

The Importance of the Blessing of Israel Genesis 12:1-9

People today are falling over themselves to enter into the property market in Auckland. Currently our fair city has attracted the attention of investors travelling here from around the world with the promise of your property growing in value by hundreds of dollars, even a thousand dollars every day and for the locals to be willing to pay for the privilege with more than half of their salary every week to you in rent. First it was our kiwi currency, the NZ dollar that was sought after by worldwide investors, now it is the land and buildings. This tiny isthmus where our city is located is fast becoming well known around the world as the place you're blessed to invest in. However, do you know what the single most important piece of real estate has been right up to this day in the context of the history of the world? Its total land area is not much bigger than Auckland and Northland combined.

Do you know what or where that place is?

The answer is what is known today as the nation, the state of Israel. A nation named after its people and located on what is perhaps the most strategic stretch of land in the world because it is where the three continents of Europe, Asia and Africa meet and was not dry and arid like the rest of the Middle East so anyone travelling overland whether a trader or an army in this part of the world would pass through it.

Today I want us to examine who is Israel, how did it come into being and why Israel as both a people and a nation have been so important to the history and hope of humankind. Last week we learnt how it was that the various people groups, ethnicities and nations developed after Babel where God confused one single language into about 10-20 original parent languages to begin with, and how each of these groups then dispersed around the world to live, subdue and rule over creation as managers or stewards just as God had purposed. How it was that each of these groups then began to create their own cultures and further differentiated languages along with their own gods, idols and alternate religions. Babel was the place where humankind rejected and turned their backs on the Lord God and made their own gods to worship beginning in sinful pride and disobedience with their temple-tower that

was going to make a name for themselves forever because they were going to reach heaven with it. So if you are God what do you do now to reach out to these stubborn humans who you created as their one and only personal, self-existent and eternal God, who you made in your image to have a relationship with you and act as your deputy managers on earth who had now as particular tribes, peoples and nations began to settle down in particular places where they were making up their own type of gods for to rely on and worship? As God what do you do?

Well the LORD/Yahweh had a plan to fulfil his purposes and that plan began with speaking to just one man, Abram, whose call we have just read of in Genesis 12. It is here that the LORD speaks to one descendent of Noah's son Shem whose father Terah had set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan but only got as far as Harran and decided to settle there, rather than go on into the unknown, possibly because they worshipped the same god in Harran, the moon-god. So for an idolater like Terah he was comfortable there in what was a flourishing caravan city where you could settle to prosper and do well. Then Terah dies and the LORD comes a calling choosing to tell just one childless man that he must simply up and leave his family and settled prosperous life of this people's nation, a call which according to Acts 7:2-4 was not the first time Abram had heard it, what he's previously heard in Ur, Mesopotamia was being renewed in Harran. The LORD called Abram to leave all these things behind to begin the pilgrimage that would lead to the fulfilment of Yahweh's purposes which was to be a better world of God's making- not man's! Here begins the story of how the LORD/Yahweh through Abram, who is later renamed, becomes the God of Abraham, his son Isaac, then grandson Jacob, whose name God changed after he wrestled with him to Israel, to become the God of Israel a nation of people who were eventually to dwell in what was known as the land of Canaan at the time, a people created by God for God who were to acknowledge and worship Yahweh as the one and only true God in what would become their homeland, the promised land, the only piece of real estate in the world that God claimed for himself for his special people to be known as their homeland, their own land the promise of which is contained in the call to Abram in the form of a sevenfold blessing beginning with the word's...

“I will make you into a great nation” “I will bless you.” “I will make your name great.” “You will be a blessing.”

From one old chosen childless man would come a multitude of people who would live and worship Yahweh in their land as a witness to the all the different peoples who all had alternate religions and idols they worshipped along with a large number of man-made gods which did not include the LORD God himself. All other nations were blessed by God’s chosen people and nation of priests as they practiced their religion- because they hadn’t made it up! God had given it to Israel complete with animal sacrifices and future hope. As such a people Israel was blessed and as an outsider, a Gentile, if you could recognise this fact and treat Israel as such then you were blessed because it is said so by God “I will bless those who bless you.” The inverse was also to be true.

Ancient people with their newly created religions very quickly arrived at the idea that you could, by pronouncing curses on someone, evoke the power of the spirit of your god to grossly affect that person or people’s lives in an extremely negative way. But God’s word to Abram “Whoever curses you I will curse” served to put what we call a special hedge of protection around his people Israel who lived in the Promised Land from any such curse. This blessing however did not prevent the Jews from being kicked out of the nation for their disobedience for times ranging from 70 years during their exiled Babylonian captivity to the nearly 1900 years of the Diaspora which came to an end on the 14th May 1948 with the declaration of the re establishment of the independent state of Israel. In the decades since Israel has repelled the curse of invasion on a number of occasions. The invading nations, peoples and religion have not been blessed in their attempts to dislodge Israel- quite the opposite in fact. Israel’s witness as God’s blessed people remains along with the truth that “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

This seventh promised blessing is restating God’s original blessing over humanity contained in Genesis 1:28. It was a promise that the LORD would fulfil, beginning with Abram through his life but then importantly through the lives of his descendants. It was a promise that God would keep reaffirming to Abram at least five more times throughout his life, then to Isaac, Jacob and eventually Moses in different ways and after

these Patriarch's it was given to Israel's Prophets right up to the New Testament where the Apostle Peter addresses a crowd of Jewish listeners as Abram's physical descendants at the Jerusalem temple after healing a lame beggar [Acts 3:12, 24-25] reaffirming the promise. The apostle Paul in Galatians 3:8 in reference to his Gentile listeners, also affirms that anyone who is not a Jew like you and me, are Abram's spiritual offspring or descendants, his children who are by faith blessed equally with this blessing that has come through Abraham.

This sevenfold promise of blessing to Abram was passed to us through the physical descendants of Abram, Israel, the people of God who were the only people to follow the one true God. As they continued to worship the LORD they carried with them in their hearts the expectation that one day God's promises would be fulfilled. They had the faith that enabled them to live in hope that one day in the future the LORD God would return to them and deliver them from evil and its associated oppression in the form of a kingly Messiah who would as one of father Abraham's offspring [v.3] and of the tribe of Judah [Genesis 49:10], as a Jew, would be the world's deliverer, the one whom would restore peace, joy and goodness on earth by releasing it from the grip of evil and brokenness that had entered the world when Adam and Eve sinned. God had promised that this state of the world would not last forever because one would be born from the human race [Genesis 3:15] who would crush the serpent Satan's head destroying the power of sin and death that gripped the human race and had spawned all the associated evil.

So with this important promise of Blessing consuming Judaism and the hearts and minds of the Jewish people, Israel as a nation eagerly awaits the promised deliverer as Abram's descendants and heirs of the promise, who were to be worshipping witnesses of the one true LORD in the land God gave them, to the world that the promise of such a blessing is on its way for God had created the nation Israel to bless all people, every different family, tribe and tongue that had rejected the one true God from the time of Babel, replacing the LORD with their own idols, gods and religions. But God chose Israel to bless all nations with the knowledge of a personal living creator God through the written word of the Old Covenant or Testament which proclaimed that the deliverer, the

Messiah will come! Isn't that good news and aren't we blessed to have the knowledge and the relationship with Israel's deliverer, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour who we will speak more of next week.