

**Nations**  
Genesis 10  
March 14, 2021

Before we get into the sermon today, I think it is important for us to take a few moments to recognize where we are and what has happened to us. A year ago this past Friday, the Governor issued an emergency declaration for COVID-19. The next day, March 13, the President declared a nationwide emergency. That same day the Governor order all K-12 schools to be closed until April 6. On March 18, the Governor closed all casinos and restricted access to hotels. On March 20 – a year from this upcoming Saturday – all “non-essential businesses were shut down. And thus began the chaos, confusion, isolation, and distancing that we have come to know all-too-well.

I have seen and heard many laments about these twelve months. I understand. In many ways it has been a difficult year. It has been a trying year. It has been a painful year. I do not want to suggest or pretend otherwise.

However.

However, it has not been universally awful. Please do not hear me making a pitch for the good times we have had isolating from one another. But we would be wrong if we focused solely on those things and failed to see what God has been doing. This is not silver-lining Pollyanna thinking; rather, this is an invitation to take a good hard look at what God has been doing in, among, and around us to see what meaning we can draw from these days.

Specifically, we need to see this last twelve months as a huge re-set. Last year, everything stopped. This year, we are now looking at what will be starting. Internally, we have covered this – we have come to recognize how essential is fellowship. Without casting a negative judgment on us, I think it is fair to say that we took our fellowship for granted. I do not mean that we took each other for granted because that has not been my experience of all of you. What I mean is that we never anticipated the day when being in the same room with one another would be anything other than an understood. It was just something that was; we worried about how to get more people together and not trying to keep them connected while keeping them apart. We have learned how much we love one another and need one another.

Externally, things are a little more complex, but some things are clear. We see two important realities of this re-set. One: in this community there are many people who have hit a wall of despair, emptiness, and longing for meaning. Two: Coming into this community are many people who are fleeing California – people who are longing for something other or different than their experience there. They, too, are looking for meaning in a very profound way . Friends, do you know what we have? We have the Gospel – which is the ultimate meaning. It is more than a bumper sticker, it is more than a cliché, and it is more than simple platitudes.

Let me use Jim Alexander’s service yesterday as a good example. There was an incredible sharing of Jim’s life and faith; I dare say that the Gospel was proclaimed – and I am not referring to my own reflection. In the construction of the service to the music to the readers to those giving thanks for

Jim's life; the one consistent feature was a description of how Jim's faith was an essential part of understanding who he was.

The message and witness to Jesus' saving grace was powerful. Though grieving, there was joy. In place of despair, there was hope. "'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? ...Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'" (1 Corinthians 15:54-57) My observation was that people went away uplifted and encouraged. Friends, we have a gospel of God's power: it is the power of God for salvation.

For us as we look outward into the re-opening time in this community, the truth is there is a mighty mission field for us to be entering. There is a mighty opportunity to be out there, doing what we do (not anything flashy or out of our gift set), and bearing witness to the hope that is found within us by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

### **Read Genesis 10:1-32**

**This is the Word of the LORD.**

### **Prayer of Invocation**

In 2 Timothy the Apostle Paul wrote, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." Including this one? Ok....

John Calvin wrote about this chapter,

If anyone pleases more accurately to examine the genealogies related by Moses in this and the following chapter, I do not condemn his industry. And some interpreters have not unsuccessfully applied their diligence and study to this point. Let them enjoy, as far as I am concerned the reward of their labors. It shall, however, suffice for me briefly to allude to those things which I deem more useful to be noticed, and for the sake of which I suppose these genealogies to have been written by Moses.<sup>1</sup>

As with so many things, I think Calvin got it right. In short, he was saying that he was going to leave the detailed study of these names to other academics while he was just going to explore the purpose for which they were included.

You might recall that we went through a list of names – the generations of Seth's line – back in Genesis 5. Like then, we are not going to go through all these names and trace out their life stories. However, it is important that we see what this list is: it is a description of the nations that Israel knew in the ancient world.

One commenter summed up this chapter this way: "The list of the sons of Shem, Ham, and Japheth contains seventy names, and we cannot believe for a moment that this is accidental. Seventy

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, Calvin's Commentaries, Genesis, p. 303-304.

stands for totality and completion. More important, the concept of seventy nations is offered as the design of God.”<sup>2</sup>

So, what should we take from this chapter?

**First, we should see that the nations exist by God’s design, plan, and purpose.**

Each of the nations named will play a role in the narrative that follows this prelude.

Remember: Genesis is the first book of a larger set. It has to be read as part of the whole, and it functions as the preface to that larger story. It is a quick blast through the past; it is not an exhaustive investigative report. It is background and introductory material. Thus, we cannot read it separate, apart, or distinct from the rest. It has to be read in light of the rest.

There is no doubt that this chapter sets up the next, where we will be talking about the Tower of Babel. The author wanted to demonstrate how – coming out of the flood – all the nations that Israel knew had essentially been one culture and one people. The author also wanted to make clear that God was sovereign over all the nations: *because* God delivered Noah and his family through the waters of the flood, God also remained sovereign over all the descendants of Noah’s family.

The construct of this chapter is fairly simple to see:

- a. There is a statement of the son of Noah whose line is being traced;
- b. There is a list, sometimes going down a couple of generations; and,
- c. There is a summation statement, “These are the descendants of X, by their families, their languages, and their nations.”

Then, there is the concluding statement which made clear the author’s reason for including this list. “These are the families of Noah’s sons, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.” The next chapter explained why and how all the differences arose.

The list of nations was supplemented by a description of their land. From the sons of Japheth came the “Islands of the Nations.” From the author’s perspective and the nations known to Israel, these were the more distant peoples. They appear later in descriptions of the breadth of God’s reach. “He will rule from sea to sea...the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him.” (Psalm 72:8-10).<sup>3</sup>

From the sons of Ham, the author introduced Babylon, which will figure significantly next week. The author also began to lay the groundwork for conflict that takes place throughout the Pentateuch between Israel and the Canaanites, between the sons of Shem and the sons of Ham. “The author was especially interested in the exact boundaries of the area of Canaan (v. 19) since

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<sup>2</sup> John Walton, NIVAC Old Testament, Genesis, p. 367.

<sup>3</sup> Frank E. Gaebelien, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol. 2, p. 99.

that area of land lay at the heart of his purpose in writing the book. This was the land promised to Abraham, though at that time the Canaanites were in the land” (Genesis 12:6).<sup>4</sup>

There is no action in this chapter. None. As an aside, the detail about Nimrod is curious and its significance has been the subject of a lot of scholarly debate. By tradition and inference, he is tagged as the builder of the tower we read about in the next chapter, but that is not assured. I also did a little research because I wondered how the name of someone who has such a positive description in Scripture has become an insult.

Well, it seems that the credit or blame may go to Bugs Bunny.

In early episodes of Warner Brothers’ Bugs Bunny cartoons, there was a clear conflict established between the titular character and Elmer Fudd. Bugs Bunny referred to Fudd as a *nimrod*. He only used the term after outsmarting Fudd — a clear attempt to insult and tease him. [Note: As in, “if he is such a mighty hunter before the LORD, he should not be outsmarted by a rascally rabbit.”]

Though *nimrod* wasn’t used colloquially at the time, the new use gained popularity as the cartoon reached more households. Few people knew the biblical reference and easily latched onto the modern definition. Given the ubiquity and longevity of the cartoon, *nimrod*, as we know it today, stuck around.<sup>5</sup>

Coming back to our verses, among the things remarkable about Genesis is how the author’s themes often preview and foreshadow events generations later. The authority of God over all the sons of Noah would be something that the Apostle Paul would address constantly in his proclamation of the gospel. We see it most clearly in our New Testament text today.

Paul’s address to the Athenians is the pinnacle of Paul’s preaching in Acts. Luke makes this the centerpiece of his message. Acts 17 is the famous Mars Hill incident. Paul and Luke were there in Athens, waiting for Silas and Timothy. Athens was not part of their missionary itinerary. It was not part of the strategy. So, they were there (or, there they were), minding their own business – at least, as well as Paul was able to mind his own business.

Paul was “distressed to see that the city was full of idols.” “Distressed” probably does not quite get the sense of Paul’s reaction; think more along the lines of David’s reaction to Goliath’s taunts. Paul was offended.

Athens could be any city in America these days. The Athenians were the post-rational, post-modern information junkies of their day. The only difference is that they were “pre-Christian” whereas we talk about the United States being “post-Christian.”

Paul’s conversations in the marketplace led him to being summoned to the Areopagus, which was the first century theological version of Twitter. The two schools of thought dominating this meeting place: the Stoics and Epicureans. The Stoics were the “Mother Nature”, green, environmentalist

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, .101.

<sup>5</sup> <https://blog.simonsays.ai/nimrod-a-common-word-with-an-unlikely-backstory-24b56379056c>

libertarians of the day. They believed in a cosmopolis – one world state – in which there were no class distinctions and believed there should be no distinctions among nations. On the upside, they had a high sense of civic responsibility and duty. On the downside, they thought suicide was an honorable option for escaping hard times in order to avoid being a burden on others. They had great pride in their own abilities to navigate the times with their own rationality.

The Epicureans were more of the Consumerist ethos; where pleasure or entertainment was the highest good – and tranquility was the highest pleasure. They were materialists, seeking to find security and fulfillment in their circumstances. They were more or less disinterested in the notions of gods, focusing on the here and now.

These schools of thought have not disappeared. People are still trying to make sense of the world. Whether it is New Age thought, or hedonism, secularism, the fascination with Eastern or native American religions, the effort is still being made to make sense of the world through multiple gods or no gods at all. It is confusing.

We live in a confused world. We want to let everyone believe whatever they want. We want everyone to have “their truth” and dismiss outright the notion of any universal, authoritative truth.

Pluralism is the temptation to validate any and every theology out there. Though more critical, the Athenians certainly allowed plenty of validation for things that are simply not the truth. The sense of Luke’s writing is that they would weigh what was offered in the Areopagus and decide for themselves which things they would believe and which they would not. It was a cafeteria-style theology – with all ideas held at arms’ length and conviction not required.

Paul was invited to speak. He began with an observation of the town. They had monuments and temples to many gods. He took an ironic (or providential) situation and used it to introduce the one true God. In Athens, many of the temples or statues had fallen into disrepair over time. The authorities wanted to be respectful of the city’s heritage, so they had workmen repair the shrines. However, over time, the specifics had been lost – things like the name of the god – hence, the shrines “to an unknown god.”

Imagine being in the Areopagus that day. When Paul mentioned this shrine inscribed “to an unknown god,” you would see the heads nodding, “yes, yes, yes, I have seen those, too.” Then, he transitioned to the foundation of truth, “What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands.” Side conversations would begin because, while they would generally agree that gods do not live in shrines, Paul was treading on thin ice. Then, Paul quoted the Athenians poets using words consistent with the Scriptures, “In him we live and move and have our being,” and “we too are his offspring.” You look around and they are still following him. They may be wary because he is stomping on some debated grounds, but has not crossed any lines yet.

“While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance,” – that’s where he crossed the line with these learned folks – “**now he commands all people everywhere** to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judge in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed,” one

sovereign God who will judge, “and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

“Now he commands all people everywhere...” What had the risen Lord Jesus told the disciples before He ascended? “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” That is at the beginning of the church; at the beginning of the book of Acts. Paul was speaking in Athens in the middle of the book of Acts. And where was Paul when Acts concluded? Rome. Paul was in Rome. And how was Rome understood at that time? Well, “all roads lead to .... Rome.” Paul’s point and ministry was that God was sovereign over all the nations.

And that is what leads us to the second thing to draw from Genesis 10: the call to “Go, make disciples of ALL nations.”

**Second, the call to “go” make disciples of all nations is broad and inclusive, not exclusive and restricted.**

The reason I included the rough edit of our conversation with Lu Hawley and the KLDP team today – instead of polishing it for a better presentation in a few weeks – is because our participation and support and commissioning of this ministry is an expression of the truth of Genesis 10: God is sovereign over all the nations and over all the peoples.

As we look at this time of re-opening, as we consider the world we are going to enter after the conclusion of this global pandemic, we are looking into a world of nations that *all* belong to God. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to recognize his authority over all of them. We are called to recognize his command to go to them – whether that is in Thailand or in Carson City – to share the good news of the gospel. We are to go to them to baptize them and to teach them to obey all that Christ has commanded.

So, as we come to the conclusion of the sermon this morning, I guess I can agree with Paul, “All scripture *is* inspired by God and *is* useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” Amen.

Prayer

Hymn #568    God of the Ages

Questions:

1. Does God’s authority over all the nations mean that I personally am called to go to all the nations? If so, what does that look like? If not, to which nations am I called to go? What am I called to share?
2. How can I be preparing for our community re-opening? What kinds of things can I be doing now to get ready for then? What do I hope and pray to accomplish for God’s glory when restrictions are lifted?