

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: March 25, 2012

Called To Be A People For God's Purposes

by Dan Trygg

"Now Yahweh said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; ² and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; ³ and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And *in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*'"

Genesis 12:1-3

"By Myself I have sworn, declares Yahweh, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and *your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.* ¹⁸ *In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.*"

Genesis 22:16-18

"Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then *you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine;* ⁶ *and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'* These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."

Exodus 19:5-6

"...upon this rock I will build *My called-out-people; and Hades' gates will not be strong against them.*" Matthew 16:18

"*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*"

I Peter 2:9

The first few chapters of Genesis set the stage for the rest of salvation history. We read about how God created humankind in His image and likeness, and set them in dominion over all the earth (Gen. 1:26). **Our first parents were created to be stewards of this planet. They were to glorify God and live to honor Him.** God gave them every blessing, and provided for every need. They daily enjoyed His presence, and fellowship with Him. There was only one limitation. They had to stay within the realm of God's blessings. **Obedience was the key to blessing.** They could eat of any tree in the garden, except the one tree, the tree of the experiential knowledge of good and evil. We read how the serpent came and tempted them to go against that one limitation. He challenged God's character and motives. Instead of recognizing all the incredible blessings, wonders and privileges that God had provided for them, they became focused on the one forbidden thing. **Satan convinced them that it was to their advantage to disregard God and His will.** He directly challenged what God said would happen. He presented God as keeping them prisoner, instead of being the provider of every blessing. As they reached out and took hold of that forbidden fruit, and ate of it, **their innocence was forever lost, and they immediately experienced the difference between good and evil.** They immediately felt naked and ashamed. They hid themselves from each other, and from God. Their fellowship with Him was broken. Instead of delighting to hear of His coming, they were filled with dread and fear, and tried to hide themselves. **God had not changed, however.** He still was the same loving Creator He always had been. *He helped them* face up to their sin, *covered* their shame and nakedness, *and gave them hope* that the seed of the woman would someday crush the head of the serpent, and restore the blessing of the garden paradise that they had now lost. *He* did not change. **His love and commitment to them remained the same. In fact, it was much deeper than they could possibly have known.** Their actions, however, had set consequences into motion which He had tried to warn them about. **Because they disobeyed, they severely diminished the blessings they now experienced, and made their way much more difficult.** They now had to toil to survive, and the woman would experience pain in childbirth. **Their relationships with one another became marked by manipulation, control and dominance. As this sinful tendency was passed along to succeeding generations, it produced violence, abuse, domination and murder, until the entire earth was perverted by its terrible evil.** Finally, the world had become so corrupt that only one man, Noah, retained a semblance of righteousness. **Noah was commissioned to build a huge boat, through which God would preserve a remnant of the animals, and his family, through a horrific deluge that would destroy all flesh.** Though Noah warned people of God's judgment, they did not believe, and so they perished in the flood. Although God graciously preserved them through the flood, **within a short amount of time the descendants of Noah's sons were soon going down the same path, ...building armies, establishing kingdoms and cooperating together to do evil.** At Babel, God confused their speech to prevent such cooperative effort, and they spread abroad across the face of the earth. **At the end of only eleven chapters of Genesis, things look pretty dismal for humankind. The effects of sin are widespread and devastating, ...and there seems to be little hope.**

Then, in Genesis 12, God recruits a man, Abram, to begin to develop and unfold His plan for redemption. There is much to learn from the life of this man. **He responded to a radical call from God. He left everything to follow this call. He followed God into an unmarked, open-ended future, ...to a land he did not know, ...to a promise he did not ever live to see fulfilled. Yet, he believed God, ...and it was counted to him as**

righteousness. He was a man beset with weaknesses, however. In the midst of his bold steps of faith, we see him also *hedging his bets*. He was supposed to leave his family and go to a new land. He left his tribe, but he took his father, brother, and nephew along with him. *He had a penchant for lying. He also tried to fulfill God's will by his own methods and resources.* These choices almost derailed his life, at times, ...and ***the consequences of some of these choices have plagued his descendants through the ages***, and even continue to impact them today. **Choices are real. Consequences are real. God does not just erase them, or their ramifications. He does have a plan, however, and He works out this overall plan, sometimes in spite of our foolishness and unbelief.** We see this in Abram's life. **God offered to make him a blessing to all peoples.** Then, as Abram responded more and more to God, the Lord narrowed His focus to bring this blessing to all nations through Abraham's descendant, his "seed". ***Note the promise that "he will possess the gate of his enemies"***. He will be victorious over those who will oppose him. **He will have opposition, but He will overcome.**

The next step in the outworking of God's plan was to establish a nation from Abraham's descendants. They were to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a people uniquely set apart for God. Again, God made a covenant with the nation of Israel. His intention was to make *them* to be a blessing to *all the nations* of the world. They were to be a sign to all nations. Referring to them as a kingdom of priests meant that **they were to represent God to other peoples.** They were to appeal to God on behalf of other peoples, *and* they were to appeal to other peoples on God's behalf, proclaiming and demonstrating the wisdom, heart and love of God to them (Isa. 42:6; 51:4; 60:1,2). Interestingly, the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew into Greek rendered the phrase "a kingdom of priests" to be "a royal priesthood", meaning that **they were to be priests to serve the King's purposes. Again, blessing comes with obedience!** God promised Israel that if they remained devoted to Him and kept the teachings of His instructions, He would protect, bless and prosper them in the land He had promised to give them. If, on the other hand, they chose to *disregard* Him and His teachings, ...if they served other Gods, or acted immorally and unjustly, in *defiance* of His instructions..., He would withdraw His blessings, protections and prosperity. **If they chose to rely on Him, walk in His ways and follow His counsel, then none of their enemies would be able to stand before them.** They would be able to remove even the most powerful, firmly entrenched and fortified cities among those who opposed them (e.g., Deut. 3:1-5). ***They would possess the gates of their enemies!*** Unfortunately, like their forefather, Abraham, the nation of Israel was also beset with weakness. They chose to disregard God and His ways. **Instead of blessing, they brought horrible consequences upon themselves. Again, their choices were real, and the consequences were also real.** Eventually, they were defeated by their enemies, debased and driven out of their inheritance. Their enemy brought the war to *their* cities, crashed through *their* gates, and led *them* away captive.

During the time of Israel's national history, however, God was continuing to work out His larger redemptive plan. Even though they as a nation were unfaithful, **there was always a remnant of faithful people through whom God was working.** Throughout these centuries God continued to reveal the details of His plan. **The prophets spoke of a coming King, a messiah ("anointed one") who would not only be Abraham's seed, but also David's seed** (II Sam. 7:12). He would save His people, and would establish a Kingdom that would never end, but would eventually fill the entire earth (Isa. 9:6,7; Dan. 7:13,14). **He would defeat all opposition, and all nations will serve Him. God would regather His people from the nations and He would establish a new covenant, one that would truly transform the heart.** After 70 years of captivity, the Medes and Persians defeated the Babylonians and encouraged exiled peoples to return to their former lands, making way for Israel to be reborn as a nation, for Jerusalem and the Temple to be rebuilt, and for the promised ruler to be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2).

In 26 A.D., Jesus of Nazareth appeared on the scene, preaching that the promised Kingdom of God had come. He went through the land of Israel, proclaiming the message, healing people from all kinds of afflictions and casting out demons. In Matthew 16, **Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was. Peter responded, "You are the Christ ('anointed one'), the Son of God!"** Jesus blessed Peter, and said that this was revealed to Him by the Father in heaven. **He said that upon this truth He would build His congregation, His called-out people, and "the gates of Hades will not be strong against them."** Later, Peter tells us that *we* are that promised chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, and people for God's unique possession and purpose. **Like ancient Israel, we are at war!** We are to go up against a fortified and entrenched foe. We are to take *his* territory, *his* land, *his* authority, *his* people, *his* possessions, *his* realm of influence away from him, and establish Jesus' rule, reign and dominion wherever we go. **As with ancient Israel, God will rout, confuse and displace our enemies before us, if we remain faithful to Him, and we will possess the gates of our enemies. Don't forget -- Blessing, protection, and victory come with obedience!** If, however, we disregard Him, by not living for Him or by choosing to ignore His calling upon our lives, then we too will be diminished and come to nothing for Him. **Our choices are real, and the consequences also will be real.**