

The Scattering and Subsequent Gathering of the Nations

(Genesis 11:8-9)

In Genesis 11:8-9, we read, “⁸ So the Lord dispersed [lit. scattered] them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there, the Lord dispersed [lit. scattered] them over the face of all the earth.” Twice previously, Yahweh instructed humanity to fill the earth; before and after the flood. However, in the land of Shinar, all the people of the earth gathered together to build a tower to the heavens instead of filling the earth as God had commanded. When someone hears the words “Tower of Babel”, they normally think only about God confusing the language of the people. However, His action of scattering the people is just as consequential as confusing their languages.

In Genesis 9, Yahweh promised He would never again judge all the earth by flood. He now judges the earth for sin in two other ways. First, He confuses the people by changing their native tongue. Second, He scatters humanity over the face of the whole earth. According to Deuteronomy 32:8, this is when ethnic (national) divisions occur – “Yahweh divided mankind.” The dispersing or scattering is Yahweh’s doing.

Then, in Genesis 12, Yahweh starts over for a third time with Abram. In Genesis 12:2, Yahweh promises to make a great nation from Abram. Previously, this nation did not exist. Yahweh is creating this new nation by means of a descendant of Abram. Through a miraculous birth, Sarai (Abram’s wife) will give birth to Isaac. Isaac’s wife, Rebekah, will give birth to twin sons, Esau and Jacob. A nation will come from each son. However, Yahweh chooses Jacob over Esau and gives Jacob the new name Israel. Israel will be Yahweh’s nation.

But what about all the other nations from Genesis 9? Has Yahweh forgotten them? No. In the same promise about a nation coming from Abram, Yahweh promises that in Abram, all the families of the earth will be blessed. Then, in Genesis 17, Yahweh changes Abram’s name to Abraham because he will be the father of a multitude of nations. How will Abraham become the father of the ethnicities (nations) scattered before his birth in Genesis 11? Even after scattering – or dispersing in the ESV’s language – the nations over the face of the whole earth, Yahweh has not forgotten the non-Israelites (sometimes translated Gentiles) whom He created.

Fast forward 2,000 years to the days of Christ on the earth. In John 10:16, Jesus mentions other sheep He has that are not of this fold. He says, “And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” In Acts 18:10, Jesus tells Paul He has “many in this city who are His people.” Yet the gospel has yet to come to Corinth. Christ is talking about His elect who have yet to come to faith in Him. In John 11:51-52 we read:

He [Caiaphas] did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation [Israel], and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. (John 11:51-52)

Did you see it? Christ is not dying for only the nation of Israel. He died to “gather into **one** the children of God who are scattered abroad.” This scattered abroad language establishes a clear connection all the way back to Genesis 11. Wow! Christ’s death on the cross is the means by which Yahweh is going to gather His children, whom the New Testament calls Gentiles. The mission Christ gave us, His disciples – called the Great Commission (Mat 28:19-20) – is how lost sheep (children of God) are gathered into the one flock of God; the body of Christ.

We proclaim Christ and His gospel to the nations – those children who were scattered abroad—so that those whom God has elected unto salvation will repent and believe the gospel. Since we have no idea who God’s elect are, we proclaim Christ to everyone. According to 1 John 2:2, Jesus Himself “is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*”. We proclaim Christ and His gospel to the nations, knowing that this is how God is regathering the nations He previously scattered abroad in Genesis 11.