WEEK #3
Bible Study

Full Scripture

Genesis 22:15-18 (NRSV)

ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH SHALL GAIN BLESSING

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, ‘By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.’

Key verse

“…and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.” Genesis 22:18 (NRSV)

Key Concept

The blessing of God is intended for all nations, all people, not a select few. God not only blessed Abraham and his descendants with prosperity and hope, but all people regardless of nationality, race, creed, gender, ethnicity, or identity, so long as we obey God’s voice.

Gathering Prayer

Holy One, God of all creation, it is by your hand that we are blessed. Bring to us this day a hope for unity and peace with our siblings in Christ as we reach beyond ourselves to recognize the image of God in those around us. Help us to know your patience and love, that we might learn from your Word to gather up the nations in your holy name. This we pray in the name of Christ our Savior, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Overview

*Genesis 22* is probably one of the most widely known scripture passages, as it contains the story of Abraham and Isaac. It describes Abraham’s journey of steadfast faith as he walks to the altar to offer his only son as a sacrifice to God. This story is often used to remind us of how we, Judeo-Christians, must remain in the faith even in moments of weakness or peril. However, if we look at this passage through the lens of the current socio-political turmoil of our country and world, we see not only a call to have faith in God, but a call for unity.

In verses 15-18, God rewards Abraham for his faithfulness. The angel of the Lord tells Abraham, that because he was willing to sacrifice the thing that was most precious to him in the entire world, his son, Isaac, God would bless Abraham. The blessing not only impacts Abraham, himself, but all those who come after him: “*I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.*” (Gen. 22:17b)

Through this blessing, God chose Abraham as the patriarch of God’s chosen people—a blessing beyond our imagination, but that was not even the full extent of God’s plan in this moment. God chose Abraham and his descendants to be the unifiers, the equalizers, by giving them authority to offer blessing to all people in all places. There was no caveat, no exception, no end to God’s blessing through Abraham. Simply stated, by Abraham's faith, God gave the world an equal opportunity for a relationship with God.

In the Hebrew Bible, this concept of blessing all people is really a big deal. There is a great deal of exclusivity in Hebrew Scripture, as it focuses on the chosen-ness of one group of people over others. All throughout the Hebrew Bible we watch the struggle of God’s chosen ones as they combat the “outside” world. We see stories of the victory of the Israelites over their enemies. But here, if we go back to the very beginning, we see God trying to gather all nations, not solely the Israelites (or descendants of Abraham).

Verse 18 states, “*and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.*” Yes, God has chosen the descendants of Abraham to go out and bless the nations. Yes, these descendants are set apart. However, these descendants are not commissioned to maintain their own social-circles, but to go out and bless everyone.

In the limited world-view of Biblical times, “*all the nations of the earth*” would have meant the socio-political enemy camp down by the sea. Today, in a globally connected society, this means so much more! It means that not only does that blessing extend to people who look and act similarly to ourselves, but also extends to those who are completely different than ourselves. Today, the idea of a blessing that encompasses “*all the nations of the earth*” means that it transcends social, political, national, racial, economic, gender, and ethnic identities.

The blessing of Abraham brought forth in *Genesis 22:15-18*, reminds us of our chosen-ness through Abraham’s faith. It reminds us that God’s message is for all people in all places, not just for a select few.
Discussion Questions

1. Abraham proved his faithfulness by offering to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. God provided a lamb as a substitute for the sacrifice. Without offering to sacrifice our children, how can we follow in Abraham’s footsteps of ultimate faith today? What are you willing to sacrifice for God?

2. In Bible times, the limited understanding of “all the nations of the earth” probably meant the rowdy non-God-fearing people around the bend in the dusty road. They were considered to be the enemies of the people of God, the “other.” Who is our “other” today? Are they just around the bend or are they on the other side of the globe?

3. Does looking at the “other” as blessed by God change your perspective of them? How?

4. When we think of the high tensions of the socio-political culture of the world today, how could recognizing the blessedness or chosen-ness of others change the way we interact with them? Are there ways that we can offer blessings to the “other” to build bridges that span the polarized cultures of our world? How effective can those blessings be in a post-Christian society (i.e. our world today)?

5. When faced with the opportunity to share the message of God with people who do not look or act like you, do you take it? If so, how do you bridge the gap? If not, what tools do you need to take advantage of that opportunity?

Sending Forth

God of all Creation, we thank you for this time gathered in your name. We pray that you would continue to dwell in each of us as we go out into the world inspired by your Word. Give us your courage to step out in faith to bridge the gaps of iniquity and injustice as we remember that we are all your people and we are all blessed by your grace and mercy. These things we pray in the name of your Son, our Savior, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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