

10.11.09 / Genesis 12:1-3, Isaiah 49:6, Luke 10:1-12, Revelation 7:9

Because there are four texts for this week we will focus on placing them within the larger Biblical context and examining connecting themes. All of these passages fit within larger narratives, but it will be impossible to reasonably examine four larger narratives in a single study, and so this aspect of the guide will be somewhat truncated.

What did it mean for those who first heard it?**Genesis 12:1-3**

Two translation notes are important for this passage. First, the opening words of God's statement to Abram involve some slight additional stress on the imperative "go". Second, verse 3 involves those who make light of you/curse you/dishonor you. The verb here literally means "lighten", but in Hebrew heavy and light have additional meaning. Heavy overlaps with "honored", and is generally a laudatory term. By contrast, lightness is pejorative. When Hagar begins to disrespect Sarah the Hebrew reads "and Sarah was lightened in her eyes". So the verb used here means dishonor, curse, and lighten. Which nuance is active is an interpretive decision. Notably, God says He will curse these people, using a verb that only means "to curse".

This speech serves to introduce Abraham's role in redemptive history (Abram normally being referred to by his later name, Abraham, which he will not receive for another few chapters). Up until this point Genesis has included a number of seemingly unconnected narratives. With Abraham this changes (notably, Abraham's father, Terah, appears to have heard this call and botched it). Abraham becomes the focal point for what God is doing with the Hebrew people, who define themselves as heirs of Abraham and his covenant. When Matthew writes his gospel he records Jesus' genealogy to Abraham. Similarly, in the latter part of John 8 the people opposing Jesus lay claim to God's promises on the grounds that they are children of Abraham. (Jesus refutes them by claiming their real father is the devil.) Again, when in Acts 7 Stephen sketches the important elements of redemptive history for the Sanhedrin, he starts with Abraham (he may deliberately shorten his narrative because of the Sadducee emphasis on Torah, but that is beyond our scope today). Abraham, then, is a sort of new beginning of God's work, cited throughout the Bible (these references barely scratch the surface) as the beginning of God setting the world right.

So what is it that Abram is promised? He, a childless man, is promised an inheritance. Not just someone to continue his line (for a number of reasons it is probable that Abram does not have much hope for a comfortable life after death – his pagan neighbors and most of his descendants seem to believe in a shadowy underworld, not a morally judged afterlife with rewards in it), but a whole nation. His name will be "made great". Obviously this does not mean he will be named "great" but rather, as we have discussed before, that he will become an important, known person. Focally, though, for these four passages is that Abraham will be a blessing, a blessing to all nations. Whatever God is doing with Abraham will ultimately be something for everyone. This is not defined any further here, only promised.

Isaiah 49:6

Isaiah, as a whole, is of roughly the Exilic era. There is some debate about this, but Isaiah is unequivocally centuries after Abraham. Between the two passages the patriarchs have lived and died, Israel has been enslaved,

Moses has led the people out of Egypt, the tribes have struggled to survive under the judges, the monarchy has been established, the kingdom has split in two, the Northern Kingdom has been conquered by Assyria, and the southern Kingdom, to whom Isaiah speaks, is threatened by Babylon, which has crushed Assyria. This covers, if we take Abraham to be at roughly 2,000 BC, approximately a millennium and a half. And now Isaiah interjects this note into the long Servant Song.

The Servant Song is an extended poetic prophecy that describes the servant of Yahweh, who comes to reveal God's saving power. Much of the description thus far has been focused, predictably, on Israel, which is in bad shape, and threatened with the Exile. However, in verse 9 this note appears: God has decided that it is not enough to restore Israel. The whole earth will see God's saving power. Again, nothing more is specified. Yahweh's great deliverance is coming, though, and apparently it's coming to everyone, out of Israel.

Luke 10:1-12

This passage occurs, of course, in the ministry of Jesus, some 500 years after Isaiah.

Jesus is, Himself, the servant of the Servant Song, but this passage focuses on the work of the incipient church. The seventy-two are sent out as messengers before Jesus – to the places He is about to go.

Verses 2-4 focus on reliance on God. It is God Who will make the "harvest" succeed or fail, it is He Who will provide workers, it is He Who they must rely on to protect them, feed them, and find them shelter. Verses 5-9 serve as instructions for entering a friendly town. The disciple (I use this in the loose sense, as a follower of Jesus, not as one of the Twelve) is to bless the house (meaning the household, a standard usage), which, apparently, will only take effect if the owner of the house is a peaceful person. The disciple should then stay with that person, probably a warning about currying favor by moving around to "more important" households. The disciple is to heal people and announce that the Kingdom of God has come near. Notably, this is sign paired with announcement. The Kingdom of God has come near – look at what's happened!

10-12 present a much less happy picture. Again, the Kingdom of God has come near. God's great action is present. Those who reject it are themselves rejected, down to the dust of their streets. Sodom, of course, is an example of great wickedness, as Sodom was utterly destroyed by fire from the Lord in Genesis. To say that it will be worse for that town than it will for Sodom is to say that their evil is, indeed, terrible. And, of course, that's because they are rejecting this long-promised work of God.

This passage is also important because the work of God is here continued through people. The Church eventually becomes the main agent here, doing Christ's work, and so it's important to think of the gospel as a continuing story, in which we are the most recent act, and not as one that is over and done with. Which of course brings us to the final passage.

Revelation 7:9

Revelation is, hands down, the hardest book of the Bible to interpret correctly, and a lot of strange ideas have crept out of poor interpretation of this book. That said, this section is, temporally, at the end of all things.

The point is simple: at the end, God's work will have gone everywhere, touched all nations, and a numberless crowd of people will worship Christ. This is the end goal, the blessing of all nations.

Questions for these verses should probably focus on the connections between them. There's also a large gap in time between Luke and Revelation, and we exist in that time. What does our section of the gospel story look like? Are we faithful, like Abram, or slackers? Are we working towards the goal described in Revelation? (This skips over some important, complex, and very hard to articulate ideas about who, exactly, does these things, but you likely get the idea.)

Please refer to the document entitled WeeklyQuestion_TheGospelUncut.pdf for weekly application questions.