

1. Because God has purposed it to be this way

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[0 : 00] Well now, we're starting a new short series today for this month, and if you'd like to turn with me to the Bibles, to page 7, you'll guess that we're in the book of Genesis, right at the very beginning.

And we're going to read a little bit from Genesis chapter 9 and 10, and then I'll explain a little bit what we're doing this month as we look at these scriptures together. If you look near the bottom of page 6, you'll see the beginning of Genesis chapter 9.

I'm going to read a verse there, and then a couple of verses at verse 18, and then a good part of chapter 10. So we're picking up the story of Genesis after the flood, and Genesis 9 verse 1 says, God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

Look down to verse 18. The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed, or, as you'll see the footnote says, the whole earth was populated.

Now jump on to the beginning of chapter 10 verse 1, which shows us how that all worked out.

These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

[1 : 28] Sons were born to them after the flood. The sons of Japheth, all that list of names. Look at verse 5. From these the coastland peoples, that is the Mediterranean peoples, spread in their lands, each with their own language, by their clans, in nations.

That's the sons of Japheth. Verse 6. The sons of Ham, Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. The sons of Cush, Seba, Havilah, Sabta, Ramah, and Sabtica.

The sons of Ramah, Sheba, and Dedan. Cush fathered Nimrod. He was the first on earth to be a mighty man. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord.

Therefore it is said, like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord. The beginning of his kingdom was Babel. These are the cities in the land of Shinar.

From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh. These other ones, you've heard of that. Verse 13. Egypt, his other son, fathered all these.

[2 : 40] And Canaan, these descendants. Verse 19. The territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon in the direction of Gerah, as far as Gaza.

Well, those are two names that you've heard in the news just this last week or two. And in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Adma, and Zeboiim, as far as Leshar. These are the sons of Ham by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

Verse 21. To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born. The sons of Shem. All these names.

And then verse 25. Picking out to Eber, were born two sons. The name of the one was Peleg. You'll see the footnote means division.

For his, in his days, the earth was divided. And we have all these other names and territories. In verse 31. These are the sons of Shem by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

[3 : 45] These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies in their nations. And from these, the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.

Well, keep your Bible open to that page. So, we're beginning a new series, and it's another question. Why is the world as it is?

And it's a question that we need to ask. Because you and I know that we live in a world of beauty. A world of joy.

A world of love. A world of creativity. A world of hope. A world of progress. We live in this world. We see it. We understand it.

We know it. But we also know, don't we, that we live in a world of ugliness. Out of pain. Out of hatred. And of destructiveness.

[4 : 48] And despair. And, not progress often, but regress. As man's inhumanity to man descends almost into bestiality at times.

So, why is the world the way it is? Why this great paradox? The view of the modernists of the last century or so was one of progress, wasn't it?

It was one of an idea of gradual advancement. Where the world was going to get better and better and better. Until ultimately all the good overtook the bad.

And we reached a wonderful utopia. The end of that paradox that we seem to know. So, that was the feeling very much and the optimism of the 19th century, wasn't it?

But, of course, then came the 20th century. With two terrible world wars. With all the genocides that we experienced.

[5 : 50] With all the horrors unimaginable. And, all of a sudden, that kind of view of history wasn't nearly so convincing, was it? And, from what we've seen so far of the 21st century, it's not looking any more convincing now either.

And that's one of the reasons why nowadays people talk about, well, we're being post-modern. We've junked that view of the world. That view of optimism and progress. And, instead, really, I guess many people today, certainly in our culture, reckon that there really is no explanation at all for the way the world is.

There's no great theory that holds everything together that explains the world as we know it. There's no coherence. So, there's not really any point even asking the question. The problem is that it's all very well to think like that.

But, it's quite another thing to actually live as though that was true. As though there were really no ultimate truth. And, no meaning to life. Or, no explanation for the world.

No purpose in the world. We just don't live our lives as though that were the case, do we? And, people do ask all the time for explanation. What is the meaning of all of this?

[7 : 11] Who am I? Where have we all come from? Where are we going? What's life about? People are asking these questions all the time. It doesn't matter what fancy philosophers want to tell us. So, here's my contention.

And, it's this. Only the Bible's view of the world can offer a really coherent explanation of life as we know it to be.

Only the Bible can really explain why the world is as we know it really is. Why the world is that world of paradox, of beauty and love and health on the one hand, and yet, also in conflict, full of national divisions, full of interracial divisions, totally unable to be a real united nations, no matter how much we talk about it.

The answer to our question, as to many other questions of life, actually come right back at the very beginning of the Bible in the book of Genesis. Genesis is the book of beginnings.

It's the book of unfoldings. In actual fact, Genesis is a prologue in the first chapter and then ten books of Genesis. Genesis. You see chapter 10, verse 1 that we read?

[8 : 32] It says, these are the generations. Or in the Greek, it says literally, this is the Genesis of. That's where we get the name of the book. And that's what Genesis is all about. It's the book of beginnings.

It's foundational for the way that we view the world. At least for the way the Bible views the world.

So what we're going to do is to look at how this book, the book of Genesis, explains the world as we know it.

And you can ask yourself the question, well, does this make sense of the world as I know it and as I see it? It could be that you're skeptical and very skeptical about the Bible's view of the world.

Well, that's fair enough. I'm sure you are fair-minded enough to just listen to what the Bible is saying and see what you make of it. See how the Bible tries to explain the world that we're in.

And you see if it makes sense. First of all, we just need to have a little brief word about what's gone before in Genesis. If you just flick back to Genesis chapter 1, you all know that this is the prologue and it's speaking about the Bible's view of creation.

[9 : 40] Now, people get in an awful tizz about the early chapters of Genesis, but I want us to notice what the really important thing is about Genesis chapter 1. Do you remember, Genesis was not written in the beginning as a book about science and technology, nor was it written as a book to

refute modern ideas about science and technology.

So let's get that clear right from the beginning. But on the other hand, when Genesis was written, nor was it just what everybody thought about the way the world was made. Not at all.

In fact, it was quite the reverse. Genesis was written in a world where almost everybody else, apart from God's people and all the nations round about the nation of Israel, when they all thought that the world came into being just as a kind of chance happening, as a fallout from fights and battles in the sky among rival gods and monsters and things like that.

That's what the people thought. You can read it in the Babylonian creation stories and so on. And at the very best, in their ideas, human beings were just playthings of the gods.

Things that existed to amuse the gods or to serve the gods. And Genesis chapter 1 is therefore absolutely flying in the face of every popular current idea in those days of how the world began.

[11:09] Genesis 1 is emphatically brushing aside all that pagan mumbo-jumbo and saying, no, the world as it is and especially humankind, human beings, they were made deliberately by the one true God.

And the world was made beautiful and perfect for God's created people, his images to live in. The world was made for mankind, was made for them to rejoice in and to enjoy.

That's a clear counterclaim of the first chapter of Genesis, the prologue to the book. But after the prologue we get more.

If you look down to chapter 2 verse 4 you'll see that this is where the first of the ten books of Genesis actually begins. Genesis 2 4, these are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, the genesis of the heavens and the earth.

And chapters 2 to 4 of Genesis tell us of the creation from the point of view of man at the centre of it. But then also sadly as you know very quickly of the spoiling of creation by mankind's rebellion against God the creator.

[12:25] Tells us of the beginnings of life in a world that is now spoiled by sin, estranged by God but not totally deserted by God. The first sin we all know about in Genesis 3 well that led on to more sin in Genesis 4 where we read about Cain murdering his brother Abel.

But if you look right down to the very end of chapter 4 the very last verse you'll see something slightly more positive. At that time the time of the first murder people began to call on the name of the Lord.

You see God hasn't totally abandoned his world despite man's rebellion. Book 2 of Genesis begins at chapter 5 verse 1 do you see this is the book of the generations of Adam and book 3 begins at chapter 6 verse 9 these are the generations of Noah and these two books very sadly speak about the avalanche of sin and rebellion that follows on from Cain's sin until at last if you look at chapter 6 verse 5 can you see things got so bad that the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

it can't get much worse than that can it? and that's why if you read on you'll discover that God must judge the earth in the flood but even God's judgment was a judgment for the sake of mercy not to destroy the whole world but to give a fresh start so that mankind could continue to live under God's blessing in his world and God made a covenant with Noah after the flood as you know and in Genesis chapter 8 and 9 we read about that and it's wonderful God promises that the earth will be preserved despite man's rebellion chapter 8 verse 26 is it I will never again curse the ground because of man the water shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh so God has not utterly abandoned his world he's given it a fresh start through the company in the ark but sin and rebellion has not been quenched for good immediately after the flood we discover it begins to rear its ugly head again and the end of chapter 9 speaks about the curse on Canaan for his sin against Noah and very quickly as we're going to discover in this series very quickly all mankind are just about as bad as they ever were again now all of this that we've just raced through here very quickly is what's known as the prehistory it takes us back doesn't it to the very mists of time to the very creation itself and nobody really knows just how long that was the Bible is not really interested in telling us that and certainly nobody was there to record and write down the kind of history that we're used to reading today and that's why some of it seems so strange to us it's written very differently isn't it from your newspapers or from your textbooks of history about the Roman world but when we begin to get to chapter 10 that we read which begins the fourth book of Genesis we're beginning to reach something of a transition aren't we it begins to sound a little bit more like the world that we can all recognise a world with nations and cities and languages and so on and it's in these chapters

that we begin to find the answers that we need the answers that explain the origins of the things that are so familiar to us in the world that we live in today our world seems very far removed doesn't it from the world of

[16:21] Genesis 3 and Genesis 6 but it's not so very far removed from Genesis 10 and 11 and what we read on after that begin to see clearly a world of peoples and tribes and languages and nations a world with warfare and distrust and ambition and force being used between different peoples and Genesis 10 and 11 are giving us an explanation really of how the world has been ever since then and the way it is still today a world with all the paradox that we recognise because according to the Bible it is a world in sin and rebellion against God it's a world under God's curse and yet at the same time it's not a world that's been totally abandoned by God God's blessing does remain in the world so with that by way of background and introduction to our series I want to spend the rest of today's time just beginning to look for an answer to that question why is the world as it is why is it as it was way back then as we read in Genesis 10 and 11 why is it still like that today and the first answer may seem a bit shocking it's because

God has purposed that it will be this way because God is sovereign and God has ordered the world this way he has overseen every single development in history and he's controlled it according to his righteous purpose and the reason that it's so hard to make sense of the world the reason for the paradoxes that we see is that it is a world both under God's blessing and under his judgment let's just think about the first of those things it's a world under God's blessing God created a beautiful world and he purposed to have a wonderful world filled with creatures and above all filled with people do you remember the very beginning the command of God to Adam and Eve be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it not exploit it by the way that's not what subdue means it means rule it as God's representative graciously and wonderfully for its benefit well the first verse we read in chapter 9 verse 1 repeated that promise didn't it repeated that command be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth it's repeated again in verse 7 and under God's gracious hand that is exactly what happened you see verse 19 told us that from these sons of Noah the whole earth was populated and filled

God's promise God's purpose didn't fall to the ground and chapter 10 with all these tables of names and places and all that sort of thing it speaks of God's gracious outworking of his blessing as the whole world is colonized and populated just as he's planned it to be you see it's a picture of God's wonderful care and his provision and his planning every single individual group of people every nation has its own land its own language its own clan its identity you remember at the end of each section we read that each by their clan their language their lands their nations now we are meant to read this historically I think but we're not meant to read it in a very wooden and literalistic sense it's a stylized table if you count up all of these names you'll find there's exactly 70 nations represented by these names it represents all the known world and their geographical locations it's rather like the sort of thing that we say well Scotland's in the north

England's in the south Ireland and Wales are in the west now we know what we mean but if somebody was to be absolutely picky and literalistic you could say well actually there are parts of England that are actually north of some parts of Scotland in the border you could say there's some parts of the east coast of Scotland that are actually geographically further west than Wales did you know that Edinburgh was actually further west than Cardiff there you are you see that's not the way we're speaking we all know what we mean when we say Scotland's in the north and Wales is in the west and so on and that's the point here it's a clear picture just in a short compass in a stylised way of a beautifully ordered world a world ordered with peoples and nations and so on everything under God's gracious control so first we have the Japhethites the first five verses those are the nations most distant from Israel the Mediterranean peoples the coastal peoples the Greeks the Medes the Mediterranean then you've got in verse 6 to 20 the Hamites that's all the peoples of Mesopotamia mainly Israel's enemies Egypt did you see in verse 6 Babel or Babylon in verse 10 Nineveh Assyria you'll see these names later on in the Bible and then lastly verse 21 the sons of Shem the Semitic nations the near neighbours to Israel the Arabians the Syrians and so on and of course the Hebrews the sons of Eber you see what we're seeing here is a transition from the distant mists of time and the prehistory into the world of known history and we're seeing a continuation of God's same gracious purpose for his whole world now being brought into the kind of language of nations and clans and peoples and languages that well almost the same as we have today and God's care for all the world hasn't stopped that's the point it's very very important that we see that

here because in Genesis 10 and 11 before the rest of the

[22 : 22] Old Testament story begins where really the story narrows right down to one man to Abraham and to one nation the people of Israel before we focus right down onto that story we're being told very clearly God's concern is for all the earth his blessing is a universal blessing it's for every people and language and clan and nation and that's why we find all around the world today blessings of every kind in every place and every culture at least to some extent there's joy and love and creativity and beauty in every part of the world in the most remote places as well as the great cities God's blessing is upon the whole world but of course that's not all we find is it the story's not quite so simple God's judgment and his curse upon sin and rebellion that's invaded the world and spoiled the world hasn't been forgotten sin is a reality and the effect of that sin has caused a continual blight also all over the world despite all these blessings of life because God is sovereign in blessing but also he's sovereign in the world in judgment and that also explains why the world is as it is see the

Bible's very honest it doesn't pretend it doesn't try and hide things as some religions and philosophies do it doesn't try and hide the reality of sin and evil it's plain and honest I wonder if you picked up the two clues in chapter 10 about this you see in verse 8 and following you see how there were two names that were picked out in this whole list for special treatment the first of them there is Nimrod do you see verse 8 the first mighty man the word really means tyrant and what did he do well he was a builder and he built cities and you'll find all the way through the Bible a builder of cities is a bad omen especially when you see the first city that he built verse 10 Babel the ancient name for Babylon all the way through the Bible the city of Babylon stands as the very opposite of God's city the city of Jerusalem and verse 11 he built Nineveh that was the capital city of Assyria the most cruel and harsh and wicked of all the ancient nations so you see despite God's clear blessing on the world and his care for all nations and his determination that he would have a purpose for all peoples that they would multiply in the earth despite all of that blessing already there's hints even in this table of the tyrants and the enemies and their anti-God cities you see in verse 25 the second name that's picked out for special treatment

Peleg because the earth was divided in his time that is it was divided by God in an act of judgment see it's not quite the peaceful dispassionate blessing that the table of nations might seem to suggest it's pointing us forward to what we're going to see next time in chapter 11 it's telling us you see that although God is sovereign over the world in blessing that's not the whole story the earth is populated by nations and languages and peoples all in their place all under God's gracious care but the explanation isn't complete unless we also take into consideration God's judgments in history because that's also what explains the world he has divided the world and he's divided the world in answer to the rebellion and the tyranny and the defiance of the men and women of this world and at key times at key moments in history God's judgments have shaped history we're going to see that first one in

Genesis 11 next time the story of the Tower of Babel God's blessings will not cease and in order that his purpose from the beginning to bless the whole world will not be frustrated he has a plan and a purpose will not stop but nevertheless his judgment is also at work in the world and that's what explains our world we know and we experience a world of paradox we experience a world full of blessings of joy of love of hope God's blessing is on all the world but we also experience a world of sadness and of despair and of misery and God's judgments are also at work in the world and the Bible says yeah all that's real and it's because the world is under God's sovereign control under his blessing because he does have an ultimate purpose for all nations yet also under his hand of judgment because of man's rebellion doesn't that fit the facts as we see them now here's the good news

God's purpose of blessing is his determined plan he will not be stopped in his purpose of blessing for all the peoples of this world never ever his judgments in the world are to stop mankind utterly destroying his world so that his plan can advance and so that his purpose will be fulfilled he will not allow man to destroy this world until God's work in redemption is done that's his promise to Noah there's a bigger story unfolding a much much bigger story but you're going to have to come back next week to hear the next installment let's pray heavenly father we thank you that you are sovereign that the world is as it is not because you are weak or unable to make it differently but because you have planned and purpose the glorious future for every tribe and tongue and people and nation help us we pray as we live in this world which is also under your hand of judgment to

hold fast to that hope and in the struggle to be strong that our faith may carry us to that very last day when Jesus

[29 : 27] Christ appears and at last every promise is fulfilled because we ask it in his name amen