

God's Heart for the Nations 1

Purpose: To understand God's heart for all the nations, beginning in Genesis to the end of the Old Testament.

Objective: By the end of the lesson the students will:

1. From the Old Testament, know God's heart to reach and bless all the nations.
2. Trust God to develop in them a heart for reaching and blessing peoples of all nations.
3. Take action based on their developing heart for the lost.

Key Verse: Genesis 12:3

I. Introduction

Many of you are familiar with Matthew 28:19 in which Jesus gives the Great Commission to "Go and make disciples of all the nations." You can see Christ's heart for the nations again in Acts 1:8, just before His ascension. Continuing on in the book of Acts, one observes the beginnings of the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Is this mission, to reach all the nations with the Gospel, just a New Testament idea? Is there any indication of God's heart for the nations in the Old Testament?

In this devotional, we'll look in the Old Testament to see what was His heart for the nations in that time period. In the next devotional, we'll see how this continued and developed in the New Testament.

II. God's Heart for the Nations – Old Testament

In the first ten chapters of Genesis, the descendents of Adam, then the descendents of Noah, were all one people with one language. Genesis 11:1-9 has the Tower of Babel account in which God confused their language and scattered them over the face of the whole earth. Different languages and different cultures were born. With this birth of "ethnos," when do we see God revealing His heart to reach all nations with the Gospel? (*Ask if any in the class want to guess the answer. After some time, you can confirm or answer...*) **In the very next chapter, Genesis 12!** (*Have someone read Genesis 12:1-3*)

In Genesis 12:3, God spoke to Abraham "...and all the peoples (clans, ethnos) on earth will be blessed through you." God has had a heart for the nations since the time that nations came into being! God's promise to Abraham was repeated in Genesis 18:18 and 22:18. It was passed on to Isaac in Genesis 26:4 and to Jacob in Genesis 28:14.

The Apostle Peter quotes Genesis 12:3 when he preached at Solomon's Colonnade (Acts 3:25). Look at that verse, and explain how Peter said that Genesis 12:3 fit into his sermon? (*Call on*

someone to answer. They should mention that Peter said the blessing promised to Abraham would come to the people through the resurrected Christ).

The Apostle Paul quotes Genesis 12:3 in Galatians 3:8 and explains it in Galatians 3:15-18. How did Paul say that this applied to the Galatian church (and to believers today)? *(Call on someone to answer. They should mention that Paul explained that the blessing to the nations would come through Abraham's seed, which is Christ. God will justify the Gentiles by faith, just as He did with Abraham).*

How else did God show His heart for the nations in the Old Testament?

(At this point, the instructor could give out verses for class members to look up, and share how their verse somehow shows God's heart for the nations. Volunteer one: Exodus 22:21; 23:9. Volunteer two: Isaiah 11:10,11; Isaiah 51:5. Volunteer three: Isaiah 42:6; Isaiah 51:4. Volunteer four: Isaiah 49:6; Isaiah 52:10. Volunteer five: Isaiah 56:7; Isaiah 61:11. Volunteer six: Isaiah 65:1; Romans 10:20. Volunteer seven: Isaiah 66:18,19. Volunteer eight: Daniel 7:14. Give them about 3 minutes to look up the verses and then call on each one to share with the class how their Scripture reading shows God's heart for the nations in the Old Testament. If not mentioned, you could fill in with the following...)

In Exodus, God instructs the Israelites how to treat foreigners living among them: "You must not exploit a foreign resident or oppress him, since you were foreigners in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:21; 23:9).

Isaiah reveals God's heart for the nations in numerous passages. The nations will seek the Lord (11:10, 11; 51:5). The Messiah will be a light to the nations (42:6; 51:4) and salvation to the ends of the earth (49:6; 52:10). His house will be a house of prayer for all the nations (56:7). The Lord will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations (61:11). The Apostle Paul quotes Isaiah 65:1 in reference to the Gentiles (Romans 10:20): "I was found by those who were not looking for Me; I revealed Myself to those who were not asking for Me." In the last chapter, Isaiah says, "I have come to gather all nations and languages; they will come and see My glory...and I will send survivors from them to the nations...And they will proclaim My glory among the nations (Isaiah 66:18, 19).

Daniel spoke of people from every nation and language serving the Messiah in His Kingdom (7:14).

In Romans 15:8-12, Paul wrote about the Gentiles glorifying God, then he supports this statement by quoting Old Testament verses. "As it is written: 'Therefore I will praise You among the Gentiles, and I will sing psalms to Your name' (2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49). Again it says: 'Rejoice, you Gentiles, with His people!' (Deuteronomy 32:43). And again: 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; all the peoples should praise Him' (Psalm 117:1). And again, Isaiah says: 'The root of Jesse will appear, the One who rises to rule the Gentiles; in Him the Gentiles will hope'" (Isaiah 11:10).

(Perhaps ask if anyone in the class can think of any other references to God's heart for the nations in the Old Testament)

Even though God worked primarily for and through the children of Israel in the Old Testament, His heart has always been to bless **all** the nations. This devotional is continued in "God's Heart for the Nations 2" in which we continue our travels into the New Testament. We'll see how well the Jews knew of God's heart as revealed in the Old Testament, and how they reacted to the phenomenon of Gentiles entering God's Kingdom without having to convert through the Law of Moses. The devotional ends with practical applications for us in light of the fact that the nations are on God's heart.

(If you will be doing the devotional on "God's Heart for the Nations 2" next week, you could ask class members to think of verses that show God's heart for the nations as revealed in the New Testament, how Jews and the early church responded to the idea of Gentile believers, and what could be applications for us in light of the fact that God wants to reach all nations and ethnic groups with the Gospel. They can share their answers next week at the beginning of the devotional.)

(Close in prayer. Perhaps ask a class member to close, asking God to use us to be a blessing to the nations according to His promise to Abraham which is fulfilled in Christ. God can use us to fulfill Genesis 12:3 in other people's lives! A promise made 4000 years ago – fulfilled in us today!)