

Perspectives™

on the World Christian Movement

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Lesson 2: The Story of His Glory

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The Biblical Foundation for the Worldwide Mission Mandate

Johannes Verkuyl

The 20th century has produced a steady stream of literature which regards the Old Testament as an indispensable and irreplaceable base for the Church's missionary task among the nations and peoples of this world. As one who has made frequent use of the literature, I wish to look at four motifs in the Old Testament which form the indispensable basis for the New Testament call to the Church to engage in worldwide mission work: the universal motif, the motif of rescue and saving, the missionary motif and the antagonistic motif.

The Universal Motif

The God who in the Old Testament identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and who discloses to Moses his personal name, Yahweh, is the God of the whole world. The experience of a few patriarchs and later the one nation of Israel with this God expands to include the horizon of the entire world. We shall cite only a few of the Old Testament passages to illustrate this universal motif.

The Table of Nations in Genesis 10

Genesis 10, with its passage listing the table of nations, is important for understanding the universal motif of the Old Testament. Gerhard von Rad described it as the conclusion to the history of the Creation. All of the nations issue forth from the creative hand of God and stand under his watchful eye of patience and judgment. The nations are not mere decorations incidental to the real drama between God and man; rather, the nations—that is, mankind as a whole—are part of the drama itself. God's work and activity are directed at the whole of humanity.

This is one of the fundamental truths of Genesis 1-11, the record of history's beginning; it is also found in the moving account of history's end, the book of John's Revelation. The very God who revealed himself to Israel and dwelt among us in Jesus Christ identifies himself as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending. He does not lay down his work until "every tongue and nation" and "a multitude without number" have been gathered round his throne (Rev 5:9-10; 7:9-17). God is cutting a path directly through the weary and plodding activities of men in history in order to achieve his goals among the nations.



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From *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*, 1978. Used by permission of Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI.

God's Election of Israel with His Eye on the Nations

After the Bible finishes its account of God's judgment of the nations, so graphically described in the Genesis passage about the Tower of Babel, it shifts in chapter 12 to God's call to Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees. The "God of the whole earth" seems at first glance to narrow his interests to the private history of one family and tribe only, but in actuality, nothing could be farther from the truth. In de Groot's words, "Israel is the opening word in God's proclaiming salvation, not the Amen."¹ For a time Israel,

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the "people of Abraham," is separated from the other nations (Ex 19:3ff.; Deut 7:14ff.), but only so that through Israel God can pave the way toward achieving his world-embracing goals. In choosing Israel as a segment of all humanity, God never took his eye off the other nations; Israel was a minority called to serve the majority.²

God's election of Abraham and Israel concerns the whole world. He deals so intensely with Israel precisely because he is maintaining his personal claim on the whole world. To speak to this world in the fullness of time, he needed a people. Countless recent studies are emphasizing this very point: God chose Israel in preparation for the complete unwrapping and disclosure of his universal intentions.

God chose Israel with the intention that she would speak to the other nations. Whenever Israel forgot this and turned away from the nations in introverted pride, prophets like Amos, Jeremiah and Isaiah lashed out at the people's ethnocentric pretension and charged them with subverting God's actual intentions (see especially Amos 9:9-10).

The Breakthrough of the Universal Motif in the Exile

Israel's experiences during the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. opened her eyes to God's universal intentions. As Israel passed through her catastrophic experience of being trounced by the Babylonians and carted off into exile,

the prophets came to see how closely the career of Israel was tied in with the history of the nations. Out of the judgment which Israel was feeling, there blossomed the eager hope of a new covenant, a new exodus, another Son of David. Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah all saw the horizon expanding and bore witness that all nations now fall within the spotlight of God's promises. The apocalyptic vision of Daniel predicts the coming of the Son of Man whose kingdom shall put an end to the brutish kingdoms of the world and whose domain shall include all peoples (Dan 7:1-29).

The Motif of Rescue and Liberation

Yahweh, the Redeemer of Israel

The soteriological (having to do with salvation) theme of the Bible, that is, God's work of rescuing and saving both Israel and the other nations, is tied closely to the theme of universalism. Yahweh, the God of all the earth, displayed his love and kept his word to Israel by freeing her from the bonds of slavery with his strong and outstretched arm (see Deut 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 24:18). This was a basic part of Israel's credo and crucial to understanding the first commandment. This God—the one who saves and frees—alone is God. "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex 20). This credo transformed Israel from being merely one nation among others into the chosen community which owes its very existence to God's act of deliverance and returns its praises to him in psalms and prayers of thanksgiving.

Yahweh, the Redeemer of the Nations

The prophets of Israel grew increasingly aware that not only Israel would share in God's acts of redemption. God would break in to restore his liberating Lordship over the entire world of the nations.

The other nations make their pilgrimage back to Zion, the mountain of the Lord. The prophets picture the people of the other nations as returning to Jerusalem, where the God of Israel shall appear as the God of all the peoples (see Isa 2:1-4; Jer 3:17; Isa 25:6-9; Isa 60; Zech 8:20ff).

Several psalms chant this theme, too. Psalm 87 proclaims Jerusalem as the ecumenical city whose citizens shall some day

include inhabitants of the various nations, even from those nations who once most ardently opposed the God of Israel. They shall join in celebrating God's restored fellowship with the peoples.

God's Method of Achieving Liberation

The Bible also describes the means God is using to bring salvation to Israel and the nations. No other Old Testament passage probes more deeply into this matter than the so-called "Servant" songs of Isaiah 40-55. These Servant songs make unmistakable reference to the spread of salvation through the whole world. The Servant shall carry it to the ends of the earth (Isa 49:6), and he will not stop until righteousness prevails throughout the earth. The coastlands are awaiting his instruction (Isa 42:4).

The fourth Servant song in chapter 53 uncovers the secret of *how* the Servant of the Lord shall discharge his mission. This deeply moving passage depicts the Servant becoming a victim of the most savage human butchery. Every kind of mistreatment human minds can devise shall be done to him. However, the Servant also at that point shall be acting as a substitute who is incurring the judgment of God which was properly due not only to Israel but to all peoples and nations. Moreover, this passage describes the nations as Yahweh's gifts to the Servant in return for his willing obedience to suffer death. He achieved the right to bring salvation and healing to all people.

The Missionary Motif

Connected with the other two Old Testament motifs mentioned previously is the missionary motif. The prophets never tire of reminding Israel that her election is not a privilege which she may selfishly keep for herself; election is a call to service. It involves a duty to witness among the nations. Israel must be a sign to the other nations that Yahweh is both Creator and Liberator. One Servant song (Isa 49:6) refers to Israel's mandate to become a light to the nations.

Virtually every author who attempts to explain this call to Israel comes up with the concept of presence. Chosen by God to become the special recipients of his mercy

and justice, Israel now has the corresponding duty to live as the people of God among the other nations in order to show them his grace, mercy, justice, and liberating power. Time and time again the prophets recorded their deep disappointment over Israel's continual sabotage of her divine calling. But however hot their righteous anger burned against Israel's disobedience, the prophets kept on reminding Israel to the very end of her mandate to be present among the people as distinct people and a royal priesthood.

It is worth noting that since the Second World War, a number of missiologists have urged Christian presence as one of the leading methods of engaging in today's mission work. For a variety of reasons and in a variety of manners, they claim that the most suitable form of witness lies in simply being a specific kind of people while living among other people. This is not the place to develop this idea further but only to point out that the idea that presence is witness has deep roots in the Old Testament. The prophets continually claimed that by her very act of living out her divine appointment to serve, Israel becomes a sign and bridge for the other nations.

However, I do not believe it is correct to view the missionary motif only in terms of the concept of presence. I simply do not understand why various writers make such a point of avowing that the Old Testament makes absolutely no mention of a missionary mandate.

Then there is that striking number of individuals who left their heathen origins and by word-and-deed witness were won over to trust and serve the living God who had shown them mercy. The stories of Melchizedek, Ruth, Job, the people of Nineveh described in the book of Jonah, and many others in the Old Testament are windows, as it were, through which we may look out on the vast expanse of people outside the nation of Israel and hear the faint strains of the missionary call to all people already sounding forth.

The wisdom literature of the Old Testament is similar in both form and content to both Greek and Egyptian cultures. Without doubt, her own literature served Israel as a means of communicating her beliefs to the other nations.

Moreover, there is no other way of explaining the powerful missionary impact of Judaism during the Diaspora³ than to affirm that those dispersed Jews *from their earliest days* had heard and understood their call to witness directly as well as by their presence.

The Motif of Antagonism

The above list of Old Testament missionary motifs is incomplete. Intricately connected with each of those mentioned above is the antagonistic motif, that is, Yahweh's powerful wrestling against those powers and forces which oppose his liberating and gracious authority.

The whole Old Testament (and the New Testament as well) is filled with descriptions of how Yahweh-Adonai, the covenant God of Israel, is waging war against those forces which try to thwart and subvert his plans for his creation. He battles against those false gods which human beings have fashioned from the created world, idolized, and used for their own purposes. Think, for example, of the Baals and the Ashtaroth, whose worshipers elevated nature, the tribe, the state and the nation to a divine status. God fights against magic and astrology which, according to Deuteronomy, bend the line between God and his creation. He contends against every form of social injustice and pulls off every cloak under which it seeks to hide (see Amos and Jeremiah, for example).

The whole of the Old Testament burns with a feverish desire to defeat these opposing powers. There are grand visions of that coming kingdom where every relationship is properly restored and when the whole of creation—people, animals, plants, and every other creature—will be in perfect accord with God's intentions for it (see Isa 2, Mic 4, and Isa 65). The Old Testament longs for this kingdom's final revealing and categorically states its promise that Yahweh shall indeed finally overcome. This too is a highly significant theme for missionary participation. To participate in mission is quite impossible unless one also wages war against every form of opposition to God's intentions wherever it be found, whether in churches, the world of the nations, or one's own life.

The Old Testament ties the antagonistic motif closely with the doxological theme: the glory of Yahweh-Adonai shall be revealed among all peoples. Then every human being shall come to know him as he really is, the "gracious and merciful God, slow to get angry, full of kindness, and always willing to turn back from meting out disaster" (Jonah 4:1-2).

The Book of Jonah

The book of Jonah is so significant for understanding the biblical basis of mission because it treats God's mandate to his people regarding the Gentile peoples and thus serves as the preparatory step to the missionary mandate of the New Testament. But it is also important for catching a glimpse of the deep resistance this mandate encounters from the very servant Yahweh has chosen to discharge his worldwide work.

Today there is much talk and writing about "educating the congregation" and "educating personnel" for mission. Jonah is a lesson in educating a person to be a missionary: it reveals the need for a radical conversion of one's natural tendencies and a complete restructuring of his life to make it serviceable for mission.

Background of the Book

The title of the book is the personal name of the unwilling prophet, Jonah, and harks back to the days of King Jeroboam II (787-746 B.C.), when a prophet named Jonah ben Amittai was living. The author uses this personal name to portray for his readers a missionary who has no heart for the Gentiles and who, like the later Pharisees, cannot tolerate a God who shows them mercy. In the words of the Dutch author Miskotte, "the writer intends to picture a person who is the exact opposite of an apostle." The author of Jonah warns his readers against this intolerant attitude and sets before each of them the question of whether he or she is willing to be transformed into a servant who works to accomplish the mandates of God.

As the author sees it, Israel has become so preoccupied with herself that she no longer directs her eyes toward the world of the nations. Israel, the recipient of all God's revelation, refuses to set foot in alien territory to tell the other peoples God's message of

judgment and liberation. But the message of the book also is addressed to the New Testament congregation which tries various ways of evading her Lord's command to speak his message to the world.

Jonah's crafty evasion efforts represent a lazy and unfaithful Church which does not heed its Lord's command. God has to wrestle against Israel's narrow ethnocentrism which tries to restrict his activity to the boundaries of Israel alone and against the Church's ecclesiocentric refusal to go out into the world to proclaim God's message and do his work. The writer is bent on convincing his readers that the radius of God's liberating activity is wide enough to cover both Israel and the Gentiles.

It is a miracle that Jonah, with its strong warning against ethnocentrism, ever made its way into the canon of Scripture. It squarely sets forth man's attempt to sabotage God's worldwide plans so that its readers—Israel, the New Testament Church, and us—can hear what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell them through the medium of this little book.

A Short Review of the Book's Eight Scenes

The first scene opens with Jonah receiving the command to go to Nineveh. While the Old Testament usually appeals to the other nations to *come* to Zion, the mountain of God, Jonah, like the disciples of the New Testament (cf. Matt 28:18-20), is told to *go*! The Septuagint translation (an early version of the Old Testament in Greek) of Jonah uses the word *poreuomai* (Greek term for "go") in 1:2-3 and again in 3:2-3, the very same verb used by Jesus in his Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28.

Where must Jonah go? To Nineveh, of all places. Nineveh, a very center of totalitarianism, brutality, and warlike attitudes. To Nineveh, notorious for the shameful hounding, vicious torture, and imperialist brazenness it reserved for those who chose to oppose its policies. God wants his servant to warn Nineveh of impending judgment and to call her to repentance. He wants to save *Nineveh!*

But Jonah refuses. He prepares himself, to be sure, but only to *flee* from the face of God who is Lord over all.

In the second scene, God responds to Jonah's flight by sending a mighty storm (1:4-16). The wind obeys Yahweh's commands,

but the disobedient Jonah sleeps in the bottom of the boat, oblivious of the fact that the storm is directed at him. At times the Church, too, sleeps right through the storm of God's judgment passing over the world, assuring herself that the wind outside has nothing to do with her. While the crew vainly searches for the storm's cause, Jonah confesses that he worships and fears the God who made both the sea and the dry land, the one God who is above all nations. This God, he claims, is bringing a charge against him, and the only way to quiet the waters is to throw him into the sea. In this scene the crew represents the Gentiles, a people for whom Jonah is totally unconcerned, and yet who themselves are interested in sparing his life. After a second order from Jonah, they throw him overboard and the storm ceases. Scarcely able to believe their eyes, the sailors break forth in praise to the God of Jonah. Their obedience surpasses that of the saboteur Jonah: they are more open to God than the very prophet himself.

The third scene (1:17) describes a large fish which, at Yahweh's instructions, opens its mouth to swallow Jonah and spew him onto the shore at the appropriate time. Jonah simply cannot escape God's missionary mandate. The God who whipped up the stormy winds and directed the sailors to accomplish his purposes now guides a fish as part of his plan to save Nineveh. Yahweh continues his work of reforming and preparing his missionary to be a fit instrument in his plans.

In the fourth scene (2:1-10), Jonah implores God to rescue him from the belly of the fish. He who had no mercy on the Gentiles and refused to acknowledge that God's promises extended to them now appeals for divine mercy, and by quoting lines from various psalms, pants after those promises claimed by worshipers in God's temple.

Yahweh reacts. He speaks to the brute beast and Jonah lands on shore safe and sound. By his very rescue, Jonah was unwittingly a witness of God's saving mercy. Though covered with seaweed, Jonah was nonetheless a testimony that God takes no delight in the death of sinners and saboteurs but rather rejoices in their conversion.

In the fifth scene (3:1-4), God repeats his order to the man whose very life affirms the

truth of what he confessed in the belly of the fish: "Salvation is from Yahweh." The Septuagint uses the term *kerygma* in 3:1-2ff. That single word summarizes Jonah's mission: he must *proclaim* that Nineveh, however godless she may be, is still the object of God's concern, and unless she repents, she will be destroyed. His message must be one of threat as well as promise, of judgment as well as gospel.

In the sixth scene (3:5-10), Nineveh responds to Jonah's appeal to repent. The proud, despotic king steps down from his royal throne, exchanges his robes for dust and ashes, and enjoins every man and animal to follow his example.

What Israel continually refused to do the heathen Gentiles did do: the cruel king of Nineveh stands as anti-type to the disobedient kings of Judah.

The people join the king in repenting. They cease all their devilish work and the terrifying and coercing engines of political injustice come to a halt. In deep penitence they turn away from idols to serve the God who is Lord of every nation and all creation. All this becomes possible because Yahweh is God. The world of the heathen is a potentially productive mission field for no other reason than this: He alone is God.

The curtain closes on this scene with these amazing words: "God saw what they did, and how they abandoned their wicked ways, and he repented and did not bring upon them the disaster he had threatened." Yahweh is faithful to his promises. Still today his will for Moscow and Peking, for London and Amsterdam is no less "gracious and full of mercy" than it was for Nineveh. To borrow from Luther, who loved to preach from the book of Jonah, the left hand of God's wrath is replaced by his right hand of blessing and freedom.

The seventh scene (4:1-4) recounts the fact that the greatest hurdle to overcome in discharging the missionary mandate was not the sailors, nor the fish, nor Nineveh's king and citizenry, but rather Jonah himself—the recalcitrant and narrow-minded Church. Chapter 4 describes Jonah, who has long since departed the city to find shelter east of the borders.

The forty-day period of repentance has passed, but since God has changed his mind about destroying it, the city continues to be nourished by Yahweh's grace and mercy. Jonah is furious that God has extended his mercy beyond the borders of Israel to the Gentiles. He wanted a God cut according to his own pattern: a cold, hard, cruel-natured god with an unbending will set against the heathen. He cannot stand to think of the Gentiles as part of salvation history.

This is Jonah's sin—the sin of a missionary

Yahweh is faithful to his promises. Still today his will for Moscow and Peking, for London and Amsterdam is no less "gracious and full of mercy" than it was for Nineveh.

whose heart is not in it. He who once pleaded with God for mercy from the desolate isolation of a fish's belly now is angry that this God shows mercy to the nations. He vents his fury in the form of a prayer found in 4:2, the key text of the whole book: "And he prayed to the Lord, 'This, O Lord, is what I feared when I was in my own country, and to forestall it I tried to escape to Tarshish: I knew that thou art a gracious and compassionate God, long-suffering and ever constant, and always willing to repent of the disaster.'" Part of the text comes from an ancient Israelite liturgy which every Israelite knew by heart and could rattle off in worship at the temple or synagogue while half-asleep (cf. Ex 34:6; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Neh 9:17). But Jonah cannot stand to think that this liturgy is true not only for Jerusalem, the location of God's temple, but for other places as well—Nineveh, Sao Paulo, Nairobi, New York and Paris.

Why is Jonah really so angry? For no other reason than that God is treating those outside his covenant the same as he is those within. But Jonah's anger in effect is putting himself outside the covenant, for he obstinately refuses to acknowledge the covenant's purpose—to bring salvation to the heathen. He had not yet learned that Israel could not presume upon some special favors from God. Both Israel and the Gentiles alike live by the grace which the Creator gives to all of his creatures. So God comes to his prophet, but no longer as a covenant partner; he comes as the Creator and asks his creature: "Do you have a right to be so angry?"

In the eighth and last scene (4:5-11), one can see God still working to teach his thick-skulled missionary his lessons. He did not catch the point of the storm, the sailors, the fish, and Nineveh's conversion because he did not want to. Now Yahweh tries one more approach—the miraculous tree. A climbing gourd springs up quickly, offers Jonah protection against the beating sun, but as quickly withers and dies, the victim of an attacking worm. Jonah is peeved.

At that point God again turns to his missionary-student, using the tree as his object lesson. The very God who directs the whole course of history, rules the wind and waves and turned Nineveh's millions to repentance now asks tenderly: "Are you so angry over the gourd? You are sorry about the gourd, though you had nothing to do with growing it, a plant which came up in a night and withered in a night. And should not I be sorry for the great city of Nineveh, with its 120,000 who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and cattle without number?"

God spares and rescues. Jerusalem's God is Nineveh's as well. Unlike Jonah, he has no "Gentile complex." And while he never forces any one of us, he tenderly asks us to put our whole heart and soul into the work of mission. God is still interested in transforming obstinate, irritable, depressive, peevish Jonahs into heralds of the Good News which brings freedom.

The book ends with an unsettling question which is never answered: "God reached his goal with Nineveh, but what about Jonah?" No one knows. The question of Israel and the Church

and their obedience is still an open one.

The question is one which every generation of Christians must answer for itself. Jacques Ellul closes his book, *The Judgment of Jonah*, with these words: "The Book of Jonah has no conclusion, and the final question of the book has no answer, except from the one who realizes the fullness of the mercy of God and who factually and not just mythically accomplishes the salvation of the world."³

The New Testament Church must pay close heed to the message of Jonah's book. Jesus Christ is "One greater than Jonah" (Matt 12:39-41; Luke 11:29-32). His death on the cross with its awful cry of God-forsakenness and his resurrection with its jubilant shout of victory are signs of Jonah for us, pointing to the profound meaning of his whole life and clearly attesting that God loved the whole world so much. If a person draws his lifeblood from the one greater than Jonah and yet declines to spread the Good News among others, in effect, he is sabotaging the aims of God himself. Jonah is father to all those Christians who desire the benefits and blessings of election but refuse its responsibility. Thomas Carlisle's poem, "You Jonah," closes with these lines:

And Jonah stalked
to his shaded seat
and waited for God
to come around
to his way of thinking.
And God is still waiting for a host of Jonahs
in their comfortable houses
to come around
to his way of loving. 🌿

Endnotes

1. A. de Groot, *De Bijbel over het Heil der Volken* (Roermond: Romens, 1964).
2. See J. Verkuyl, *Break Down the Walls*, trans. and ed. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), p. 40.
3. Editors Note: The term "Diaspora" refers to a period marked by the voluntary and involuntary scattering or dispersion of the Jewish people into other nations between the destruction of the first temple in 581 B.C. and the destruction of the second temple in 70 A.D. The Diaspora synagogues were eager to attract converts to Judaism. Many Jewish scribes were funded to travel to enlist and to instruct new proselytes from Gentile backgrounds as described by Jesus in Matt 23:15.
4. Jacques Ellul, *The Judgment of Jonah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 103.

Study Questions

1. Explain the four motifs in the Old Testament that, according to Verkuyl, form the basis for the New Testament call to worldwide mission: the universal motif, the motif of rescue and saving, the missionary motif, and the antagonistic motif. Give examples of each.
2. Verkuyl calls the book of Jonah a lesson in educating a person to be a missionary. Explain what he means, and give examples from the story of Jonah.

The Story of His Glory

Steven C. Hawthorne

The Bible is basically a story about God. When we turn to the Bible as a self-help book, we end up bored or frustrated with what seems to be a rambling collection of stories. What if the Bible is more about God than it is about us? How thrilling to discover that every element of scripture—the reports of events, the verses of distilled wisdom, the lyrical prophecies—converge in one central saga of one worthy Person.

We're used to the idea that the Bible is a true story. It's so true that the story is still unfolding to this minute. We are used to hearing that the Bible is a love story. But we tend to see only one side of the love: how God loves people. If the main point of the Bible is that God is to be loved with heart, soul, mind and strength, perhaps it would be wise to read the entire story from God's point of view. When we look at it all from God's viewpoint, the grand love story finally makes sense: God is not just loving people. He is transforming them to become people who can fully love Him. God is drawing people as worshipers to offer freely to Him their love-inspired glory.

God can be loved only when He is known. That's why the story of the Bible is the story of God revealing Himself in order to draw to Himself obedient worship, or glory, from the nations. With God's passionate love at the core, the Bible is truly the story of His glory.

BASIC CONCEPTS OF GLORY

To trace the story of God as the Bible presents it, we need a grasp of three related ideas which define the story at every juncture: glory, the name of God and worship.

Glory

Don't be thrown off by the religious-sounding word "glory." Glory is the relational beauty that every person's heart yearns to behold and even to enter. The word "glory" in scripture refers to the essential worth, beauty and value of people, created things and, of course, the Creator Himself. The Hebrew word for glory is a word meaning weight, substance, and at the same time, brilliance or radiant beauty. To glorify someone is to recognize their intrinsic worth and beauty, and to speak of that feature in a public way. To glorify God is to praise or to speak of Him openly and



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mobilization ministry. After co-editing the *Perspectives* course and book in 1981, he launched "Joshua Project," a series of research expeditions among unreached peoples in Asia and the Middle East. He also co-authored *Prayerwalking: Praying on Site with Insight* with Graham Kendrick.

truthfully. Glory is at the heart of true worship throughout the Scriptures:

All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord; and they shall glorify Your name (Ps 86:9).

We...worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus...(Phil 3:3).

The idea of “glory” also describes honor that can be given or awarded. When someone is exalted or made great, they are, to some extent, in a biblical sense, glorified. God is so rich in glory that He bestows extravagant honors upon His human servants without compromising His own majesty in the slightest. Jesus exposed our habit of seeking “glory from one another,” and yet failing to “seek the glory that is from the one and only God” (John 5:44).

The Name of God

Throughout the larger story, the biblical authors use the idea of the “name of God” as a key idea. To distinguish the functions of reference, revelation and reputation, it may help to sort out the usages with three easy-to-remember categories: *name-tag*, *window* and *fame name*.

Name-Tag Names

First, there are the names themselves used to designate God in the Bible. God is never anonymous in His story. He uses many names for Himself. Because the function is *reference*, we can call these names, for our purposes, the “name-tag” names of God since a name-tag distinguishes and identifies someone. It is just as true to refer to the God of scripture as “Lord of hosts” as it is to refer to Him as “God Almighty,” or “Judge of all the earth” or “King of glory.” Each of these names is truly God’s name.¹

Window Name

Second, God is pleased to disclose Himself accurately by any of the biblical names. The function is *revelation*. For example, anyone who spends a few minutes pondering the biblical name “The Lord is my Shepherd” will have a better understanding of the nurturing kindness of God.

Fame Name

The third usage of the phrase “the name of God” is the most abundant in the Bible, even though it is little recognized. “God’s name” most often refers to the idea of His public renown. I call it God’s “fame name.” The function is God’s *reputation*. God’s name is His global name-sake. It is the open memory, based on historical incidents, which establishes a reputation worthy of future trust. God’s name is the body of truth about Himself which He has displayed and declared in the long-unfolding story of the Bible. The Hebrew people were not only to treasure this story, but they were also to tell it. Unlike the way of many religions, God’s revelation was never to be a secret affair for a few people. Isaiah calls Israel to “make known His deeds among the peoples,” so that the nations are steadily reminded that “His name is exalted” (Isa 12:4). As we shall see, much of the story of the Bible recounts what God has done to make His name great among the nations.

Worship

Why does God want to be known with such precision? God wants to be more than globally famous—He yearns to be truly worshiped.

God Reveals Glory to Receive Glory

God’s glory flows in two directions. The first direction of His glory is toward the world. He shows His glory to people throughout the earth. He reveals who He is and what He has done in order to bring about the second direction of glory—that people might give Him glory in loving worship. God *reveals* glory to all nations in order that He might *receive* glory from people through worship.

Psalm 96 shows these two directions of glory. God mandates a declaration of His glory to the nations in verses 2 and 3:

Proclaim good tidings of His salvation
from day to day.
Tell of His glory among the nations,

God reveals glory
to all nations
in order that
He might receive glory
from people
through worship.

His wonderful deeds among
all the peoples.

What an eloquent portrayal of the evangelization of the world! But the Psalmist goes on to tell the purpose for world evangelization by describing the second aspect of God's glory: a response of glory *from* the nations toward God in verses 7 to 9:

Give to the LORD,
O families of the peoples,²
Give to the LORD glory and strength.
Give to the LORD the glory of His name;
Bring an offering,
and come into His courts.
Worship the LORD
in the splendor of his holiness;
Tremble before Him, all the earth.

The heart of mission flows in this amazing economy of glory: God *reveals* His glory to all nations in order to *receive* glory *from* all creation.

A Purpose Beyond Salvation

People are indeed saved by the global declaration of God's salvation, but the ultimate value of their salvation is not to be seen in what they are saved *from*, it is what they are saved *for* that really matters. People are saved to serve God in worship. In this respect, we can say that world evangelization is for God. However accustomed we may be to seeing people as being of paramount importance, the Bible is clear: The rationale for mission is the colossal worthiness of God. Examine the logic of Psalm 96:2-4:

Proclaim good tidings of His salvation....
Tell of His glory...among all peoples.
For great is the LORD, and greatly to be
praised; He is to be feared above all gods.

A Rationale Greater than Supremacy

The rationale for mission seems simple enough: Since God is supreme, every creature should bow down in subjection. But can this really be the logic at the center of the universe? Our hearts won't buy it. There is something more. The Scriptures are loud about the truth that God is love. God calls people to love Him with all that they are. Where is God's love, and ours, in response?

A God who demands worship just because He's supreme doesn't seem like a very loving God. In fact, such a God might not seem like He is worthy even to be admired. God's penchant for praise might make Him appear to be struggling with a low self-image problem. It's foolish to speak of God's jealousy for worship as if He were a petulant tribal deity threatened by rival gods. God is not threatened; rather He is immeasurably saddened by false worship. When people worship anyone or anything besides Him, they become like it. God has better intentions for people.

What is true worship anyway? Worship takes place when people recognize who God is and offer public acknowledgment and freely approach God, personally offering face-to-face gratitude and day-to-day allegiance. Worship is genuine relational interaction with God. That's why God always welcomes us to worship with a gift. He never needs the worship gifts. But the gift brings the giver. That is why the nations are urged to come bringing a gift, offering God tokens of their finest worth (Ps 96:8 and many others). By their sacrifices and gifts, they offer themselves.

Fully Bestowing His Love

Why is God so desirous of worship? Two reasons: He is delighted by the sincere love that comes to Him in true worship. But there is more: By wooing people into true worship, God is able to fully bestow His love upon them. You can see it in Psalm 96:6:

Splendor and majesty are before Him,
Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.

"Splendor and majesty" do not refer to God's self-experience. Rather, along with "strength and beauty" (the parallel passage says "joy" in 1 Chr 16:27), they are features of God's presence that are to be the experience of people who approach Him in true worship. There can be nothing more splendid or majestic for humans than to be elevated and placed in the gorgeous, heart-stopping grandeur of God's regal presence.

Worship is the way that people glorify God. When looked at from God's point of

view, we can see that worship is also God's way of glorifying people—in all the best sense of bringing people into their highest honor. Worship fulfills God's love. He loves people so vastly that He wills to exalt them to something better than greatness; He wants to bring them into an honored nearness to Him. Stretch your mind and your heart as far as you can, but you'll never perceive the extent of what God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor 2:9).

Perhaps John got a glimpse of the "splendor and majesty" of those courts in Revelation 5:1-14. He heard all of heaven's myriads raise their voices acclaiming the marvel that God Himself has purchased people from every tribe and tongue. Why has God bought such ignoble humans at the extravagant cost of the blood of His Son? Furthermore, why has He purchased some from every single ethnicity? Of what value are these ones? Their precious value is this: They will be His priests. Some from every people will gladly offer to God the distinctive honors and redeemed glories of their people. Each of the peoples has eternal worth because of Christ's blood. Each of the peoples has an appointed place before Him. God has set His mighty heart to bring them there. It must come forth. The passion of this unrequited love of God for each of the peoples is the very soul of any true missionary enterprise.

The psalmist reflects God's zeal for the people groups of earth. God beckons every one of the "families of the peoples," people linked by blood and marriage with generational depth. Each of these extended families has a history and a destiny before God. In formal language they are each invited into His regal presence (Ps 96:7-9). They are not to come empty-handed, but they are to extend to God a sampling of the unique glory and strength of their people. The peoples are to voice praise gifts to God in their many languages, but no people is to offer speculative guesses about what constitutes rightful praise. Only the truth God has revealed about Himself—"the glory of His name"—is the substance and true measure of worthy praise (v. 8).

THE BIBLE AS GOD'S STORY

The Bible is the astounding drama of God's love drawing the worship of the nations. Remember the basic thesis: God *reveals* his glory *to* all peoples so that he may *receive* glory *from* all creation. This double dimension of glory can help make sense out of an apparent jumble of ancient stories.

Worship fulfills God's love. He loves people so vastly that He wills them to something better than greatness; He wants to bring them into an honored nearness to Him.

Abraham

When Abraham arrived in the land of promise, he did not excel as a brilliant missionary, however we might define that role. He's certainly not on record as a great evangelist. He was actually thrown out of Egypt in disgrace (Gen 12:10-20). Abraham's neighbors frightened him into lying about his family. Abraham's rationale for falsely presenting his wife does not reveal an evangelist's confidence that lives might change: "Surely there is no fear of God in this place" (Gen 20:11). But for all his failings, he did the most missionary thing he could have done when he first arrived in the new land: His first act was to establish ongoing public worship of God. "He built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD" (Gen 12:7-8). His household may have been the only worshipers at that altar, but God was explicitly worshiped by name and in a public way.

Blessed to Be a Blessing to Be a Blessing

At one point Abraham rescued some of his powerful neighbors from an alliance of marauding nations (Gen 14). After the miraculous victory, Abraham refused to accept the windfall of reward from the king of Sodom. If he accepted the largess, he knew that from that point, he and his family would always be viewed as living under the patronage of that city. Instead he chose to keep himself positioned before the nations as one specifically blessed by God.³

With the nations watching, Abraham resolutely named God as the one who would reward and bless him. His bold words (Gen 14:21-24) were substantiated by the gift of goods Abraham offered God. Abraham offered to God the wealth of Sodom as well as that of other nations. He helped foreign nations present a tithe to God, a recognized formal act of worship (Gen 14:18-20). With Melchizedek as presiding priest, Abraham functioned as a priest by offering worship gifts on behalf of other nations.

Abraham was blessed in order to be a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:1-3). But the purpose goes beyond the blessing of nations. God Himself is blessed! Melchizedek openly recognized that Abraham was blessed by God. By God's power, Abraham had been a blessing to his neighbors by rescuing enslaved families and their goods. But the grand result was that God Himself would be blessed in praise! Listen to Melchizedek: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High...And blessed be God Most High..." (Gen 14:18-20).

What do we learn from the entire series of events? Abraham made God's name known by his ongoing worship. God made His name great by dramatic redemptive power through His people. The outcome was a multi-national gathering of grateful honor in which God was explicitly worshiped in truth.

Global Purpose Confirmed by Obedience in Worship

The crucial, proving moment of Abraham's life was a worship event (Gen 22). God told Abraham to bring His son Isaac to offer him in an act of worship. It was a test to prove what Abraham and his family would be. Would God find in Abraham an obedient, priestly passion for God (literally, "a fearer of God," Gen 22:12)? Would Abraham prove to be zealous to offer the worship God desired? If so, God would find him to have the kind of faith that God wanted multiplied among the nations.

You know the story. At the very moment that Abraham obeyed in worship, God spoke from heaven with a solemn oath, declaring forcefully His global purpose to bless the peoples of the earth through Abraham's family (Gen 22:18).

The Exodus

God did more for His name than to gain early worship from Abraham. God went global in a big way at the Exodus. At first glance, the story of the Exodus doesn't look like a great missionary event. Thousands of Egyptians died. Grief covered every Egyptian home. What was God doing?

The key passage is Exodus 9:13-16 in which Moses gives an ultimatum to Pharaoh, with a bold word about His purposes:

Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, *so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth.* For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. But indeed, for this cause I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power, and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth" (my italics).

Take note that God never said, "Let My people go!" That's just half the sentence, without the purpose, which was clearly stated every time Moses declared it. Take care to hear the entire cry of salvation: "Let my people go, *that they may worship Me!*" (Ex 8:1,20; 9:1,13; 10:3)⁴

Pharaoh well understood the entire demand of Moses that the people be released to worship. Pharaoh probably thought that the appeal for a worship vacation was a ploy to disguise plans for escape. Perhaps many of the Hebrews made the same mistake. How many of them may have thought that the plans to worship God in the wilderness were but a ruse to dupe the authorities? Is it any wonder then that many of them remained fixated on matters of comfort, diet, safety and entertainment? They were slow to comprehend that in their escape, God had a purpose for Himself in the sight of the nations. They had turned salvation inside-out: they seriously thought that their rescue was the predominate concern of God. Instead, God was orchestrating a powerful plan to draw the attention of the nations to Himself.

God Brings Global Attention to His Name

God was singling Himself out from all the gods of earth. He was making an “everlasting name” for Himself at the Exodus (Isa 63:11-14 and Neh 9:9-10). He wanted everyone in Egypt and beyond to know that there was absolutely no god like the only living God. He wanted the world to watch a mob of slaves marching in procession to worship Him. God established His reputation as one greater and absolutely different (truly holy,

The Exodus events revealed His glory by establishing His name in a global way.

not just holier) than every other deity ever dreamed up by man—an exquisite, almighty, resplendent God. The Exodus was to be a reference point for all subsequent revelation to the world of his character, His holiness and His power. How did chaos in Egypt reveal the ever-living God?

Judging the Gods of Egypt

Some scholars have noted that every one of the plagues of Egypt was either aimed against the false gods of Egypt or the oppressive power structures that were revered with fanatical zeal.⁵ Some Egyptian deities, such as the Nile River, or the great sun god, were embarrassed directly by the plagues of blood and darkness. Other deities were indirectly shamed by exposing their complete inability to do what they were supposed to do. There were gods who were revered as being able to deal with infestations of insects or to protect cattle from disease. The powerful religious elite was shamed. The deeply revered military was summarily annihilated. Why was God wrecking Egypt before the watching world?

God was executing judgments “against all the gods of Egypt” (Ex 12:12). He was not aiming at destroying people, but devastating one of the most highly regarded collections of false gods in all the earth. If He wanted to destroy the people of Egypt He could have done it quickly. “For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you..., you would then have been cut off from the earth. But indeed,

for this cause I have allowed you to remain... to proclaim My name through all the earth” (Ex 9:15-16).

The Nations Take Notice

Did it work? Did the world take notice of God making His name great? The devastation recorded in the book of Exodus didn’t make headlines in Egyptian hieroglyphics, but we should understand that events which put Egypt in a bad light were never chipped into stone.

The Bible reports that the waves of the Red Sea hadn’t quite calmed down before Moses led the people in singing, “The LORD is His name...Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness?” Then they began to list some of the surrounding nations, stating clearly that: “The peoples have heard, and they tremble...” (Ex 15:3,7,15).

Jethro had married into Moses’ family, but was still very much a Gentile. He had certainly heard about the God of the Hebrews for years from Moses. Perhaps many peoples and cities had heard something of this great God without trusting or worshiping Him. But listen to Jethro after the plagues of Egypt. “Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people” (Ex 18:11). Jethro was a leading priest of a foreign people, well-qualified to evaluate religious matters (Ex 18:1).

As we read the story of Moses confronting Egypt today, it might appear that Egypt was just another harsh empire that abused slaves. In Moses’ day it was open knowledge that Egypt was a complex of religious, economic and military powers inextricably enmeshed with spiritual powers. God unraveled the system to show it for what it was at the core—horrid, spiritual evil, dedicated to diverting worshipers from coming to Him. God had blessed Egypt, but Egypt had made itself an enemy of God. God’s “judgments” of the plagues and the awesome Red Sea affair (Ex 12:12) are not to be understood as mere punishment for bad deeds. God’s intervention put down oppressive evil in order to liberate people. Why were they freed? “Let my people go, *that they may worship Me.*” God

had orchestrated the Exodus events so that He revealed His glory by establishing His name in a global way. Then, with the world watching, He drew the people to Himself to establish a way of worship that all other nations could enter.

The Conquest

The conquest of Canaan should be seen in the same light of God winning to Himself a single, holy people of worship. To that people, and by their witness, He will draw every other people to revere and know Him.

Just Recompense

At first glance to modern readers, the conquest may seem like a genocidal land grab rather than an act of a good and loving God. But a close look at the pertinent passages of Scripture shows that God ordained the conquest of Canaan with a double purpose. First, God was bringing just recompense for the “wickedness” of the peoples of the land (Deut 9:5). Long before this, God had told Abraham that “the iniquity of the Amorites (was) not yet complete” (Gen 15:16). God had allowed sin to run its full course. We might wonder how the Canaanites felt about God’s wrath. The one statement about the conquest recorded from a Canaanite came from a king who acknowledged the righteous execution of God’s justice: “As I have done, so God has repaid me” (Judg 1:7).

Demolishing False Worship

The second, and primary, reason for the thorough ferocity of the Hebrew conquest was this: God was demolishing systems of false worship in order to preserve the singular devotion of His people and the holiness of His name. Almost every passage describing the rationale behind ousting the peoples living in the land offers this reason: Canaanite worship would swiftly turn the Hebrews “away from following Me to serve other gods” (Deut 4:15-24; 6:13-15; 7:1-8; et al.).

Joshua and Moses both voiced the same God-given rationale for the violence of the conquest: it was, at the core, an annihilation of false worship. God had mandated the destruction so that Israel would never “mention the name of their gods, or serve

them, or bow down to them” (Josh 23:7). While there are difficulties in fully understanding this part of the story of God’s people, one thing is clear about the conquest: the point was pure worship. God’s objective was not that Israel would be the only people that worshiped Him. His point was to insure that He was the only God that they worshiped.

Idolatry Would Profane the Name

Idolatry doesn’t seem to threaten most believers today. The first four commands of the Ten Commandments can mystify or even bore us. Why was God so ferociously passionate about idolatry? Without grasping His global purposes for glory, it may seem that God is over-wrought about a nasty, primitive habit.

But look at idolatry from God’s point of view. God had distinguished His name far above any other. Any kind of idolatry would, in effect, profane (that is, bring down as common) God’s name, the very name God had just singled out and sounded forth to the world.

Look again at the conquest. The point of the invasion was not that Israel deserved someone else’s homeland. God told Israel clearly that they weren’t special or favored because of their intrinsic righteousness or their great nobility (Deut 7:6-7). Israel was told repeatedly that God would destroy them just as swiftly if they turned away from His worship to other gods.

The record is clear that the Hebrew people were at several points precariously close to being destroyed. Why? Hadn’t God specially loved and saved them? For all the special love God had promised the descendants of Abraham, God was resolute in working for His glory. God was not averse to taking a delay and dealing with another generation. The issue at every juncture was the worship of the people to God and their testimony to His glory.

One instance makes this constant purpose of God clear: the rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea. Israel had followed God through a divinely opened way, and stood on the threshold of fulfilling God’s purposes. Spies were sent to check out the land and the people. Ten of the

spies spooked the entire people, touching off a hysterical rebellion for self-preservation (Num 13:17-14:10). God was ready to destroy the entire people and start over with Moses, making out of him another people “greater and mightier” than the Hebrews. The point is not that the people had done something so bad that God had become fatally angry. God simply required for His purposes a nation who would at least believe in Him.

Moses actually argues with God, bringing up, as he had in a previous instance (Ex 32:1-14), that the nations were watching. They had heard something of God’s name which could be falsified by what God was about to do. “Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame (literally “name”) will say, ‘Because the Lord could not bring this people into the land...’” Moses challenges God, telling Him that the nations will conclude that the Hebrew God is weak—all beginnings, but no finish (Num 14:15-16).

Then Moses asks God to magnify Himself according to how God Himself had summarized His name: “The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression...”⁶ A long pause from heaven, and then God said that He had pardoned Israel according to the prayer of Moses. Then God raised His voice, I think, using some of the strongest expressions possible: “But indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord!” (Num 14:17-21).

What was God saying? That He would continue to use the nation, but wait for another generation. Even though He was taking a delay, He remained everlastingly resolute to bring forth His purpose on earth: to fill the earth with “the glory of the Lord.” To fulfill that purpose required an obedient, worshiping, witnessing people.

The Temple

Perhaps the first clear mention of the temple is made on the plains of Moab prior to Joshua leading the people into the land. Moses issues God’s directives to destroy “all the places where the nations...serve their gods.” Instead of remodeling any of the former places of worship, the shrines were to be

completely ruined in order to “obliterate their name from that place.” God’s name is never to be equivocated with the name of any other deity. Instead, a new and special place would be built, “to establish His name there for His dwelling” (Deut 12:2-14, especially verse 5).

Consider God’s declaration of purpose for the temple: “to establish His name there for His dwelling.” God wanted to do two things in this special place. First, He wanted to reveal Himself by “His name.” It would be a place of revelation as worshipers continually exalt His character and voice the stories and songs about His working. Second, God desired a place of encounter, of relationship, of dwelling. From the earliest mention of a tabernacle God intimated His desire to enjoy an exalted nearness amidst His people, “that I may dwell among them” (Ex 25:8). To “dwell” is a relational affair. It is consummated worship. God coming near His people as they come near to Him. Solomon knew that the temple was not God’s domicile. As he dedicated the fabulous structure, he prayed:

“But will God indeed dwell with mankind on the earth? Behold, heaven and highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house which I have built” (2 Chr 6:18).⁷

David had designed the temple as a place of approaching God with praise. Solomon installed the choirs and priestly musicians that his father had planned. These choirs were to continually “praise and glorify the Lord” using some of the Davidic songs, and no doubt using David’s dedicatory hymn found in 1 Chronicles 16:23-33 (another rendition of Ps 96, discussed above), which explicitly beckons “all the families of the peoples” to worship God (v. 28).

According to Solomon’s dedication, the house of the Lord is to be a place where God would see, hear and answer His people. But the house was not just for Israel. Solomon makes special mention of “the peoples.” He knew that God’s purpose for the temple was to welcome all nations to worship.

Solomon knew the story up to that point. God had made Himself vastly famous. People of other nations would seek to know the

God of Israel personally. Listen to Solomon's astounding prayer:

Also concerning the foreigner who is not of your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for your name's sake (for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm); when He comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You as do Your people Israel... (1 Ki 8:41-43).

Solomon did not pray for a few of the individuals to come, but for many from every one of the peoples. Solomon prayed that the nations would meet God as they came to the house to pray and to worship. He did not ask that Gentiles know God in their own Gentile way, but rather that they would know God just as Israel did. Solomon envisioned all peoples joining Israel in the same kind of humble, joyous, worshipful walk with God that Israel enjoyed—"the fear of the Lord."

The Nations Begin to Come

Did the report of God's name go out to the world? Did foreigners ever come to the house of the Lord and learn of the fear of the Lord? Did God answer Solomon's prayer? The best answer to these questions is "Yes" as well as "No."

The record shows that soon after the temple was complete (1 Ki 9:25), the Queen of Sheba "heard about the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord" (10:1, my emphasis). She came to learn, she listened to Solomon's wisdom (v. 8), and came away with understanding of the covenant-keeping God who "loved Israel forever." As only a royal potentate might see, she realized that God Himself had established the power of Solomon, and the hope that through God's rulership, there might be "justice and righteousness" (v. 9).

Was this an isolated instance? Apparently not. A few verses later it says that, "All the earth was seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart" (v. 24). The world didn't honor

Solomon for being brainy or clever with court cases. The world recognized that God himself had put wisdom in this man's heart. And what was the first lesson in wisdom that Solomon put forth to the world? "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 1:7, 9:10). Solomon was introducing the world to the worship of God as well as the life of wisdom under God.

God's purposes were apparently being fulfilled. His name was great. Israel was making it known so that the nations were coming to know God personally. What could have possibly slowed God's unfolding plan to draw the nations to Himself? Only one thing. It was the issue about which God most stringently warned His people: idolatry.

And of all the possible horrors, probably the worst thing happened—Solomon himself led the way into grotesque idolatry. It was one of history's most bitter ironies. Imagine the brilliant hopes with the riches and the desires of the nations turning to Israel. Solomon had consecrated the temple in a spectacle of unimaginable glory. He had closed that event with a blessing of purpose on the building and nation, "so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no one else" (1 Ki 8:60).

And then just three chapters after this climactic opening of doors to the nations to know and fear the only God by name, Solomon's heart was turned "away after other gods." He actually constructed shrines within sight of the holy mountain of God (1 Ki 11:1-8). Can any believing reader of these verses not feel disappointment to the point of nausea? It's hard not to speculate about what might have happened if worship had been pure and steady for at least another generation.

The Persistence of God

God's plan was simple: God would make His name great and then Israel could make His name known. He has always purposed to single out His name from all other gods, and then to welcome the nations to worship Him personally in the light of that revealed name through the witness of the people of Israel.

The story from this point becomes a prolonged up-and-down struggle with

idolatry. Various episodes revive fidelity to God's worship, but are followed by stunning new lows of profaning God's name. The upper-most issue throughout the generations is God's glory by Israel's worship. At times the people disregarded the worship of God so greatly that generations would pass without the slightest attention to the simple regimens by which God had invited Israel to meet with Him (the ordinances for worship in the books of Moses). The words of some of the prophets show that even when worship patterns were followed, they were often performed superficially. The prophets exposed perfunctory worship, showing that it perversely lacked the justice and the kindness which was supposed to have thrived behind every offering and prayer to God (Isa 1:11-15; Amos 5:21-24; Mic 6:6-8). Although God delayed the great shaking of Israel and Judah, He finally separated the people from the land which was to showcase the blessing of God. They were exiled to distant lands. And then the utmost tragedy: The house of God was burned and broken to rubble.

Near the end of the time of exile, Daniel cried out for God to enact His promise to restore the temple and His people. Daniel was intensely aware of the entire saga, how God had brought His people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand... "(to) make a name for yourself, as it is this day" (Dan 9:15). Daniel's over-riding concern was that the ruins of intended glory on the temple mountain in Jerusalem were a continuing reproach to God's glory to "all those around us." He prayed that God would restore the people and the city so that the glory of His name would be restored. Daniel did not base his request on the supposed greatness of Israel, but "for your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people are called by your name" (Dan 9:16-19).

Ezekiel, a near contemporary to Daniel, breathed the same themes. God had restrained His wrath at several junctures from destroying Israel, but God's restraint had been for the sake of His name (Ezek 20:5-22). The dealings of God with Israel were not because of sickly favoritism, but solely for His glory among the nations:

Thus says the Lord God, 'It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord' (Ezek 36:22-23).

The Destiny of Israel: Glory From All Nations

Daniel and Ezekiel weren't the only prophets who saw the ongoing story of Israel as focusing on God's name and glory. Other prophets and psalmists spoke of the history and the destiny of Israel in terms of the nations being drawn to God by name, and worshiping Him with diverse, lavish glory.

Shout joyfully to God, all the earth. Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious. Say to God, 'How awesome are your works!' Because of the greatness of your power your enemies will give feigned obedience to you. All the earth will worship you. And will sing praises to you; they will sing praises to your name (Ps 66:1-4).

All the kings of the earth will give thanks to You, O Lord, when they have heard the words of Your mouth. And they will sing of the ways of the Lord. For great is the glory of the Lord (Ps 138:4-5).

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Hab 2:14).

For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord, to serve him shoulder to shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my worshipers, my dispersed ones will bring my offerings (Zeph 3:9-10).

For from the rising of the sun, even to its setting, my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to my name, and a grain offering that is pure; for my name will be great among the nations (Mal 1:11).

These are but a sampling of the scores of prophetic words which tethered Israel's identity to the culmination of God's purposes:

the glory of God on earth drawing the worship of all peoples. When the people of God were finally brought back to the land, building the temple was to be top priority. Haggai made it clear that the temple was for God's glory, and for a greater glory than had ever come before. "And I will shake all the nations; and the

adore You!" The prayer can be prayed most thoroughly in the global dimension that Jesus taught: "on earth as it is in heaven." There is no question of the primacy of this prayer for all believers. The prayer has to be understood. There can be little doubt that Jesus is teaching the Church to pray for the fulfill-

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desired of the nations will come; and I will fill this house with glory" (Haggai 1:8; 2:7, *KJV*). From the exile onward, Israel avoided idolatry. But the lesser national glory they desired never came. They were waiting for a messianic deliverer to free them from oppression. They almost missed the Messiah when He came because Jesus' vision of redemption was for God's kingdom to be enacted among all peoples.

The Glory of God in Christ

Christ is the crescendo of the story of God's glory. At the end of all things, He will have bought and brought people from every tribe and tongue to honor the Father. It's no surprise then, to see how His every move was part of pressing the story of God's glory toward its culmination for all nations.

Jesus summed up His ministry in terms of bringing global glory to His Father:

"I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do." And what was the work? "I manifested Your name to the men You gave Me out of the world" (John 17:4,6).

Sanctify Your Name

The prayer Jesus taught His disciples to pray can be easily misunderstood because of the antiquated English translation, "Hallowed be Thy name." This prayer is not a statement of praise. It is explicitly a request in the original language: "Father...sanctify your name!" To paraphrase, "Father lift up, single out, exalt, manifest, and reveal Your name to the people of earth. Become famous for who You really are. Cause the people of earth to know and

ment of ancient purposes revealed in the Law, the stories, the songs and the prophecies of Israel for the glory of God.

In one telling encounter with the non-Jewish Samaritan woman, Jesus declared God's future for her and other Gentile nations: "An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers" (John 4:23).

A House of Worship from All Peoples

In His most public hour and most passionate moment, Jesus made an issue of the worship of the peoples. He cleansed the temple of the religious commercialism which formed a blockade prohibiting the nations from approaching God. He quoted Isaiah 56:7, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." The religious leaders listening to Him immediately recalled the rest of the passage that Jesus was quoting from Isaiah 56:6-7. Jesus intended for them to hear it fully:

Also the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the Lord,...even those I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar. *For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.*

Just before going to His death, He displayed His life purpose, and the purpose of His soon-coming death (John 12:24-32). He openly considered the option of asking the Father to rescue Him from death: "What shall I say, Father, save Me from this hour?" But instead of asking to escape, He said, "But for this purpose I came to this hour." What purpose was this? The purpose bursts forth from His heart in His next statement. It becomes

the prayer of His death and His life: "Father! Glorify Your name!" And then, to the bewildered amazement of those standing near Him, God the Father Himself answered Jesus from heaven: "I have both glorified it (My name), and will glorify it again." God's answer from heaven still thunders, if you can hear it. It is God's answer to anyone who yields their life to the Father for the greater glory of His name. Jesus said that the answer didn't come for Him, but for His followers who would come to similar moments of choosing to follow Him (12:30) in accordance with God's ancient purpose. How would Jesus' death glorify God's name? "If I be lifted up, I will draw all people to Myself" (12:32).

Ministry of Surpassing Glory with Paul

Paul saw his life as continuing the ancient purpose toward a huge global outpouring of obedient worship from all nations. His most precise statement of mission purpose was to "bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations *for His name's sake*" (Rom 1:5, emphasis mine). Paul saw the entire world as divided into two categories: where Christ was "named" and where Christ was not yet named. Paul resolutely prioritized his efforts so as to labor where Christ was not named (Rom 15:20).⁸

We can see the double direction of God's glory in Paul's ministry. On the one hand he labored to glorify God by revealing Christ to the nations—getting Christ "named." But his highest zeal, the very boast of his being, was in that which was to come back to God from the nations. "Because of the grace that was given to me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the nations, [priesting] the gospel,⁹ that my offering of the nations might become pleasing, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God"¹⁰ (Rom 15:15-17).

Paul's passionate ambition to "preach the gospel" was based on the far more fundamental commission (or in his language, a "grace that was given") which he had received from God to "priest the gospel." There's no mistaking the imagery. Paul sees

himself before God, serving the nations as if he were a priest, instructing and ushering them near to God, helping them bring the glory of their nation to God for His pleasure. Paul's job was not to change the societies and

Now let us focus our deepest affections and boldest plans on the splendor of every people loving God with the sanctified best of their society. What a magnificent hope!

cultures. The Spirit of God was at work transforming and sanctifying the finest possible display of glory from the peoples.

Paul labored at great cost with a brilliant vision before him. It was something he knew was worth working and waiting for. "With one voice" many diverse streams of believers, Jew and Gentile, weak and strong, will together "glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 15:6).

A Rehearsal for Eternal Glory

At the end of history, we will marvel at how abundantly God's love has been fulfilled. His love will have triumphed by winning passionate devotion from all peoples. Jesus will have thoroughly fulfilled the promise He uttered to His Father, "I have made Your name known to them, and I will make it known; that the love wherewith You loved Me may be in them..." (John 17:26).

Beyond history, we will have found that all of the worshipful service of the many nations throughout the generations will have been a rehearsal for greater affairs of love and glory, still involving the beautified glory from every people.

Heaven will fill earth: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His peoples,¹¹ and God Himself shall be among them" (Rev 21:3).

The peoples will endure everlastingly. The city which is heaven on earth will be adorned by kings of the peoples continually bringing the treasure and fruit of the peoples to God's throne (Rev 21:22-26). We will serve Him, awed and honored by having

His very name on our faces. And gazing into His face, we shall serve Him as beloved priests (Rev 22:1-5).

What is an Evangelized World For?

Until now we have cried, "Let the earth hear His voice!" Let us never cease voicing His Word to every creature. But soon comes the day when, by most reckonings, the earth will have heard. What then?

There is another cry, far more ancient. It is a shout for earth's destiny. It is to be lifted today more than ever: "Let all the peoples praise You!" (Ps 67:3-5). We hear even now growing praise from the nations. Now let us focus our deepest affections and boldest plans on the splendor of every people loving God with the sanctified best of their society. What a magnificent hope!

CHANGES IN PRACTICE

This emphasis on the glory of God is far more than a decorative flower on the Great Commission. More than ever we must work together with a shared passion that Christ be named and that Christ is praised in every people. A "doxological" (having to do with glory) vision of world evangelization offers practical wisdom essential for the finishing of the remaining task. Stepping into the story of His glory will help us in three practical ways.

1. Deepen Our Motive Base to a Love for God's Glory

World evangelization is for God. It is common to work out of a concern for the predicament of people—either to see them saved from hell, or to see them served to communal wholeness, or both. Such compassion is biblical and necessary. However, our love for people takes on balance and power when our overriding passion is for God to be honored by the kindness extended in His name; and even more, for God to be thanked personally by the people transformed by the power of the gospel.

Jesus was moved with an abounding compassion as He saw the multitudes as abandoned sheep, but He did not respond to the naked need. He deliberately recast His vision

of the same lost crowds with a different metaphor. Instead of beleaguered sheep, He saw the people as carrying great value to God: "His harvest." Who can comprehend God's delight in the fullness of the fruit He receives from people's lives? Jesus began to do just that. From that vision He implored the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers to bring God His harvest (Matt 9:35-38). Jesus knew that in God's ways, volunteering is of little value. Anything of lasting power comes from an authentic "sending" of God. Compassion flows like rivers from one who is truly sent.

Mission efforts which draw their motivation from compassionate response to human predicament will only go so far. Guilt-based appeals to care for hurting or lost people continue to soften our hearts a little. In practice, however, they weary and harden believers to a minimal token obedience. Costly and difficult work needs to be done. Such labor cannot be sustained by the fleeting, momentary zeal generated by appeals for desperate, perishing souls. God's global purpose is an ancient affair, far more than an urgent need. Now more than ever believers need to be nurtured into a far-reaching jealousy for God's glory. With confident certainty that God will fulfill His promise, we can be deeply moved by needs while acting boldly for God's purpose.

2. Define the Task as Increasing God's Glory

Never has there been a day when Christians are taking so much care to reach all of the world's peoples. Considering people groups and their cultures helps to devise effective gospel communication to specific cultures. The people group approach appears to be useful for evaluating progress and apportioning different assignments for effective collaboration.

Even so, the people group approach has been a contentious issue. For years, some have decried the entire approach as disintegrating the unity of churches or as a cover for stubborn attitudes of colonial domination by Westerners. Recently, others have quietly abandoned the people group approach for other paradigms which seem more workable. Even

as nation-states disintegrate overnight into the competing peoples that comprise them, country-by-country approaches to evangelization are still proving attractive. Other geographical approaches range from marking urban centers, to drawing windows of longitude and latitude, to mapping spiritual forces arrayed against the gospel. Of course, the peoples of the earth are geographical, urbanized, nationalized entities. We need to take

God yearns for a unique outpouring of love, righteousness, wisdom and worship from every people.

We must aim beyond the gospel encounter. We must aim to see obedient worship result for God which may be distinctive to that particular people.

I submit that it is not the people group *approach* which is important, but the people group *result*. What is the result of the gospel? Surely something more than every person having a chance to pass verdict on the message. God has promised to get obedient glory for Himself from every tribe and tongue. He yearns for the unique outpouring of love, righteousness, wisdom and worship that can come from every people. This would be the best rationale for planting indigenous churches. Such a vantage point elevates the distinctive wonder of each people group, and at the same time, enhances the value of extending the gospel breakthrough to every place. Geography matters all the more. Every city and place takes on

note of these dimensions as important factors in fashioning useful approaches to any people. But our goal must not be reduced to approaching peoples merely to “impact” them as “targets.”

greater significance as the venue of a unique display of God’s Kingdom.

3. Integrate Efforts For God’s Glory

The obviously false dichotomy between evangelism and social action can be set aside with a doxological approach. Arguments have swirled around which part of man is more important: Is it more important to save a soul or to heal a community? The question is equally repugnant to all. The most common response has been vague generalizations suggesting that we treat the issue as a “both/and” matter instead of an “either/or” question. We may be able to do better. What if the same issues were resolutely examined and embraced for what comes to God?

Glory comes to God from gospel declaration or a kind deed done in His name. Greater glory resounds when whole communities see Christ’s hand transforming their lives.

Some have needlessly proposed a double mandate to fashion a point of balance. The so-called cultural mandate to fill the earth is balanced by the evangelistic mandate to evangelize the world. Is there not a singular purpose of God being served by all the peoples and in all places of the earth? The service of the nations must be a total life obedience of justice and righteousness. The worship offerings now to be brought to God through Christ are words as well as works.

Within the vision for God’s glory lies the substance of true unity between churches. With a jealousy for unique glory to come to God from every people, we can easily set aside demands for uniformity of worship and conduct. We can delight in the variety of styles of righteousness, peace, and joy, while increasing in jealousy for the commonly confessed singular truth in the person of Christ. 🌟

Study Questions

1. How does prayer, which asks God to sanctify His name, work toward fulfilling His ancient purpose?
2. Explain how the fulfillment of the Great Commission will result in worship “from every people.”
3. Explain how worship both reveals God’s glory and allows God to fully accomplish His love for people.
4. Hawthorne says that the story of the Bible is directed toward God being known and worshiped. Critique his thesis. Is there a coherent story throughout the Bible? Is God’s glory the paramount theme? What other options are there?

Endnotes

1. What about the name “Yahweh,” or, as some translations render it, “Jehovah”? It is no doubt an important name. But we must be careful not to regard the living God as actually having a single, legal “real” name, as if He had a birth certificate on file somewhere. The Bible is consistent in urging us to know Him as He aspires to be globally known. The question of Exodus 3:13 was probably not a reference issue (Which god are you representing, Moses?). It was a reputation concern (What kind of track record has this God built for Himself that would move us to commit such a suicidal act of insurrection against Pharaoh? What is the basis of the trustworthiness of God?). It’s possible to understand the tetragrammaton (YHWH) in a verbal sense of “I will cause to be what shall be,” which is perfectly in keeping with a God who is both Creator and promise keeper. The larger context brings emphasis on God’s final answer to the people’s question: “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations” (Ex 3:15).
2. The Hebrew word often translated “ascribe” is a simple word meaning “give.” I use the most literal translation “give” because “ascribe” could make it appear to be an entirely cognitive affair. The context describes this worship as an affair involving gifts from people to God which far surpass mere mental ascriptions.
3. Abram recognized that by God’s promise to bless him and his family, God was virtually constituting a new family. The biblical concept of blessing was loaded with overtones of family honor and heritage. A biblical blessing was often a statement of power which bestowed a destiny. A family blessing often became the most valued feature of an inheritance. Many present-day societies restrict the idea of inheritance to shuffling unspent assets after the death of an ancestor. Biblical inheritance was not considered to be the leftovers from one generation trickling down to be consumed by the next. A blessing was known to be a special heritage for future generations of a family, multiplying with increased abundance. The most astounding feature of the blessing promised to Abram (Gen 12:1-3) was that God was entrusting to him an endowment that was destined to impart something substantial to every single family on the planet, far beyond one extended family.
4. See as well the other variations of the appeal to release the Hebrews which reflect that the general Hebrew word translated “serve” is very much in the context of service of worship (Ex 3:12; 4:23; 5:1; 7:16; 8:27,29; 10:9). See especially Exodus 10:26 which makes it clear that to “serve” was to offer sacrificial gifts to God.
5. See *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, by John Davis, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971).
6. God had given this extensive summary of His dealings as His name at Sinai (Ex 33:19; 34:6-8). It is good news in a capsule about how God does things with people. It is a very significant statement, and was recognized by later generations of Israel as a summary of what was to be proclaimed among the nations (Ps 86:9-15; 145:1-2,8-12,21). Jonah himself recognized this package of truth as something that he knew, that he had withheld from the Ninevites (Jonah 3:9-4:2).
7. Don’t take Solomon’s question about God dwelling with people on earth as a word of despair about God ever dwelling with people. His prayer is not intended as a definitive map of the cosmos. It rather fits the self-effacing approach to the Most High. He follows with a profoundly humble appeal, using formal, courtly language, that the king of all the earth deign to turn his eyes toward a place of encounter and hold audience as He had promised (2 Chr 6:19-21). Compare 2 Chronicles 6:1-2 in which Solomon acknowledges the cloud of God’s glory so filling the temple that no priest could endure the dreadful brilliance (2 Chr 5:13-14).
8. A close look at the context shows what Paul means by Christ being “named.” It was not a matter of the message of Christ being preached once by a missionary, but rather a “foundation” being laid (Rom 15:20). Paul has just been speaking of specific regions in which the gospel has been “fulfilled” or brought to a substantial closure (Rom 15:19). Translations such as “fully preached” or “fully proclaimed” stress the cognitive transfer of gospel information instead of describing the advance of a gospel movement, which the menu of gospel activities in 15:18-19 implies. In light of how Paul uses the idea of “foundation” elsewhere (particularly 1 Cor 3:8-15), I conclude that “Christ is named” when there is a growing movement of obedience to Christ established which has proven potential to articulate and demonstrate the life of Christ to its entire community. This is what many would consider a church.
9. Paul takes the idea of a priest and turns it into a verb so that he effectively says that he is “priesting” the gospel. The image is that of a Hebrew priest whose primary task was to help the people present their worship gifts to God.
10. The idea is “toward the face of God” as if in a temple.
11. Some variant manuscripts with good attestation keep the word “peoples” plural in this passage.

Let the Nations Be Glad!

John Piper

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the Church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides for ever.

Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God. "The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!" (Ps 97:1). "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" (Ps 67:3,4).

But worship is also the fuel of missions. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish. Missionaries will never call out, "Let the nations be glad!" who cannot say from the heart, "I rejoice in the Lord...I will be glad and exult in you, I will sing praise to your name, O Most High" (Ps 104:34; 9:2). Missions begins and ends in worship.

If the pursuit of God's glory is not ordered above the pursuit of man's good in the affections of the heart and the priorities of the church, man will not be well served and God will not be duly honored. I am not pleading for a diminishing of missions but for a magnifying of God. When the flame of worship burns with the heat of God's true worth, the light of missions will shine to the darkest peoples on earth. And I long for that day to come!

Where passion for God is weak, zeal for missions will be weak. Churches that are not centered on the exaltation of the majesty and beauty of God will scarcely kindle a fervent desire to "declare his glory among the nations" (Ps 96:3).

The Second Greatest Activity in the World

The most crucial issue in missions is the centrality of God in the life of the Church. Where people are not stunned by the greatness of God, how can they be sent with the ringing message, "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods!"? (Ps 96:4). Missions is not first and ultimate: God is. And these are not just words. This truth is the life blood of missionary inspiration and



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endurance. William Carey, the father of modern missions, who set sail for India from England in 1793, expressed the connection:

When I left England, my hope of India's conversion was very strong; but amongst so many obstacles, it would die, unless upheld by God. Well, I have God, and His Word is true. Though the superstitions of the heathen were a thousand times stronger than they are, and the example of the Europeans a thousand times worse; though I were deserted by all and persecuted by all, yet my faith, fixed on the sure Word, would rise above all obstructions and overcome every trial. God's cause will triumph.¹

Carey and thousands like him have been moved and carried by the vision of a great and triumphant God. That vision must come first. Savoring it in worship precedes spreading it in missions. All of history is moving toward one great goal, the white hot worship of God and his Son among all the peoples of the earth. Missions is not that goal. It is the means. And for that reason it is the second greatest human activity in the world.

God's Passion for God—The Foundation for Ours

One of the things God uses to make this truth take hold of a person and a church is the stunning realization that it is also true for God himself. Missions is not God's ultimate goal, worship is. When this sinks into a person's heart, everything changes. The world is often turned on its head. Everything looks different—including the missionary enterprise.

The ultimate foundation for our passion to see God glorified is his own passion to be glorified. God is central and supreme in his own affections. There are no rivals for the supremacy of God's glory in his own heart. God is not an idolater. He does not disobey the first and great commandment. With all his heart and soul and strength and mind he delights in the glory of his manifold perfections.² The most passionate heart for God in all the universe is God's heart.

This truth, more than any other I know, seals the conviction that worship is the fuel and goal of missions. The deepest reason why our passion for God should fuel mis-

sions is that God's passion for God fuels missions. Missions is the overflow of our delight in God because missions is the overflow of God's delight in being God. And the deepest reason why worship is the goal in missions is that worship is God's goal. We are confirmed in this goal by the biblical record³ of God's relentless pursuit of praise among the nations. "Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him all peoples!" (Ps 117:1). If it is God's goal, it must be our goal.

The Power of Missions is Worship

God's supremacy in his own heart is not unloving. It is in fact the fountain of love. God's full delight in his own perfections overflows in his merciful will to share that delight with the nations. We may reaffirm then the earlier truth that worship is the fuel and goal that drives us in missions, because it is the fuel and goal that drives God in missions. Missions flows from the fullness of God's passion for God and it aims at the participation of the nations in the very passion that he has for himself (cf. John 15:11; 17:13,26; Matt 25:21,23). The power of the missionary enterprise is to be caught up into God's fuel and God's goal. And that means being caught up in worship.

Only One God Works for People Who Wait for Him

This remarkable vision of God as one who "exalts himself to show mercy" (Isa 30:18) impels world missions in more ways than one. One way we have not pondered is the sheer uniqueness of this God among all the gods of the nations. Isaiah realizes this and says, "From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who works for those who wait for him" (Isa 64:4). In other words, Isaiah is stunned that the greatness of God has the paradoxical effect that he does not need people to work for him, but rather magnifies himself by working for them, if they will renounce self-reliance and "wait for him."

Isaiah anticipated the words of Paul in Acts 17:25, "God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything." The uniqueness at the heart of Christianity is the glory of God manifest in

the freedom of grace. God is glorious because he does not need the nations to work for him. He is free to work for them. "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Missions is not a recruitment project for God's labor force. It is a liberation project from the heavy burdens and hard yokes of other gods (Matt 11:28-30).

Isaiah says that such a God has not been seen or heard anywhere in the world. "From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you." What Isaiah sees everywhere he looks are gods who have to be served rather than serve. For example, the Babylonian gods Bel and Nebo:

Bel bows down, Nebo stoops, their idols are on beasts and cattle; these things you carry are loaded as burdens on weary beasts. They stoop, they bow down together, they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity. "Hearken to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am He, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save" (Isa 46:1-4; cf. Jer 10:5).

The difference between the true God and the gods of the nations is that the true God carries and the other gods must be carried. God serves, they must be served. God glorifies his might by showing mercy. They glorify theirs by gathering slaves. So the vision of God as one whose passion for his glory moves him to mercy impels missions because he is utterly unique among all the gods.

The Most Shareable Message In the World

There is yet another way that such a God motivates the missionary enterprise. The gospel demand that flows from such a God to the nations is an eminently shareable, doable demand, namely to rejoice and be glad in God. "The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!" (Ps 97:1). "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" (Ps 67:3-4). "Let the oppressed see it and be glad; you who seek

God, let your hearts revive" (Ps 69:32). "Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you! May those who love your salvation say evermore, God is great!" (Ps 70:4). What message would missionaries rather take than the message: Be glad in God! Rejoice in God! Sing for joy in God! For God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him! God loves to exalt himself by showing mercy to sinners.

The liberating fact is that the message we take to the frontiers is that people everywhere should seek their own best interest. We are summoning people to God. And those who come say, "In your presence is fullness of joy and at your right hand are pleasures for evermore" (Ps 16:11). God glorifies himself among the nations with the command, "Delight yourself in the Lord!" (Ps 37:4). His first and great requirement of all men everywhere is that they repent from seeking their joy in other things and begin to seek it only in him. A God who cannot be served⁴ is a God who can only be enjoyed. The great sin of the world is not that the human race has failed to work for God so as to increase his glory, but that we have failed to delight in God so as to reflect his glory. For God's glory is most reflected in us when we are most delighted in him.

The most exhilarating thought in the world is that God's inexorable purpose to display his glory in the mission of the Church is virtually the same as his purpose to give his people infinite delight. God is committed to the holy joy of the redeemed, gathered from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, with the same zeal that moves him to seek his own glory in all that he does. The supremacy of God in the heart of God is the driving force of his mercy and the missionary movement of his Church.

Biblical Expressions of the Supremacy of God in Missions

Against the background we have developed so far, we may now be able to feel the full force of those biblical texts that emphasize the supremacy of God in the missionary impulse of the Church. The motives we see will confirm the centrality of God in the missionary vision of the Bible.

We have seen some of the Old Testament texts which make the glory of God the center-

piece of missionary proclamation: “Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!” (Ps 96:3). “Proclaim that his name is exalted!” (Isa 12:4). There are many others. But we have not yet seen the straightforward statements of Jesus and Paul and John that say the same thing.

Leaving Family and Possessions for the Sake of the Name

When Jesus turned the rich young ruler away because he was not willing to leave his wealth to follow Jesus, the Lord said, “It will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 19:23). The apostles were amazed and said, “Who then can be saved?” (v. 25). Jesus answered, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (v. 26). Then Peter, speaking as a kind of missionary who had left his home and business to follow Jesus, said, “Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What shall we have?” (v. 27). Jesus answered with a mild rebuke of Peter’s sense of sacrifice:

“Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life” (v. 29).

The one point of focus for us here is the phrase, “for my name’s sake.” The motive that Jesus virtually takes for granted when a missionary leaves home and family and possessions is that it is for the sake of the name of Jesus. That means for the sake of Jesus’ reputation. God’s goal is that his Son’s name be exalted and honored among all the peoples of the world. For when the Son is honored, the Father is honored (Mark 9:37). When every knee bows at the name of Jesus, it will be “to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10-11). Therefore, God-centered missions exists for the sake of the name of Jesus.

A Missionary Prayer for God’s Name to Be Hallowed

The first two petitions of the Lord’s Prayer are perhaps the clearest statement of all in the teachings of Jesus that missions is driven by the passion of God to be glorified among the nations. “Hallowed be your name. Your

kingdom come” (Matt 6:9-10). Here Jesus teaches us to ask God to hallow his name and to make his kingdom come. This is a missionary prayer. Its aim is to engage the passion of God for his name among those who forget or revile the name of God (Ps 9:17; 74:18). To hallow God’s name means to put it in a class by itself and to cherish and honor it above every claim to our allegiance or affection. Jesus’ primary concern—the very first petition of the prayer he teaches—is that more and more people, and more and more peoples, come to hallow God’s name. This is the reason the universe exists. Missions exists because this hallowing doesn’t.

How Much He Must Suffer for the Name

When Paul was converted on the Damascus road, Jesus Christ became the supreme

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the Church. Worship is.

treasure and joy of his life. “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil 3:8). It was a costly allegiance. What Paul learned there in Damascus was not only the joy of sins forgiven and fellowship with the King of the universe, but also how much he would have to suffer. Jesus sent Ananias to him with this message: “I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:16). Paul’s missionary sufferings were “for the sake of the name.” When he came near the end of his life and was warned not to go to Jerusalem, he answered, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13). For Paul, the glory of the name of Jesus and his reputation in the world was more important than life.

“For the Sake of His Name Among All the Nations”

Paul makes crystal clear in Romans 1:5 that his mission and calling are for the name of Christ among all the nations: “We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.”

The apostle John described the motive of early Christian missionaries in the same way. He wrote to tell one of his churches that they should send out Christian brothers in a manner “worthy of God.” And the reason he gives is that “they have gone out for the sake of the name, taking nothing from the Gentiles” (3 Jn 6-7).

John Stott comments on these two texts (Rom 1:5; 3 Jn 7): “They knew that God had superexalted Jesus, enthroning him at his right hand and bestowing upon him the highest rank, in order that every tongue should confess his lordship. They longed that Jesus should receive the honor due to his name.”⁵ This longing is not a dream but a certainty. At the bottom of all our hope, when everything else has given way, we stand on this great reality: the everlasting, all-sufficient God is infinitely, unwaveringly, and eternally committed to the glory of his great and holy name. For the sake of his fame among the nations he will act. His name will not be profaned for ever. The mission of the church will be victorious. He will vindicate his people and his cause in all the earth.

The Power of Missions When Love for the Lost is Weak

Compassion for the lost is a high and beautiful motive for missionary labor. Without it, we lose the sweet humility of sharing a treasure we have freely received. But we have seen that compassion for people must not be detached from passion for the glory of God. John Dawson, a leader in Youth With a Mission, gives an additional reason why this is so. He points out that a strong feeling of love for “the lost” or “the world” is a very difficult experience to sustain and is not always recognizable when it comes.

Have you ever wondered what it feels like to have a love for the lost? This is a term we use as part of our Christian jargon. Many believers search their hearts in condemnation, looking for the arrival of some feeling of benevolence that will propel them into bold evangelism. It will never happen. It is impossible to love “the lost.” You can’t feel deeply for an abstraction or a concept. You would find it impossible to love deeply an unfamiliar individual portrayed in a photograph, let

alone a nation or a race or something as vague as “all lost people.”

Don’t wait for a feeling of love in order to share Christ with a stranger. You already love your heavenly Father, and you know that this stranger is created by Him, but separated from Him, so take those first steps in evangelism because you love God. It is not primarily out of a compassion for humanity that we share our faith or pray for the lost; it is first of all, love for God. The Bible says in Ephesians 6:7-8: “With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.”

Humanity does not deserve the love of God any more than you or I do. We should never be Christian humanists, taking Jesus to poor sinful people, reducing Jesus to some kind of product that will better their lot. People deserve to be damned, but Jesus, the suffering Lamb of God, deserves the reward of his suffering.⁶

The Miracle of Love That Weeps

Dawson’s words are a wise and encouraging warning not to limit our mission engagement to the level of compassion we feel for people we do not know. However, I don’t want to minimize what the Lord is able to do in giving people a supernatural burden of love for distant peoples. For example, Wesley Duewel of OMS International tells the story of his mother’s remarkable burden for China and India:

My mother for years carried a hunger for the people of China and India. For many years practically every day as she prayed during family prayer for these two nations she would break down and weep before she finished praying. Her love was deep and constant, and she will be rewarded eternally for her years of love-burden for those lands. This is the love of Jesus reaching out and mediated through Christians by the Holy Spirit.⁷

I emphasize again that the motive of compassion and the motive of zeal for the glory of God are not separate. God-centered compassion (which is the only kind that cares for people eternally) weeps over the misery of people who reject God’s glory and drink the

cup of his wrath. But this weeping is not because of the loss of Christian joy. If that were true, unbelievers could blackmail the saints and hold their happiness hostage for eternity. No, the weeping of the saints at the loss of precious souls is, paradoxically, the weeping of joy in God. And the reason joy can weep is because it longs to be extended and expanded into the lives of others who are perishing. Therefore, the weeping of compassion is the weeping of joy impeded in the extension of itself to another.

The Call of God

God is calling us above all else to be the kind of people whose theme and passion is the supremacy of God in all of life. No one will be able to rise to the magnificence of the missionary cause who does not feel the magnificence of Christ. There will be no big world vision without a big God. There will be no passion to draw others into our worship where there is no passion for worship.

God is pursuing with omnipotent passion a worldwide purpose of gathering joyful worshipers for himself from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. He has an

inexhaustible enthusiasm for the supremacy of his name among the nations. Therefore let us bring our affections into line with his, and, for the sake of his name, let us renounce the quest for worldly comforts, and join his global purpose. If we do this, God's omnipotent commitment to his name will be over us like a banner, and we will not lose, in spite of many tribulations (Acts 9:16; Rom 8:35-39). Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. The Great Commission is first to delight yourself in the Lord (Ps 37:4). And then to declare, "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" (Ps 67:4). In this way God will be glorified from beginning to end and worship will empower the missionary enterprise till the coming of the Lord.

"Great and wonderful are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the ages!
Who shall not fear and glorify your name,
O Lord?
For you alone are holy.
All nations shall come and worship you,
for your judgments have been revealed"
(Rev 15:3-4). 🙏

Endnotes

1. Quoted in Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), p. 140.
2. I have tried to unfold this wonderful truth of the Father's delight in himself, that is, his Son in *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1991), Chapter One, "The Pleasure of God in His Son."
3. See especially "Appendix One: The Goal of God in Redemptive History," in *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Portland: Multnomah Press, original 1986, 2nd edition 1996), pp. 227-238; and the entirety of *The Pleasures of God*.
4. I am aware that the Bible is replete with pictures of God's people serving him. I have dealt in some detail with the way service can be conceived biblically so as not to put God in the category of an employer who depends on wage earners. See *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, pp. 138-143.
5. John Stott, "The Bible in World Evangelization," in Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981), Ch. 4, this volume.
6. John Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for God* (Lake Mary, Florida: Creation House, 1989), pp. 208-209.
7. Wesley Duewel, *Ablaze for God* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press of Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), pp. 115-116.

Study Questions

1. Explain the sentence: "Missions exists because worship doesn't."
2. Piper speaks of passion for God's glory in the same breath as saying that God is supreme and requires worship. How can we authentically desire what God has required? How does this intentional passion motivate missions?

Beyond Duty

Tim Dearborn



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From *Beyond Duty*, 1997. Used by permission of World Vision Inc., Federal Way, WA.

We often focus on the question: “What must we do to obey the Great Commission, make disciples of all nations and hasten the return of our Lord?” This is the wrong beginning point, for it locks us into a human-centered perspective. If we begin with the human-centered orientation, we continually feel constrained by insufficient resources—and the tasks are far greater than we can possibly fulfill.

Biblical priorities reflected again and again in Scripture ask us to begin instead with these questions:

- Who is the triune God?
- What is God doing in the world?
- How are we to participate with God in his redemptive purposes?

Mission is ultimately not a human response to human need. The Church’s involvement in mission is its privileged participation in the actions of the triune God.

A Singular Passion

Lack of interest in mission is not fundamentally caused by an absence of compassion or commitment, nor by a lack of information or exhortation. And lack of interest in mission is not remedied by more shocking statistics, more gruesome stories or more emotionally manipulative commands to obedience. It is best remedied by intensifying peoples’ passion for Christ, so that the passions of his heart become the passions that propel our hearts.

Mission must never have first place in the Church’s life. The Church is to have but one Lord—one passion—the One in whom all the fullness of God dwells, who has reconciled all things to himself (Col 1:19-20). If the Church today is in need of a conversion, it is always and only to Jesus Christ. We must say an emphatic, “No!” to lesser gods who clamor for our allegiance, and a living and joyous, “Yes!” to the One in whom all creation is summed up.

It is insufficient to proclaim that the Church of God has a mission in the world. Rather, *the God of mission has a Church in the world*. Grasp this inversion of subject and object, and participation in God’s mission will become a joyous, life-giving privilege. Miss it, and mission involvement will eventually degenerate into a wearisome, overwhelming duty.

If the Church is faithful to the gospel, then its focus, passion and delight are always and only Jesus Christ. Once our

hearts beat in time with that of our Lord, we can experience a joyously passionate engagement in mission.

Mission's Integrating Theme

So many conflicting and competing missions cry for our attention. We're so easily drawn and quartered by the pull of divergent needs and calls. Without a central understanding of the biblical emphasis on the kingdom of God, our terminology becomes one of "I bring you bad news of sad problems."

Efforts to provoke interest in mission are often based on bad news—natural catastrophes, complex humanitarian disasters, unreached people groups, oppressed and exploited minorities, urban or suburban problems and civil wars.

These things are important, but the gospel begins with "I bring you good news of great joy!"

Woven into the fabric of our Christian faith is good news! And yet we've made mission the discussion of bad news and unmet needs. Do any of these sound familiar?

- Thousands of people every day are slipping into Christless eternities.
- 34,000 children die every day from malnutrition and preventable illnesses.
- There are thousands of unreached people groups without a church.
- More Christians have been killed for their faith in 20th century than in all others combined.
- Genocide, ethnic cleansing, illiteracy, homelessness, poverty, oppression...the list goes on and on.

Sad News of Unsolvable Problems

I must confess I once challenged and provoked people into mission using statistics similar to those mentioned above. I'm not at all suggesting that these are not real needs. The point is this: How shall we respond to these needs?

Good-hearted people always want to respond with compassion and kindness. We worked ourselves into exhaustion with exhortations to give more, do more, be more, care more, serve more, love more, sacrifice more. As fruitful as this could be, something always seemed to be missing.

My church members—including myself—often seemed exhausted. Missionaries we sent seemed overwhelmed by the arduous duty and responsibility on their shoulders.

Materials written to motivate the church in mission are filled with descriptions of tasks we must perform, responsibilities to be carried out, our Lord's commandment and commission to the church; and the desperate needs of the unreached, undernourished and oppressed. And so the Church moves out in mission from a sense of duty, obligation and responsibility to attempt these tasks.

Not surprisingly, this commitment to the missionary enterprise of the Church produces exhausted servants. The tasks are so great and our resources appear to be so small. Yes, we must confront huge problems and fundamental issues—but in the context of a coming kingdom, not in the context of ever-deepening chaos. Missions is not ultimately our response to great need.

No wonder the Church and many organizations' supporters are increasingly disinterested in mission! People cannot handle relentless exposure to catastrophes and crises. This is not the gospel. The gospel is good news of great joy!

The Kingdom of God is Good News of Great Hope

We are witnesses to great hope, not merely grievous hurt. This should be deeply woven into our psyche as Christians. Scripture tells us, "since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us give thanks" (Heb 12:28).

Frankly, we have not set our hearts toward hope. We look at the world and it seems to us that everything is being shaken. Everything seems to be teetering on the brink of disaster—and yet the undergirding news in Scripture is that we have a kingdom that cannot be shaken. The author of Hebrews affirms this, saying,

"...we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (Heb 6:18-19).

Christ's Great Victory

If we have this utterly reliable anchor, this certain and steadfast hope, then it is actually blasphemous to focus our missionary communication on descriptions of the great void of unmet needs in the world. P.T. Forsyth makes the statement that:

The weakness of much current mission work is that [we] betray the sense that what is yet to be done is greater than what [Christ] has already done. The world's gravest need is less than Christ's great victory.

If we understand biblical faith, we will understand that what Christ has already accomplished is far more determinative, significant, complete and important than anything yet to be done.

In my work with World Vision and discussions with its leaders, we have begun to recognize that sometimes we've inadequately represented mission in our well-intentioned promotional and fund-raising activities. We've perfected the art of portraying truly heart-rending stories, and providing people with pictures and descriptions of real crises, needs and disasters. God has used our best efforts, though flawed, and his people have responded from compassionate hearts. However, if Forsyth is right—and the Bible is emphatic in its documentation of the truth of his statement—then we must change how we communicate mission opportunities. Instead of relying entirely on presentations of need, we must begin inviting people to participate in God's work by making known to all people the "mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9).

Privileged Participation— Not Exhausted Action

Without this news of great hope and full confidence in a completely sovereign God, we will have the sense of mission as an exhausting human enterprise. We'll feel as though we've been handed a mandate, a commission and a duty, and that the job is completely up to us. This inevitably leads to burnout. Mission was never intended to be an exhausting human enterprise. Mission is our privileged participation in the life-giving action of the triune God.

Seeking First the Kingdom

Jesus invites us to participate in what God is doing in bringing his kingdom. But what does that look like? We all know Matthew 6:33: "Strive first for the kingdom of God." If the kingdom was so central to Jesus' life and ministry, then we cannot afford to be fuzzy about its meaning and significance.

Look at what Jesus said about the kingdom of God:

- The kingdom of God was the subject of Jesus' first message when he told the people that the Kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1:15, Luke 4:18).
- The kingdom was also the subject of his last message (Acts 1:1-8).
- Jesus himself said the kingdom was the goal, the intention and the purpose of all his teaching (Luke 8:10).
- Even Jesus' miracles were called "signs of the kingdom."
- We all know the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done."
- Jesus even goes so far as to say that the end of this age will not come until the gospel of the kingdom has been proclaimed to all ethnic groups (Matt 24:14).

Signs of the Kingdom

Without this integrating vision of the kingdom of God, mission involvement can degenerate into competition among our own programs, ambitions and desires. When the kingdom of God is the goal of all we do, then competing calls and opposing ambitions fade under the sound of the King's marching orders. To engage in mission is to participate in the King's business.

God Himself brings his Kingdom to fruition. He establishes it—not us. God chooses to let us share in his work. We are not told in Scripture that we bring, cause or create the Kingdom. We are called by the Spirit of God to participate with him in building God's kingdom, but the responsibility is his. This is not merely a semantic issue. These terms mean the difference between something that is life-giving, or something that can be death-dealing. We have a pivotal role in the coming kingdom of God. The Spirit of God is sent to manifest signs of the Kingdom through us. But the work remains God's.

Signs of Kingdom Life

Jesus' miracles were signs of kingdom life. Because he chose to limit himself to time and space, he could cast out only a few demons, and feed only a few people miraculously. In comparison to the population of the world at the time, relatively few were privileged to see Jesus in action. Only those living in Palestine and specifically around Galilee had the opportunity to experience a part of what the kingdom was about. But Jesus' reputation began to spread, so that when he came to a new town, people brought the afflicted to him for healing. Every act of healing illustrated the message, "The kingdom of God has come near...to you" (Luke 10:9). All of God's fullness is on the way. Whole towns and regions were transformed by the hope of the kingdom.

In a similar way, the late Mother Teresa, for example, only cared for about 200,000 people in Calcutta, but all 18 million people in that city knew that life could be different because of her example. In fact, her good works have come to be known in the global village and have impacted the world.

God desires that we be living signs of the kingdom, to provide visual aids of what life will look like one day when the kingdom is fully here. We will not bring the kingdom or build the kingdom, but our privilege is to live out previews of "coming attractions," revealing what this kingdom will look like.

Both Hands of the Gospel

The King seeks to restore the well-being and wholeness of his creation. The Church is not to be an underground railway to heaven, hiding people on earth until they can escape to glory. Nor is the Church to be another philanthropic organization, kindly doing good works and dispensing aid to those in need.



Rather, the Church is the Body of Christ, consciously and explicitly participating in the establishment of his reign on earth. The Church is to be consciously and explicitly Christ's, regardless of the activity.

Therefore, we extend both hands of the gospel: the hand inviting people to repentance, faith and eternal reconciliation with God through Christ Jesus, and the hand manifesting deeds of mercy and compassion, extending the goodness of God's Kingdom on earth. One is not a means to the other. Both are equally significant to life in the eternal kingdom as described by Scripture.

No Longer a Somber Duty

To engage in mission is to participate in the coming of the kingdom of God. When the King and his kingdom are the unifying, controlling source and goal of all we do, then competing calls and opposing ambitions fade under the sound of the King's marching orders. Participation in God's mission is no longer a somber duty. It becomes a joyous privilege and an adventure of passion and hope. 🌍

Study Questions

1. In the long run, can it be counterproductive to provoke interest in mission by moving people to be concerned with human need?
2. What does Dearborn mean by "signs of the kingdom?"
3. How can missions become a joyous passion instead of a duty?

On Mission With God

Henry T. Blackaby and Avery T. Willis, Jr.



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God is on mission. He has been on mission throughout history to accomplish His purpose throughout the earth. Each time we see God in the Bible, He is acting in accordance with His purpose: to reveal Himself in order that His name would be glorified, that His Kingdom would be established and that some from every people would be reconciled to Himself.

God on Mission

Throughout history in order that...

- God's Name is Glorified
- God's Kingdom is Established
- The World is Reconciled to Himself

God Reveals Himself to Reconcile the World to Himself

God has chosen to reveal Himself, His purpose and His ways, involving His people with Him as He invites all the world's peoples to know and worship Him.

- Through Abraham, God revealed Himself as the Lord, the Almighty and the Provider, who wants to bless all the peoples of the world through His people.
- Through Moses, God revealed Himself as the I AM THAT I AM, whose plan is to show His glory to the world through His people, who are to be a kingdom of priests to all peoples.
- Through David, God revealed that His Seed would rule all nations and His Kingdom would be for all peoples.
- Through Jesus, God revealed His love and His purpose to reconcile the world to Himself through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.
- Through Paul, God revealed that the mystery of the ages is that He includes all peoples in His redemption.
- Through John, God revealed that some from every nation, tribe, tongue and people will worship Him forever.

He is at work all the time to the very end of time bringing about this revelation, to reconcile all peoples to Himself.

When this mission is fulfilled, it will not only be the fullest expression of earth's praise, it will be the fullest revelation of God's love.

God Initiates His Work Through His People

God has initiated every part of His work throughout history. Instead of carrying out His mission on His own, God chooses to accomplish His mission in a very personal way. He chooses to involve His people with Him, working through them to accomplish His purposes. When He is about to take a further step to advance His mission, He comes to one or more of His servants. He lets them know what He is about to do. He invites them to join Him, bidding them to adjust their lives to Him so that He can accomplish every aspect of His mission through them. The prophet Amos indicated that, "The Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

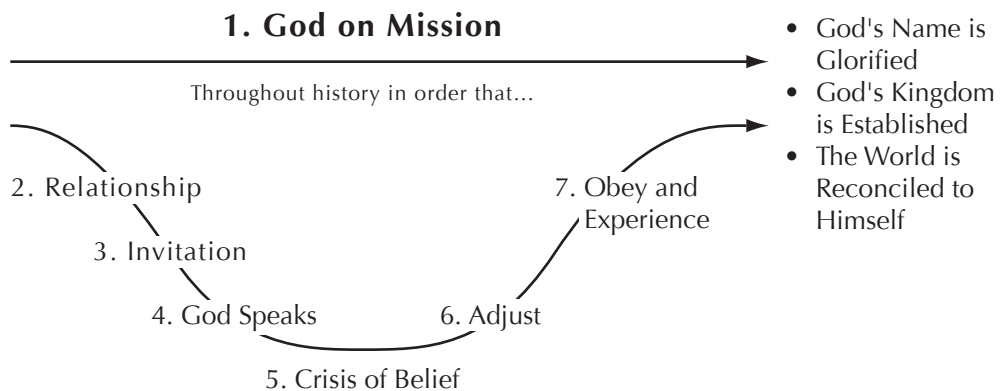
When God was ready to judge the world, He came to Noah. He intended to glorify Himself by preserving righteousness on the earth. He was going to do it through Noah. When God was ready to set apart a people for Himself, He came to Abraham. God was going to accomplish His will through Abraham. When God heard the cry of the children of Israel and decided to deliver them, He appeared to Moses. God came to Moses because of His purpose. He planned to deliver Israel through Moses and reveal His purpose for them. As He worked through Moses and Israel, God revealed Himself to the entire world.

Moses' experience is a good illustration of how God deals with His people. The diagram below shows seven realities that Moses learned, that are true for all of God's people. This process can help you understand how God is welcoming you to be part of His mission.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God worked in the same way as He did with Moses, inviting His people to be on mission with Him. His ways are the same today. God reveals Himself to us so we can know Him personally. Then He initiates a relationship with us, and invites us to join Him. As God reveals Himself to us we often experience a crisis of belief that calls for major adjustments in our lives so that we can relate to Him and His mission. As we make the adjustments and obey Him, He moves us into the middle of His activity, in order to experience Him and to enjoy the astounding significance of being on mission with God.

Jesus: On Mission with His Father

God wants us to be like Jesus, who always obeyed Him. Jesus indicated through His life that He was joining the Father in His mission. He announced that He had come not to do His own will, but the will of the Father who had sent Him (Matt 26:42; John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:29; 17:4). To know the Father's will, Jesus said He watched to see what the Father was doing. Then Jesus joined Him in that work: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (John 5:17,19). Jesus



listened to the Father and whatever He heard the Father say, these are the things that He would say (John 14:10-11). Jesus did not take the initiative but depended on the Father to reveal Himself and what He was doing (John 17:6-8) and He bore witness to the Father, and the Father worked through Him (John 14:10).

The Father loved the Son, and took the initiative to come to Him and reveal what He (the Father) was doing, or was about to do. Jesus kept on looking for the Father's activity around Him, so that He could unite His life with His Father's mission.

Knowing and Working in God's Ways

Even a casual reader of the Bible can see that God's ways and plans are so different from the ways that people accomplish their goals. God said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isa 55:8). On their own, people achieve goals by their efficiency and ingenuity. With God on His mission, you must follow Kingdom principles to accomplish Kingdom purposes.

Our ways may seem good to us. We may succeed in moderate accomplishments. When we try to do the work of God in our own ways, however, we will never see the mighty power of God in what we do, and the world will not see God revealing Himself to them. It is only by God's power that people come to know and worship God. When God accomplishes His purposes in His ways through us, people will come to know God. They will recognize that what has happened can only be explained by God. He will receive the glory!

Learning to follow God's ways may be more important than making sincere attempts to do His will. God is eager to reveal His ways to us because they are the only way to accomplish His purposes. God wants to complete His work through you. He can only do that as you adjust your life to Him and to His ways. Start looking for how God welcomes you to join Him and to experience Him. He has involved His people on mission with Him in the same ways all through history.

God at Work

Our Response

1. God is always at work around you to accomplish His mission.	Expect God to encounter you to reveal what He is doing near you or among distant peoples to reconcile a lost world to Himself.
2. God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.	Respond to God as He invites you into a covenant relationship of promise and obedience. God wants to deepen His love relationship with you far more than He wants merely to utilize you for a task.
3. God invites you to become involved in His work when He reveals Himself and His work to you.	Respond when God calls you to Himself to be on mission with Him.
4. God speaks to you by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances and the church, to reveal Himself, His purposes and His ways.	Respond as God prepares you for His mission as you learn His ways with others.
5. God's invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.	Obey as God sends you where He can best work through you to accomplish His mission.
6. Expect God to empower you as you make the life changes that open you to co-labor with God according to His ways.	Make major adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing.
7. Expect God to guide you on His mission to reveal Himself and to reconcile a lost world to Himself.	Come to know God by experience as you obey Him and He accomplishes His work through you.

Knowing and Doing God's Will

How can you know God's will? Since all true mission is really God on His mission, there is not a different mission for you, for me, for the people who lived a thousand years ago, or for believers on the other side of the world. He has never been willing that any should perish. God's mission is to glorify His name, to establish His kingdom and to reconcile the world to Himself.

Within this immense global purpose, God does not leave you to guess His will. Since He is pursuing a love relationship with you, you cannot know His will without knowing Him better. As you come to know Him better, He reveals His will in a clearer way. And you are changed as well. You will find that you want to do His will more and more (Phil 2:13).

On mission with God, you will experience that God is love. His will is always best. He pursues a love relationship with you so you can join Him in His mission.

On mission with God, you will experience that God is all-knowing. His directions are always right. He reveals them when you are obedient to Him.

On mission with God, you will experience that God is all-powerful. He enables you to

accomplish His will when you are totally dependent on Him.

Let God orient you to Himself and then you will be oriented to His will. The servant does not tell the Master what kind of assignment he needs. The servant waits on his Master for the assignment. As you obey Him, God will prepare you for the assignment that is just right for you.

On Mission with Jesus

Christians are Kingdom people and Christ Himself is the eternal King over His kingdom. He "has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father" (Rev 1:6). You are called into a partnership with Christ the King. In this partnership, you will become involved in His mission to reconcile a lost world to God. To be related to Christ is to be on mission with Him. You cannot be in relationship with Jesus and not be on mission. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

Jesus was on mission with the Father, and He calls every one of His followers to join Him in that relationship of love, power and purpose. Never get over how amazing this really is. Nothing could be more precious than to follow God on mission in the same way that Jesus did. 🌟

Study Questions

1. "You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing." What adjustments did each of these biblical servants have to make to obey God's call: Noah (Gen 6-7), Moses (Ex 3-4) and Paul (Acts 13:1-3; 16:6-10)?
2. What adjustments would you have to make in your life if God were to call you now into a different ministry or to live in a different place?
3. Do you agree that every Christian is being sent "on mission" by Jesus (John 20:21)? If you agree, discuss how every Christian can be taught and trained to be ready for mission.

Witness to the World

David J. Bosch

A careful reading of both Old and New Testaments reveals that God himself is the subject of mission. We have here to do with *Missio Dei*, God's mission. One of the ways in which the Old Testament in particular has given expression to the conviction that God is the author of mission is by laying much emphasis on what God rather than man does, almost to the extent of suggesting that man is inactive. That this is not the intention will hopefully become clear.

The "Servant of the Lord"

It has for a long time been customary to refer to the "Servant of the Lord" in Isaiah 40-55 as the missionary par excellence. This interpretation flows from the centrality of the concept "witness" in those chapters.¹ The "servant" is, however, not an active missionary sent out to the nations. The verb "yôš.î" in Isaiah 42:1 is not to be translated as "carry out," "bring to," but rather as "cause to become visible." The NEB translation of this verse is therefore preferable: "...my servant... will *make justice shine* on the nations." It is not the servant's own activities which are emphasized, but the fact that God works in and through him. He is, we are told, brought into the courtroom to witness in the case between God and the nations. He is, however, a very remarkable and, according to our standards, useless witness, for he can neither see nor speak (Isa 42:18-20; 43:8-13). The purpose of this metaphor is, once again, not to say that the witness is indeed blind, deaf and mute, but that, in the final analysis, Yahweh himself is the Witness.

The "servant" of the Lord in Isaiah 40-55 is a paradigm of Israel. Israel's election and existence has no goal in itself, but through Israel God is busy with the nations. Her election is a prolepsis, an anticipation. In and through her God stretches his hand out to the world. His salvific activities in Israel are a sign and signal to the nations. She is called to be "a light to all peoples" (Isa 42:6). God intends to do more than merely restore the tribes of Judah and bring back the descendants of Israel: "I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to earth's farthest bounds" (Isa 49:6).

For many years it has been customary to argue that the Old Testament views mission centripetally—the nations coming towards Israel—whereas the New Testament understanding of mission is centrifugal—from the center, Israel or the Church, missionaries move outward



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into the world. It is true that the Old Testament views mission predominantly in centripetal categories, but not exclusively so. The metaphor of light in Isaiah 42:6, 49:6 and elsewhere, is particularly appropriate to give expression to both a centripetal and a centrifugal movement. A light shining in the darkness draws people towards it, centripetally, yet at the same time it goes outward, crossing frontiers and allowing God's salvation to reach "to earth's farthest bounds" (Isa 49:6).

In the Old Testament, Israel's missionary significance lies, however, predominantly within the framework of centripetal categories. This explains the centrality of Jerusalem or Zion in the Old Testament's universalistic passages. The centripetal category is employed to give expression to the conviction that God, not Israel, is the author of mission.

Zechariah 8 gives classical expression to this. It is Yahweh who, after the exile, gathers his scattered people from the nations (vv. 7-8) and instructs them (vv. 9-19). The nations observe this and spontaneously express the desire also to go to Jerusalem. As many as ten men "from nations of every language" will pluck the robe of a Jew and say: "We will go with you because we have heard that God is with you" (v. 23). It is not Israel's faith, example and witness that act as a magnet here; it is God's faithfulness to Israel that causes the nations to come. And yet, not for a single moment does this suggest that Israel's faith, example and witness are dispensable. Far from it. Once again, Israel herself is fully involved in God's mission to the nations. She was a pagan whom God elected to salvation; but she retains her new and special position as "non-pagan" only in so far as she accepts and lives up to her responsibility in the world. Primarily this means remaining true to Yahweh, but then this implies remaining true to the world, in letting her light shine forth and being an example to the world. Israel is to witness by word and deed.

God and Man as Competitors?

It would, however, be wrong to find the real difference between Old and New Testaments in the centripetal-centrifugal distinction. At least three observations can be made to establish that that distinction is a relative one.

First, the centripetal missionary dimension is by no means confined to the Old Testament. It is characteristic of the New Testament also. Astrologers came from the East to Jerusalem to look for the Savior of the world (Matt 2). Simeon refers to the deliverance which God has prepared "in full view of all the nations: a light that will be a revelation to the heathen..." (Luke 2:31-32). Quoting Isaiah 56:7, Jesus referred to the temple as "a house of prayer for all the nations" (Mark 11:17). The cleansing of the temple moreover, suggests that the restoration of Israel should precede the pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem. The Roman army officer coming to Jesus (Matt 8:5) and the Greeks traveling to Jerusalem to see Jesus (John 12:20) give expression to the same idea: Salvation is to be found in Israel and the nations who wish to partake of it should go there. After all, "it is from the Jews that salvation comes" (John 4:22). The world's salvation can be consummated at one place only—in Jerusalem; this explains the prominence of this city in all four Gospels, especially that of Luke (the non-Jew!).

Secondly, we have to point out that the centripetal-centrifugal distinction may easily lead to "true" mission being understood as only centrifugal, as this suggests the crossing of geographical boundaries and proclamation to pagans by word of mouth. However, the crossing of geographical boundaries constitutes only one element of what the Bible understands by "mission." Mission is more than preaching to pagans.

Thirdly, there is a tendency to understand mission in the Old Testament as entirely and exclusively "God's work." Some of Jesus' contemporaries indeed believed that God's work, by definition, excluded any human involvement. This understanding implies that New Testament centrifugal mission, in which man is ostensibly more actively involved, might then be labeled "man's work." With this, however, we enter a very slippery area where God's activity excludes man's and vice versa. Then God and man become competitors.

We want to put it, categorically, that this is a false conception that can only be detrimental to the Church. The Bible speaks with a disarming candor here. The disciples are seed (Matt 13:38) and at the same time laborers

bringing in the harvest (Matt 9:37-38); they are members of the flock (Matt 10:16; Luke 12:32; John 10:1-16) but also shepherds (Matt 10:6; John 21:15-17); they are in need of absolution (Matt 18:23-27) but can also give absolution to others (Matt 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23). God has revealed to them the "secrets of the Kingdom" (Matt 13:11), yet they have to seek the Kingdom (Matt 5:20; 6:33; Luke 13:24). They are God's children (John 1:12), yet have to become that by loving their enemies (Matt 5:44-45). They have received eternal life (John 3:16-17; 11:25-26) yet still have to go through the gate that leads to life (Matt 7:14). Because they have done what Jesus expected of the rich young ruler, they are "perfect" (Matt 19:21; cf. Mark 10:28), yet have to keep watch and pray so that they will not fall into temptation (Matt 26:41). The believers must work out their own salvation in fear and trembling, for(!) it is God who works in them (Phil 2:12-13). Therefore Paul can, quite unselfconsciously, call them "God's fellow-workers" (1 Cor 3:9). The key to these apparently complete paradoxes lies in the New Testament expression "in Christ."

By God's grace I am what I am, nor has his grace been given to me in vain; on the contrary, in my labors I have outdone them all—not I, indeed, but the grace of God working with me (1 Cor 15:10).

If, however, we regard God and man as competitors and put God's work against man's, we soon land ourselves in one of two untenable positions. If we emphasize only the one side, our faith adopts the blind, unbending characteristics of fate; if we emphasize only the other side, we become fanatics and arrogant zealots.

There is, as the examples quoted from Scripture indicate, a creative tension between God's work and man's, and any attempt to explain it by means of a balanced formula or to codify it precisely in a dogma, risks destroying its tender mystery. To recognize this is of the utmost importance for the biblical foundation of mission.

In Christ

Many scholars have underlined the remarkable fact that the so-called "Great Commission" (Matt 28:18-20 and parallels) seems to play no role in the New Testament Church

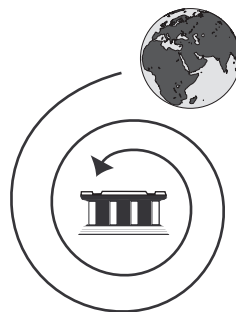
Two Forces *Jonathan Lewis*

In the fulfillment of Israel's obligation, two forces were at work. The first of these was an **attractive force**, symbolized first by the tabernacle and then by the temple in Jerusalem. These buildings were the places where God's name dwelt. They were holy places, the heart of Israel's religious ceremony and practice. Yet they were not intended just to serve Israel. When Solomon dedicated the temple, it was clear to him that the temple had a wider purpose.

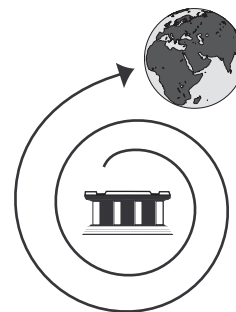
The Bible records several other foreigners who were attracted to Israel because of the evidence of

God's blessing, including Ruth, a Moabite woman, and Naaman the Syrian. Hundreds of other

unrecorded accounts are evidenced by the fact that on the day of Pentecost there were devout men



An Attractive Force
"Come to the Blessing"
Centripetal Force



An Expansive Force
"Go to the Nations"
Centrifugal Force

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herself, because it is never repeated nor referred to. Two reasons may perhaps explain this silence.

First, the Great Commission is not a commission in the ordinary sense of the word. It is, rather, a creative statement in the manner

of Genesis 1:3 and elsewhere: "Let there be..."

Or, as Lesslie Newbigin puts it, with reference to Acts 1:8: "The word, 'You shall be my witnesses,' is not a command to be obeyed but a promise to be trusted."²

It was a promise, however, that could only be perceived in the act of obeying, as Peter discovered when he visited Cornelius and said in amazement, "I now see how true it is that God has no favorites..." (Acts 10:34). Paul referred to it as a "mystery," a "secret" only now revealed to him in the act of preaching the gospel to all people, "that through the gospel the Gentiles are joint heirs with the Jews, part of the same body, sharers together in the promise made in Christ Jesus" (Eph 3:6).

**Mission in the New Testament
is more than a matter of obeying a
command. It is, rather, the result of
an encounter with Christ.**

A second reason for the silence about the Great Commission in the early church lies in the fact that a mission to the Gentiles was never at issue in the early Church—despite the views of scholars such as Ferdinand Hahn, Ernst Käsemann and others. Heinrich

Kasting has convincingly refuted their arguments and shown that the Gentile mission was never a point of controversy in the early Church. Opinions differed only on the way in which Gentiles were

to be brought into the Church, especially on the question of circumcision.³ In these circumstances, a reference to a "missionary command" would have been irrelevant.

Both these considerations demonstrate that mission in the New Testament is more than a matter of obeying a command. It is, rather, the result of an encounter with Christ. To meet Christ, means to become caught up in a mission to the world.

Mission is a privilege in which to participate. Thus Paul introduces himself to the

from "every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5) staying in Jerusalem. God's plan to reach the nations, however, includes much more than a passive attraction.

A second force in operation was an active, **expansive force** which operated to send God's message beyond the borders of Israel. Some examples of Israelites who were used to proclaim God's message to other nations include captives such as Joseph and exiles such as Daniel and Esther. Or consider the prophet Jonah, who was commanded to preach repentance to Nineveh. Jeremiah was appointed as a "prophet to the nations," and it is speculated that he or other messengers may have traveled widely in delivering his many oracles. Nor did God use only the great

in this role of bearing His message. It was a little Israelite slave girl who announced His healing power to Naaman, the mighty but leprous captain of the Syrian army.

Some might argue that these cases are exceptions and would point out that many of these people were captives or otherwise ministered against their wills. However, volunteerism has never been the deciding factor in furthering God's mission. God will use His people to spread His message, whether they are willing agents or not. Israel's tragic history would have been considerably different if she had been a willing instrument of God's redemptive plan. She was not. God used captivity and exile both to judge Israel's disobedience and to extend her

witness beyond her borders.

These two dynamic forces are also present today. On a global scale, many are attracted to "Christian" nations because of the evidence of God's blessing through material wealth and stability. In communities, congregations where God's power and grace are evident also draw people. On a personal level, godly character attracts those who want to possess those same qualities. Yet the gospel will not be spread to all nations simply through passive attraction. There are too many social, cultural, and geographic barriers that need to be crossed for this to happen. God's people must be willing to go to the nations with the good news if they hope to fulfill their covenant obligations.

Church in Rome as somebody who, through Christ, has “received the *privilege* of a commission in his name to lead to faith and obedience men in all nations” (Rom 1:5). Mission, for Paul, is the logical consequence of his encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road.

Similarly, in the so-called “christological hymn” (Phil 2:6-11), there is no reference to a missionary command. And yet, the worldwide mission falls clearly within the purview of the hymn: “...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess, ‘Jesus is Lord’” (vv. 10-11). Mission is therefore, according to the New Testament, derived from Christology. This is how it appears in another early Christian hymn:

He who was manifested in the body,
vindicated in the spirit, seen by angels;
who was proclaimed among the nations,
believed in throughout the world,
glorified in high heaven (1 Tim 3:16).

Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 and Ephesians 2:14-18, mission is christologically founded as the message of the reconciliation of the world with God; the “service of reconciliation,” entrusted to the Church, proceeds from the fact that Jesus, with regard to Jews and Gentiles, has broken down, “in his own body of flesh, the enmity which stood like a dividing wall between them,” thus creating “out of the two a single new humanity in himself.”

The Church, therefore, is involved in mission because Jesus was given a name above all names (Phil 2:9), and declared Son of God by a mighty act in that he rose from the dead (Rom 1:4); because God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19) and Jews and Gentiles to one another in a single body to himself through the cross (Eph 2:16).

If the Church is “in Christ,” she is involved in mission. Her whole existence then has a

Mission is a privilege in which to participate.

missionary character. Her conduct as well as her words will convince the unbelievers (1 Pet 2:12) and put their ignorance and stupidity to silence (1 Pet 2:15). “God’s scattered

people,” to whom 1 Peter is addressed (cf. 1:1), are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation and a people claimed by God for his own. This new status in Christ has a clear purpose: to proclaim the triumphs of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light (cf. 1 Pet 2:9). Because of this new life in Christ, mission “happens,” so to speak, for we read about unbelievers calling upon the Christians for an explanation of the hope that is in them (1 Pet 3:15). This hope was so conspicuous, that the unbelievers became both curious and jealous. To put it in Pauline language: this was the way in which God spread abroad the fragrance of the knowledge of himself (2 Cor 2:14). Wherever the apostle lived, spoke and acted as “Christ’s fragrance,” something happened to the surrounding people. 🌿

Endnotes

1. See also Allison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977), pp. 35-47.
2. L. Newbigin, “The Church as Witness,” *Reformed Review*, vol. 35, no. 1 (March 1978), p. 9.
3. See H. Kasting, *Die Anfänge der urchristlichen Mission* (Chr. Kaiser, Munich, 1969), pp. 109-23. Kasting shows that it was Judaistic elements in the early Church, not the “official” early Church herself, which tended to limit salvation to Israel. At a later stage, especially after the first century, the “unofficial,” Judaistic position increasingly became the accepted one in Jewish Christianity. That attitude would ultimately become one of the factors leading to the end of Jewish Christianity.

Study Questions

1. What are some examples of centripetal witness in the Bible? In the modern world?
2. Do your best to describe what Bosch calls a “tender mystery,” the co-working of God and man in mission. What are some biblical truths which describe the paradox that mission is God’s work as well as man’s work?

Is God Colorblind or Colorful?

The Gospel, Globalization and Ethnicity

Miriam Adeney

Isabell Ides was 101 years old when she died last June. A Makah Indian, a member of a whale-hunting people, she lived in the last house on the last road on the farthest northwest tip of the United States. Isabell was known far and wide because she loved and taught Makah culture and language. Hundreds of people learned to weave baskets under her hands. Several generations learned words in their language from her lips. Young mothers brought her their alder-smoked salmon. After chewing a bit, she could tell whether their wood was too dry. Archaeologists brought her newly excavated 3,000-year-old baskets, and she could identify what the baskets were, how they were made, and how they had been used. "It's like losing a library," an anthropologist said at her funeral.

Isabell also taught Sunday School at the Assembly of God church on the reservation. She attributed her long life to her Christian faith.

Did Isabell's basketry matter to God, as well as her Sunday school teaching? How important was her ethnic heritage in the Kingdom's big picture? This question reverberates as we explore globalization.¹



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Adapted from *One World or Many? The Impact of Globalisation on Mission*, edited by Richard Tiplady, 2003. Used by permission of William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA.

Creative Destruction

In the spring of 2001, representatives of 34 nations gathered in Quebec to discuss a free trade agreement that would cover the whole of the Americas. There were many worries. How can there be a level playing field between the US or Canada and Honduras or Bolivia, between some of the richest and some of the poorest countries on the planet? Won't the small ones be gobbled up? Even Brazil, Latin America's largest economy, was skittish.

Into this discussion, US federal Economics Chairman, Alan Greenspan, dropped the phrase "creative destruction." Yes, he said, more open global trade means some "creative destruction." Businesses will close. Jobs will be lost. "There is no doubt," Greenspan (as cited in *Workers*, 2001) stated, "that this transition to the new high-tech economy, of which rising trade is a part, is proving difficult for a large segment of our work force.... The adjustment process is wrenching to an existing work force made redundant largely through no fault of their own." But such trauma is just part of the price of progress. As is often said, you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs. You can't garden without pruning. You can't

use the computer without pressing the delete button now and then. You cannot train as an athlete without sloughing off bad habits. Honing, sharpening, weeding out, paring down—these are positive terms. So Greenspan spoke of the “creative destruction” inherent in globalization. But, he added, “History tells us that not only is it unwise to try to hold back innovation, it is also not possible.”

Ethnicity is one arena of destruction. In today’s global system, local ethnic values are being trampled. Cultural values are more than commodities. They are parts of heritages on which we cannot put a price. Yet, like endangered species, cultural values are being threatened. How should we respond when globalization drowns ethnicity?

A Place in the Story

What is God’s view of ethnicity? God created us in his image, endowed us with creativity, and set us in a world of possibilities and challenges. Applying our God-given creativity, we have developed the cultures of the world.

In the beginning, God affirmed that it was not good for humans to be alone. Humans were made to live in communities of meaning. So God gave his blessing to cultural areas such as the family, the state, work, worship, arts, education, and even festivals. He gave attention to laws which preserved a balanced

ecology, ordered social relations, provided for sanitation, and protected the rights of the weak, the blind, the deaf, widows, orphans, foreigners, the poor, and debtors.

He affirmed the physical world, out of which material culture is developed. He delighted in the very soil and rivers that He gave his people. It was “a land which the Lord your God cares for. The eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year” (Deut 11:12). Knowing the material delights of his people, God put them in:

- A good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills.
- A land of wheat and barley, vines, fig trees, and pomegranates.
- A land of olive oil and honey.
- A land where you will eat bread without scarceness, you will not lack anything in it.
- A land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you may dig brass (Deut 8:7-9).

In the picture language of the Old Testament, God gave people oil to make their faces shine, wine to make their hearts glad, friends like iron to sharpen them, wives like fruit-

ful vines, and children like arrows shot out of their bows. Economic, social, and artistic patterns combine to make up a culture. This is the context within which we live. It is where we were designed to live. Global systems may immerse us in *virtual* realities—media, packaged music, the stock market, sports scores, and news flashes—in which great tragedies are juxtaposed with beer ads. Yet if we are absorbed in the global or virtual level, we miss out on the real rhythms of nature and society. Seed time and harvest, and the health of our soil, trees, and water. Friendship, courtship, marriage,

The Trampling of Ethnic Values

Sembene Ousmane

Take myself, father of a family, and others like me: We are no longer typical, living examples for our children. It’s the cinema, the TV, the video which are the channels for the new cultures, the new values. We, the older generation, are absent in our own families.

I was born in the colonial era. I witnessed all the humiliation and self-abasement my father had to put up with in order to survive. But in the evenings when we came home to our huts, we

rediscovered our culture. It was a refuge. We were ourselves again, we were free. Nowadays the TV is right there inside the hut where in the old days the father, the mother, the aunt held sway and the grandma told her stories and legends. Even that time is now taken away from us. So we are left with a society which is growing more and more impoverished, emptying itself of its creative substance, turning more and more to values it does not create.

Excerpted from “If I Were a Woman, I’d Never Marry an African” by Firinne Ni Chreachain, *African Affairs* vol. 91, p. 244.

parenting, aging, and dying. Creation, use, maintenance, and repair. There are rhythms to living in God's world. These are expressed locally, through specific cultural patterns. Knowing these helps us know ourselves, our potentialities and our limits, and the resources and sequences that weave the fabric for happy choices. They cannot be known at the abstract, global level. Disciplining a child, for example, is not virtual. Being fired from a job is not a media experience. Having a baby is not a game. Coping with cancer is not abstract.

When I lived in the Philippines, I saw strong families. Warm hospitality. Lots of time lavished on children. Enduring friendships. A heritage of economic freedom for women. The ability to live graciously on little money. Sauces that extended a small amount of meat to many people. A delight in sharing. Skill in the art of relaxation. Lithe, limber bodies. The ability to enjoy being with a large number of people continuously. Since every good gift is from above (Jas 1:17) and since all wisdom and knowledge come from Jesus Christ (Col 2:3), such beautiful qualities in Filipino culture must be seen as gifts of God. Our Creator delights in colors. He generates smells, from onion to rose. He shapes every fresh snowflake. He births billions of unique personalities. Is it any surprise if he programs us with the capacity to create an amazing kaleidoscope of cultures to enrich his world?

Cultures contain sin and must be judged, as we will discuss in the following section. But ethnic pride is not automatically sin. It is like the joy parents feel at their child's graduation. Your child marches across the platform. Your chest hammers with pride. This is not pride at the expense of your neighbor, whose face also glows as his child graduates. No, your heart swells because you know your child's stories. The sorrows he has suffered. And the gifts that have blossomed in him like flowers opening to the sun. You yourself have cried and laughed and given away years of your life in the shaping

of some of those stories.

At its best, ethnicity is an expansion of this good family pride. Ethnicity is a sense of identification with people who share a culture and a history, with its suffering and successes, heroes and martyrs. Like membership in the family, ethnicity is not earned. It is a birthright, received whether you want it or not.

Human beings were created to live in community. In today's world, we still feel that need. "Even when our material needs are met, still our motivation...emotional resilience... and moral strength...must come from somewhere, from some vision of public purpose anchored in a compelling image of social reality," according to anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1964, p. 70). Being a world citizen is too vague to provide this motivation and strength, says Geertz. World citizenship makes the common person feel insignificant. Even national citizenship may breed apathy. But when you are a member of an ethnic group, you have celebrations which give zest, values which give a cognitive framework, action patterns which give direction to your days, and associational ties which root you in a human context. You have a place in time in the universe, a base for the conviction that you are part of the continuity of life flowing from the past and pulsing on into the future. You are in the story.

Created to Create Culture *Erich Sauer*

God's words to Adam call humanity to progressive growth in culture. Far from being something in conflict with God, cultural achievements are an essential attribute of the nobility of humans as they possessed it in Paradise. Inventions and discoveries, the sciences and the arts, refinement and ennobling, in short, the advance of the human mind, are throughout the will of God. They are the taking possession of the earth by the royal human race, the performance of a commission. Humans have a

position of authority, under God and over the rest of creation.... They are expected to find out the potentialities of earth, air, and sea, to use nature and its resources.... In this we can see the scientific quest foreshadowed, whose aim is to understand and classify the natural world. Here is the divine charter for the immense variety of human activity: agriculture, technology, industry, craft, and art. These, according to Christianity, are God's gifts for the enrichment of the human life.

Excerpted from *The King of the Earth: The Nobility of Man According to the Bible and Science* by Erich Sauer, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

When Ethnicity Becomes an Idol

God ordained culture. But customs that glorify God are not the only reality that we observe around us. Instead of loveliness, harmonious creativity, and admirable authority, we often see fragmentation, alienation, lust, corruption, selfishness, injustice and violence cultivated by our culture. No part remains pure. Science tends to serve militarism or hedonism, ignoring morals. Art often becomes worship without God. Mass media is full of verbal prostitutes. Businessmen pull shady deals. Politicians fill their own pockets. Workers do shoddy work. Husbands deceive their wives. Wives manipulate their husbands. Children ignore their parents as persons.

We are not only created in God's image. We are also sinners. Because we have cut ourselves off from God, the cultures we create reek with evil. We are called, then, not only to rejoice in the patterns of wisdom, beauty, and kindness in our culture, but also to confront and judge the patterns of idolatry and exploitation.

Sometimes ethnicity is turned into an idol. Like other idols of modern society—money, sex, and power, for example—ethnicity is not bad in itself. When we exalt it as though it were the highest good, however, ethnicity becomes evil. Racism, feuds, wars, and “ethnic cleansing” result. When ethnicity becomes an idol, it must be confronted and judged.

Implications for Mission

Ethnicity counters the dehumanizing bent of globalization. Even at its best, economic globalization tends to treat cultural values as commodities. Ethnicity reminds us to keep faith with our grandparents and with our human communities. It is a vital counterbalance. What does ethnicity mean for mission? We will suggest four applications.

1. Affirm the Local

First, mission should affirm local cultures. We do not do this uncritically. Working with and under local Christians, we judge patterns of idolatry and exploitation, as explained above. Yet we love the local culture. We receive it as a gift of God. And while we live in that place, we adapt gladly to those dimensions of local values that are wholesome.

We speak the local language. Everywhere Christians go, they translate the Bible. This has been noted by Lamin Sanneh, a Muslim background Christian who is Professor of History at Yale University. Muslims insist that people learn Arabic, because that is the language of God. But Christians say, “God speaks your language.”

We patronize local businessmen and businesswomen. We encourage local artists, musicians, and writers, rather than routinely importing foreign books or translating them. We stay in locally owned hotels and homes. We learn from the lore of local herbalists. We safeguard local forests. We gain skills in local sports and games. We make efforts to be present at local parties and funerals. We empathize with local social reformers. If we are missionaries, we discipline our thoughts so that we are not preoccupied with our homeland's cultural patterns. Specific heritages matter. Even the 20th century epic *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954) affirms the local. Columnist Mike Hickerson (2002) observes:

The Lord of the Rings suggests that God's victory on Earth (or Middle-Earth) is incomplete unless and until the victory fills the “small places.” ... The final battle between good and evil is not some gigantic historic battle—like the destruction of the Death Star—but rather a small fight, followed by a small reconstruction of a very small place. The Good News fills every valley.... In their return to the Shire, the Hobbits continued their mission to its proper conclusion. Without their humble work among their own humble folk, evil would have retained a stronghold in Middle-Earth. The global is important, and so too is the local.

In missionary training programs, this emphasis must be made. There is a tendency for missionaries from dominant cultures to assert their ethnic heritage as though it were God's pattern for everybody. Western missionaries do this. Chinese and Korean missionaries do it in Central and Southeast Asia. Latinos do it in indigenous communities.

Even within a single nation, missionaries who are from the majority population may lack appreciation for minority cultures and treat them poorly. Consider an email invitation that arrived this morning. The message reads:

When you come, would you conduct a workshop on theology of culture? In our country, we have so many different ethnic groups, and the prejudices are amazing. So we may have people from one ethnic group working in a village with multiple ethnic groups. But they tend to work only with their own, and come up with all sorts of reasons not to work with the others.

Throughout history, some missionaries have equated their heritage with God's preferred way. It is easy to criticize them in hindsight. However, we dare not dismiss them too glibly. While early missionaries' theology of culture may have been skimpy, their practice often was robust. They learned local languages. They were major sources of cultural information for the first anthropologists. Without airplanes, they stayed put through wars, epidemics, droughts, and floods. Their children and wives were buried in local dirt.

By contrast, today's missionaries love to talk about contextualization. But do we have time to live it? Jesus spent 33 years immersed in one local culture.

2. Be Pilgrims

Many people have several ethnic identities. Consider this situation: On the west coast of America, earlier generations of Asians were prevented by law from marrying Caucasians. Quite a few Filipino immigrants married Native Americans. Picture three adult

children in such a family today. One identifies primarily as a Filipino, the second as a Native American, and the third as an American. But all three switch identities from time to time.

Furthermore, cultures change continually. In the process, new identity combinations emerge. The renowned Wing Luke Museum is re-opening this week in my home city, Seattle, Washington. Reportedly it is the only pan-Asian-Pacific-American museum in the USA. What is an Asian-Pacific-American? "Not a race, ethnic group, or nationality," according to Jack Broom in the *Seattle Times*. "It's a census category that historically combined people from more than 40 countries making up a vast portion of the globe, stretching from Tahiti to Pakistan, Japan to Indonesia, Hawaii to India" (2008, p. A16).

Fourteen percent of my county's population is Asian Pacific American. In spite of the *Seattle Times'* disclaimer, this is a significant ethnic category, a measurable group with enough identity to support a noted museum. In a nesting hierarchy of ethnic identities, it constitutes one level. The *Times* article goes on to say that the high numbers "reflect the Northwest's perch on the Pacific Rim."

Multiple identities are not unusual. Spanish speakers in the USA grew by 50% from 1980 to 1990. They now make up 30% of the population of New York City. Most speak English as well. In the same decade, the number of Chinese speakers in the U.S. increased by 98%. Four-fifths of these people

Ten Ways to Build Multi-Ethnic Bridges Between Churches

1. **Welcome.** We must welcome people of other cultures who want to join our church, and if they so desire, we must help them create niches where they can worship in familiar ways.
 2. **Teach.** We must teach, over and over, the contrasting biblical-truths of unity and creativity.
 3. **Pray.** We must pray with each other regularly across ethnic boundaries.
 4. **Evangelize.** We must work together in culturally-relevant local evangelism.
 5. **Nurture.** We must work together with ethnic churches in our community to nurture the youth, while encouraging the youth to maintain pride in their heritage.
 6. **Repent.** We must repent of hegemonic dominance or neglect on one side and of resentment or dependency on the other.
 7. **Link.** We must designate a member to be a "culture broker" who links our congregation with specific churches of other heritage in our community, and who holds the church members accountable for maintaining faithful relationships of depth and substance.
 8. **Invest.** We must invest time and money sacrificially and risk our-selves emotionally in strong part-nership and exchange patterns.
 9. **Build leaders.** We must work together in culturally-relevant leadership training and publishing of useful materials.
 10. **Learn.** We must be ready to learn from each other, believing that the word of the Lord may come to us through people very different from ourselves.
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continue to prefer speaking Chinese at home even though most speak English.

At the core, ethnic identity rests on self-ascription as a member of a shared culture, a shared community, a shared heritage. In a multiethnic society, you may not see much difference between the economic, social, and worldview patterns of people whose parents came from different countries. They may shop at the same stores and make jokes about the same sports events.

What matters is not the depth of observable difference but the depth of the identification with distinctive communities. A people's history, for example, is their private property. The Jews have their history. The Chinese have their history. African-Americans have their history. Nobody can take this from them. It is their heritage. When the history involves suffering, and when heroes have arisen in the midst of that suffering, communal ties are even stronger.

Heritage matters, but a lot of people have more than one, and are at various points on an identity continuum. Some balance several identities. People may not put this into words, or even into conscious thought. But they know when they feel uncomfortable, when they feel crammed into inappropriate categories, into boxes that don't fit. It is important to respect the way people identify themselves at any particular time; however, doing so may scramble our categories or lists of people groups. Individuals from the same ancestry—even siblings—may choose to identify differently.

What is the identity of the refugee immigrant? The bi-racial child? The Navaho who wonders whether home is the reservation or the city? The cosmopolitans and the youth who buy and wear goods from everywhere and who read, listen to, and watch media from everywhere? Who are their people? Are they destined to be global nomads?

Wherever they are, the gospel offers them a home. God doesn't stereotype us. He meets us each as the exceptions that we are, with our multiple and overlapping identities, our

unique pilgrimages, our individual quirks. God doesn't slot us into pigeonholes. Whether we have permanently lost our community, or are temporarily adrift, or have patched together bits of several heritages, God wel-

comes us into his people. The gospel offers us a home beyond the structures of this world.

Local cultures are gifts of God, but they are never enough. Yes, like Jeremiah, we "seek the welfare of the city" where we find ourselves (Jer 29:7, *NASB*). Yet, like Abraham, we know that

this is not our final resting place. We remain pilgrims, seeking the city "whose builder and maker is God" (Heb 11:8-10, *KJV*).

3. Build Bridges

In 1964, when he was 14, Zia entered a school for the blind in Afghanistan. He became a joyful Christian. Over the next years, he learned to speak the Dari, Pushtu, Arabic, English, German, Russian, and Urdu languages, and to read these languages where Braille script was available. During the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, Zia was put in charge of the school for the blind. Later, because he would not join the Communist Party, he was thrown into prison. He escaped to Pakistan in the disguise of a blind beggar, which was his actual state.

In Pakistan, because Zia was translating the Old Testament, he was offered a scholarship to go to the United States to study Hebrew. He declined the opportunity. Why? He was too busy ministering locally. Although he didn't think he had time to extract himself to learn Hebrew, he did learn Urdu as his seventh language in order to reach Pakistanis. Eventually he was martyred.

Zia represents the millions of Christian witnesses over the centuries who have discovered that the gospel links us with the globe. We begin locally, but we do not stop there.

Today the world desperately needs people like Zia. Economic and technological globalization connect us at superficial levels. Societies must have people who can make deeper

It is important to respect the way people identify themselves at any particular time, however much doing so may scramble our categories or lists of people groups.

connections. Thomas Friedman (1999) explores this idea in his powerful book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, where the Lexus represents the global economy and the olive tree represents local traditions. Clifford Geertz (1973) writes about the tension between epochalism and essentialism, between the need to be part of the contemporary epoch versus the need to maintain our essential identities, to know who we are. Manuel Castells (1996, p. 459) in *The Rise of the Networked Society* argues that although a networked globe means an integration of power, this happens on a level increasingly divorced from our personal lives. He calls it “structural schizophrenia” and warns, “Unless cultural, political, and physical bridges are deliberately built...we may be heading toward life in parallel universes whose times cannot meet.”

Who can build bridges? What movement spans nations, races, genders, *ethne*, rich and poor, illiterates and Ph.D.’s? It is an awesome thing to realize that there are scarcely any people more suitably poised to connect inter-culturally than the church universal.

When civil ties break down, it is often believers who can lead societies across bridges of reconciliation, reaching out to clasp hands with brothers and sisters on the other side. Our loyalties do not stop at the edges of our culture. We are pilgrims. We can step out into the margins. Indeed, that has always been the Christian mandate. Abraham was called to be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen 12:1-3). David sang, “May *all* the peoples praise you, O God” (Ps 67:3,5). Paul was propelled by a passion for the unreached peoples (Rom 15:20-21). John vibrated with a vision of peoples and tribes and kindreds and nations gathered together around the throne of God at the end of time (Rev 4-5).

Making cross-cultural connections has been our mandate from the beginning. Our involvement in globalization is rooted not in economics but in God’s love for his world. We cannot be isolationists, content in our cocoons. The love of God compels us to step outside our boundaries. Where there is conflict, we step out as peace-makers. Where the gospel is not known, we step out as witnesses. Global connections also

make it possible for us to step out to serve the Church of Jesus Christ worldwide more swiftly and comprehensively than ever before.

To whom much has been given, from them much is required. Are we building bridges?

Ethnic churches have great value. Like a mosaic, like a kaleidoscope, the whole spectrum of cultures—and ethnic churches—enriches God’s world.

4. Nurture Ethnic Churches

Finally, we must consider distinct ethnic churches in our own communities. Some people ask: “If 11:00 A.M. on Sunday is the most segregated hour in America, aren’t ethnic churches racist? Certainly they foster evangelism and fellowship. But just because something succeeds doesn’t make it right. The devil has lots of success, too.”²

How can we answer? In this chapter, we have laid the foundation for arguing that ethnic churches are justified not only for pragmatic reasons—because they work—but also because they are rooted in the doctrine of creation. In God’s image, expressing God-given creativity, people have developed different cultures. These cultures offer complementary glimpses of beauty and truth, and complementary critiques of evil.

Every church must welcome people of every race and culture. Some people flourish in multicultural churches. Others treasure their own tradition. For them, culture remains important in worship. They pray in their heart language, with meaningful gestures, ululations, and prostrations. Their culture will affect the way they do evangelism, discipling, teaching, administration, counseling, finances, youth work, leader training, discipline, curriculum development, relief, development, and advocacy. Their theologians complement other cultures’ understanding of the Bible.

Separate congregations are not bad. What is bad is a lack of love. This lack of love is too often found in churches in which the majority of the members are from the subculture at the top of the power hierarchy. Wealthier, more powerful churches do have special obligations. If our brothers and sisters lack health care,

good schools, or safe streets—or if they lack Bible commentaries in their language, or tuition money so their pastors can go to Bible school—we cannot just smile and walk on. As the apostle James wrote,

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? (Jas 2:1-16).

In this context, ethnic churches have great value. Like a mosaic, like a kaleidoscope, the whole spectrum of cultures—and ethnic churches—enriches God's world. Just as strong, healthy families are the building blocks for strong healthy communities, so strong ethnic

churches can be the building blocks for strong multicultural fellowships. It is when we learn commitment and cooperation at home that we are prepared to practice those skills at large.

Ethnic churches are a good place to begin global mission work too. We can partner with international Christians who live in our own cities—students, businessmen, temporary visitors, refugees, immigrants. Many represent relatively “unreached” peoples. Many regularly return to their homeland to help dig wells, set up clinics, teach in Bible schools, publish hymnbooks and training textbooks, etc. We can pray with them, help them grow to maturity as Christ's disciples, and reach out together to their peoples.

When ethnicity is treasured as a gift but not worshiped as an idol, God's world is blessed, and we enjoy a foretaste of heaven. Let us keep that vision before us. 🌍

Endnotes

1. What is ethnicity? Ethnicity's most fundamental criterion is self-ascription as a member of a shared culture. Other-ascription limits this but is secondary. Components of ethnic identity may or may not include the following: an ancestral land (whether or not inhabited by members of the group today), an ancestral language (whether or not spoken by members of the group today), shared history (especially if this includes suffering and heroes), food, humor, and behavior appropriate between close relatives. The actual distinctives shared may be trivial; it is the self-classification that is significant. What a given ethnicity means is reshaped continually. For a fuller discussion of ethnicity, see Williams (2001).
2. For an argument against ethnic churches, see Padilla (1983).

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Study Questions

1. How does Adeney describe the value of ethnicity?
2. When does ethnicity become an idol? How do we confront it?
3. Adeney writes about four ways that mission should address the “dehumanizing bent of globalization.” What are they?

His Glory Made Visible

Saturation Church Planting

Jim Montgomery

All that is mine is yours, and that which is yours is mine; my glory is made visible in them. —John 17:10

Saturation Church Planting (SCP) is the vision of seeing the incarnate Christ present in the midst of every small unit of population in a people group, a region, a city, a country and in the world.

The SCP concept sounds simple and obvious now, but for me, it came only after 20 years of agonizing over how to go about making disciples of all nations.

Christ Alive and Well

A strategic breakthrough in my thinking came about at the conclusion of a very successful effort in the Philippines. We had seen over 10,000 evangelistic Bible study groups established in a short time. But I was not at all satisfied. Why wasn't I thrilled? It was because there were still millions that did not have a personal relationship with the Lord.

"Why, Lord," I began to pray, "did you give us a command that you knew was impossible to obey? Did you deceive us? Did you mean something different than what your Word seems clearly to say?"

"If you truly wanted *nations* to be *discipled*, why didn't you stay here on the earth? You could have gone about every village as you did in Galilee. You could have appeared speaking the language, wearing the dress, intimately knowing the culture, eating the food and having relatives and contacts in every village and neighborhood of every "nation" in every country in the world.

"You could have gone on demonstrating your power, showing your love and compassion and forcefully communicating your great message of the Kingdom. Why did you leave it to us, when you knew it was totally beyond our capabilities?"

"Now that I have your attention," the Lord seemed to say after weeks of praying this prayer, "I want you to know that is exactly how to go about completing the Great Commission.

"See to it that I, the Lord, truly become incarnate, as you have been suggesting, in every small group of people on the earth."

In a flash of insight from the Lord, it all became very clear. Where does the Lord dwell?

"Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27).



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also served with OC International for 27 years. He authored six books on the Great Commission. Among them is *DAWN 2000: 7 Million Churches to Go*, which describes the vision and history of the DAWN movement.

From *Then the End Will Come*, 1997, William Carey Publishing, Pasadena, CA. Used by permission of the author.

“...the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 Jn 4:4).

“Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matt 18:20).¹

It became clear that Christ could be alive and well and present in all his power and glory and compassion. This could be done by communicating his wonderful message of the Kingdom in a totally contextualized way in every small community of people on Earth if only there were some truly born-again believers exercising the gifts of the Spirit and functioning in each place as the Body of Christ.

Shortly after my family and I completed our missionary stint in the Philippines in the mid-1970s, I happened to talk with David Liao, then a professor of missions at Biola University. I told him about the dream and commitment of the Church in the Philippines to grow from about 5,000 congregations to 50,000 by the year A.D. 2000.

“Oh, you mean saturation church planting,” he said.

I had followed the saturation *evangelism* movements such as “Evangelism in Depth” in Latin America, but I had never before heard the term saturation *church planting*.

But yes, that described exactly the concept that was developing in the Philippines. I had felt the Lord saying to me in 1974 that to work most directly at completing the Great Commission would mean seeing the risen Christ become incarnate within easy access

of every person of every class, kind and condition in the world.

This translated into planting a Christ-centered church in the midst of every

small group of people in every nation.

More than planting churches, more than saving souls, we yearn for the day when it can truly be said that the earth is full of the glory of the Lord.

Saturation Church Planting in the Bible

I am aware, of course, that the validity of a strategy for world evangelization depends on much more than my testimony and what seems to work. Though my gifting is not as a scholar or theologian, I am encouraged by the fact that over the past 24 years of the existence and spread of this strategy, I have yet to hear a theologian speak against it. Actually, the reverse has been true. I frequently come across comments of theologians and missiologists that tend to reinforce that which I felt I heard from the Lord or learned from godly mentors.

This is not to imply that I did not find support for the SCP concept from my own Bible study. Take the ministry of the Apostle

The Shopping Window of God *Wolfgang Simson*

Jesus commissioned us to go and make disciples of all nations. Many Christians around the world have the growing conviction that discipling the nations will only be achieved by having a church—the shopping window of God—in walking distance of every person on the globe. The church must again become the place where people can literally see the Body of Christ, where his glory is revealed in the most practical of all terms—hands-on,

down-to-earth, right next door, unable to overlook or ignore, living every day among us. Many have told me, often with tears in their eyes, that their nation will not truly change its values and be disciplined by anything artificial, by being briefly touched for a fleeting moment by the abbreviated gospel of a shortlived campaign, or even by the type of church that has been there for the last 50 or 500 years. It really matters what kind of churches are planted. Nothing

short of the very presence of the living Christ in every neighborhood and village of every corner of the nation will do. He has come to live among us—and stay on. We therefore need to plant and water church planting movements that plant and water other church planting movements—until there is no space left for anyone to misunderstand, ignore or even escape the presence of Jesus in the form that he has chosen to take while on earth—the local church.

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Paul, for example. While his methods varied and were highly contextualized, the fruit of his ministry was powerfully consistent: there were always strings of multiplying congregations permeating large populated areas left behind him. It could then be said “that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10).

As Peter Wagner wrote in *Spreading the Fire* (his first of three volumes in “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” series), “The most concrete, lasting form of ministry in Acts is church planting. Preaching the gospel, healing the sick, casting out demons, suffering persecution, holding church councils and multiple other activities of the apostles and other Christians that unfold before us have, as their goal, multiplying Christian churches throughout the known world.”²

In the third volume of this series, Wagner also wrote, “Part of Paul’s influence in the new churches was, undoubtedly, to stir them to evangelize the lost in their cities and to plant new house churches in every neighborhood. *No missiological principle is more important than saturation church planting*” (italics mine).³

Later, I began to connect this multiplication of churches with an Old Testament vision and prophecy that was repeated in at least four books of the Bible.

Numbers 14:21, for example, records that “all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord” (RSV). Similar prophecies are recorded in Isaiah 11:9 and Habakkuk 2:14.

Then a colleague pointed out to me the last two verses of Psalm 72. Verse 20 says, “This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse.” And what were the last words of the last prayer of David? “May the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen” (v. 19).

Where does the glory of the Lord reside? Certainly “the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Ps 19:1). But many verses also tell us that Christ—and therefore his glory—resides in us.

I saw this again as I was meditating and praying through the priestly prayer of our Lord recorded in John 17. As I was reading in my Spanish Bible, “*mi gloria se hace visible en ellos*,” suddenly jumped from the page (vs. 10).

“*My glory is made visible in them.*”

There it was again! More than planting churches, more than saving souls, we yearn for the day when it can truly be said that the earth is full of the glory of the Lord. And where is His glory?

“My glory is made visible in them.” In His people.

Peter Wagner illustrates this in *Spreading the Fire* when he writes that “multitudes of churches in many parts of the world, although imperfectly, do accurately reflect the glory of God through Jesus Christ.”⁴

SCP, then, is simply the task of seeing that there is the presence of Christ in every place in the form of a gathered body of believers.

Even so, we work at saturation church planting not only because it is a good strategy for completing the Great Commission; we do it because we want to cooperate with the oft repeated Old Testament prophecy that “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord” (Hab 2:14).

We do it to answer the last recorded prayer of David: “may the whole earth be filled with his glory” (Ps 72:19).

We do it so that the glory of the Lord may be made visible in every small community of humankind in the world. 🌍

Endnotes

1. James H. Montgomery, *DAWN 2000: 7 Million Churches to Go* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1989), pp. 29,30.
2. C. Peter Wagner, *Spreading the Fire* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1994), p. 60.
3. C. Peter Wagner, *Blazing the Way* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1995), p. 48.
4. C. Peter Wagner, *Spreading the Fire* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1994), p. 60.

Study Questions

1. Describe the strategy of Saturation Church Planting. Why is Montgomery convinced that SCP is the key to completing the Great Commission?
2. Montgomery lists several Old Testament passages in support of his vision for SCP, all of which have a theme of glory. What is the significance of this?