of a better country. He leaves his father because he has received a better Father. He obeys God’s command because he has received God’s grace. *Abram is a new Adam, standing at the precipice of a new Eden, with a renewed sense of God’s presence.* The Cainites and Babelites all moved east, away from Eden, away from God. Not Abram. He moves toward God’s presence, toward God’s country. Are you? This is God’s glorious agenda, to restore you to his presence, and to use you to spread his presence. **I will make a great nation of you. Instead of gathering a self-worshipping people to climb the heavens, God will make a new people out of Abram that will be a light to the nations. God blesses Abraham in order to bless the world. I will make your name great.** Contrary to the people of Babel, Abram refuses to make a name for himself; instead, God will make a name for him, and makes a name for us when we turn back to him in worship.

*He blesses God’s world.* Abram receives blessing in order to be a blessing: **And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing** (12:2; cf. 20:7; 45:18). He doesn’t hoard God’s blessings; he receives them by faith and then, in turn, seeks to bless others. We are blessed to be a blessing. We receive God’s presence to extend God’s presence. How will God bless the world through Abram? Abram mediates blessing for the world through his seed

- **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed 12:3**
- **seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him 18:18**
- **and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice. 22:18**
- **Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. Gal 3:16**

Christ is the long-awaited seed, the son in the line of promise—Abel, Seth, Shem, & Abram. **Jesus is humanity-restoring seed of Abram that restores order, wonder, and purpose.** In Abraham, there is a man who will succeed where Adam, Noah, and even Abram fail. The one man who can flip everything right side up, restore our worship by forgiving our self-worship, the man Christ Jesus on a cross and the new man out of a grave, represents a whole new mankind. In Abraham all the peoples of the earth are blessed to return to God’s presence on a trajectory to re-enter God’s garden.