

PACKED

DISCOVERING GOD'S HEART FOR THE NATIONS

A 28-DAY DEVOTIONAL

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WEEK 1: THE ITINERARY

GOD'S PROMISE AND BLESSING

DAY 1

GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

Shane Sebastian

In college, one of my favorite bands was Nirvana. Nirvana has the best song in the history of songs: *Smells Like Teen Spirit*. Come on, admit it, there's nothing better as far as songs go. I remember before and after class, before going surfing, on my way home from Bible study, and everywhere else I listened to that song. I also remember having no idea what Nirvana was singing about. The more I listened, the murkier the song seemed. Nirvana was loud, but they were hardly clear in their message.

Fortunately, God is much more clear about his message—the story of the Bible. From the very beginning of Genesis all the way through the Book of Revelation we see the obvious theme of the Bible: *God's love for the nations, His heart to bless all nations, and to do so through His people*. Another word for “bless” is the word “heal.”

One of my professors in seminary, David McDonald, says that God desires to use us to heal others. “The church is an agency of healing. We continue the mission of Jesus, picking up where he left off. We are the body of Christ and each one of us has a role to play in cultivating God's kingdom on earth.”

In Genesis 10, we read about what is called “the table of nations.” The table of nations is exactly what it sounds like: a list of the nations that existed during that time. There are seventy nations listed, which was the total of all nations in the world. We will discuss the table of nations

more in the devotional for Day 8.

Then in Genesis 11, we read a crazy story about how God actually created the nations that are listed in the previous chapter. At this point in history, there is still only one nation, one culture that God has created: “Now the whole world had one language and the same words” (Genesis 11:1). We read that these people, this one nation, wanted to build a tower that would show how powerful they were, a tower that would display their greatness. Some Bible scholars say they built this tower because they thought God would destroy them through another flood (as he did in Genesis 7) because they were so wicked.

God did promise that He would never flood the earth again. Yet He was very unhappy with these people. So what did God do? He took this one nation and created seventy. Genesis 11:7 says, “‘Come, let us go down and confuse their language, so that they may not understand another’s speech.’ So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth.” God literally took one culture and created many cultures.

As we move to Genesis 12, we read of an incredible promise—a promise where God involves you and me. God tells Abraham that he is going to be a blessing to the nations, to the whole world. Genesis 12:1-3 says, “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 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. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” Again, God promises that He

will use Abram (later, God changes his name to Abraham) and his family to bless all the nations, all the peoples and cultures God has created.

According to the theologian John Stott, “These are perhaps the most unifying verses in the Bible; the whole of God’s purpose is encapsulated here.”

REFLECT

Read through Genesis 12. What are some of the things God asks Abraham to do in this passage?

What promises does God make?

How would you define blessing?

How do you think it relates to healing?

How is God’s mercy shown when He spreads the promise of Abraham from Israel to the whole earth?

DAY 2

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

Shane Sebastian

Ten years ago, a girl I know, Michelle, went to Japan for a year as a missionary to work with college students. After training, and with an open heart, she began to make friends with students on a campus in Tokyo. She noticed that Japanese students really love music; they love hip-hop and dancing. So Michelle did something I would never have done in a million years: She started a hip-hop dance club.

A few times a week, Michelle gathered her new friends and they would dance. Michelle would teach, they would practice together, and then go out to eat. After a month or so, a student in the club, Yukina, asked Michelle why she was in Tokyo that year. Michelle said, “I am here to help students like you understand God’s love for them. He has changed my life, and He can change yours too.”

Fast-forward ten months. Yukina had become a follower of Jesus through her friendship with Michelle. Yukina eventually led her sister and her parents into a relationship with God. The next summer they were baptized as a family. Yukina came back to Tokyo that fall and began to lead a Bible study for other women on her campus. Lives were changed as they heard and understood the story that is so consistent throughout the Bible—God’s heart for the nations.

Another way to translate the word “bless” is the word “heal.” Michelle was blessed; she had been spiritually

healed from her sin. And she was now passing it on to Yukina. A friend of mine once told me that I had been healed spiritually—God had come to me, and he had done so on his way to bless and heal someone else. In other words, salvation is meant to be passed on. Like Michelle to Yukina. Yukina to her family and friends. Yukina’s family and friends to their friends. And so on.

The idea of Michelle blessing her new friend Yukina, and Yukina then blessing her family, is the fulfillment of the promise we looked at yesterday. Genesis 12:1-3 is often referred to as the Abrahamic Promise: “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 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. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

Genesis 18:18 reminds us of this promise when the Bible says, “Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.” This is a promise that will one day be fulfilled.

As a part of the family of Abraham, you and I have been blessed to be a blessing. God has blessed us with a relationship with Him, and that comes from the inheritance of that relationship. How are we passing it on?

REFLECT

Read through Genesis 18.

Read Matthew 28:18–20, Mark 16:15–18, John 20:21, Acts 1:8 and Revelation 7:7–9.

We bless and heal by being a witness. What does a witness do?

Why do you think being a witness for Christ is a part of healing and blessing?

Think of a time when you helped bring healing in someone's life. What did that look like? What were the circumstances? How did you feel in the process?

How can you bless and be a witness to someone right now?

DAY 3

SHARING A MEAL WITH THE ANGELS

Shane Sebastian

I recently heard from one of our students who is on STINT (a short-term international assignment) in North Africa. She regularly meets with the president of the Muslim student association on a college campus. They have become friends and trust is being built.

This student told our STINTer that she had been having a “dream about the prophet Jesus visiting her.” Our STINTer told her friend it’s very special that Jesus would visit her in a dream. The Muslim girl responded that it actually wasn’t very special at all. It wasn’t special because thirteen other students in her Muslim club were having the exact same dream.

I love talking with young people about the opportunity they can have in pointing others to Jesus by going overseas. Having spent the last few years on STINT with my four children (and even our dog), this is something very near and dear to my wife and me.

I’ve spoken and written much about why going on STINT, or going on a Summer Mission or one or two launching trips, is so worth it. I could give you multiple reasons and stories of how God will use you to change lives, how you will point people to an eternal relationship with the loving God, and even how an adventure like this will prepare you for the challenges life will throw at you in the future.

But those reasons don’t compare for a second to the real

reason why we should consider going overseas to point people toward Jesus: It's to follow God's call in being a blessing to the nations.

Genesis 18:18 says, "Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him."

The context of this verse is fascinating. God and two of His angels had just stopped to have a meal with Abraham and Sarah while they were on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah to pass His judgment. They actually stopped to have a bite to eat. I mean, do angels even get hungry? Why would God and His angels chat and eat with Abraham and Sarah?

God, through two angels, stopped to remind Abraham and Sarah of His promise to not just bless them, but to have them bless the nations. Just a few chapters prior (Genesis 12:1-3), God had given what is known as the Abrahamic Promise. He tells Abraham that He would bless him to bless others. This blessing is to be one that crosses cultures and reaches out to every nation.

The Old Testament scholar Christopher J.H. Wright writes about the Abrahamic Promise that God and the angels are reminding Abraham and Sarah about: "God's promise to Abraham is the key to the rest of Scripture. It is the beginning of mission and at the heart of the gospel. When we forget who we are and why we are here—to participate in the mission of God—then we have lost the plot of Scripture."

I love how God invites His children—not just Abraham and Sarah, but you and me—to be a blessing to the nations.

REFLECT

Explain in your own words how the Abrahamic Promise is “the key to the rest of Scripture.” Do you believe this to be true? Why or why not?

Who are examples in Scripture that serve as a blessing to the nations? How?

Sometimes God calls us to difficult places to share with others how they can know Him, like Sodom and Gomorrah. What are the hard places where God has called you (past, present, or future)?

Where might God be calling you—now or in the future—that is a hard place?

DAY 4

THE MINOR PROPHETS AND THE NATIONS

Shane Sebastian

My family and I recently lived in Puerto Rico for two years on STINT (a short-term international assignment). I remember going to a campus right after we moved there and meeting a student named Juan-Carlos. Juan-Carlos filled out a survey for me about spirituality. As I spoke with him about his religious background and his life story, I asked him if he would have thirty minutes to talk about what it means to have a relationship with God through the person of Jesus Christ. I remember thinking, *This kid doesn't want to talk to me, and he doesn't want to talk about Jesus.*

I was wrong.

After an hour of conversation, Juan-Carlos prayed and became a follower of Jesus, right there in the cafeteria on campus. Since then time, Juan-Carlos brings his friends to church, prays for his friends on a daily basis, and has seen one of his friends come into a relationship with Jesus. I was recently with Juan-Carlos's parents, and they told me that their son has become a model to them as he walks with Jesus.

What I love about that story is that Juan-Carlos began to clearly understand the part that he plays in the mission of God. He knows God has healed him and that God wants to use him to heal his family, friends, and others in his sphere of influence and around the world. Juan-Carlos also understands God's desire to be known among the nations.

We've seen over the last few days that God's heart for the world is everywhere in the Bible. God introduces His love for the nations in Genesis. But His love for the nations, and His desire to know and be known by all cultures, is repeated throughout the entire Bible. From start to finish, this story is everywhere in the Bible. Bob Sjogren, in his book *Unveiled at Last*, says, "The main story of the Bible, its theme, is about spreading knowledge of God to all people in every nation and in every language. It is a unifying thematic backbone permeating God's Word from Genesis to Revelation."

The Old Testament speaks of God's heart for the nations. The prophet Habakkuk says, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14). Isaiah speaks of the glory of God: "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will show my glory" (Isaiah 40:5). King David writes in 1 Chronicles 16 verses 8 and 23, "Oh give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples ... Sing to the Lord, all the earth, proclaim His salvation day after day. Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all peoples." Finally, the prophet Malachi speaks of God's glory: "'For from the rising of the sun even in its setting, My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered in my name, and a grain offering that is pure; for my name will be great among the nations,' says the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 1:11). God's love for every nation is all over the Old Testament.

REFLECT

God gave Juan-Carlos vision and motivation to share the Gospel after he became a Christian. Who is someone close to you that you can pray would become a follower of Jesus? Ask God to give you an opportunity to speak with them.

Read 1 Chronicles 16:8,23 again. How can you “make known His deeds among the peoples?”

How have you seen God use you or those around you to make “His deeds known?”

DAY 5

GOD'S HEART FOR THE NATIONS IN THE PSALMS

Allyson Moody

Have you ever watched a friend fall in love?

If you think about a man who pursues the woman he loves, he does everything he can think of to win her heart and understand her. My husband, David, did this a lot when we were first dating. Like any couple, we logged countless hours of time together while we were dating. He asked lots of questions, paid attention to my likes and dislikes, and remembered my stories. I desperately wanted to know what made this quiet, kind elementary teacher tick. He wanted to win my heart and I wanted him to pursue it. We wanted to know everything about each other, and even though we are now married, we discover new things everyday.

But both of us want to know the Lord's heart even more. One of my favorite ways to learn about the heart of God is through reading the Psalms. You can actually read the entire book of Psalms each month if you read five psalms a day. This is a discipline I've had for many years, and I truly love this book.

Many of the psalms describe God's character and the things He loves, because they are written by King David. Throughout Scripture, David, Israel's king, is described as "a man after God's own heart". David spent time in God's presence, getting to know the one who captured his heart. I love seeing the way David, Solomon, and others rejoice, cry out, and praise God through poetry and song in this

powerful book. Their descriptions of the character of God are so inspiring, and they challenge us to grow in our love for the Lord and the things on His heart. The nations are mentioned 175 times in the Psalms, which shows us that the world, and more specifically missions, are close to the Lord's heart.

In Psalm 67, we see a brief description of how the Lord loves the nations. It says:

- 1 May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
- 2 that your way may be known on earth,
your saving power among all nations.
- 3 Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!
- 4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth.
- 5 Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!
- 6 The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, shall bless us.
- 7 God shall bless us;
let all the ends of the earth fear him!

David's desire is to be a blessing and to see many people praise God because He is worthy of glory. David's words are a reminder of the Abrahamic Promise in Genesis 12, that all nations would be blessed through Israel.

The call to be a blessing to the nations is found throughout the Psalms because it is on the heart of God.

David, being a man after God's own heart, captured in poetry and song God's desire for all nations to come to know him.

REFLECT

Read Psalm 67.

How do you think your friends would describe the things on your heart?

Why do you think King David earned the title "a man after God's own heart"?

How well do you think you know God's heart right now?

What practices or steps could you take this next week to grow in your understanding of His heart?

How has God blessed you?

What are some of the ways you can be a blessing where God has you?