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Contents

- 1 **Editorial: Shoring up the Foundations**
Hans M. Weerstra
- 3 **The Great Commission in the Old Testament**
Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.
- 9 **The Khmer: A People Disillusioned**
Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse
- 11 **All the Clans, All the Peoples**
Richard Showalter
- 15 **The Supremacy of God Among "All the Nations"**
John Piper
- 27 **Challenging the Church to World Mission**
David J. Hesselgrave
- 33 **Biblical Foundations for Missions: Seven Clear Lessons**
Thomas Schirrmacher
- 41 **Seeing the Big Picture**
Ralph D. Winter
- 45 **Melchizedek and Abraham Walk Together in World Mission**
W. Douglas Smith, Jr.
- 49 **The Biblical Basis and Priority for Frontier Missions**
William R. O'Brien

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Editorial: Shoring up the Foundations

Our desire and effort to evangelize the world must be firmly grounded in God and His Word. The mission mandate that we hold dear must rest squarely on biblical foundations. We cannot proceed and expect success in this task with wrong or shaky motives or questionable ideals. World missions must have sure foundations, and unless these are firmly in place, we run the risk of being like the “foolish man who built his house upon the sand...and great was the fall of it.” (Matt. 7:26, 27)

This whole issue is focused entirely on the biblical mandate and basis of world missions. Although in the past, excellent articles have been written on this vital subject, (in fact some are reprinted and revised here in this issue) no one entire edition has been dedicated before to this all important subject. And it was time to do so, not merely because we haven't done it before, but for abetter reason.

Some years ago, the whole Mississippi basin experienced a major flood. Many of the levees (dikes) of this mighty river, designed to hold back its flood waters, were either totally destroyed or were in serious jeopardy due to the devastating flood. These have now been restored and repaired.

In the same way, we also need to shore up the mission foundations of God's purpose and plan, build them anew where they have been washed away or weakened in order to survive and to hold at bay the destructive influences of our secular world and culture that like a flood threatens to destroy us with equally devastating consequences.

Without any doubt, Christ is building His Church in every place among all peoples “that He might fill all things” and He is using His people to do it. (Matt. 16:18; Ef. 4:10-12) But Christ's Church must be built on solid foundations. At mid-point of the 90s—five years away from AD 2000—it's an excellent time to shore up the

basics and let God speak to us anew about His purpose and plan of world redemption.

Since the mission mandate and its foundations rests on God and His will, and is central to all of Scripture (as you will see in this issue), *God by His Spirit needs to reveal to us this vital matter*. For many of us it will come as a first time revelation, like a brand new discovery, while for others it will be a rediscovery, giving us an even deeper understanding. But to whomever and however it comes, *God Himself must disclose it*. It is like “the mystery of the gospel” that is made known by revelation and can only be known as such. So, whether we see it for the first time or rediscover it anew, the mission mandate and foundations, central to all of Scripture, must be disclosed to us by God Himself.

The fundamental question is: To whom will God disclose this central purpose, plan, promise and biblical mandate? Ask yourself: Will God disclose it to me, can He reveal it to me? Do I (we) have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches? May no doubt remain. What you will “hear” in the articles of this special issue is something the Spirit indeed is saying to the churches today. Question is: Do we have ears to hear what He is saying?

Having ears to hear essentially has to do with the ability to discern God's truth according to His view of things. In other words, it means being able to discern spiritual reality with God's help and from His perspective, according to His Word and purpose, revealed by His Spirit for us today in and for our “kairos moment” of history.

The apostle Paul put it this way: “I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or lofty wisdom... but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” Paul con-

tinues: “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.” And then he gives the bottom line: “the unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God.” Why not? Because “they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” Only spiritual men and women can discern spiritual reality because as Paul said, “we have the mind of Christ.” (See I Cor. 2)

Hence a fundamental directive is that we will need spiritual ears to hear what God wants to impart to us, including His Word to us in this issue. We will need to read the articles with spiritual discernment. You will find much more than interesting information, much more than “human wisdom of lofty words and persuasive arguments,” as Paul would say. It really has to do with receiving a spiritual gift that God wants to give us—that we all desperately need! Without the ability to hear we will miss it. At best, it will be just interesting information, just unique concepts, maybe.

Jesus reminds us of the flip side of this matter: “every one who hears these words of mine and *does not do them* will be like a foolish man.” We must be willing and eager *to do* what we hear! It is my conviction that God will not disclose anything of any real value to anyone (whether by means of this issue or anywhere else) who is unwilling to do what He says to do. Our hearts must be inline with His purpose, ready and willing to “observe,” (see Matt. 28:19) what He mandates. On this basis God will reveal His Word to us and the biblical mandate of missions will be revealed. May we see it clearly!

*Dr. Hans M. Weerstra,
IJFM Editor
March 1996, El Paso, TX USA*

The Great Commission in the Old Testament

World-wide missions in the Old Testament? Yes, and no faint glimmers nor only promises of better things to come in the New. Here is an article that will change your view of Scripture and will give you new zeal for God's purpose and plan of the ages.

by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.

Most readers of Scripture will readily acknowledge that there is an unmistakable and clear evidence for asserting that the New Testament (N.T.) has a strong mission emphasis. This is especially the case in the classic Great Commission passage of our Lord in Matt. 28:19-20 followed through in the book of Acts. But few will accord the Old Testament (O.T.) anything even approaching such a mission emphasis or mission mandate.

However, the call for a mission mandate and emphasis in the O. T. cannot be overlooked, if readers are to do justice to the basic claims and message of the Old Testament (O.T.). Right from the beginning of the canon there is more than just a passing concern that all the nations of the earth should come to believe in the coming Man of Promise, the One who would appear through the Seed of the woman Eve, through the family of Shem, and then through the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David.

The message of the O.T. was/is both universal in its scope and international in its range. This is clear right from the start in Genesis 1-11 with its universal audience. It also is very clear from the fact that when God first called Abraham to be his chosen instrument, the Living God gave the first great commission to him. For while others tried to make a "name" for themselves, as in the case of the sons of God marrying the daughters of men (Gen. 6:4), and the building of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:4)—both cases involving the quest for a "name" or a reputation, God offered to give to Abraham a "name" as a gift from his grace.

But the gift of a name was not to be squandered on himself, but it was distinctly designed for the purpose of blessing others. Genesis 12:2-3 pointedly declared that Abraham's name, his blessing, and his being made into a great nation was for the purpose of being a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. Herein lies the heart of the mission mandate from its very inception!

That mission to and for the peoples of the earth was the focus can be attested from the representative Gentiles that are named in the O.T. text. One need only recall the names of Melchizedek, Jethro, the mixed multitude of Egyptians that went up out of Egypt with the Israelites, Balaam, Rahab, Ruth, the widow at Zarephath, and many others like them who responded through the preaching of prophets like Jonah or the major writing prophets, who addressed twenty-five chapters of their prophecies to the Gentile nations of their day (Isa. 13-23; Jer. 46-51; Ezek. 25-32). There are more verses dedicated to the foreign nations in those twenty-five chapters of the three major prophets alone than are found in all of the Pauline prison epistles in the N.T. There can be little doubt that God was more than mildly interested in winning the nations outside of Israel.

Rejection of Missions in the O.T.

Up until the present century, O.T. scholarship could be broadly characterized as accepting the proposition that Israel was called to respond to an active mission mandate to the peoples of the world. Sadly since that time, the idea of mission in that testament has been widely challenged with only a small number of writers defending the existence

and focus of world mission in the older canon.

The modern discussion on the rejection of missions in the O.T. is probably to be traced to Max Löhr.¹ Robert Martin-Achard summarized Löhr's position, and sets forth three theses: 1) the concept of mission was peripheral, not central, to the message and the work of Israel; 2) the concept of mission, to the degree that it is present at all in the O.T., can be attributed to the prophets; however, even then it did not come to maturity until the prophets were declining in importance; and 3) the mission to the Gentiles bore no tangible results since it collided with the particularism of the Law and the Jewish contempt for the heathen. In Löhr's view, the real father of Jewish missionary activity was someone dubbed "Deutero-Isaiah," allegedly someone who wrote Isaiah's chapters 40-66 in the post-exilic period, (sometime after 536 B.C.). Such a view undoubtedly qualifies as a minimalistic view, even if we do not comment on the unnecessary dividing up of the book of Isaiah and late dating of the same.

There were other voices that disagreed with Löhr. In the middle of the century, no voice was more active in defending the concept of Israel's mission to the nations than that of H. H. Rowley.² Rowley named Moses as the first missionary in that he evangelized the Israelites in Egypt to faith in Yahweh, (whom Rowley wrongly and unnecessarily went on to identify as a Kenite deity). Evangelized Israel was, in turn, called to mission by virtue of the fact that they had been the objects of God's election. They had been elected to be the people of God. This was not

merely an election for privilege, but it was an election for purpose: it was a particularistic call of one nation *in order* to reach the rest of the nations!

Rowley was not alone in his estimation of Israel's call to world-wide mission. Edmund Jacob likewise agreed that the concept of mission was a basic concept that could be found throughout the O.T. Jacob was especially enthusiastic about the importance of the book of Jonah for the missionary message.³ No less supportive were the voices of A. Gelin (Jonah is "the missionary manual *par excellence*") and Robert Dobbie (Jonah is "the best missionary tract ever written").⁴

Other scholars allowed Isaiah 40-66 to be included in what Johannes Lindblom called "the missionary revelations, dealing with the missionary charges (that were) incumbent upon Israel in relation to the Gentiles."⁵ In a similar fashion, Christopher R. North used that same section of the canon to show Israel's mission to humanity.⁶

But even this small amount of agreement was to experience significant opposition. Norman H. Snaith argues that Isaiah 40-66 did not support any concept of Israel's mission to the nations.⁷ He was followed by P. A. H. de Boer who also could find no exegetical grounds for such a position.⁸

The result of this drawing back of any missionary message in the O.T. text was to claim that Israel never had been given the role of being evangelists nor missionaries. Instead, their role was a passive one: they were just to be the people of God in the world. Martin-Achard concluded: "The Chosen People do not have to make propaganda in order to win mankind for its God. It is enough that, by its very existence, it should testify to the greatness of Yahweh."⁹

A Case for Missions in the O.T.

There are two outstanding missions texts in the Pentateuch, viz. Gen. 12:3 and Ex. 19:6. Both revolve around the

famous declaration that God's plan was to provide for the blessing of all the peoples in all the nations of the earth through the father of the chosen people and the nations that would be born from him.

The Abrahamic Covenant

The Greek translation of Gen. 12:3 (the Septuagint) rendered the verb in Gen. 12:3 in its passive form—"be blessed." No less decisive are the words of the apostle Paul in Rom 4:13 and Gal 3:8; in fact, even the intertestamental and apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (44:21) interpreted this promise as a passive and not as a reflexive—"bless themselves." However in spite of this, the reflexive interpretation is the one favored in some recent versions and commentaries of the Bible.

But looking at the text in context, clearly God intended to use Abraham in such a way that he would be a means of blessing to all the nations of the world. Clearly, he was to be the instrument in the redemption of the world. This would be God's solution to the curse that had been imparted as a result of the fall, (Gen. 3) and the curse imposed at the dispersion of the human race at the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:7ff).

In what way, we might ask, is this text a missionary text? If Abraham is to be no more than an intermediary of the divine blessing, was he not thereby absolved from taking any initiative in actively converting the nations to the Man of Promise who was to come?

However, there is no mistake that Abraham was to be more than just a foil for the gospel. Everything he was and did, as the current office-holder of the promise, would have both an "already" and a "not-yet" aspect to the message he spoke and the actions he set forth. The work of providing the Messianic Seed and the regenerating action of redemption were distinctively God's own unique actions. But the descendants of Abraham, knowing how wide the scope of their influence would be in decimating the blessing of

God, could not rest passively on their laurels and leave the work of missions to God or to a later generation. The patriarchs, and subsequently, the chosen people or nation who came from them, must actively call a waiting and watching world to repentance and to a belief in this Man of Promise who would come from their offspring.

Israel a Priestly Kingdom

The world mission purpose and focus is made even clearer in Ex. 19:6—Israel as a whole nation was to be "a priestly kingdom," "a royal priesthood." It was from this passage that I Pet 2:5 and Rev 1:6, along with the Reformers, announced the N. T. doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

Prior to Israel's refusal and failure to act accordingly, it had been God's plan that every Israelite serve as a priest. Only after the nation's refusal to act did God appoint the tribe of Levi to assist them. But there can be no doubt about the fact that in God's plan, every Israelite was to be a ministering priest. And if it be asked, "For whom were all the Israelites to act as priests?" the answer is inescapable—they were to be priests for all the nations of the earth!

Did the call of the Levites change the missionary imperative for the whole nation? No! The only thing it changed was the directness of their access to God. Now the priests of Aaron's family would represent the people before God, but the nation was not rid of its obligation to be a witness to the nations. After all, that was the reason for their election. Election was never merely an election to privilege: foremost of all it was an election to service—and that service was a world mission service—to share the blessing (what Paul equated with the "good news" or "gospel" in Gal 3:8) with all the families of the earth (an expression in Gen. 12:3 that had just been used in the Gen. 10 listing of the (then-known) seventy nations of the world.

The Dynasty Of David

Without any question, the great missionary text located in the historical books is the one found in II Samuel 7:19. The context for this startling revelation was King David's declaration that he intended to build a house for God to replace the 400 year old curtains and accoutrements of the Tabernacle that Moses had built in the wilderness. God had a different plan! The prophet Nathan announced that God would make a house (i.e., a dynasty) out of David, rather than have David build a house for the Lord. Furthermore, God repeated to David most of the promises he had given beforehand to Abraham and the other patriarchs—they would now be fulfilled in David and his family!

David was so surprised by all of these "new" declarations that he went into the house of God in II Sam. 7:18ff and prayed: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant."

It is at this point where one of the most sensational texts of Scripture appears, but unfortunately it also happens to be one of the places where most translations go just plain haywire. Literally translated, David exclaims: "And this (which God had just declared about David's house and future) is (or will be) the charter for humanity, O LORD God!" David instinctively knew what many modern readers of the text have a great deal of difficulty seeing: the son born to David would be one that God personally would be a Father to (II Sam. 7:14) and that this son would be the means of blessing all the nations and families of the earth.

In many ways, this amazing expression of II Sam. 7:19, "law (or charter) for humanity" is very similar to the one that the prophet Isaiah will use two centuries later in Isa. 42 6, viz., "a covenant for the people." Isaiah saw

Israel's role as a missionary role and he used this expression "a covenant for the people" in direct parallelism with "a light for the Gentiles."

This son of David would have a dynasty, a throne and a kingdom that would last forever (II Sam. 7:16). It is this kingdom that would embrace all peoples, including all the Gentiles, if they would only call upon the name of that Man of Promise who was to come.

Even in his final words in II Sam. 23:5, king David showed an uncanny sense of clarity about what God was revealing to him. There he concluded, "Has not (God) made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part? Will he not cause to sprout (or "branch out") my salvation.?" The verb David chose became one of the key terms for the Messiah, "the Branch" (see Isa. 4:2; Jer. 23:5-6; Zech. 3:8; and 6:12). Accordingly, almost as if he wanted to make a pun on this word, he declared that the salvation that would come to him and to all Israel through this Seed, now located in his family, would "branch out" (or spread). Since there was/is no other God in all the universe, He too had to be the God of the Gentiles. This would be God's "charter for all of humanity"!

The Message of the Psalms

Repeatedly, the various psalmists will summon the nations to enter into the praise of the Lord God of Israel. These invitations both presume and build on the fact that the invitation to believe the gospel had been issued and responded to by the heathen peoples of the world.

The key Psalm is Ps. 67. God had blessed Israel and caused his face to shine upon them in a favorable way (an allusion to the Aaronic benediction of Num. 6:24-26) so that God's way might be known in all the earth and his salvation among all the nations (Psalms 67:2). This is very clear. Although one might quibble over Psalms 117 and debate whether in that Psalm we have a real example of missionary preaching, this

point cannot be debated in Psalms 67. In fact, this Psalms ends with the note that God had blessed Israel specifically so that "all the ends of the earth might fear Him" (Psalms 67:7).

No less impressive are the millennial or enthronement Psalms (Ps. 93-100). After alternating in successive Psalms with first an invitation to "Sing to the LORD a new song" with a declaration that "The LORD reigns" (e.g. Psalms 96, 98 compared with Psalms 97, 99), the whole series of Psalms climaxes in Psalms 100 with an invitation for all the nations of the earth to come to the Lord with singing and joyful service. Not only should the nations recognize their Creator, but they should acknowledge Him as their God and Lord and King over all.

The Servant Songs

As Johannes Blauw summarized the situation, almost all those who have been concerned with the question of the missionary message of the O.T. are agreed that the universal significance and calling of Israel is nowhere expressed more clearly than in Isaiah 40-55.¹⁰ Within this corpus, there are two Servant Songs that have been pointed to by most observers as being the most mission oriented that give to Israel a calling and a world-wide mission mandate and ministry: Isa. 42:1-7 and 49:1-7.

In these two marvelous texts, Israel is called to reveal God's "justice" to the nations (Isa. 42:1) and to serve as "a light to the Gentiles" (42:6 and 49:6) so that this salvation offered to Israel might reach to the ends of the earth (Isa. 49:6).

The only way to escape the obvious mission import of these clear declarations is to argue that "the Servant of the LORD" is an eschatological figure only, and not a figure that is to be equated with the nation of Israel. This interpretation, however, will not receive the endorsement of Isaiah's text. The identity of the Servant of the Lord is consistently a composite concept of both the nation (e.g., Isa. 41:8;

44:1) and the One who is to come who would minister to Israel (e.g., Isa. 53).

Blauw himself, while admitting to the strong universal intent and flavor of these passages with their call to world mission, distinguished between the “centripetal” and the “centrifugal” mission consciousness in the O.T.¹¹ In other words, according to Blauw the message had more of an inward and example-setting quality (centripetal force) rather than an outward and witness-bearing mandate to reach all the peoples of the earth (seen as a centrifugal N.T. dynamic).

But this issue could not be highlighted more dramatically than in the debate over the phrase in Isa. 42:6, “a covenant for the people.” Normally the word “people” (Hebrew *berît `am*) stands in the singular for Israel. Yet Isa. 42:5 and 40:7 uses the singular “people” to refer to the nations. Indeed, the parallel clause in Isa. 42:6 is a synonymous parallelism in which “a covenant for the people” is paralleled with “and a light for the Gentiles.” Surely “Gentiles” (Hebrew *gôyim*) makes it clear that the “people” intended here are not the Israelites, but the Gentile nations! It is true, of course, that this same “covenant for the people” (Hebrew *berît `am*) is used in Isa. 49:8 for the restoration of Israel to her land. But that is altogether in accord with the wide ranging nature of the promise plan of God that it would embrace within one and the same “covenant” an appeal for Israel to proclaim God’s salvation to all the nations while still embracing his promise to bring the nation of Israel back to their land.

However protests do sound: “Yes, but that word was directed to the ‘Servant of the Lord,’ not to the nation, or even to the believers of that nation.” However, it is precisely at this point where the reasoning has gone askew. Israel had been called to be “my son,” “God’s firstborn,” (Ex. 4:22); indeed, they were to be a “kingdom of priests,” “a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). Israel was

also to be God’s “servant.”

Of course it is true that the “seed,” “my son,” “my firstborn,” the “Lord’s servant” had primary reference to the Messiah who was to come. But under the terms of corporate solidarity, which was/is so important to O.T. thinking, the One Christ represented the many, including the believers in Israel. It is not as if the writer indulged in double-talk or double meanings, or even that he meant one literal surface meaning and another hidden meaning that was left for N. T. writers to discover when the truth of world missions was enlarged. Rather, it was the fact that the writer saw as one collective whole both the one representing the group and the many as a single whole. It is much like in Western society where we exercise corporate solidarity thinking.

An example will suffice: If after repeated failure to win any proper redress of a newly purchased car, say from the General Motors Company, I finally take them to court to sue for relief, the court docket reads in its own legal fiction, “Walter Kaiser, Jr. vs. GMC.” For the purposes of law, GMC is regarded as a single person or entity, (thereby, I suppose, making this a fair contest). Actually, however, embraced in the single idea of GMC is the whole management team, all of the stockholders, the governing boards, and the employees. Yet they are treated as if they are one single person.

So it is with the concept of “Seed,” “My Son,” “My Firstborn,” “My Servant,” and others. It certainly does point to Christ in each case, but at the same time that same single idea points to all who believe in Christ as well, whether they look forward to His coming as in the O.T. era, or look backward to His first coming, as in the N.T. age. Little wonder, then, that Paul can claim in Galatians 3:16 that it did not say in the O.T. “seeds,” (i.e., plural “descendants”), but “seed,” which is one, i.e., Christ. The apostle Paul was not using trickery or Jewish midrashic

principles to make his point. No, he declared in the most vehement of terms possible that he understood this to be what the text itself taught. And having just made that point, he announces, without feeling any vacillation of any kind, that if we have believed in Christ, then we too are Abraham’s “seed” (Gal 3:29). Sadly to say, it is just this precise point that has been so badly missed in twentieth century exegesis, especially regarding a sound theology of missions in the O.T.

Therefore, the “servant” is to be identified with the righteous remnant in Israel. The servant has a task to perform which takes it far beyond its own nationalistic and provincial boundaries. That servant must be a “light to the Gentiles” (Isa. 49:6). That is precisely how missions came to be and must be seen as a central part of the vision of Isaiah.¹²

The Book of Jonah

The other landmark case of missions in the O.T., specifically in the prophets, is found in the book of Jonah. Without any doubt, Jonah is called to take a message from Yahweh to Israel’s most bitter and cruelest of enemies—the Assyrians in the capital of Nineveh. The sin of this Gentile nation had brought it to the brink of destruction. They must know this is the case, even if the impending doom is less than a five weeks away. But how ever we look at it, if ever there was a case of an intransigent and unwilling missionary this is just such a case.

Surprisingly enough to everyone, except to the prophet Jonah, the response to the message was overwhelming. The Gentiles in this capital city repented in a most dramatic way, giving enormous glory to God, but deep grief to a prophet who wished that so bitter an enemy would have had its just recompense for all the suffering they had imposed on Israel (along with a host of other peoples in the Near East).

It is clear that the sympathies of the author of the book of Jonah are with

those who favor extending the missionary message to others: *and it is centrifugal, not centripetal*. The only anti-missionary around is the prophet himself who had served reluctantly as God's missionary after he has had a "whale" of an experience and had been "down-in-the-mouth" for a period of time!

Conclusion

God had never elected Israel only to be engrossed in "navel-gazing"—only to receive the blessing for herself. She had been called and elected for service unto the nations of the earth. Certainly with Abraham, and then most decisively with Moses, the stage had been set for a whole nation to be involved in a ministry of being priests and witnesses to all the peoples of the earth.

The covenant that David received was not to be selfishly squandered on themselves, but it was to be "a charter for all humanity." That same point was affirmed by Isaiah as he again repeated this truth: it was to be "a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles." How much more clearly could the matter be put than that? In fact, if any doubt still existed, then what in heaven's name is Jonah doing off in the territory of their most wretched of all enemies calling for repentance? Certainly, he is not doing this in the name of one of the pagan deities of Assyria, but in the name of Yahweh, the only true God of the universe who wants to save!

World-wide missions are not a missing element, or a belated afterthought, nor even an added gloss appended to the O.T. Instead, world-wide missions forms the heartbeat of the message and purpose of the O.T. That is why Genesis begins in the first eleven chapters with a focus on all the families and nations of the earth much before one family is called to serve all the other families of the earth. Teaching or reading the O.T. without missions is like eating bread without butter: the two go together like love and marriage, like

horse and carriage! Rightly understood, the O.T. is a missions book *par excellence* because world missions to all the peoples of the earth is its central purpose. It also is the key that unlocks true understanding of its message as well as for the whole Bible.

End Notes

1. I am indebted for this reference (and much of the history of this discussion) to my former student, Donald E. Weaver, Jr., who did a Master of Arts thesis under my direction entitled, *Israel's Mission to the World* (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1977). Max Löhr, *Der Missionsgedanke im Alten Testament. Ein Beitrag zur alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Möhr, 1896). His views were most conveniently summarized by Robert Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations: A Study of the Old Testament Conception of Israel's Mission to the World*, transl. John P. Smith. London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962, pp. 5-6.
2. Among the numerous writings of H. H. Rowley on this subject are these: *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1944; *ibid.*, *Israel's Mission to the World*. London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1939; *ibid.*, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1950; and *ibid.*, *The Faith of Israel. Aspects of Old Testament Thought*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956.
3. Edmund Jacob. *Theology of the Old Testament* transl. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock. New York: Harper and Row, 1958, p. 270, n.8.
3. Jacob, *Theology...*, p. 221.
4. A. Gelin. "L'Idée Missionnaire Dans Ia Bible," *Supplement to Union missionnaire du clergé de France*, No. 14, April 1956 as cited by Martin-Achard. *A Light to the Nations*. p. 50. Also Robert Dobbie. "The Biblical Foundation of the Mission of the Church," *International Review of Missions* 51 (1962): 197.
5. Johannes Lindblom, *The Servant Songs in Deutero-Isaiah. A New Attempt to Solve an Old Problem*. Lund: E.W.K. Gleerup, 1957, p. 57.
6. Christopher R. North. *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah. An Historical and Critical Study*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 143.
7. Norman Snaith. "The Servant of the Lord in Deutero-Isaiah," in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy. Presented to Professor Theodore H. Robinson*. ed H. H. Rowley. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1950, pp. 187-200.
8. P.A.H. de Boer. "Second Isaiah's Message," *Oudtestamentische Studien* 11 (1956):80-101. Another advocate of these same views was Antoon Schoors. *I Am God Your Saviour. A Form-Critical Study of the Main Genres in Isaiah XL-LX*. Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum*. 24 (1973): 302-303.
9. Martin-Achard. *A Light to the Nations*, p. 31.
10. Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* London: Lutterworth, 1962, p. 31.
11. *Ibid.* p. 34.
12. For an in-depth study on the two Servant Poems in Isa. 42:1-6 and Isa. 49:1-6 see my article "The Missionary Mandate of the O.T." that answers the question of *how* Israel was to serve the Lord as a light to the nations. God's heart for missions never dwindled or relaxed throughout the whole O.T. But nowhere did it receive as strong a theological explication as it did in these two Servant Poems. It would forever be known that Israel was to be a "light to the nation," a "covenant to the people (all the peoples)," and God's "salvation to the ends of the earth." For a copy of this article contact the *IJFM* editor.

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The Khmer: A People Disillusioned

Genocide and centuries of domination by outsiders leave the Khmer devastated.

by Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse

They are called “the killing fields” because up to 4 million people, mostly Khmer, were killed in the mid-1970s. Had the United States experienced the same scale of genocide, up to 70 million Americans would have been killed.

Prior to that, nearly all Khmer lived in small villages where they led a quiet and peaceful life until the Vietnam War spilled over into Cambodia.

The Khmer Rouge

In 1975, the Khmer Rouge came to power under the leadership of Pol Pot. A number of factors led to this take over: 1) instability generated by the Vietnam War, 2) an American sanctioned coup that resulted in a corrupt anti-communist government, 3) indiscriminate heavy bombing by the United States, 4) an invasion by opposing Vietnamese, and 5) American troops. Cambodia was like a ripened plum for the Khmer Rouge and its reign of terror.

During the dictatorship of Pol Pot, Cambodia was totally devastated. City dwellers were forced to do slave labor on rice farms, and in an effort to rid the nation of Western influence, a campaign emerged in which most of the intellectuals were killed. Those who had an education, who spoke a foreign language, or who even wore glasses were executed. Open fields became the sites of mass graves for millions. Piles of skulls still remain near many population centers.

In 1979, Vietnam invaded Cambodia, forcing the Khmer Rouge into exile. Since that time, various fac-

tions, including the Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge, have struggled for control of the country under the watchful eye of the United Nations. Today, thousands continue to live in refugee camps on the Thai border.

A Rich Culture

The Khmer originated when people migrated from India to Cambodia in the 1st century. The Kingdom of Angkor reached its zenith during the 12th century, symbolized by the world famous Hindu temple, Angkor Wat.

Foreign Dominance

The Angkor Empire fell in 1432. For the next 400 years, the Khmer suffered under Thai and Vietnamese aggression. During that time Khmer territory was systematically sliced away. Both the Thai and Vietnamese attempted to absorb the Khmer and destroy their cultural identity.

In the 1800's, Cambodia became a French colony, and was occupied during World War II by the Japanese. Independence was finally achieved in 1954.

Buddhist Revival

The Khmer adopted Theravada Buddhism from the conquering Thai in the 15th century. Their Buddhist religion has been heavily influenced by animism and Hinduism. The Buddhist worldview

reveals a fatalistic view of life. They resign themselves to whatever happens and at the same time struggle to gain merit.

During the terrorizing by the Khmer Rouge between 80,000 to 100,000 Buddhist monks were systematically executed in Cambodia.

The Khmer also believe in spirit beings called *neak taa*. These spirits are believed to cause sickness, drought and other problems. Shrines are built to the spirits throughout the country. Sacrifices and offerings are made as appeasement.

About 1000 years ago Khmer kings dedicated the people to the Hindu deity Naga, a five-headed serpent god

associated with Shiva, a god of destruction. A spirit of destruction still lurks over this people.

Christianity

The first form of Christianity came to the Khmer by a Portuguese Catholic missionary in 1555. The first evangelical missionaries arrived in 1923.

From 1970-1975 there was a new openness among the Khmer. Massive evangelistic crusades were held in 1972 and 1973. Church growth during this time was about 300% annually. However, most of the 9,000 Christians fled the country or were killed by the Khmer Rouge. However, still today it is reported that the Khmer openly inquire about the Lord Jesus among the Westerners in Cambodia and Thailand.

Khmer Facts

Religion: Theravada Buddhism

Population: 12 million

—In Cambodia: 8,445,000

—In Thailand: 1,534,000

—In Vietnam: 829,000

—In Laos: 728,000

—(Other Khmer are located in Australia, Canada, France, and USA.)

Language: Khmer

Diet: Primarily rice, and small portions of fish and fruit.

Health Care: Few doctors, high child mortality rate, poor water and sanitation.

Products: Rice, fishing, timber, and rubber.

Literacy: 60-70%

Urbanization: 12% (In Cambodia)

The time for the Khmer to respond to the Gospel is now, since many are searching for basic answers of life. Their disillusionment can be turned to hope only through the reality of being adopted into God's family and enter His Kingdom!

Pray for the Khmer!

- * **Pray** for the physical and emotional healing of the Khmer, and for relief from their great material poverty.
- * **Pray** about the spiritual poverty of the Khmer, and that a dynamic vibrant church will take root and grow.
- * **Pray** for the completion and effective distribution of the newly translated

Khmer Bible.

- * **Pray** for the overthrow and dissolution of the evil Khmer Rouge and "the killing fields.
- * **Pray** that more Christians will take opportunities to minister to the Khmer.
- * **Pray** for Christian relief organizations, that they can assist the Khmer in rebuilding their country.
- * **Pray** that the millions of landmines will be removed and pray for the hundreds of people that have been maimed, Pray for comfort for the Khmer people who have lost loved ones.

*"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven."
(Matthew 18:19)*

For information and copies of prayers cards on the Khmer and other

Unreached Peoples contact:

The Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse

P.O. Box 17490

Colorado Springs, CO 80935 U.S.A. Tel. 719-574-7001; Fax: 719-574-7005

All the Clans, All the Peoples

Disciple the nations? Yes, but God is more specific! The Abrahamic blessing that forms the foundation for the mission mandate central to the entire Bible makes it very clear that the blessings of salvation need to go to all the clans, to all the peoples of the earth.

by Richard Showalter

To whom was the Abrahamic promise directed? (Gen. 12:1-3) First and obviously, to his lineal descendants. But its ultimate fulfillment is directed to “all the families of the earth.” (v.3) “All” is inclusive, but who are the “families”? The term *mispahot* in Genesis 12:3 has been variously rendered by Hebrew translators. The Septuagint translates it *phulai* (tribes, nations, peoples).¹ Traditionally, standard English Bibles have read “families.”² Other recent translators have rendered it “tribes” (Jerusalem Bible) and “peoples” (Today’s English Version, and the New International Version). Some exegetes have suggested reading it “communities.”³ How are we to understand the precise meaning of this significant term in the “bottom line” of the Abrahamic promise?

The missionary heart of God is nowhere more clearly revealed than in this great commission passage of the Old Testament and its essential reiteration in Matthew 28:19, 20. The two commissions are essentially one and the same. The promise (*epangelion*) to Abram is the gospel (*euangelion*) to the world. The Sender is the same, the command is the same, the mission is the same. The promise is Christ; the gospel is Christ. The Lord says go for the sake of the world. Even the promise of his abiding presence is the same. Compare Gen. 28:14,15 with Matt. 28:20. The similarities are striking between God’s promise to Jacob and the Lord’s promise to the disciples of his abiding presence till the end. It’s as if the Lord in the Matthew passage is quoting directly from Gen. 28:15.⁴ In both cases the commission is echoed again and again in Scripture.⁵ In both cases the shadow

of the cross falls across the lives of those who obey, falls in decisive separation from familial and national loyalties which often trammel and bind the witness. Abram was called out from hearth and home; the disciples later were told to “hate” father and mother for the sake of Christ. But nonetheless, both were promised a larger family as they obeyed: for Abram—descendants as the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:16); for the disciples—parents and houses and lands (Mark 10:29,30). In both cases, too, the commission’s object was the whole earth.

Yet it is characteristic of the Lord that He does not give the promise as a mere generality. The precise word of blessing is for “all the *mispahot* (Hebrew)” of the earth. Who are they? Can we define a social unit which sharpens for us the object of the promise? Does that definition reveal more clearly the path and the destiny of the blessing of world mission?

Contextual Definition

A careful contextual examination of the term in the Old Testament (300 usages) shows the following:

(1) *Mispaha* (sing.) is most commonly used to describe a subdivision of a tribe or larger people-group.⁶ This is clearly indicated in the tribal enumerations of Numbers 26 and the land divisions of Joshua 13 and 15.

(2) The most precise definition comes from Joshua 7:14 and I Samuel 10:20, 21. Here it is a social group smaller than a tribe but larger than a household. When Achan sinned, the Israelites were reviewed first by tribe, then by *mispaha*, then by household. This precise usage may be assumed to

underlie even the broader references to a whole tribe or people. (For example, *mispaha* clearly refers to the whole tribe of Dan in Judges 13:2. However, on closer comparison, we discover that in the detailed tribal enumeration of Numbers 26, Dan was composed of a single *mispaha*, in contrast to the other tribes. Consequently, for Dan the tribe and the *mispaha* are probably synonymous.) In these instances we would translate “clan.”

(3) It is used loosely on a few occasions to refer to a whole tribe or a whole people. Clear examples of this usage are Amos 3:1, 2 and Jer. 8:3.

(4) Other uses are metaphorical or by analogy with these basic meanings, and are not important for understanding the promise of Genesis 12:3.⁷

Reiterations of the Promise

Hebrew lexicographers support the general features of this analysis. Gesenius gives the primary English meaning as “clan.”⁸ Koehler and Kittel give both “family” and “clan.”⁹ All recognize the fact of a reference to a tribal or people subdivision.¹⁰

Another route for determining the meaning of *mispahot* in Genesis 12:3, is to compare reiterations of the promise.¹¹ In this case, we discover that three passages (of five total) read *goyim* (nations, peoples) instead of *mispahot*. The Hebrew *goyim* is roughly equivalent to the Greek *ethne* of Matthew 28:19.¹² This interchange between *mispahot* and *goyim* in five passages containing the same promise provides good support for the TEV/NIV rendering “all the peoples” in Genesis 12:3,¹³ and the TEV translation of *ethne* as “peoples” in Matthew 28:19. It also underscores

All the Clans, All the Peoples

the parallelism of Genesis 12:3 and Matthew 28:19 as two statements of the same great commission, one in the Old Testament and the other in the New.

It points away from the almost exclusive use of “nation” in English translations of Matthew 28:19 which risks misleading the modern reader who is accustomed to identifying it with contemporary concepts of the nation-state or country.

Numerical Description of the Clan

What, we may ask, would a Hebrew *mispaha* actually look like? Following the enumeration of Numbers 26, we find that there were approximately sixty *mispahot* in Israel at that time.¹⁴ This produces an average size per clan of 10,000 men aged twenty years and older. By extrapolation, the actual size of a clan including women and children would then average at least to 40,000 people at the time of the conquest.¹⁵ Outside the extended family, it would function as the arena for identity, social and political connection, religious life, marriage, etc.

Contemporary Discussions

Contemporary discussions of “all the nations, peoples” center largely around the meanings of *goyim* (Hebrew) and *ethne* (Greek). In Old Testament scholarship, Speiser has analyzed the meanings of *goy* (sing., “nation”) and ‘*am* (sing., “people”), and concluded that *goy* is nearer the modern concept of nation (because a territorial base is needed), and that ‘*am* is nearer the concept of people-group.¹⁶ He is undoubtedly correct. However, all of this must be understood in the context of ancient civilization in which modern nationalism was entirely unknown, and in which a nation with a territorial base was actually a functioning people-group (i.e., linked by blood and culture as well as politics). Thus Speiser concludes by affirming that Israel was both ‘*am and goyim. The interchange of *mispahot* and *goyim* in the Genesis reiterations of the promise further substantiates the “people-focus” of the*

blessing, since the “clan” carries strong overtones of consanguinity.¹⁷

New Testament Scholarship

In New Testament scholarship, one debate concerns the religious meaning of *ethne*, and a second discussion concerns its sociological meaning.

The first debate poses the question, does *ethne* refer to all nations including the Jews, or does it refer to the Gentiles only?¹⁸ The evidence is not one-sided. *Ethne* is frequently used to denote the surrounding Gentile nations (excluding the Jews) in both Old and New Testament. But it is not always so used; sometimes it clearly includes both Jews and Gentiles.¹⁹ On either interpretation, however, the effect of the commission is to underscore the universality of the gospel in both Old and New Testaments.²⁰ Neither interpretation is affected by our consideration of Genesis 12:3.

The second debate, a sociological inquiry, is more closely related to our examination of *mispaha/goyim* in the Old Testament promise (covenant). It poses the question, does *ethne* in Matthew 28:19 imply an evangelistic approach to peoples as peoples, or does it refer simply to all people in general? The question focuses especially on the issue of whether or not to target cultural units in evangelism. Walter Liefeld and David Hesselgrave have cautioned against reading an entire missiological methodology into *ethne*.²¹ Hesselgrave summarizes the discussion by pointing out that his reading of the classic Great Commission allows for a particular methodology (e.g., approaching peoples as peoples, rather than as individuals), but does not require it.²² To substantiate this caution, Liefeld and Hesselgrave argue that Greek words other than *ethne* would have been used in the Great Commission if the intent had been to focus on “ethnic groups.”²³

For this discussion, the Old Testament commission is illuminating. We have observed there the parallel use of

mispaha/phule (with stronger ethnic overtones) and *goyim/ethne* (with perhaps stronger “national” overtones). *Mispaha* is clearly a specific “people-word,” denoting as it does a clan, used interchangeably with *goy*. The point is not so much that Genesis 12:3 and Matthew 28:19 require a certain methodology by the use of this language, but rather that they assume a social reality which structures the mode of communication and blessing for all people to all peoples.

Summary

Since the ancient notion of national identity is related to consanguinity and common culture, we find the *mispahot* (clans) and the *goyim* (peoples, nations) of the Genesis commission to be particular, yet inclusive, references to humanity in all its subdivisions. We find this underscored in the meanings and usages of the words. In general, the *goyim* are larger subdivisions and the *mispahot* are smaller. A free, but not misleading, sociological translation might be “cultures” (*goyim, mispahot*) and “subcultures” (*mispahot*).

Thus the overarching impact of the promise to bless “all the clans/nations” of the earth can be stated: Through you (God’s people) the peoples of the earth will be blessed, even to the individual subcultures. The promise of blessing is for each of those subdivisions of humanity in which people find their identity.

End Notes

1. Cf. Bauer, Arndt, & Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago: Press, 1957, p.876. Cf., also Karl L. Schmidt on *ethnos* in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. II (ed./trans. Geoffrey Bromiley), Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964, p. 369. On the definition of *ethnos*: “This word, which is common in Greek from the very first, probably comes from *ethnos*, and means ‘mass’ or ‘host’ or

- 'multitude' bound by the same manners, customs or other distinctive features. In most cases *ethnos* is used of men in the sense of a *people*." He describes *phule* as "people as a national unity of common descent." Both words are used by the Septuagint in the "bottom line" of the Abrahamic commission in various texts.
2. King James Version, Revised Standard Version, New English Bible, New American Standard Bible, New Revised Standard Version.
 3. James Muilenberg, "Abraham and the Nations," *Interpretation* 19, (1965), pp. 385-398. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1964, p. 86.
 4. Cp. G. Ernest Wright, "The Old Testament Basis of the Christian Mission," *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (ed. Gerald Anderson), New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1961, p. 18. Wright and others (cf. Driver, von Rad, Zimmerli) argue against a reductionist and nontheological interpretation of Gen. 12:1-3. It is our conclusion that the two commissions are essentially one.
 5. The first: Genesis 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14, 15. The second: Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, John 20:21, Acts 1:8.
 6. Ex. 6, Num. 26, Joshua 13, 15.
 7. Cf. Brown, Driver, Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Gesenius), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907, pp. 1046, 1047. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1951, p. 579.
 8. Brown, Driver, Briggs, *ibid.*, p. 1046.
 9. Koehler, *ibid.*, p. 579. Kittel, *op. cit.*, pp. 369ff.
 10. Cf. Speiser, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
 11. Gen. 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14, 15.
 12. Cf. Kittel, *op. cit.*, pp. 369ff.
 13. The passages are all redactions of J, for those who follow the documentary hypothesis.
 14. Precise enumeration is difficult, due to overlap and subdivision. In some cases, a *misphais* is further subdivided into additional *misphahot* above the household level, apparently due to larger populations or to social dissimilation. Joseph had 12 clans, Benjamin 7, Gad 7, Judah 5, etc.
 15. A growing comprehension of the *misphahot* of Israel may also yield clues to the political and religious structure of the nation. For example, the "elders" are apparently heads of *misphahot* (Exodus 12:21).
 16. E. A. Speiser, "'People' and 'Nation' of Israel", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79, (1960), pp. 157-163.
 17. Cf. Koehler, *op. cit.*, p. 579; Brown, Driver, Briggs, *op. cit.*, pp. 1046, 1047.
 18. Cf. Peter O'Brien, "The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20: A Missionary Mandate or Not?" *The Reformed Theological Review* 35, (Sept.-Dec., 1979), pp. 66-78. Also John P. Meier, "Nations or Gentiles in Matthew 28:19," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39, (Jan., 1977) pp. 99-102, in debate with Hare and Harrington, "Make Disciples of All the Gentiles," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (1975), pp. 359-369.
 19. Cf. Kittel, *op. cit.*, articles by both Bertram and Schmidt, especially pp. 369ff.
 20. In the first case, the gospel is being extended to the Gentiles from a Jewish base, where many have rejected it. In the second case, the gospel includes the Gentiles along with the Jews. The debate concerns the overall interpretation of Matthew, but does not touch on the universality of the commission.
 21. Walter L. Liefeld, "Theology of Church Growth," in *Theology and Mission: Papers Given at Trinity Consultation No. 1*, (David Hesselgrave, ed.), Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1978. David J. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980, pp. 47, 48. Also David J. Hesselgrave, "Confusion Concerning the Great Commission," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 15:4, October, 1979, p. 200.
 22. David J. Hesselgrave, letter to the editor, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 16:4, October, 1980, p. 245. Cf. also Tesunao Yamamori and David Hesselgrave in letter and response, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 16:1, January, 1980, p. 50. Compare C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981, p. 54.
 23. In addition to Liefeld and Hesselgrave, see C. Gordon Olson, "What about People-Movement Conversion?" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 15:3, July, 1979, p. 136. Also note Karl Barth, "An Exegetical Study of Matthew 28:16-20," *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (Gerald Anderson, ed.), New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1961, p. 64. "Not the nations as such are made disciples. This interpretation once infested missionary thinking and was connected with the painful fantasies of the German Christians. It is worthless." Barth is here concerned with the structure of Christian community, while the church growth writers focus more on Christian communication. The two foci are not exclusive, but complementary, if understood correctly.
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- [Editor's note: This article is a revised reprint from *IJFM* Vol.1:2, 1984. Showalter's article was one of the first to appear in the Journal.]

The Supremacy of God Among “All the Nations”

Is reaching all the unreached peoples of the world the special task of Christian Missions? Here is an eloquent plea for the Church to catch a God-centered Biblical-based vision in order to fully engage in world evangelization to every tribe, people, tongue and nation.

by John Piper

How do we decide what the task of missions is, or even if there should be such a thing as missions? One answer would be that love demands it and love defines it. If people all over the world are under condemnation for sin and cut off from eternal life (Ephesians 2:2-3, 12; 4:17; 5:6), and if calling on Jesus is their only hope for eternal, joyful fellowship with God, then love demands missions.

But can love decide and define missions? Not without consulting the strange ways of God. Sometimes the ways of God are not the way we would have done things with our limited views. But God is love, even when his ways are puzzling. It may not look like love for your life if you sold all that you had and bought a barren field. But it might, in fact, be love from another perspective, namely, that there is a treasure buried in the field. So, of course, love will consult God's perspective on missions. Love will refuse to define missions with a limited human perspective, love will test its logic by the larger picture of God's ways.

Sinking Ocean Liners

The limits of love's wisdom become plain when we imagine missions as a rescue operation during a tragedy at sea. Suppose there were two ocean liners on the open sea, and both began to sink at the same time with large numbers of people on board who did not know how to swim. There are some lifeboats but not enough. And suppose you were in charge of a team of rescuers in two large lifeboats.

You arrive on the scene of the first sinking ship and find your self surrounded by hundreds of screaming people, some going down before your eyes, some fighting over scraps of debris, others ready to jump into the water from the sinking ship. Several hundred yards farther away the very same thing is happening to the people on the other ship.

Your heart breaks for the dying people. You long to save as many as you can. So you cry out to your two crews to give every ounce of energy they have. There are five rescuers in each boat and they are working with all their might. They are saving many. There is lots of room in the rescue boats.

Then someone cries out from the other ship, "Come over and help us!" What would love do? Would love go or stay?

I cannot think of any reason that love would leave its life-saving labor and go to the other ship. Love puts no higher value on distant souls than on nearer souls. In fact, love might well reason that in the time it would take to row across the several hundred yards to the other ship, an overall loss of total lives would result. Love might also reason that the energy of the rescuers would be depleted by rowing between ships, which would possibly result in a smaller number of individuals being saved. So love, *by itself*, may very well refuse to leave its present rescue operation. It may stay at its present work in order to save as many individuals as possible.

This imaginary scene on the sea, of course, is not a perfect picture of the church in the world, if for no other reason than that the rescue potential of the church is *not* fully engaged even where it is working. But the point of the illustration still stands: love alone (from our limited human perspective) may not see the missionary task the way God does.

God May Have Another View

God may have in mind that the aim of the rescue operation should be to gather saved sinners from every people in the world (from *both* ocean liners), even if some of the successful rescuers must leave a fruitful *reached* people (the first ocean liner), in order to labor in a (possibly less fruitful) *unreached* people (the second ocean liner).

In other words, the task of missions may not be merely to win¹ as many individuals as possible from the most responsive people groups of the world, but rather to win individuals from *all* the people groups of the world. It may not be enough to define missions as leaving the safe shore of our own culture to do rescue operations on the strange seas of other languages and cultures. Something may need to be added to that definition which impels us to leave one rescue operation to take up another.

It may be that this definition of missions will in fact result in the greatest possible number of worshippers for God's Son. But that remains for God to decide. Our responsibility is to define missions His way and then to follow Him in obedience!

That means a careful investiga-

tion of how the New Testament portrays the special missionary task of the church is needed. More specifically it means that we must assess biblically the widespread concept of “unreached peoples” as the focus of missionary activity.

People Blindness

Since 1974 the task of missions has increasingly focused on evangelizing² unreached *peoples* as opposed to evangelizing unreached *territories*. One reason for this is that at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization Ralph Winter indicted the Western missionary enterprise with what he called “people blindness.” Since that time he and others have relentlessly pressed the “people group” focus onto the agenda of most mission-minded churches and agencies. The “shattering truth” that he revealed at Lausanne was this: in spite of the fact that every *country* of the world has been penetrated with the gospel, four out of five non-Christians are still cut off from the gospel because of cultural and linguistic barriers, not geographic ones.

Winter’s message was a powerful call for the church of Christ to reorient its thinking so that missions would be seen as the task of evangelizing unreached *peoples*, not the task of merely evangelizing more territories. In a most remarkable way in the next 15 years the missionary enterprise responded to this call. In 1989 Winter was able to write, “Now that the concept of “unreached peoples” has taken hold very widely, it is immediately possible to make plans...with far greater confidence and precision.”³

A Milestone Definition

Probably the most significant unified effort to define what a “people group” is came in March, 1982, as a result of the work of the Lausanne Strategy Working Group. This meeting defined a “people group” as

a significantly large grouping of

individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc. or combinations of these....[It is] the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.⁴

We should be aware that this definition was developed not merely on the basis of Biblical teaching about the specific nature of people groups, but mainly on the basis of what would help missionaries identify and reach the various groups. This is a legitimate method for advancing evangelistic strategy.

We also need to make clear at the outset, that I am not going to use the term “people group” in a precise sociological way as distinct from “people.” I agree with those who say that the biblical concept of “peoples” or “nations” cannot be stretched to include individuals grouped on the basis of things like occupation or residence or handicaps. These are sociological groupings that are very relevant for evangelistic strategy but do not figure into defining the *biblical* meaning of “peoples” or “nations.”

“Test All Things”

My aim is to test the people group focus by the Scriptures. Is the specifically missionary mandate of the Bible 1) a command to reach as many individuals as possible, or is it 2) a command to reach all the “fields,” or is it 3) a command to reach all the “people groups” of the world, as the Bible defines people groups? Is the emphasis that has dominated mission discussion since 1974 a Biblical teaching, or is it simply a strategic development that gives mission effort a sharper focus?

The Great Commission Passage

18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing

them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

This passage is often called the Great Commission. The first thing to make clear about it is that it is still binding on the modern church. It was not merely given to the apostles for their ministry, but was given to the church for its ministry as long as this age lasts.

The basis for saying this comes from the text itself. The under girding promise of verse 20 says, “And behold, I am with you always to the close of the age.” The people referred to in the word “you” cannot be limited to the apostles, since they died within one generation. The promise extends to “the close of the age,” that is, to the day of judgment at Christ’s second coming (cf. Matthew 13:39-40, 49). So Jesus is speaking to the apostles as representatives of the church that would endure to the end of the age. He is assuring the church of his abiding presence and help as long as this age lasts.

This is further buttressed by the authority Jesus claims in verse 18. He lays claim to “all authority in heaven and on earth.” This enables him to do what he had earlier promised in Matthew 16:18 when he said, “I will build my church.” So the abiding validity of the Great Commission passage rests on the ongoing authority of Christ over all things (Matthew 28:18), and on the purpose of Christ to build his church (Matthew 16:18), and on the promise to be an ever present help in the mission of the church to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

These words of the Lord are crucial for deciding what the missionary task of the church should be today. Specifically the words “make disciples of all nations” must be closely examined. They contain the very important phrase “all nations” which is often referred to in the Greek form *panta ta ethne* (*panta*

= all, *ta* = the, *ethne* = nations). The reason this is such an important phrase is that *ethne*, when translated “nations,” sounds like a political or geographic grouping. That is its most common English usage. But we will see that this is not what the Greek means. Nor does the English always have this meaning. For example, we say the Cherokee Nation or the Sioux Nation. This means something like: people with a unifying ethnic identity. In fact the word “ethnic” comes from the Greek word *ethnos* (singular of *ethne*). Our inclination then might be to take *panta ta ethne* as a reference to “all the ethnic groups.” “Go and disciple all the ethnic groups.”

But this is precisely what needs to be tested by a careful investigation of the wider Biblical context and especially the use of *ethnos* in the New Testament as well as its Old Testament background.

The Singular *Ethnos*

In the New Testament the singular *ethnos* never refers to an individual.⁵ This is a striking fact. Every time the singular *ethnos* does occur it refers to a people group or nation, and often the Jewish nation, even though in the plural it is usually translated “Gentiles” in contrast to the Jewish people.⁶ Here are some examples to illustrate the corporate people group meaning of the singular use of *ethnos*.

Nation (*ethnos*) will rise against nation (*ethnos*) and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. (Matthew 24:7)

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem devout men from every nation (*ethnos*) under heaven. (Acts 2:5)

There was a man named Simon who... amazed the nation (*ethnos*) of Samaria. (Acts 8:9)

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (*ethnos*), God’s own people. (1 Peter 2:9)

What this survey of the singular establishes is that the word *ethnos* very

naturally and normally carried a corporate meaning in reference to people groups with a certain ethnic identity. In fact the reference in Acts 2:5 to “every nation” is very close in form to “all the nations” in Matthew 28:19. In Acts 2:5 the term must refer to people groups of some kind. At this stage, therefore, we find ourselves leaning toward a corporate “people group” understanding of “all the nations” in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19.

The Plural *Ethne*

Here we meet a change. Unlike the singular, the plural of *ethnos* does not always refer to “people groups.” It sometimes simply refers to Gentile individuals.⁷ Many instances are ambiguous. What is important to see is that in the plural the word can refer either to an ethnic group or simply to Gentile individuals who may or may not make up an ethnic group. For example, to illustrate the meaning of Gentile individuals consider the following texts. When Paul turns to the Gentiles in Antioch after being rejected by the Jews, Luke says, “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God” (Acts 13:48). This is a reference not to nations but to the group of Gentile individuals at the synagogue who heard Paul. Consider 1 Corinthians 12:2. Paul writes: “You know that when you were Gentiles, you were led astray to dumb idols.” In this verse “you” refers to the individual Gentile converts at Corinth. It would not make sense to say, “When you were nations.”

Perhaps these are sufficient to show that the plural of *ethnos* does not have to mean nations or “people groups.” On the other hand the plural, like the singular, certainly can, and often does, refer to “people groups.” For example, in Acts 13:19, referring to the taking of the promised land by Israel, Paul says, “And when he had destroyed seven nations (*ethne*) in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance.” Romans 4:17-18 says: “As it

is written, I have made you the father of many nations.” Here Paul is quoting Genesis 17:4-5 where “father of many nations” does not refer to individuals but to people groups. *Ethnon* is a Greek translation of the Hebrew *goyim* which virtually always means people groups. For example, in Deuteronomy 7:1 Moses says that God will “clear away many nations before you, Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.” The word “nations” here is *goyim* in Hebrew and *ethne* in Greek.

What we have seen then is that the plural *ethne* can mean Gentile individuals who may not be part of a single people group, or it can mean (as it always does in the singular) people groups with ethnic identity. This means that we cannot yet be certain which meaning is intended in Matthew 28:19. We cannot yet answer the question whether the task of missions according to the Great Commission passage is merely reaching as many individuals as possible or reaching all the people groups of the world.

Nevertheless, the fact that in the New Testament the singular *ethnos* never refers to an individual but always refers to a people group should perhaps incline us toward the people group meaning unless the context leads us to indicate otherwise. This will be all the more true when we put before us the Old Testament context and the impact it had on the writings of John and Paul. But first we should examine the New Testament use of the crucial phrase *panta ta ethne* (all the nations).

Panta ta Ethne

Our immediate concern is with the meaning of *panta ta ethne* in Matthew 28:19, “Go and make disciples of *all the nations*.” Since this is such a crucial phrase in the understanding of missions, and since it is tossed about as a Greek phrase today even in non technical writings, it’s important to make

some of the uses of it readily accessible for the non-Greek reader to consider. Space does not permit an entire study of all (18 references), however the following texts provide a representative sample where the combination of *pas/pan* (all) and *ethnos* (nation/Gentile) occurs in the New Testament, either in the singular (“every nation”) or plural (“all nations/Gentiles”). The different forms of *pan*, *panta*, *pasin* and *pantōn* are simply changes in the grammatical case of the same word to agree with the various forms of the noun *ethnos* (*ethne*, *ethnesin*).

Matt. 24:14—“This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to *pasin tois ethnesin*; and then the end will come”

Matt. 28:19—“Make disciples of *panta ta ethne*.”

Luke 12:29-30—“Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be of anxious mind. For the *panta ta ethne* of the world seek these things.”

Luke 21:24—“They will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive among *ta ethne panta*.” (This warning echoes the words of Ezekiel 32:9 where the corresponding Hebrew word is *goyim* which means nations or people groups. See also Deuteronomy 28:64.)

Luke 24:47—“Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to *panta ta ethne*, beginning from Jerusalem.”

Acts 2:5—“Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from *pantos ethnous* under heaven.” (This must clearly refer to people groups rather than individuals. The reference is to various ethnic or national groups from which the diaspora Jews had come to Jerusalem.)

Acts 10:35—“In *panti ethnei* any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” (Again this must be a reference to people groups or nations not to individual Gentiles because the individuals who fear God are

“in every nation.”)

Acts 14:16—“In past generations He allowed *panta ta ethne* to walk in their own nation.”

Acts 15:16-17—“I will rebuild the dwelling of David which has fallen... that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and *panta ta ethne* upon whom is called my name upon them.” (I render the verse at the end with this awkwardly literal translation simply to highlight the fact that this is a quotation from Amos 9:12, which in Greek follows the Hebrew with similar literalness. Again the Hebrew word behind *ethne* is *goyim* which means nations or people groups.)

Acts 17:26 “And He made, from one, *pan ethnos* of men to live on all the face of the earth.” (As with Acts 2:5 and 10:35 this is a reference to “every people group” rather than individuals in general because it says that every nation is made up “of men.” It would not make sense to say that every individual Gentile was made up “of men.” Nor does the suggestion of some that it means “the whole human race” fit the meaning of *ethnos* of the context.⁸ (Also see Rom. 1-5, Gal. 3:8, 2 Tim. 4:17, Rev. 12:5, and 15:4.)

We can conclude that the singular use of *ethnos* in the New Testament always refers to a people group. The plural use of *ethnos* sometimes must be a people group and sometimes must refer to Gentile individuals, but usually can go either way. The combination of these comparisons suggests that the meaning of *panta ta ethne* leans heavily in the direction of “all the nations (people groups).” It cannot be said with certainty that it always carries this meaning wherever it is used, but it is far more likely than not in view of what we have seen so far.

This likelihood increases even more when we realize that the phrase *panta ta ethne* occurs in the Greek Old Testament some 100 times and virtually never carries the meaning of Gentile indi-

viduals but always carries the meaning “all the nations” in the sense of people groups outside Israel.⁹ That the New Testament vision for missions has this focus will appear even more probable when we turn now to the Old Testament background.

The Old Testament Hope

The Old Testament is replete with promises and expectations that God would one day be worshipped by people from all the nations (peoples) of the world. We will see that these promises form the explicit foundation of New Testament missionary vision.

Foundational for the missionary vision of the New Testament was the promise which God made to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3:

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

This promise for universal blessing to all the “families” of the earth is essentially repeated in Genesis 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14. In 12:3 and 28:14 the Hebrew phrase for “all the families” (*kol mishpahōt*) is rendered in the Greek Old Testament by *pasai hai phulai*. The word *phulai* means “tribes” in most contexts. But *mishpaha* (singular) can be, and usually is, smaller than a tribe.¹⁰ For example when Achan sinned, Israel is examined in decreasing order of size: first by tribe, then by *mishpaha* (family) then by household (Joshua 7:14).

So the blessing of Abraham is intended by God to reach to fairly small groupings of people. We need not define these groups with precision in order to feel the impact of this promise and mandate. The other three repetitions of this Abrahamic promise in Genesis use the phrase “all the nations”

(Hebrew: *kolgozey*) which the Septuagint translates with the familiar *panta ta ethne* in each case (18:18; 22:18; 26:4). This again suggests strongly that *panta ta ethne* in missionary contexts has the ring of people groups rather than Gentile individuals as such.

The New Testament explicitly cites this particular Abrahamic promise twice. In Acts 3:25 Peter says to the Jewish crowd, “You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your posterity shall *all the families* of the earth be blessed.’”

The other New Testament quotation of the Abrahamic promise is in Galatians 3:6-8:

6 Thus Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. 7 So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8 And scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles (*ta ethne*) by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, In you shall all the nations (*panta ta ethne*) be blessed,

Interestingly all the English versions translate the word *ethne* differently in its two uses in Verse 8: in the first case, “Gentiles” and the next, “nations.” One could try to argue that Paul’s use of the promise to support the justification of individual “Gentiles” means he did not see people groups in the Abrahamic promise, since it is individuals who are justified. But that is not a necessary conclusion. More likely is the possibility that Paul recognized the Old Testament meaning of *panta ta ethne* in Genesis 18:18 (the closest Old Testament parallel) and drew out the inference that individual Gentiles are necessarily implied. So the English versions are right to preserve the different meaning in the two uses of *ethne* in Gal. 3:8.

Paul’s use of the promise alerts us not to get so swept up into people group thinking that we forget the truth that the “blessing of Abraham” is indeed experienced by individuals, or not at all.

What we may conclude from the wording of Gen. 12:3 and its use in the New Testament is that God’s purpose for the world is that the blessing of Abraham, namely, the salvation achieved through Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham, would reach to all the ethnic people groups of the world. This would happen as people in each group put their faith in Christ and thus become “sons of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7) and heirs of the promise (Gal. 3:29). This event of individual salvation as persons trust Christ will happen among “all the nations.” The size and make up of the nations or people groups referred to in this promise and its New Testament usage are not precise. But the words point to fairly small groupings. Since the reference to “all the nations” in Genesis 18:18 (Gal. 3:8) is an echo of “all the families” in Gen. 12:3.

The Hope of the Nations

One of the best ways to discern the scope of the Great Commission as Jesus gave it and the apostles pursued it is to immerse ourselves in the atmosphere of hope which they felt in reading their Bible, the Old Testament. One overwhelming aspect of this hope is its expectation that the truth of God would reach to all the people groups of the world and that these groups would come and worship the true God. This hope was expressed in people group terminology again and again (peoples, nations, tribes, families, etc.). Here is a sampling from the Psalms and from Isaiah of the kind of hope that set the stage for Jesus’ Great Commission. The texts fall into four categories of *exhortation, promise, prayers* and *plans*.

The first category of texts expressing the hope of the nations is a collection of *exhortations* that God’s glory be declared and praised among the nations and by the nations.

“Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion! Tell among the *peoples* his deeds.” (Ps. 9:11)

“Clap your hands, *all peoples!* Shout

to God with loud songs of joy!” (Ps. 47:1)

“Bless our God, O *peoples*, let the sound of his praise be heard.” (Ps. 66:8)

“Declare his glory among the *nations*, his marvelous works among *all the peoples.*” (Ps.96:3)

“Ascribe to the Lord, O *families of the peoples*, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength! Say among the *nations*, “the Lord reigns! Yea, the world is established, it shall never be moved; he will judge the *peoples* with equity.” (Ps. 96:7,10)

The second category of texts expressing the *hope* of the nations is a collection of *promises* that the nations will one day worship the true God.

“I shall give thee the *nations* for thine inheritance.” (Ps. 2:8; cf. 111:6)

“I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations; therefore the *peoples* will praise you for ever and ever” (Ps. 45:17)

“The princes of the *peoples* gather as the *people* of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted!” (Ps. 47:9)

“*All nations* whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.” (Ps. 86:9) (Also see: Ps. 102:15; 111:6, Isa. 11:10; 25:6-7; 49:6; 52:10; 52:15; 55:5, 56:7; 60:3; 66:18; 66:18-19.)

The third category of texts that express the *hope* of the nations announces the plans of the psalmist to *make God’s greatness known* among the nations.

“For this I will extol thee, O Lord, among the *nations*, and sing praises to thy name.” (Ps. 18:49)

“I will give thanks to thee, O Lord, among the *peoples*; I will sing praises to thee among the *nations.*” (Ps. 57:9)

“I will give thanks to thee, O Lord, among the *peoples*, I will sing praises to thee among the *nations.*” (Ps. 108:3)

Blessed to Be a Blessing

What these texts demonstrate is that the blessing of forgiveness and salvation that God had granted to Israel was meant also to reach all the people groups of the world. Israel was blessed in order to be a blessing among the nations. This is expressed best in Psalm 67:1-2, “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, [WHY?] that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving power among *all nations*.” Blessing came to Israel as a means of reaching the nations. This is the hope of the Old Testament: the blessings of salvation are for all the nations.

To see what power this Old Testament hope had on the missionary vision of the New Testament we need to turn now to the apostle Paul and his idea of the missionary task. The Old Testament hope is the explicit foundation of Paul’s life work as a missionary.

Paul’s Idea of the Mission Task

We treated Paul’s use of Genesis 12:3 (Galatians 3:8) earlier in this article. He saw the promise that in Abraham all the nations would be blessed, and he reasoned that Christ was the true offspring of Abraham and thus the heir of the promise (Galatians 3:16). Further he reasoned that all who are united to Christ by faith also become sons of Abraham and heirs of the promise. “It is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham... If you are Christ’s then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:7, 29). So the promise of Genesis 12:3 becomes true as the missionaries of the Christian church extend the message of the gospel to all the families of the earth.

Father of Many Nations

But Paul saw another connection between the promise to Abraham and Paul’s own calling to reach the nations. We read in Genesis 17:4-5 that God promised to make Abraham *the father of a multitude of nations*. We saw earlier

that “nations” here refers to people groups—not Gentile individuals. But how was this promise supposed to come true? How could a Jew become the father of a multitude of nations? It would not be enough to say that Abraham became the great grandfather of the twelve tribes of Israel plus the father of Ishmael and his descendants plus the grandfather of Esau and the Edomites. Fourteen hardly makes a multitude of nations.

Paul’s answer to this was that all who believe in Christ become the children of Abraham. In this way Abraham becomes the father of a multitude of nations, because believers will be found in every nation as missionaries reach all the unreached people groups. Paul argues like this: In Romans 4:11 he points out that Abraham received circumcision as the sign of righteousness which he had by faith before he was circumcised. “The purpose was to make him *the father of all who believe* without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them” (Romans 4:11) So true spiritual sonship in Abraham is to share his faith and not his Jewish distinctives.

When Paul read that Abraham would be made “the father of many nations” he heard the Great Commission. These nations would only come into their sonship and enjoy the blessing of Abraham if missionaries reached them with the gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. It is not surprising then to find Paul supporting his own missionary calling with these and other Old Testament promises that predicted the reaching of the nations with God’s light and salvation.

“Light to the Nations.”

In Acts 13:47 Paul’s explanation of his ministry to the Gentile nations is rooted in the promise of Isaiah 49:6 that God would make his servant a light to the nations. As Paul reached the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia on his first missionary journey, the Jews “were

filled with jealousy and contradicted what was spoken by Paul and reviled him” (Acts 13:45). So Paul and Barnabas turn away from the synagogue and focus their ministry on the people from other people groups. To give an account of this decision Paul cites Isaiah 49:6, “Since you thrust [the word of God] from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles (*ethne*). For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles (*ethnon*, nations), that you may bring salvation to the utter most parts of the earth’” (Acts 13:46-47).

Passion for Unreached Peoples

We see therefore that the people group focus governed Paul’s missionary practice. We might ask: Was his aim to win as many Gentile individuals as possible or to reach as many people groups or nations as possible? Romans 15:18-21 gives a startling clear answer:

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the nations (*ethnon*), by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fulfilled the gospel of Christ thus making it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on another man’s foundation, but as it is written, They shall see who have never been told of him, and they shall understand who have never heard of him.

Literally Paul says, “From Jerusalem and around to Illyricum I have *fulfilled (peplerokenai)* the gospel.” What can that possibly mean? We know that there were thousands of souls yet to be saved in that region because this is Paul’s and Peter’s assumption when they wrote letters to the churches in those regions. It is a huge area that stretches from southern Palestine to northern Italy. Yet Paul says he has *fulfilled the Gospel* in that whole region even though his

work is only 10 or 15 years old.

We know that Paul believed work was still needed there because he left Timothy in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3) and Titus in Crete (Titus 1:5) to do the work. Nevertheless, he says he has *fulfilled the Gospel* in the whole region. In fact, he goes so far as to say in Romans 15:23, “But now, *since I no longer have any room for work in these regions.....* I hope to see you as I go to Spain..” This is astonishing! How can he say not only that he has fulfilled the gospel in that region, but also that he has no more room for work? He is finished and going to Spain (Romans 15:24). What does this mean?

It means that Paul’s conception of the missionary task is not merely to win more and more individual people to Christ (which he could have done very efficiently in these familiar regions), but the reaching of more and more peoples or nations. His focus was not primarily on new geographic areas. Rather, he was gripped by the vision of unreached peoples. Romans 15:9-12 (just quoted) shows that his mind was saturated with Old Testament texts that relate to the hope of the nations as peoples.

What was really driving Paul when he said in Romans 15:20 that his aim was to preach not where Christ has been named “*in order that I might not build on another’s foundation?*” One could uncharitably assume a kind of ego-drive that likes to be able to take all the credit for a church planting effort. This is not the Paul we know from Scripture; nor is it what the text suggests.

The next verse (Romans 15:21) shows what drives Paul. It is the Old Testament conception of God’s world-wide purpose that gives Paul his vision as a pioneer missionary. He is driven by a prophetic vision of hope. He quotes Isaiah 52:15, “They shall see who have never been told of him, and they shall understand who have never heard of him.”

In the Old Testament these words are

immediately preceded by: So shall He startle many nations (*ethne polla*): kings shall shut their mouths because of him” (Isaiah 52:15). No doubt Paul reflected on the fact that his commission from the Lord came to him in similar words. In a close parallel to Isaiah 52:15, the risen Lord Jesus had said to Paul that he is “to carry [Christ’s] name before the nations (*ethnon*) and kings” (Acts 9:15).

In other words, what drives Paul is a personal commission from the Lord which has been richly buttressed and filled out with a prophetic vision of hope. He was gripped by the Old Testament purpose of God to bless all the nations of the earth (Galatians 3:8) and to be praised by all the peoples (Romans 15:11), and to send salvation to the end of the earth (Acts 13:47), and to make Abraham the father of many nations (Romans 4:17), and to be understood in every group where He is not known (Romans 15:21).¹¹

John’s Vision of the Mission Task

The vision of the missionary task in the writings of the apostle John confirms that Paul’s grasp of the Old Testament hope of reaching all the peoples was not unique among the apostles. What emerges from Revelation and the Gospel of John is a vision that assumes the central missionary task of reaching people groups, not just Gentile individuals.

The decisive text is Revelation 5:9-10. John is given a glimpse of the climax of redemption as redeemed people worship at the throne of God. The composition of that assembly is crucial.

The missionary vision behind this scene is that the task of the church is to *gather the ransomed from all peoples, tongues, tribes and nations*.¹² All peoples must be reached because God has appointed people to believe the gospel whom he has ransomed through the death of his Son. The design of the atonement prescribes the design of mission

strategy. And the design of the atonement (Christ’s ransom, verse 9) is *universal* in the sense that it extends to all peoples and *definite* in that it effectually ransoms some from each of those peoples. Therefore the missionary task is to gather the ransomed from all the peoples through preaching the gospel.

Gathering the Scattered Children

This understanding of John’s vision of missions is powerfully confirmed from his Gospel. In John 11:51-52 Caiaphas, the high Priest, admonishes the irate Jewish council to get Jesus out of the way because “it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.” Then John comments on this word from Caiaphas. His words are crucial for understanding John’s missionary vision. John says,

[Caiaphas] did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

This ties in remarkably with John’s conception of missions in Revelation 5:9. There it says that Christ’s death ransomed men “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” Here in John 11:52 it says that Christ’s death gathers the children of God who are scattered among all those nations. In other words, both texts picture the missionary task as gathering in those who are ransomed by Christ. John calls them “the children of God.” Therefore, “scattered” (in John 11:52) is to be taken in its fullest sense: the “children of God” will be found as widely scattered as there are peoples of the earth. The missionary task is to reach them in every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.

At this point we might ask whether this focus on peoples was the intention of Jesus as he gave his apostles their final commission. Paul’s conception of his own missionary task,

which he received from the risen Lord, would certainly suggest that this is what the Lord commanded, not only to him, but to all the apostles as the special missionary task of the church.

The Great Commission in Luke

But there is also evidence of this in the context of Luke’s record of the Lord’s words in Luke 24:45-47.

Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations (*panta ta ethne*), beginning from Jerusalem..”

The context here is crucial for our purposes. First, Jesus “opens their minds to understand the *Scriptures*.” Then he says “Thus it is *written*.” (in the Old Testament), followed (in the original Greek) by three coordinate infinitive clauses which make explicit what is written in the Old Testament: first, that the Christ is to *suffer*, second, that he is to *rise* on the third day; and third, that repentance and forgiveness of sins are to be *preached* in his name to “all the nations.” Jesus is saying that his commission to take the message of repentance and forgiveness to *all nations* “is written” in the Old Testament Scriptures. This is one of the things he opened their minds to understand. But what is the Old Testament conception of the worldwide purpose of God (which we saw above)? It is exactly what Paul saw that it was—a purpose to bless all the families of the earth and win a worshipping people from “all the nations.”¹³ Therefore we have strong evidence that the *panta ta ethne* in Luke 24:47 was understood by Jesus not merely in terms of Gentile individuals, but as an array of world peoples who must hear the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

House of Prayer for All Nations

Another pointer to show us the

way Jesus thought about the world-wide missionary purpose of God comes from Mark 11:17. Here Jesus cleanses the temple and quotes Isaiah 56:7: Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations (*pasin tois ethnesin*).”?

The reason this is important for us is that it shows Jesus reaching back to the Old Testament (just like he does in Luke 24:45-47) to interpret the world-wide purposes of God. He quotes Isaiah 56:7 which in the Hebrew explicitly says, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples (*kol ha’ammin*).”

Here the people group meaning is unmistakable. Isaiah’s point is not that every individual Gentile will have a right to dwell in the presence of God, but that there will be converts from “all peoples.” who will enter the temple to worship. That Jesus was familiar with this Old Testament hope, and that he based his worldwide expectations on references to it (see Mark 11:17 and Luke 24:45-47), suggests that we should interpret his “Great Commission,” along this line—the very same line we have found in the writings of Paul and John.

Back to the Great Commission

My conclusion from what we have seen is that one would have to go entirely against the flow of the evidence to interpret the phrase *panta ta ethneas* as “all Gentile individuals” (or “all countries”). Rather the focus of the command is the discipling of all the people groups of the world.

Therefore in all likelihood Jesus did not send his apostles out with a general mission merely to win as many individuals as they could, but rather to reach all the peoples of the world and thus to gather the “sons of God,” which are scattered (John 11:52), and to call all the “ransomed from every tongue and tribe and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9), until redeemed persons from “all the

peoples praise him.” (Rom. 15:11).

Thus when Jesus says in Matt. 24:14 that “this gospel must first be preached to all nations (*panta ta ethne*), there is no good reason for construing this to mean anything other than that the gospel must reach all the peoples of the world before the end comes. Also when Jesus says, “go and make disciples of all the nations (*panta ta ethne*),” in Matt. 28:19 there is no good reason for construing this to mean anything other than that the missionary task of the church is to press on to all the unreached peoples of the world until the Lord comes. Jesus commands it and he assures us that it will be done before he comes again. He can make that promise because he himself is building his church from all the peoples of the earth. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him for this very reason (Matthew 28:18).

Implications

That there is a distinct calling on the church to do frontier mission work among all the remaining unreached people groups is very clear from the Scriptures. So the question for us today should be: what persons or agencies in the various local churches and denominations should pick up this unique Pauline frontier type mission? To be sure, it is not the only work of the church! “Timothy-type” ministries are important. He was a foreigner working at Ephesus, continuing what Paul began. But Paul had to move on, because he was driven by a special commission¹⁴ and by a grasp of God’s worldwide mission purpose revealed in the Old Testament. There is no reason to think that God’s purpose has changed today!

Who then is to pick up the mantle of the apostle’s unique mission of reaching more and more peoples who have not been reached? Should not every denomination and church have some vital group that is recruiting, equipping, sending and supporting Pauline type missionaries to more and more unreached

peoples? Should there not be in every church and denomination a group of people (a missions agency or board) who see their special and primary task not merely to win as many individuals to Christ as possible, but to win some individuals (i.e., plant a church) among all the unreached peoples of the earth?

The Worship of the Nations

Now what does all of this have to do with the supremacy of God? God's great goal in and throughout all of history is to uphold and display the glory of his name for the enjoyment of his people from all the nations.¹⁵ The question now is: why does God pursue the goal of displaying his glory by focussing the missionary task on all the peoples of the world? How does this missionary aim serve best to achieve God's goal?

The first thing we notice in pondering this question is how the ultimate goal of God's glory is confirmed in the cluster of texts that focus missionary attention on the people groups of the world. For example, Paul said that his apostleship was given "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of [Christ's] name among all the nations" (Romans 1:5). Missions is for the glory of Christ! Its goal is to reestablish the supremacy of Christ among the peoples of the world. Similarly in Romans 15:9 Paul says that Christ did his own missionary work and inspired Paul's "in order that the nations might glorify God for his mercy." So the goal of Christ's mission and ours is that God might be glorified by the nations as they experience his mercy. Accordingly, the consummation of missions is described in Revelation 5:9 as persons from every tribe, tongue, people and nation worshipping the Lamb and declaring the infinite worth of his glory. All of this is in accord with the repeated Old Testament calls to "Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!" (Psalm 96:3). Truly, the goal of missions is the glory of God!

Intended and Eternal Diversity

We also need to notice as we ponder this question, that the diversity of the nations has its creation and consummation in the will of God. Its origin was neither accident nor evil.¹⁶ Its future is eternal: the diversity will never be replaced by uniformity. The evidence for this is found in Acts 17:26 and Revelation 21:3.

To the Athenians Paul said, "[God] made from one every nation of men (*pan ethnos anthropon*) to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation." This means that the origin of peoples is not in spite of, but because of, God's will and plan. He made the nations of men. He set them in their place. And he determines the duration of their existence. The diversity of the nations is God's idea. Therefore, for whatever reason he focuses the missionary task on all the nations, it is not a response to an accident of history. It is rooted in the purpose God had when he determined to make the nations in the first place.

God's purpose to have diversity among nations is not a temporary one only for this age. In spite of the resistance of most English versions, the standard Greek texts of the New Testament now agree that the original wording of Revelation 21:3 requires the translation: "and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, Behold the dwelling of God is with men, and he will dwell with them and they will be his peoples," and not "his people" (singular).

What John is saying here is that in the new heavens and the new earth the humanity described in Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 will be preserved: persons ransomed by the blood of Christ "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." This diversity will not disappear in the new heavens and the new earth. God willed it from the beginning. It has always had a permanent place in his plan.

How Diversity Magnifies God

Now, we can ask the question: How does God's focus on the diversity of the peoples advance his purpose to be glorified in his creation? As I have tried to reflect Biblically on this question at least four answers have emerged.¹⁷

First, there is a beauty and power of praise that comes from unity in diversity that is greater than that which comes from unity alone. Psalm 96:3-4 connects the evangelizing of the peoples with the quality of praise that God deserves. "Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! *For great is the Lord and greatly to he praised.* He is to be feared above all gods." Notice the word "for." The extraordinary greatness of the praise which the Lord should receive is the ground and impetus of our mission to all the nations.

I infer from this that the beauty and power of praise that will come to the Lord from the diversity of the nations are greater than the beauty and power that would come to him if the chorus of the redeemed were culturally uniform. The reason for this can be seen in the analogy of a choir. More depth of beauty is felt from a choir that sings in parts than from a choir that only sings in unison. Unity in diversity is more beautiful and more powerful than the unity of uniformity. This carries over to the untold differences that exist between the peoples of the world. When their diversity unites in worship to God the beauty of their praise will echo the depth and greatness of God's beauty far more exceedingly than if the redeemed were from only one or just a few different people groups.

Second, the fame and greatness and worth of an object of beauty increases in proportion to the diversity of those who recognize its beauty. If a work of art is regarded as great among a small and like-minded group of people, but not by anyone else, the art is probably not truly great. Its qualities are such that it

The Supremacy of God among “All the Nations”

does not appeal to the deep universals in our hearts but only to provincial biases. But if a work of art continues to win more and more admirers not only across cultures but also across decades and centuries, then its greatness is irresistibly manifested. Thus when Paul says, “Praise the Lord all nations, let all the peoples praise him” (Romans 15:11). He is saying that there is something about God that is so universally praiseworthy and so profoundly beautiful and so comprehensively worthy and so deeply satisfying that God will find passionate admirers in every diverse people group in the world. His true greatness will be manifest in the breadth of the diversity of those who perceive and cherish his beauty. His excellence will be shown to be higher and deeper than the parochial preferences that make us happy most of the time. His appeal will be to the deepest, highest, largest capacities of the human soul. Thus the diversity of the source of admiration will testify to his incomparable glory!

Third, the strength and wisdom and love of a leader is magnified in proportion to the diversity of people he can inspire to follow him with joy. If you can only lead a small, uniform group of people, your leadership qualities are not as great as if you can win a following from a large group of very diverse people.

Paul’s understanding of what is happening in his missionary work among the nations is that Christ is demonstrating his greatness in winning obedience from all the peoples of the world: “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the nations” (Rom. 15:18). It is not Paul’s missionary expertise that is being magnified as more and more diverse peoples choose to follow Christ. Rather, it is the greatness of Christ that is magnified. *He is showing himself superior to all other leaders.*

The last phrase of Psalm 96:3 shows

the leadership competition that is going on in world missions. “Declare his glory among the nations... He is to be feared above all gods.” We should declare the glory of God among the nations because in this way he will show his superiority over all other gods that make pretentious claims to lead the peoples. The more diverse the people groups who forsake their gods to follow the true God, the more visible is God’s superiority over all his competitors!

By focusing on all the people groups of the world, God undercuts *ethnocentric* pride and puts all peoples back upon his free grace rather than any distinctive of their own. This is what Paul was emphasizing in Acts 17:26 when he said to the proud citizens of Athens, “[God] made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation.” F. F. Bruce points out that “The Athenians...pride themselves on being... sprung from the soil of their native Attica ... They were the only Greeks on the European mainland who had no tradition of their ancestors coming into Greece; they belonged to the earliest wave of Greek immigration.”¹⁸

To this boast Paul countered: you and the Barbarians and the Jews and the Romans all came from the same origin. And you came by God’s will, not your own; and the time and place of your existence is in God’s hand. Every time God expresses his missionary focus on all the nations he cuts the nerve of *ethnocentric* pride. It’s a humbling thing to discover that God does not choose our people group because of any distinctives of worth, but rather that we might *double our joy in him* by being a means of bringing all the other groups into the same joy.

Humility is the flip side of giving God all the glory. Humility means

revelling in his grace, not our goodness. In pressing us on to all the peoples God is pressing us further into the humblest and deepest experience of his grace, and weaning us more and more from our ingrained pride. In doing this he is preparing for himself a people from all the peoples—who will be able to worship him with free and “white-hot” admiration!

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of God in all of history is to uphold and display his glory for the enjoyment of the redeemed from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. His goal is the gladness of his people because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. Delight is a higher tribute than duty. The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy his glory forever. Since his glory is magnified most in the God-centered passions of his joyful people, God’s self-exultation and our jubilation are one. The greatest news in all the world is that God’s ultimate aim to be glorified and man’s aim to be satisfied are not at odds.

Therefore the church is bound to engage with the Lord of Glory in his cause. It is our unspeakable privilege to be caught up with him in the greatest movements in history—the ingathering of the elect “from all tribes and tongues and peoples and nations” until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and all Israel is saved, and the Son of Man descends with power and great glory as King of kings and Lord of lords and the earth is full of the knowledge of his glory as the waters cover the sea for ever and ever. Then the supremacy of Christ will be manifest to all and he will deliver the kingdom to God the Father and God will be all in all!

End Notes

1. I use the word “win” in the sense that Paul does in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22. The use of “save” in verse 22 shows that this is what he has in mind: to

- be used by God in love and witness to “win people over to faith in Christ and so to save them from sin and condemnation. “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might *win* the more. To the Jew I became as a Jew, in order *to win* Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might *win* those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ—that I might *win* those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might *win* the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means **save** some.”
2. I use the word “evangelize,” in the broad New Testament sense of speaking the good news of Christ and his saving work. The speaking is with a view of bringing about faith and establishing the church of Christ (Rom. 10:14-15; 15:20), even though true evangelizing does not depend on a believing response (Heb. 4:6). For a remarkably thorough historical survey of the concept see David B. Barrett, *Evangelize! A Historical Survey of the Concept* (Birmingham, Alabama: New Hope, 1987).
 3. Ralph Winter. “Unreached Peoples: Recent Developments in the Concept.” *Mission Frontiers*, Aug./Sept. 1981, p. 12.
 4. Ralph Winter. “Unreached Peoples: Recent Developments in the Concept.” p. 18.
 5. Galatians 2:14 appears to be an exception in the English text (“If you, though a Jew, live like a *Gentile* and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”). But the Greek word here is not *ethnos*, but the adverb *ethnikos*, which means to have the life patterns of Gentiles.
 6. Following are all the singular uses in the New Testament: Matthew 21:43; 24:7 (= Mark 13:8=Luke 21:10); Luke 7:5; 23:2 (both references to the Jewish nation); Acts 2:5 (“Jews from every nation.”); 7:7; 8:9; 10:22 (“whole nation of the Jews”), 35; 17:26; 24:2, 10, 17; 26:4; 28:19 (the last five references are to the Jewish nation); John 11:48, 50, 51, 52; 18:35 (all in reference to the Jewish nation); Revelation 5:9; 13:7; 14:6; 1 Peter 2:9. Paul never uses the singular.
 7. For example, Matthew 6:32; 10:5; 12:21; 20:25; Luke 2:32; 21:24; Acts 9:15; 13:46, 47; 15:7, 14, 23; 18:6; 21:11; 22:21; Romans 3:29; 9:24; 15:9, 10, 11, 12, 16; 16:26; Galatians 2:9; 3:14; 2 Timothy 4:17; Revelation 14:18; 16:19; 19:15-20:8; 21:24. When I use the term “Gentile individuals” I do not mean to focus undue attention on specific persons. Rather, I mean to speak of non-Jews in a comprehensive way without reference to their ethnic groupings.
 8. Following Dibelius, this is suggested by F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), p. 358. But Lenski is surely right that the very next clause in Acts 17:26 militates against such a translation: “...having determined allotted periods and boundaries of their habitation.” This naturally refers, as John Stott also says, to various ethnic groups with “the epochs of their history and the limits of their territory,” R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostle* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1934), p. 729; John Stott, *The Spirit, The Church, and the World* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1990), p. 286. The point of the verse is to take the air out of the sails of *ethnic* pride in Athens. All the other *ethne* have descended from the same “one” as the Greeks, and not only that, whatever time and territory a people has, it is God’s sovereign doing and nothing to boast in: “Both the history and the geography of each nation are ultimately under [God’s] control” (Stott).
 9. My survey was done searching for all case variants of *panta ta ethne* in the plural. The following texts are references to Greek Old Testament (LXX) verse and chapter divisions which occasionally do not correspond to the Hebrew and English versions. Genesis 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; Exodus 19:5; 23:22; 23:27; 33:16; Leviticus 20:24, 26; Deuteronomy 2:25; 4:6, 19, 27; 7:6, 7, 14; 10:15; 11:23; 14:2; 26:19; 28:1, 10, 37, 64; 29:23-30:1, 3; Joshua 4:24; 23:3, 4, 17, 18; 1 Samuel 8:20; 1 Chronicles 14:17; 18:11; 2 Chronicles 7:20; 32:23; 33:9; Nehemiah 6:16; Esther 3:8; Psalm 9:8; 46:2; 48:2; 58:6, 9; 71:11, 17; 81:8; 85:9; 112:4; 116:1; 117:10; Isaiah 2:2; 14:12, 26; 25:7; 29:8; 34:2; 36:20; 40:15, 17; 43:9; 52:10; 56:7; 61:11; 66:18, 20; Jeremiah 3:17; 9:25; 25:9; 32:13, 15; 33:6; 35:11, 14; 43:2; 51:8; Ezra 25:8; 38:16; 39:21, 23; Daniel 3:2, 7; 7:14; Joel 4:2, 11, 12; Amos 9:12; Obadiah 1:15, 16; Habakkuk 2:5; Haggai 2:7; Zechariah 7:14; 12:3, 9; 14:2, 16, 18, 19; Malachi 2:9; 3:12.
 10. Karl Ludwig Schmidt argues that the *mishpahōt* are “smaller clan-like societies within the main group or nation.” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. by Geoffrey Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964], p. 365.)
 11. To these reflections could be added Paul’s crucial words in Romans 10:14-15 concerning the necessity of people being sent so that they can preach so that people can bear so that they can believe so that they can call on the Lord so that they can be saved.
 12. One can’t help but sense that John means for us to see a great reversal of the idolatry so prevalent on the earth, expressed, for example, in Daniel 3:7. Nebuchadnezzar had erected an idol and called everyone to worship it. The words used to describe the extent of that worship are almost identical to the words John uses in Revelation 5:9 to describe the extent of the true worship of God: “*All the peoples nations, and tongues* fell down and worshiped the golden image which King Nehuchadnezzar had set up.”
 13. From all the uses of *panta ta ethne* in the Old Testament that Jesus may be alluding to, at least these relate to the missionary vision of the people of God: Genesis 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; Psalm 48:2; 71:11, 17; 81:8; 85:9; 116:1; Isaiah 2:2; 25:7; 52:10; 56:7; 61:11; 66:18-20 (all references are to the LXX verse and chapter divisions).
 14. “Depart; for I will send you far away to the *ethne*” (Acts 22:21).
 15. I have labored to demonstrate this

The Supremacy of God among “All the Nations”

from Scripture in Chapter One of *Let the Nations be Glad*, and in *Desiring God* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1886), pp. 227-238; and *The Pleasures of God* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1991), pp. 101-122.

16. The story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 does not mean that God disapproves of the diversity of languages in the world. We are *not* told that apart from the tower of Babel God would not have created different languages in the world. Blocking an act of pride (Genesis 11:4) was the occasion when God initiated the diversity of languages in the world. But that does not mean that the diversity of languages was a curse that would need to be reversed in the age to come. In fact the diversity of languages is *reported* in Genesis 10:5, 20, 31 before the tower of Babel is mentioned in Genesis 11. What we learn is that God’s plan of a common origin for all peoples on the one hand and his plan for diversified languages (and cultures) on the other hand restrains the pride of man on two sides: diversity restrains the temptation to unite

against God (as at Babel) and unified origin restrains the temptation to boast in *ethnic* uniqueness (as, we will see, in Athens). The miracle and the blessing of “tongues” at Pentecost was not a declaration that in the age of promise the languages of the world would disappear, but rather a declaration that in the age of promise every obstacle to humble, God-glorifying unity in faith would be overcome.

17. I omit discussing the real possibility that there are mysterious correlations between the numbers and the purposes of the peoples and the numbers of the saints or the angels. Deuteronomy 32:8 says, “When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples *according to the number of the sons of Israel.*” The Greek Old Testament has the strange rendering: “...according to the number of the *angels* of God,” which the RSV follows, by translating, “...according to the number of the sons of God.” Making much of this would be speculation. But

it does remind us that God has reasons that are often high and hidden.

18. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1968), pp.357-358.

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All the Clans, All the Peoples

Disciple the nations? Yes, but God is more specific! The Abrahamic blessing that forms the foundation for the mission mandate central to the entire Bible makes it very clear that the blessings of salvation need to go to all the clans, to all the peoples of the earth.

by Richard Showalter

To whom was the Abrahamic promise directed? (Gen. 12:1-3) First and obviously, to his lineal descendants. But its ultimate fulfillment is directed to “all the families of the earth.” (v.3) “All” is inclusive, but who are the “families”? The term *mispahot* in Genesis 12:3 has been variously rendered by Hebrew translators. The Septuagint translates it *phulai* (tribes, nations, peoples).¹ Traditionally, standard English Bibles have read “families.”² Other recent translators have rendered it “tribes” (Jerusalem Bible) and “peoples” (Today’s English Version, and the New International Version). Some exegetes have suggested reading it “communities.”³ How are we to understand the precise meaning of this significant term in the “bottom line” of the Abrahamic promise?

The missionary heart of God is nowhere more clearly revealed than in this great commission passage of the Old Testament and its essential reiteration in Matthew 28:19, 20. The two commissions are essentially one and the same. The promise (*epangelion*) to Abram is the gospel (*euangelion*) to the world. The Sender is the same, the command is the same, the mission is the same. The promise is Christ; the gospel is Christ. The Lord says go for the sake of the world. Even the promise of his abiding presence is the same. Compare Gen. 28:14,15 with Matt. 28:20. The similarities are striking between God’s promise to Jacob and the Lord’s promise to the disciples of his abiding presence till the end. It’s as if the Lord in the Matthew passage is quoting directly from Gen. 28:15.⁴ In both cases the commission is echoed again and again in Scripture.⁵ In both cases the shadow

of the cross falls across the lives of those who obey, falls in decisive separation from familial and national loyalties which often trammel and bind the witness. Abram was called out from hearth and home; the disciples later were told to “hate” father and mother for the sake of Christ. But nonetheless, both were promised a larger family as they obeyed: for Abram—descendants as the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:16); for the disciples—parents and houses and lands (Mark 10:29,30). In both cases, too, the commission’s object was the whole earth.

Yet it is characteristic of the Lord that He does not give the promise as a mere generality. The precise word of blessing is for “all the *mispahot* (Hebrew)” of the earth. Who are they? Can we define a social unit which sharpens for us the object of the promise? Does that definition reveal more clearly the path and the destiny of the blessing of world mission?

Contextual Definition

A careful contextual examination of the term in the Old Testament (300 usages) shows the following:

(1) *Mispaha* (sing.) is most commonly used to describe a subdivision of a tribe or larger people-group.⁶ This is clearly indicated in the tribal enumerations of Numbers 26 and the land divisions of Joshua 13 and 15.

(2) The most precise definition comes from Joshua 7:14 and I Samuel 10:20, 21. Here it is a social group smaller than a tribe but larger than a household. When Achan sinned, the Israelites were reviewed first by tribe, then by *mispaha*, then by household. This precise usage may be assumed to

underlie even the broader references to a whole tribe or people. (For example, *mispaha* clearly refers to the whole tribe of Dan in Judges 13:2. However, on closer comparison, we discover that in the detailed tribal enumeration of Numbers 26, Dan was composed of a single *mispaha*, in contrast to the other tribes. Consequently, for Dan the tribe and the *mispaha* are probably synonymous.) In these instances we would translate “clan.”

(3) It is used loosely on a few occasions to refer to a whole tribe or a whole people. Clear examples of this usage are Amos 3:1, 2 and Jer. 8:3.

(4) Other uses are metaphorical or by analogy with these basic meanings, and are not important for understanding the promise of Genesis 12:3.⁷

Reiterations of the Promise

Hebrew lexicographers support the general features of this analysis. Gesenius gives the primary English meaning as “clan.”⁸ Koehler and Kittel give both “family” and “clan.”⁹ All recognize the fact of a reference to a tribal or people subdivision.¹⁰

Another route for determining the meaning of *mispahot* in Genesis 12:3, is to compare reiterations of the promise.¹¹ In this case, we discover that three passages (of five total) read *goyim* (nations, peoples) instead of *mispahot*. The Hebrew *goyim* is roughly equivalent to the Greek *ethne* of Matthew 28:19.¹² This interchange between *mispahot* and *goyim* in five passages containing the same promise provides good support for the TEV/NIV rendering “all the peoples” in Genesis 12:3,¹³ and the TEV translation of *ethne* as “peoples” in Matthew 28:19. It also underscores

Challenging the Church to World Mission

Underlying the task of challenging the Church is something very basic—something that lends meaning and urgency to all other appeals. It's the perception, purpose and plan of Almighty God. Divorced from God's all-encompassing understandings and undertakings, all other appeals and challenges lose their ultimate significance and become counter productive.

by David J. Hesselgrave

The traditional word was “exhort.” In New Testament Greek it is *parakaleo*—to “call near,” i.e., to invite, invoke, entreat, beseech. But the contemporary word seems to be “to challenge.”

It has been said that church leaders have done a much better job of *challenging* Christians to good works and Christian witness than they have in *channeling* them in work and witness. Generally speaking, that is probably true. However, it may not be true when it comes to Christian missions. In evangelical circles at least, not only has the call to mission been loud and clear; opportunities for missionary involvement have been many and varied. Nevertheless, as we have come to know it, the missionary challenge cries out for reexamination.

Contemporary calls to missionary commitment usually are directed to one or more of three types of motivation: 1) obedience to the commands of Scripture (principally but not solely the Great Commission), 2) meeting the desperate needs of people (primarily spiritual but including all kinds of needs), and 3) involvement in an exciting and winning cause (being “where the action is,” participating in a cause that will ultimately triumph). Down through the years challenges of these types have been relatively effective in motivating Western churches to support Christian missions around the world. In more recent years, and largely motivated by the same kinds of appeals, many of the younger churches of the Third World

themselves have initiated significant missionary endeavors.

If, then, the call to mission has been effective both in the West and East, and North and South, we might ask, why subject it to scrutiny at this late date in the history of church and mission?

The answer is really quite simple. Underlying these challenges is something still more basic—something that lends meaning and urgency to all such appeals. Namely, the perception, purpose and plan of Almighty God. Divorced, or even temporarily separated, from HIS all-encompassing understandings and undertakings, appeals such as those mentioned lose their ultimate significance and may actually become counter productive.

Some years ago, one seminarian expressed his concern about typical missionary challenges in the following manner (as closely as I can recall):

Sometimes I grow weary of going to missionary conferences, drinking missionary firewater, and returning home to regurgitate, only to be invited to return for more firewater. Unless the Spirit speaks I sometimes fear that missionary activists will only succeed in turning me off on missions. The Spirit speaks through Scripture I am told.

Although his reaction may have been extreme, it nevertheless is worth pondering.

Divine Intention or Human Invention

Perhaps the age-old question “Does the end justify the means?” pertains here. We may not see its relevance because the inherent goodness and

greatness of the church's missionary task sometimes obscure the problem.

When this happens, biblical principles yield to blatant pragmatism, divine intention to human invention. In the vast majority of cases, it is not the conscious intent of missionary recruiters and promoters to mislead the Christian public. It is just that the needs are so many, the opportunities are so great, and the time is so short that even though there may be an occasional twinge of conscience over lack of depth and objectivity in our preaching and reporting, it is quickly quieted by the assurance that God's hand is in this entire enterprise and therefore all appeals are justified.

There comes to my mind a cartoon I saw a number of years ago. It pictured a missionary speaker about to take his turn on the podium. As he left the pew he turned to a missionary colleague and queried, “Shall we tell them the truth or keep them happy?” That captures something of the dilemma, though the alternatives are not quite that stark and simple. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that missionary challenges do not always take the high road.

Consider briefly some of the ways in which human invention can obscure divine intention in communicating missionary challenges of the three types mentioned above.

Obedience to the Great Commission

On the face of it, simple obedience to what our Lord has commanded may seem to be the most uncompli-

cated and purest form of motivation for participation in the world mission of the church. Even in this case, however, the command can be misrepresented or misinterpreted so as to make it subservient to our special interests and undertakings. For example, in spite of textual and exegetical problems, the Marcan statement of the Commission (Mark 16:15-20) has been used to support the notion that attesting miracles must accompany the preaching of the gospel. In spite of the emphasis on authoritative sending in the text, the Johannine statement (John 20:21) has been used to support the idea that political and social action is an equal partner with evangelism in the Great Commission. In spite of a grammatical construction that binds the whole world together as the immediate arena of mission, Acts 1:8 has been used to challenge churches to concentrate on their "Jerusalem" before considering missions "to the uttermost parts."

Meeting the needs of humankind

I recall the stirring address of a prominent evangelical professor upon his return from Africa several years ago. He related how Africans had crowded around the airplane as he was about to take off. One mother especially was pressing toward the window and pointing to her sickly child. With great passion he explained how, after taking off, he had said to the pilot, "I've just seen Jesus. I've just seen Jesus." Then, referring to Jesus' words to the effect that when we care for these little ones we care for Jesus himself (Matt. 25:40), he made an impassioned appeal for funds for medical work in that African country. Of course, the cause itself was legitimate and the use of Matthew 25 for this kind of appeal is a common one. But careful exegesis simply will not sustain it. (See John Amstutz article "Humanitarianism with a Point" in *IJFM* Vol. 9:4. 1992)

This brings to mind the results of some recent research by James F. Engel and his associates. According to

this research, whereas their forebears had an abiding concern for evangelism and church-planting in the "regions beyond," baby boomers tend to favor a "holistic" mission that is more socially oriented and starts "right here at home." This indicates that there will be an increasing problem when it comes to raising support for missions among baby-boomers. Engel's solution is to make a corresponding adjustment in the way we view and promote missions in the future (James F. Engel "We are the World" *Christianity Today* 34, no 13, 1990, pp 32-34). From a pragmatic perspective, that solution seems incontrovertible. However, lest we mistake God's priorities, perhaps both baby-boomers and their elders together should take a more careful look at the biblical text!

3) An exciting and winning cause

Make no mistake about it. From a Christian perspective no cause is greater than that of proclaiming the gospel to our world and inviting its peoples to become citizens of the Kingdom of God. Nor does any cause have an outcome that is more hopeful and certain. Unfortunately those truths are easily transmuted into appeals that are suspect. The missionary volunteer who responded to a short-term opportunity in Eastern Europe by exclaiming "I think I'll go. It sounds like fun" was misled in the same way as the recruit who signs on with the Navy after viewing the sign "Join the Navy and see the world."

So are all those who are overly impressed by statistics which point to the great growth of the church worldwide. Growth there is, but statistics can conceal as much as they reveal. Over a decade ago some church growth analysts projected general population and church growth rates of sub-Saharan Africa into the future and confidently predicted that Africa would be a Christian continent by the year 2000. For a while all eyes were trained on Africa. Optimism and enthusiasm were everywhere evident. Africa as a mission field

was elevated on the agenda of churches and missions. However, today we know more about the problems of both the nations and the churches of Africa. Inter-tribal strife is everywhere evident. Even many evangelical churches are plagued by lingering ties to questionable tribal customs and witchcraft. As a result, churches and missions in Africa receive much less attention though the challenge is greater than ever! Bandwagons are not recommended conveyances if one really wants to go somewhere.

A word of caution: By no means are the above lines to be interpreted as questioning the necessity of obedience to Christ and responding to human need, or as an indictment of short-term missions and statistical analysis. Not at all! However, there is a better way to challenge the church. There is a missionary motivation that holds more potential and promise. There is an understanding of both church and mission that runs deeper. To that we now turn.

The Supremacy and Glory of God

Not a few church and mission leaders have based the missionary calling and motivation in the nature of God and the church as revealed in Scripture. Writings of Johannes Verkuyl, J. Robertson McQuilkin, Arthur Glasser, Herbert J. Kane, Don Richardson and Steven Hawthorne, among others, readily come to mind. That is all to the good. But it must be admitted that when it comes to the world mission of the church, all too often pastors and leaders of our congregations leave the task of instructing and challenging God's people to others. That in itself is quite discouraging. But the problem is compounded when mission people who inherit that opportunity by default are not given the time, or do not have the ability or inclination, to go about it in the best way.

Happily, there are many exceptions to this state of affairs. One such is

Minneapolis's Bethlehem Baptist Church where John Piper is senior pastor. I stress "pastor" because that fact in itself is important to my present purpose.

Piper is no ordinary pastor and Bethlehem Baptist is not your average church. Piper has a doctorate in theology from the University of Munich. He and his family (in fact, most of the church staff) live within walking distance of their inner-city church. Piper has been actively involved in writing, in lecturing and preaching elsewhere, and in anti-abortion and other social causes in Minneapolis, in addition to ministering to the local congregation. At the heart of all that he does in writing, preaching and ministering is a concern for the supremacy of God in church and mission. Perhaps a part of the secret to understanding both Piper's mind and heart is to be found in his own words:

I have to admit that most of my soul's food comes from very old books. I find the atmosphere of my own century far too dense with man and distant from the sweet sovereignty of God (Piper 1991:14).

Little wonder that, according to *World Pulse* (Vol. 28, No.5; Feb. 12, 1993), Bethlehem Baptist is ranked seventh in the list of the top twenty missions churches in the United States; has an organized group of some fifty or sixty people who meet regularly with an eye to missionary service; devotes one-third of its budget to support the missionary program; is a center for those who want to enroll in the Perspectives World Christian Movement course inaugurated by the U.S. Center for World Mission. That is not to say that the church has had no problems. On the contrary, one might expect that Satan will take aim on a church with this kind of vision and outreach. At the same time, the success of the church and its pastoral staff has been outstanding even in the kind of geographical location being vacated by many churches.

Let the Nations be Glad!

As a theologian-pastor, John

Piper has written on a variety of topics, like the art of preaching, the doctrine of justification, the basics of Christian living, the teaching of the Synoptics and more. But for our purposes perhaps the most revealing work is a recent one entitled *Let the Nations be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (1993). In the preface of that book, Piper

**I am fully persuaded
that the farther
our runaway world
gets from the Bible
the closer the church
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opens his heart and mind to the scrutiny of his readers. What he writes cannot be expressed in a more poignant way than he has already expressed it:

This book is a partial payment of a debt I owe to the nations... To those culturally near me and those culturally far I am a debtor. Not because they gave me anything that I must pay back, but because God gave me what can't be paid back. He gave me the all satisfying pleasure of knowing him and being loved by him through his Son Jesus Christ.

I have said to the missionaries of our church, "Your devotion has a tremendous power in my life. Your leaving is a means of my staying. Your strengths make up for my weaknesses. Your absence empowers my presence. So I thank God for you. May God make the reciprocity of our motivation more and more effective in the years to come." But the [this] book is not just for missionaries. It's for pastors who (like me) want to connect their fragile, momentary, local labors to God's invincible, eternal, global purposes. It's for lay people who want a bigger motivation for being world Christians than they get from statistics. It's for college and seminary classes on the theology of

missions that really want to be theological as well as anthropological, methodological and technological. And it's for leaders who need the flickering wick of their vocation fanned into flame again with a focus on *the Supremacy of God in missions*. (Piper 1993: 7-8; emphasis his.)

What a word that is! How humbling to even those of us who have devoted years to the mission field and taught in the mission classroom!

But it is not so much the testimony in the preface but the substance of the book itself that is crucial to our thesis here. Namely, that it is *the Word of God itself that provides the basic context, content, and correctives that the Spirit uses to guide and guard us in global mission*. These are not, of course, mutually exclusive categories. They intertwine considerably so that, at times, any one of them becomes inextricable from the others. But they do furnish us with one way of getting at what Piper says and does in this book so I will employ them here.

The Context

The Bible is the context of mission. I know that that sounds strange. It is not Piper's phrase, it is mine. To be sure, the context of mission is the world, but it is the world as that world is seen by God—the world first of all in joyful subjection to its Creator, then in rebellion and conflict, and, ultimately, the world restored to a glad relationship with its Sovereign God. It is not the world as worldlings view the world that is really the context of mission. It is not even the world as we Christians might be tempted to view the world. It is the world as God views the world that is missions' real context—the world defined and described in the Bible, the biblical world of which our contemporary world is an extension.

The primary question in missions, then, is not "What in the *world* is God doing?" but "What in the *Word* is God doing?" What he is doing in the world is what we find him doing first

in the Word. Piper understands that, though he does not express it in this way. Why do I say it that way? Because, by my calculations there are well over 600 Scripture references in this book of but 228 pages. Of course, even that can be misleading. Gustavo Gutierrez has about 425 Bible references in his book *Liberation Theology* but the picture he paints of the world, and its problem and its solution, is still very different from that which is revealed in the Bible. So it is important to add that Piper does not just *refer* to Scripture, he responds to it. He does not *wrest* from the text, but *rests* in the text.

That makes for both a world of difference and a different world because, as we have said, the biblical world is a world that begins and ends with God—with both the supremacy of God and the worship of him. So, though we have not always looked at things that way, Piper is essentially correct when he writes:

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists [sic] 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 forever. Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal in 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 coast lands be glad." (Psalm 97:1). "Let the peoples praise thee, O God; let all the peoples praise thee! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" (Psalm 67:3-4) (Piper 1993, 11; emphasis his).

So if we begin with a beneficent but benign God looking down at a wayward world and compassionately considering what he might do to rescue his creatures and creation, we've got the wrong starting point for understanding world mission. Mission begins with the supremacy and glory of a "God in

relentless pursuit of praise and honor from creation to consummation" (Piper 1993:17). The God of the Bible looks on his world as a jealous God who will not share his glory with another. Jealous, not as though he needs us. Jealous because only when God is God to all his creatures can the world be put on its true axis.

The Content

Without even the thought of doing justice to the content of a book absolutely crammed with the really solid stuff on missions, I would simply point again to the central theme of the supremacy of God in the Word and world and provide two intimations of how the text of the Bible informs the content of Piper's book.

The content of *Let the Nations Be Glad* is first of all *extensive*. The grand sweep of the biblical perspective on mission is both prescribed and preserved. The blurb on the back cover says that Piper deals with key biblical texts. He does that. But he does more than deal with important, but unconnected, texts. He literally marches through four solid pages of biblical texts to show how, at all times and in every situation, God has demonstrated zeal for his own glory (Piper 1993: 17-21). When Piper sets out to show how the early church called upon God in prayer to the end that God be glorified in his world, he devotes almost five solid pages to make his case (Piper 1993: 56-61). Of course, no author can simply pile up verse upon verse (not just the reference, but also the text). Nevertheless, the Bible itself supplies a great part of the content of this book quantitatively.

The content is also *intensive*. Over and over, Piper faces really tough and contemporary missiological questions such as those having to do with the meaning of *ethne*, the definition of "unreached peoples," the complementarity of the various statements of the Great Commission, and the necessity of repenting and believing in Christ.

These and similar issues are met head-on and analyzed biblically and intensively. This is not accomplished by a missiologist as such but by a pastor-theologian. Not for the seminary classroom alone but is for all God's people who all are, or should be, concerned for God's work in the world.

So here we have both breadth and depth of content. Could it be that too many of us underestimate the capacity of too many of God's people too much of the time? It would seem so from a reading of this book.

The Correctives

David Wells charges that evangelicals have lost the power of dissent (1992: 288). Not Piper. He refuses to capitulate to clichés like "Missions work is the greatest activity in the world" and "Prayer is THE work of missions." He does not run away from themes like suffering and judgment. He takes issue with the proposals of prominent people, like the universalism of George MacDonald and the pluralism of John Rick. He even takes issue with the conclusions of some fellow evangelicals. Piper is thorough-going in his criticism of Clark Pinnock, John Stott and Edward Fudge for defining hell, not as a place of eternal punishment, but as an "event of annihilation." He takes issue with Millard Erickson and Norman Anderson who have espoused the idea that people can be saved apart from conscious knowledge and belief in Jesus.

By the way, it is important to note that Piper does not oppose these scholars on the basis that such teachings cut the umbilical cord of missions and rob the church of missionary motivation. No, he opposes them on the basis that their views do not square with the biblical text. He does so courteously and christianly as well as (many will be persuaded) conclusively. In the process Piper rescues significant motivations for world mission. But he does so almost as a byproduct of loyalty to the text itself.

Conclusion

If it were true that Piper is falling on his face as a pastor, or that he were not in demand as a preacher and teacher, or that his writings had little market and impact, then I might at least waver in my confidence not in the potential of the Word to convict and challenge God's people, but in the capacity of contemporary congregations to hear and respond to it. But Piper's record lead in another direction. I am fully persuaded that the farther our runaway world gets from the Bible the closer the church and mission must get to it—not just for information, but for sustenance and strength!

I have learned that there is no better way to get on track, perhaps no other way exists, than placing missions squarely in the context of Scripture. Piper points us in that direction. If and when other visions move us in the wrong direction, or point us to less worthy pursuits, we could do no better than join Piper in a reconsideration of the biblical text and see again that which supersedes all of "our" worlds, both ancient, modern, postmodern, because

God is pressing us further into the humblest and deepest experience of his grace, and weaning us more and more from our ingrained pride. In doing this he is preparing for himself a people from all the peoples of the earth who will be able to worship him with free and white-hot admiration.

Therefore the church is bound to engage with the Lord of Glory in his cause. It is our unspeakable privilege to be caught up with him in the greatest movement in history—the ingathering of the elect "from all tribes and tongues and peoples and nations" until the full number of Gentiles come in, and all Israel is saved, and the Son of Man descends with power and great glory as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and the earth is full of the knowledge of his glory as the waters cover the sea for ever and ever. Then the supremacy of Christ will be manifest to all and he will deliver the kingdom to God the Father and God will be all in all (Piper 1993: 223).

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Biblical Foundations for Missions: Seven Clear Lessons

“Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people... Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts” (Ps.96:7-8) .

by Thomas Schirrmacher

There are many Old Testament texts which address the heathen peoples directly. The general tone of these texts is “Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts” (Ps.96:7-8). This is particularly the case with the Old Testament prophets.

We must consider those prophets who addressed non-Jewish nations exclusively.¹ By far, not only is judgment preached against heathen nations but also salvation through repentance (see Nineveh in Jonah) or through the coming Messiah. God was always the God of all nations, so that He naturally turns to the nations. Israel’s particular role was not to hinder salvation for all peoples, for Abraham’s calling included the mandate, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). In Abraham, “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 18:18).

For this reason, Paul and Barnabas support their evangelization among the Gentile nations (Acts 13:47) with a quote from the book of Isaiah, “It is too light a thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth” (Isa. 49:6).

Missions in Jonah

In the book of Jonah, God, who created all nations and wants to bring His salvation to all the peoples, demonstrates how He deals with the particu-

laristic attitude of His people Israel, who claimed Him for themselves alone.

To be sure, God’s covenant with Abraham gave Israel a special position, but only in order to bless all the other nations of the earth (Gen. 18:18). The complete book of Nahum treats God’s word to Nineveh (Nahum 1:1, compare with Nahum 1-3).

The book of Jonah begins, as if it were a matter of course, with the command that Jonah proclaim God’s word to a heathen city. “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it.” That the sin of the Gentiles is a sin against God, is also considered obvious, for they too are under the Law of God: “for their wickedness is come up before me” (Jonah 1:2).

In spite of his disobedience, Jonah confesses to the sailors in which God he believes: “I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land” (1:9). He uses the description of God—Creator of heaven and earth—which the Jews preferred when speaking to Gentiles, and which implies God’s universal sovereignty over all human beings. (Compare 2 Kings 19:15, Isa. 37:16, 40:12, Jer. 10:11, Acts 4:24, 14:15, 17:24-25, Rev. 14:6-7).

After that, the sailors, having first prayed “every man to his god” (1:5), then cry to the Lord (see their prayer in 1:14), and even “feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.” (1:16). It is very significant that the book of Jonah reports not only the conversion of the heathen in Nineveh but also that the mariners brought sacrifices and offer-

ings to the true God. In his prayer in the fish’s belly (2:2-10), which includes parts of various Psalms, Jonah remembers that, “Those who cling to worthless idols (literally, ‘the vapor of emptiness’) forfeit the grace that could be theirs,”—the grace that they can only receive from God. Jonah then promises to bring the Lord offerings and vows. (2:9-10).

The command to preach God’s message in Nineveh, having been given in Jonah 1:2 and repeated in 3:2, we see that its fulfillment is described with classic terminology of missionary activity: Jonah “proclaimed” and the residents of Nineveh “believed” (3:4-5 NIV). The prophecy of judgment does not contradict the fact that the sermon was intended to be evangelistic. Both Peter in his sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-26) and Paul in Athens (Acts 17:14-31), preach judgment only to wait for the reaction of their audience before introducing the theme of grace.

The prophet uses the term “to turn” which is otherwise used to describe Israel’s turning from sin to her God. In 3:5-9, the book reports a mass conversion of Gentiles that has few parallels, even in the history of Israel. The report ends with the message of 3:12, “And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do, and he did it not.” Jesus later uses Nineveh’s conversion as an accusation against His Jewish contemporaries, “For as Jonah was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation...The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall

condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and, behold one greater than Jonah is here” (See Luke 11:30, 32, and Mt 12:41). What a disgrace to Jews: Gentiles are being held up as good examples for them!

Jonah being a good theologian, knew very well that God wanted to be merciful to the heathen Gentiles as well as to Israel. The prophet’s anger (4:1) that arose rests on this knowledge, “Was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.” (4:2). It becomes evident here, that Jonah had fled from his evangelistic mission for theological, not from personal reasons! As a Jew, the prophet could not endure the thought of heathen Gentiles, especially their enemies, being treated with the same mercy as Israel.

Using the first verdant and the withered gourd, God however illustrates His relationship to the heathen, and concludes in the final verse with a distinct justification for Old Testament missions, “But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?” (4:11, NIV).

Missions in Joel

The prophet Joel proclaims not only the pending judgment over Israel (Joel 1-2) but also the future judgment upon the heathen Gentiles who oppose His people. In both cases, the prophet speaks of God’s grace and salvation and of returning to the Lord. Both sections have the proclamation of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Joel 3 in common. This is as significant for the salvation of Israel as it is for all the nations (“all flesh” Joel 2:28). For Peter, this text was fulfilled on Pentecost (“but this is that which was

spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). For this reason, he quotes the whole chapter² (Acts 2:17-21), beginning with the outpouring of the Spirit with miraculous signs upon “all flesh” (Joel 2:28)—that is, upon Jews and Gentiles alike, upon all men and women, etc., continuing with terrible judgments (2:30-31) and ending with the statement that from this time on, all can be saved by calling on the Lord, and that salvation will come out of Zion (2:32).

When Paul wanted to prove in Romans 10:11-12 that all people, not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles, can be saved through faith on Jesus Christ, he quotes not only Isaiah 28:16 “he that believeth shall not make haste,” but also the same promise from Joel cited by Peter (Joel 2:32) “who-soever calleth on the name of the Lord shall be delivered”). In 1 Corinthians 1:2, the description that “all who in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ” is used to define the universal church. Paul assumes in both cases that his audience knows that Joel 2 refers to “all flesh.”

Paul adopts not only the meaning of “calling on the name of the Lord” from Joel, but the significance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as well, for God has “saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost... shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Tit.3:5-6).

In short, the apostles understood Joel to proclaim world missions, which depend on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as well as on God’s grace, which saves all without exception who call upon Him as Lord.

Note that the sermon on Pentecost uses not only this passage out of Joel, but the whole book. Joel prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem (Joel 1-2), which can only be prevented by a thorough conversion of the people and the priests (Joel 2:12-17), for God is “gracious and merciful” (Joel 2:13). Peter’s

Pentecost sermon is held in the face of judgment pending over Jerusalem, which took place in 70 B.C. Peter exhorts his audience, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40), that is, the generation living in the forty years between Christ’s crucifixion and the destruction of Jerusalem—the last generation which had the opportunity to repent before the great catastrophe, which Jesus had also predicted, “All these things shall come upon this generation” (Mt. 23:36, also “generation” in Mt. 24:34 and 17:17).

World Missions in Daniel

The prophet Daniel is of double significance for worldmissions to all the nations. On the one hand, the events of his book takes place among the heathens and reports that they have heard of the God of Israel on an international scale. On the other hand, Daniel announces prophetically how God will deal with them and that His kingdom will one day include the whole world through the atoning death of His Son.

We see Daniel and his three friends at the Babylonian Court (Dan 1) and, in spite of Chaldean education, they keep the commands of the true and living God (Dan. 1:8-17), and with God’s great blessing (Dan. 1:15-20), so that Daniel becomes the third most powerful man in the government of three successive world empires (Dan. 1:2, 2:48-49, 5:29 and 6:3-29).

God reveals himself in a dream to the pagan ruler Nebuchadnezzar—even though the dream could only be interpreted by the “Jewish missionary” Daniel (Dan. 2 and compare the dream in Dan. 4:7-24). The courageous testimony of Daniel’s three friends, which brought them into the blessings of the fiery furnace, leads the King to an initial, wonderful confession of the true and living God, the God of Israel, to all the world, (Dan. 3:28-30) “because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort” (Dan. 3:29). Even more wonder-

Thomas Schirmacher

ful is Nebuchadnezzar's letter (Dan. 4:1-37) to all "people, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth" (Dan. 4:1). In this letter, the most powerful man of his time confesses how God had humiliated him. He begins and ends the document with a magnificent confession and descriptions of the living God (Dan. 4:1 2. 34-36). "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and his dominion is from generation to generation" (Dan. 4:1 and 34): "All his works are truth and his ways justice. And those who walk in pride he is able to put down." (Dan. 4:37).

In the same way, God reveals himself to Nebuchadnezzar's heir, Belshazzar (Dan. 5) through a writing on the wall, and continues to do likewise to the Mede, Darius, through Daniel's courageous testimony in the lions' den. Darius also proclaims God's power to the whole world in an official, international "circular" (Dan. 6:25-28). He commands that "in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel...for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his... dominion shall be even unto the end" (Dan. 6:26). Like Nebuchadnezzar before him, Darius emphasizes that Daniel's God "delivereth and rescueth" (Dan. 6:27). The final chapters of Daniel reveal the prophet's own dreams during the reigns of Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus.

During Daniel's lifetime the great world empires had heard at least twice, from the mouths their highest rulers, that the God of Israel is the true God, the most powerful God, the Creator and the only real Saviour! Daniel was one of the most significant and successful missionaries of all history!

God's Worldwide Kingdom

We have assumed that the prophet Daniel was significant for missions to all nations for two reasons: First because the contents of his book takes place among pagans and reports

that heathens have heard of the God of Israel on an international scale, and secondly, because Daniel prophetically announces how God would deal with the heathen nations, and that His kingdom will encompass the whole world through the atoning death of the Son of Man.

The future of the world's great empires and the coming of the Son of

Daniel was one of the most significant and successful missionaries of all history!

Man to save mankind are primarily described in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 and in the prophet's visions in chapters 7 to 12. Although heathen nations play an important role in other prophecies in the book (Dan. 8), we will discuss here only the prophecies which deal with the relationship between the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of God.

Most Bible-believing theologians agree that the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2) and in Daniel's vision of the four beasts (Dan. 7) represent a succession of great world kingdoms; the Babylonians (gold, lion), the Medes and the Persians (silver, bear), the Greeks (copper, panther) and the Romans (iron, terrible beast). Both visions show that God will replace these worldly kingdoms in the period of Roman rule by his own eternal Kingdom—which is to be realized especially in the New Testament Church. The theme that God is the only true Sovereign of the world, and that His Kingdom, not those of human rulers, will last eternally, permeates the whole book of Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream ends when the figure is destroyed by a stone, which grows into a "great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Dan. 2:35 and 45). Daniel explains, "In the days of those

kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44). The age of world empires will therefore end with the Romans, the Kingdom of God will be established during the period of Roman rule and grow, until it fills the whole earth. This kingdom will not be taken over by any other nation, either by those mentioned in the text or by the Jews—as the statement, "shall not be left to another people" is interpreted by many. Jesus—beginning with the disciples and the Church—had indeed established His Kingdom during the Roman period, and in many parables had already announced that the Kingdom would grow until it filled the earth (see Mt. 13:24-35).

Daniel interprets the end of the worldly kingdoms represented by the beasts in the same way (Dan. 7:9-14 and Dan. 7:26-27). God decides from His throne to end the empires (Dan. 7:9-12). This occurs when the Son of Man (Jesus' own designated name) ascends to Heaven and there receives "dominion and glory, and a kingdom" from God, so that "all people, nations and languages, should serve him" (Dan. 7:14), and this kingdom will be eternal (Dan. 7:14). "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (7:27).

In the context of the prophecy of the establishment of an eternal kingdom, including all peoples, Daniel 9:24-27 is significant, although its interpretation is disputed. In my opinion, this concerns the time between the reconstruction of Jerusalem (vs 24, 25) and the crucifixion of Jesus ("to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity,

and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and the prophecy and to anoint the most Holy,” vs 24, “shall Messiah be cut off” vs 26, the cessation of the sacrifices, vs 9:27). The period of time between the events is set at 490 years (70 year-weeks of 7 years per week), which fits arithmetically, in any case. Not until the elimination of Messiah does a prince destroy the holy city (vs 26), which initiates the “end” (vs 26) of the age of the Jews. This occurred in 70 B.C., when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman Emperor, (vs 27 repeats vs 26 chronologically). “He” in vs 27 would therefore be the messiah, the “Abomination of desolation” the destruction of the Temple, (see Mt. 24:15).

O.T. Foundations for N.T. Missions

Although the apostles spoke of Jesus’ commandment several times after Pentecost, (Acts 1:2, 10:42). they never cited the Great Commission as such, (Mt. 28:18-20. Mk.16:15-16). Did the early church agree on preaching the Gospel to all peoples so that there was no need to mention Christ’s command? On the contrary, missions to the Gentiles began very slowly and was for a long time a controversial matter. Take the Apostolic Council in Acts 15 and the Epistle to the Galatians as examples.

In studying the New Testament and discussions on the justification of missions, we discover that wherever we would have quoted the Great Commission, the apostles referred to the Old Testament. The Great Commission is the fulfillment of the New Testament, a signal that the long-announced plan was to be set into action. The letter to the Romans, particularly Chapter 15 is an obvious and clear example.³

The promise made to the patriarchs, that all nations would be blessed in them (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:17; 26:4; 28:14) is also used repeatedly to sup-

port the evangelization of non-Jewish peoples (Lk. 1:54-55 and 72; Acts 3:25-26; Rom. 4:13-25; Eph. 3:3-4; Gal. 3:79+14; Heb. 6:13-20; 11:12).

Several examples will demonstrate that New Testament world-wide missions were based on Old Testament foundations. For instance, in Acts 13:46-49, Paul and Barnabas, having been rejected by the Jews in Antioch, explain their decision to preach to the Gentiles in the future by citing Isaiah 49:6 (Acts 13:47) “For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.”

James uses Amos 9:11-12 in his closing speech at the Apostolic Council to justify Paul’s right to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15:13-2; Isa. 61:4; Ps. 22:27-28; Zech. 8:22). He believes the Church to be the “tabernacle of David that is fallen,” which will join the remnant of Judah with the heathen Gentiles.

Peter combines the Great Commission with a reference to the Old Testament as an argument for his preaching the Gospel to Cornelius. “And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:42-43).

For this reason, we are not surprised that the Great Commission takes on a different form in Luke than in Matthew and Mark, and that Jesus’ command in Luke is derived directly from the Old Testament. In Luke 24:43-49, Jesus says to the disciples, “These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures. And said unto

them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins, should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” According to Jesus’ own words, all parts of the Old Testament speak not only of His coming, as well as of the cross and the resurrection, but also of world missions that forgiveness must be preached to all the nations.

Missions in John

When studying the significance of missionary thought in the Gospel of John, there are four points to note:

1. *Missio Dei*

In the Gospel of John, Jesus’ sending of His disciples into the world is understood to be a continuation of His commission from His Father (about fifty times in John, the first time 3:17, esp. 10:16, 17:18, 21 and 23, compare 14:31) and the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and Jesus (John 14:26, 15:26, Luke 24:49). For this reason, John uses the same word, ‘to send’, (Latin: *missio*) both times. In John 17:18-23, Jesus says, “As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.” In John 20:21, He changes this phrase into a personal address, “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.” In His prayer for the disciples of chapter 17, He reports to His Father that He has given them God’s Word, and has prepared them to carry the message to the world.

2. *John as an Evangelistic Tract*

Much attention has been paid to this gospel’s character as an evangelistic tract, that is, as a text for people who have not yet come to believe in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, as Savior and light of the world. We cannot consider here

the discussion between Wilhelm Oehler, who held this gospel to have been written for the world,⁴ that is, for the non-Jew, or for Israel, as Karl Bornhauser interprets it.⁵ I believe that John's emphasis on Jesus' coming for the whole world, as light of the world, etc., supports the theory that it was intended to be a 'tract for the heathen'. (Point 4 below).

3. *Non-Jews in the Gospel of John*

After Jesus' long discussion with Nicodemus, a representative of Jewish spirituality (John 3:1-26), John had no qualms to continue with a long conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42). While John does not tell us how Nicodemus reacted to Jesus' words, the depiction of the incident at the well ends with the confession of a whole Samaritan city, "that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (4:42). Jesus had made it clear to the woman, that with His coming, the question of where one was to worship God had become insignificant, but that "the true worshipper," should worship Him in "spirit and in truth," therefore providing the possibility that the Gentiles who lived far away from Jerusalem could now worship God just as the Jews could.

4. *The Whole "World" as Object*

John's strong emphasis that Jesus is not only the Savior of the Jews, but of all peoples, and that the disciples, as His ambassadors, were to preach the Gospel to all nations, becomes particularly apparent when one observes all occurrences of the word "world."

The usage of "world" with but few exceptions, (see 12:19, for example) always means either the whole of human creation or all those who rebel against God.

We have already examined a few texts in which Jesus proclaims that His Father had sent Him into the world, and that He now sends His disciples into the world. A close look at the context of the central role of the '*Missio Dei*'

shows how strongly both Jesus and John wish the whole world to believe in Jesus Christ. "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word: That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou has sent me... that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou has sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (17:18-23).

That Jesus' commission is meant not only for Israel, but for the "world" is further developed by the repeated insistence that Jesus' significance in His offices (king, priest, prophet, Son of God, Christ, sacrificial lamb), His properties (truth) and in the central imagery (bread, light) is intended for the whole world.

John emphasizes most often that Jesus is the "light of the world" (in Jesus' description of Himself, 8:12, 9:5, similarly in 1:9, 3:19, 11:9, 12:46). Jesus says, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (8:12). At the very beginning of the gospel, John, speaking of the 'Word', that is of Jesus, says, "That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him and the world knew him not" (1:9-10).

Jesus tells Pilate, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth" (18:37). John emphasizes repeatedly that Jesus had come into the "world"—into the creation rebelling against God on the one hand, and all people, not just to Israel, on the other. "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world" (16:28). Jesus is the bread that comes from heaven, so that men may live eternally, for He will give His body "for the life of the world" (6:51).

The divine bread which has come down from heaven "giveth life unto the world." (6:33). Jesus is the "Christ" and the "Son of God" "who should come into the world" (11:27) as Martha confesses and believes. He is the prophet that "should come into the world" (6:14). He has come to judgment (9:39), although He has not come to judge, but to save the world (12:47). His well-known words to Nicodemus underline this idea, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son so that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world: but that the world through him might be saved" (3:16-17).

Nor does John the Baptist's early confession concern only the Jews. Although this term, 'the lamb', calls to mind a central Old Testament thought, nevertheless John says, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). Like the confession of the Samaritans, Jesus is "indeed the Savior of the world" (4:42).

The activity of the Holy Spirit concerns the whole world when Jesus promises the Spirit's coming and the success of world missions. "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (16:8).

Missions in Matthew

The classic Great Commission (Mt. 28,16-20) is not only the end of the Gospel of Matthew, it is really its climax and its goal. For this reason, Matthew emphasizes from the first chapter on, that the Good News is for the heathen Gentiles. That this particular Gospel, written for Jewish Christians—as the book itself demonstrates, and as the early Church unanimously reports—should so emphasize missions, demonstrates that, beginning with his birth, the earthly Jesus was already the Salvation of the Gentiles, of all the nations.

According to Mt. 5:14, Christ's disciples are "the salt of the world," that is of the cosmos, not only of the Jewish homeland, as in the case of "the salt of the land (or of the earth)" in Mt. 4:13. Similarly, the "field" which God sows in Mt. 13:38 is the whole "world." "This gospel shall be preached in the whole world" (Mt. 26:13).

The harvest in Mt. 9:37-38 is great, so that the disciples must ask God for more laborers, for "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations" (Mt. 24:14).

In Mt. 25:31-46, when the heathen nations appear before the throne of the Son of Man, some are lost and others saved (the "blessed of My Father", vs 34). For this reason, the disciples will "be hated of all nations" (Mt. 24:9).

In chapter 12:18-21, Matthew quotes a prophecy from Isaiah (Isa. 4:1-4) that the Messiah will "show judgment to the Gentiles" and that "in his name shall the Gentiles trust." (Compare a similar quote Isa. 8:23 and 9:1, Mt. 4:13-17.)

The "nations", whom Mt. 28:18 describes as recipients of the proclamation of the Gospel, have therefore already been mentioned in the whole book. (Approximately half of the examples of the word Gentiles or nations in Matthew have been mentioned.)

Matthew's genealogy of Jesus in 1:1-7 mentions women who were Gentiles! The Canaanite Tamar (Mt. 1:3. Gen. 38) and the Hittite Bathseba (in Mt. 1:6, who merely is called "the wife of Uriah" rather than naming her by name, because she was a Hittite were cases of adultery. Two of the women, however, were Gentiles who had come to believe in the living and true God of Israel. The former prostitute, Rahab, (Mt. 1:5) had made a covenant with the Israelite spies and was saved from the destruction of Jericho (Josh. 2). Because she had taken the God of Israel to be her own God, she could be married to

Salma (Mt. 1:5). Ruth (Mt. 1:4) had been born a Moabitess (Ruth 1:4), and had thus been cut off from the fellowship with the people of God (Deut. 23:4). Because, however, of her vow, "thy people shall be my people and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16), she was able to marry Boas and become the best-known ancestress of David and of Jesus.

What an affront to Matthew's Jewish contemporaries, to find heathen women in Jesus' genealogical table! He must have mentioned them on purpose, in order to show that the very purpose of Israel's history was to bring salvation and blessing to the Gentiles! (Compare Gen. 12:3 and 18:18).

While Luke, a Gentile, mentions the Jewish shepherds in the Christmas story as the first visitors to the newborn Saviour of the world (Lk. 2), Matthew ignores them and reports the journey of the heathen Wise Men of the East, who believed, unlike the educated Jewish scribes, and travelled to Bethlehem to worship him (2:1-12).

That Gentiles were often more likely to believe than were the Jews, is a story with an unbroken thread in Matthew. The following examples must have been as insulting to his Jewish readers as Jesus' own statements were to his hearers. Jesus had to flee his homeland and seek refuge in Egypt of all places. (2:13-15)! In 4:13-17 the writer reports that Jesus began his call to repentance in heathen Galilee, in order to fulfill the prophecy in Isa. 28:23 and 9:2, that "the people who walked in great darkness" that is, in the above mentioned Gentile territory, "have seen a great light"—Jesus (Mt. 4:15-16).

Mt. 8:5-13 describes a heathen centurion, who has come to believe in Jesus, of whom Jesus says: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (vs 10) and adds, that many people from the far corners of the earth will feast with the patriarchs in Heaven, while many Jews ("children of the kingdom") will be cast out (vs 12-13).

Shortly afterwards, Matthew reports that Jesus said of the Jewish cities that rejected His messengers (Mt. 10:15), "Verily, I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment than for that city." A similar statement may be found in the following chapter (Mt. 11:20-24) for Tyre and Sidon, symbols of paganism as were Sodom and Gomorrhah, would have repented, had Jesus done such miracles there as He had done in Jewish cities.

In Mt. 15:21-28, Jesus is on Gentile territory again and meets a believing Canaanite woman, who is willing to be satisfied with Israel's leftovers and the Messiah. In Mt. 16:4, Jesus reminds the Pharisees of the "sign of Jonah" that had been understood by the Gentiles (see "Missions in Jonah" above).

In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (20:1-16), the Jews would seem to be the first who are last and the Gentiles to be the last who are first. This idea is repeated more strongly in the parable of the wicked husbandmen (21:33-46), in which the vineyard is taken from the original tenants, the Jews, and given to others, the Gentiles (21:41-43), as the chief priests had to realize to their own condemnation.

This message recurs again in the parable of the wedding guests (22:1-4), for here the original guests, the Jews, are rejected in favor of the people from the highways, the Gentiles, who certainly did not belong there.

The message that the Gentiles could be grafted onto the olive tree of Israel's salvation history through the cutting off of the Jews (Rom 11:11-24)—which does not contradict the doctrine of the repentance of Israel in the future—had, therefore, been preached by Jesus again and again. Matthew demonstrating that faith is the essential factor, not nationality, held up the mirror of the Gospel to and for the whole world to his Jewish contemporaries.

End Notes

Thomas Schirmmacher

1. Obadiah writes only against Edom, Nahum against Niniveh, which is also the object of the prophet Jonah, whom we will consider later in this article. Isaiah prophesied against Babylon (Isa. 13:1-14, 21. 21:1-10), against the Assyrians (Isa. 14:24-27. 31:4-9), against the Philistines (Isa. 14:28-32), Moab (Isa. 15-16), Damascus (Isa. 17:1-11), Ethiopia (Isa. 18 and 20:1-6), Egypt (Isa. 19:1-20:6), Edom (Isa. 21:11-12. 34:1-17), Arabia (Isa. 21:11-17), and the Phoenician cities Tyre and Zidon (Isa. 23). Ezekiel prophesied against the Ammonites (Ez. 25:1-7), Moab (Ez. 25:8-11), Edom (Ez. 25:12-14. 35:1-15), the Philistines and the Cretes (Ez. 25:13-17), Tyre (Ez. 26:1-28:19), Zidon (Ez. 28:20-24) and Egypt (Ez. 29-32). Jeremiah speaks of Egypt (Jer. 46), the Philistines (Jer. 47), Moab (Jer. 48), Ammon (Jer. 49:1-6), Edom (Jer. 49:7-22), Damascus (Jer. 49:23-27), the Arabian tribes (Jer. 49:28-33), Elam (Jer. 49:34-39) and Babylon (Jer. 50-53). These prophecies are headed, "The word of the LORD... against the Gentiles." in Jeremiah 46:1. God commands the prophet to speak to a list of rulers, including Judah and 25 Gentile nations and kingdoms, "all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another, and all the kingdoms of the earth:" (Jer. 25:18-26). Amos warns Damascus (Amos 1:3-5), Gaza (Amos 1:6-8), Tyre (Amos 1:9-10), Edom (Amos 1:11-12), Ammon (Amos 1:13-15), Moab (Amos 2:1-3) and finally in the same list, Judah (Amos 2:4-5) and Israel (Amos 2:6-16). Zephaniah addresses Moab and Ammon (Zeph. 2:8-11). Joel speaks of Tyre, Zidon and the Philistines (Joel 4:4-8), but actually to all nations (Joel 4:2): "Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles: (Joel 4:9, compare vs. 1-13). The dreams which Daniel had or interpreted (Dan. 2, 7, 8 and 11) include the great heathen world empires, Babylon, Medio-Persia, Greece and Rome.
2. Dispensationalists see Pentecost only as a "prefulfillment" of Joel 2 and do not expect the complete fulfillment until the millennium. This interpretation is primarily directed against charismatics, who expect the fulfillment of the latter rain of Joel 2 in the form of a universal outburst of charismatic activity in the last days. In my opinion, neither interpretation adequately explains the fact that Peter is preaching an immediate fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in the Pentecost occurrence. He includes the miraculous signs of Joel 2:28-32 in his description of Pentecost signs which, in the Old Testament always indicated overwhelming spiritual, mental and political upheavals, such as in my opinion, sufficiently accompanied the end of the old covenant. No stars must literally fall from heaven, which would destroy the earth in any case, so that there could be no more history on this earth.
3. Compare "Romans as a Charter of World Missions: A Lesson in the Relation of Systematic Theology and Missiology". by the author in *IJFM* Vol.10:4, Oct. 1993, pp 159-162
4. Oehler, Wilhelm. *Das Johannesevangelium eine Missionsschrift fur die Welt*, C. Bertelsmann, Gutersloh, 1936. Oehler, Wilhelm. *Zum Missionscharakter des Johannesevangeliums*, Beitrage zu Furderung Christlicher Theologie, Reihe 1, No 43, pp. 435-546, 1950.
5. Bornhauser, Karl. *Das Johannesevangelium eine Missionsschrift fur Israel*, Beitrage zur Furderung Christlicher Theologie, Reihe 2, Band 15, C. Bertelsmann, Gutersloh, 1928.

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Objections? World Missions in the Old Testament?

Do you have doubts, maybe serious objections, about seeing any real world-wide mission concern and outreach in the O.T.? Perhaps these will be cleared up after carefully considering the fine articles in this special issue. For instance, seeing "The Great Commission in the Old Testament," or standing in awe at "The Supremacy of God Among All the Nations" or learning the seven lessons of the "Biblical Foundations for World Missions" and "Seeing the Big Picture" unfold can absolutely change the way you see the Bible, change the way you see God's purpose and plan and can certainly change your view of the O.T. Hopefully this has happened to you!

However, if any doubts still linger in this area, please share these with us and we'll make every effort to try to answer them. Also ask for the article (for which there was no room in this issue)

"Missions in the Old Testament: Taking a Good Look at the Objections"
by Dr. Hans M. Weerstra, editor of the *IJFM*.

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Seeing the Big Picture

When we speak of evangelizing the world, using popular phrases like “winning the world to Christ,” we do not think in detailed technical terms, nor consider the fundamental elements of exactly what it is we are doing. But are we “Seeing the Big Picture”?

by Ralph D. Winter

What we see 100 years ago, and again today, is only part of a lengthy pattern running back to Abraham, to the beginning of the Bible, and is best seen in that light. I think we can profit by tracing that whole series of events very briefly.

Genesis 1 to 11 tells us how God’s creatures were alienated from Him in the first place. Those few pages are like the introduction to the whole Bible, emphasizing three points: 1) we see the goodness of God’s original creation, 2) the entrance of a God-defying evil person—more than a force—who is still alive and menacing today, and 3) we see the hopelessness of man “only doing evil continually.”

More than “Getting Saved”

However, every commentator divides Genesis at chapter 12, because there is where we find the beginning of the one, long, sustained, dramatic account of the gradual redemption of this planet—the story of “The Kingdom Strikes Back,” something much more significant than a few individuals here and there “getting saved.”

That is, beginning in Genesis 12 we find that God has in His sovereignty chosen to “bless” a man named Abram, not just “save” him, but *bless* him. We note that this is also the key word when Isaac confers the “blessing” upon Jacob and not Esau.

Not a Raise in Salary!

It is not merely a word implying worldly blessings but one which speaks primarily of a new, family relationship, made possible only because Abram was able, as Jesus put it, “To see my day and be glad.” Yes, Abram in

faith depended upon the shed blood of Christ, the seed which one day would bruise the head of the serpent. (Gen. 3:15)

God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, father of peoples, in order to emphasize what was meant in Genesis 12 by his being the one through whom all of the peoples on earth would be brought into that same amazing blessing of sonship and inheritance.

The Mystery in Our Mission

The Bible does not talk as though God is just out to save us as individuals. God is not just out to save us from harm, and certainly not to save us to be independent of Himself. Yet, as evangelicals, our most important tenet of faith is that God wants to make us, individually, his children, with all the rights and privileges and responsibilities which come with that relationship. But God does not just want to “save us,” whatever that means to a new believer. He wants us to become *joint-heirs* with His only Son, whom He sent to die for us, so that through His shed blood we might be brought into the household of God, not as servants but as sons, and, as part of a family—His family.

All of this rich meaning is implied in the master term *blessing*, although it does not come through in English. That is, we don’t think of *being blessed* as gaining a new family relationship, something that normally includes others in that family, on earth and in heaven (Gal. 3:26-28). *The English word allows us to suppose that missions is all about helping people, to save people, when in fact missionaries are inviting people and their whole families into our same global and heavenly family.* To do that it is virtually

necessary to create the family-like fellowship of the church in mission church planting activity. Unless the church already has been planted among a given people, this is a necessary work of missionary effort.

But a dual meaning of this wonderful truth is the fact that from the beginning this blessing for us was intended for *all other peoples* as well. This gives us a breathtakingly broader mandate than to run throughout the world proclaiming the Gospel. How differently our evangelical terms sound when compared to what Paul summed up his work to be—“to bring about obedience of faith among all peoples for His Name’s sake.” The implication is that missions work for at least one obedient, evangelizing family tradition within every people or lineage on earth.

The Patriarchal Period

In this period of roughly 400 years we see many examples of both success and failure on the part of this man and his lineage, in regard to being the means of the blessing, or the inclusion as sons, of those of other nations, tribes, and tongues. Abraham’s own first journey down to Egypt was a disaster as a mission, in that his own personal security, elevated above even his wife’s well-being, brought him low rather than high in the eyes of the ruler of Egypt. What a missed opportunity! Abraham’s great grandson, Joseph, would be a much greater blessing in Egypt, although we do not know all that we someday will know about what transpired there.

The Period of the Captivity

Then, God moved this chosen family, this chosen race, this special people,

Seeing the Big Picture

right into Egypt for another 400 years. Again we do not know the details but we do know the purpose: they were to enable the Egyptians to come into that same blessing. Perhaps this happened in part. One of the pharaohs in a totally unique shift moved to monotheism, and in his tomb we see some of the phrases of the Psalms. But again we must wait until later to know more of the details. Egypt certainly ended up rejecting the will of the One who could have been their Father in heaven, and their revolt and its terrible consequences were acted out on a stage for all the world to see.

The Period of the Judges

In a third roughly-400-year period, called the Judges, we see the children of Abraham, specifically of Israel, reestablished in the strategic global location of Palestine, led out of Egypt by one of their own who had been an Egyptian, but who had been brought up by a mother who stood within the lineage of the blessing of God.

As the people leave Egypt, the purpose of the blessed nation is restated in reference to the original covenant with Abraham. It is said that this people is to function as a *nation of priests and a holy people*, in “all the earth” (Ex. 19:5,6). Meanwhile, however, the promised base of their global operations had become inhabited by a people whose fullness of evil has grown to the place where God must erase them from the record, a task in which God plans to use His own people. By that time His people have themselves degenerated to a level in which they are not useful for anything more refined than military exploits, a phenomenon reminiscent of another unspiritual leader (standing within a nation which had received the blessing) named Cortez, who with a tattered handful of men pushed over an evil empire called Aztec, which also had moved to a crescendo of human sacrifice.

Thus the period of the Judges is described as one in which a blessed nation survives, but does not reach out very effectively with that special blessing conferred upon them and entrusted to them, *a response characteristic of many other groups and periods later in human history*.

The Period of the Kings

In the next roughly-400-year period, called the Kings, God’s redemptive purpose is more clearly discovered and enacted, but limply and sporadically. First, God uses great strength against the northern kingdom, pushing them unwillingly into contact with other nations. Then He does the same with the southern kingdom when it, too, falls short of the relationship He intended, a relationship with Himself and with other nations. *God was in the mission business whether Israel was or not*.

The Period Following the Exile

In the final roughly-400-year period before Christ, the children of Israel straggle back from Babylon and in renewal rediscover more clearly than ever just what God wanted of them. They had glimpses of the fact that even their deportation had missionary purpose—God was not as interested in re-establishing them in their land as He was in their functioning as His Salvation (Blessing) to the ends of the earth (Isa 49:6).

About a hundred years before Christ, a devout and biblically focused group within this chosen nation (Pharisees) gained momentum, at the very time when the Jews had been relocated into many mission fields. By this point, the Jews had been scattered by divine forces both to the East (two-thirds of the Jews never made it back from Iran), to the North (where in every city Moses was preached), and to the Southwest, into Greek-speaking Egypt. In Egypt their concern for the Word of God produced the first (and by all odds the most

influential) missionary translation of all time, the *Septuagint*, which became the Bible of the early church, in Greek, and which provided the source of 80% of the quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament.

The Jews, in their limited grasp of God’s purpose, were constantly anguished by distressingly foreign and cosmopolitan inroads into their precious land and into what they considered their sacred culture, but it is evident that *God was in the mission business whether they were or not*. Besieged by foreigners and foreign armies going back and forth over them as a door-mat was not what they had in mind, but was apparently significant to the purposes of God.

The Pharisees actually began sending missionary teams out in every direction, “traversing land and sea to make a single proselyte.” Such missionaries then and now will tend to be a resented threat to the cultural and social tradition of other nations, and do not carry a complete nor true understanding of the nature of the *blessing* to be mediated—which speaks of spiritual sonship more than external cultural transformation (proselytization).

The Midpoint of History

At this point the ultimate occurs. God’s purpose is uniquely breathed into the dramatic story by the entrance of His own Son, who was sent to fulfill, not to destroy, but whose destruction by His own people both identifies the degree of their own degradation and also God’s grace and unvanquishable purpose. In the face of Jesus Christ we have all beheld the glory of the eternal God. In His parables we see the purposes of God for *all the nations*. We see the special nature of the nation first chosen not only for sonship, but with an overriding purpose for *all peoples*—whose “blessing” even that chosen nation’s inadequacy would not be able to forestall.

The Roman Period and Beyond

Thus, in the first AD period of 400 years, we see the invasion of God's grace into one of the world's largest and most powerful empires, as the followers of a helpless babe born in a stable grew in wisdom and knowledge and in favor with God and man, the meek literally inheriting the earth, perplexing all secular scholars, moving from a stable in a tiny town to the palace of the emperors in just a few decades.

That's right, the emperor of Rome, moving his seat of empire East into Greek territory, turned over the keys to the Lateran Palace to the Christian leaders of Rome, the equivalent of today's White House being given over to Billy Melvin of the National Association of Evangelicals.

And all this in about 300 hundred years. This peaceful conquest of Rome ushered in a final, flourishing century of Bible translation into the language of the Western half of the empire, Latin, and the collation of the New Testament documents, but also introduced affluence and distraction from divine purpose, dissipation of energy in self defense, and the exclusion of missionary rationale. The weighty fact for us, however, is that *the Romans did not busy themselves extending the blessing that had been carried into their midst.*

In response to their missionary unfaithfulness, God sent the very peoples who threatened Rome's autonomy—the Gothic tribal peoples—into the heart of the civilization of Rome, to get what they were not sent, namely, the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant. Oh, these tribal peoples had already been alerted to the Gospel, because Rome had continuously exiled its heretics into the barbarian domains beyond its borders. But the point is this: When the Romans did not *give away* their best, God forced them to *give it up*. Could that be true for us today?

In the second AD period (AD 400

to 800), the Gothic tribesmen and other middle European tribes, notably the Celtic peoples, had their turn at the Scriptures, gleaning the inner meanings at least partially, in a more amazing devotion to the pages of holy writ than has graced any period of history. (That is, the so-called illuminated manuscripts of the Bible—intended to impress the darkened hearts of tribal chieftains—represent the most detailed artwork known in the annals of humanity).

In the third post-biblical 400-year period, from 800 to 1200, we see drawn into blessing a cluster of peoples still further north, called the Vikings. *They too had to come after the blessing they had not been sent.* Their raids on middle Europe, spread out over 250 years, were as destructive as any force God ever brought against Israel, and the result was as missionary as any era—*God was in the mission business whether His people were or not.* The young women the Vikings loved to take as slaves and concubines, and at times as wives, were, in some cases—those who kept the faith—the main instrument that carried the blessing to these northern peoples.

The result of this unusual, although not very desirable missionary mechanism, was that the pitch darkness of these incredibly ruthless sea-going savages was, after two and a half centuries of turmoil and heartache, brought into contact with the light. As Churchill puts it in his *History of the English Speaking Peoples*, these northern peoples were “held and dazzled by the effulgence of the glory of the Gospel.” But not because very many missionaries were sent to them. They had to come after the blessing they were not sent—do we need to wonder why our country is being invaded from all sides by hundreds of nationalities?

In the next four centuries, ruthless pirates, now transformed, became Christian leaders of a sort, leading the Crusades against the Muslims in a pathetic

misunderstanding of the Great Commission. They also tried to glorify God in out-doing each other at one point in the building of astonishing buildings called cathedrals (all of which were begun within a single 50-year period). Much good was also accomplished. Remaining Bible study centers earlier established by Celtic missionaries, but mainly burned down by the Vikings, were renovated and now transformed into much larger centers of order and worship, underlying most of the major cities of Europe today, while scholarship, a virtual monopoly of the most committed Christians, emerged in the form of the early universities. Most important, the mechanisms of global mission were decisively hammered out by sheer determination and devotion, and the unrelenting efforts of strategists like Prince Henry the Navigator and Christopher Columbus, both of whom, once we remove our contemporary secular interpretations, were actuated by devotion to Christ and to global missionary endeavors.

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[Editor's note: The article here produced is Part I of “The Big Picture” with its main focuses on the Biblical story followed by subsequent post biblical periods of missions, up to AD 1600. Readers who would like to obtain Part II, covering the events of modern mission history since 1600 should contact the *IJFM* editor and ask for a copy.]

Melchizedek and Abraham Walk Together in World Mission

*Why must the church today begin mission where God and the apostles began?
Here is a biblical rationale that world mission needs to start with creation, conscience and culture.*

by W. Douglas Smith, Jr.

No truth is more overwhelming than the unyielding fact that mankind is lost. Our minds boggle at the thought of hundreds of generations of unevangelized heathen whose souls are already in hell. The vast majority of today's population will follow shortly. We sink before the immense task of dispersing the darkness which envelopes nearly 2.5 billion fellow human beings. Our feelings rebel against such a tragedy. We know our theology contradicts those feelings, but just this once we wish our theology were mute.

Christians can never give enough nor pray enough. Missionaries, no matter how zealously they work, can feel they have stretched themselves far enough. The mission executive pensively scans his map, mentally totaling the vast populations whose spiritual destiny may well hang on his decisions.

The colossal responsibility for the two and half billion weighs us down and mocks our puny efforts. Somewhere, in some missionary conference, someone told us that if we were truly obeying the Holy Spirit, the world would be saturated with the Gospel. That voice regularly reminds us how much heathen blood clings to our hands.

Yet, less than two hundred years ago the Church in England, influenced by rationalism and deism, could not have cared less. When young William Carey in 1785 proposed to a group of ministers that they discuss "The Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens," the moderator squelched him with this icy reply, "Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He

will do it without your aid or ours."¹ In those years the Church assumed absolutely no responsibility for the lost unreached peoples of the world.

Now the pendulum has swung to the other extreme—and has hung there. The burden of world evangelization topples from heaven to earth. Our current view nearly leaves God out of the picture. Sermons, films, lectures, literature and even scholastic preparation for mission service stress the human factor so heavily that mission ceases to be regarded as a basic divine enterprise.

To be sure, God started the clock ticking, but according to many sincere mission promoters, He seems to be distant, uninvolved, watching helplessly while we botch His magnificent program of world redemption. He depends on us. We fail miserably. The unreached perish without hope. He is bitterly grieved. We go to heaven and eventually live happily ever after.

Is God frustrated? Has He been unable to reach the pagan world prior to the traditional date of the founding of Catholic and Protestant missions? Is His mighty voice stifled in the many cultures where no mission penetrates? If not, then how has God been speaking in time and space ever since creation?

God Speaks Through Creation

"The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psa. 19:1). The lavish sunset colors stroked by the Master Artist on the easel of the sky communicates God's majesty, intelligence and omnipotence. The rhythm of the seasons sings of His goodness and concern for men. The fertile valleys and snow mantled

peaks echo their agreement. "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). Through nature God sings an anthem of Himself, and men universally hear. God's attributes are clearly seen. At all times God is being perceived. The message written in natural wonders strikes so forcefully that it leaves all men without excuse.

Think back to when God challenged Job to an intellectual battle (Job 38). He began, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" God then multiplied that question with several dozen more. Those questions probed into stellar space and delved into the microscopic world of the snowflake. God could not quote Scripture because Job had no Bible. He could not remind Job of laws and covenants, but He could awaken Job's conscience with a whirlwind tour of many kinds of natural phenomena.

God still speaks to cultures without the Bible through the drama of wind, cloud, storm and thunder; through the panorama of galaxies; through the miracles of birth, blossom and fruit. Do primitive cultures jumble this message by insensitiveness to the light they do have, thereby inverting God's order? Do they become oppressively subdued under a harsh creation? Answer: They worship the creation rather than the Creator. Satan abuses creation and culture for his own ends, usurping man's vice regency under God. (Rom. 1:18-32; Isa. 14:12-14)

Melchizedek and Abraham Walk Together

God Speaks Through Conscience

Every culture recognizes some system of right and wrong. Paul speaks of “the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending themselves (Rom. 2:15). Conscience declares that the God of creation is holy and just. As C. S. Lewis has so poignantly expressed: “when I open that particular man called myself, I find that I do not exist on my own, that I am under a law; that somebody or something wants me to behave in a certain way...we conclude that the Being behind the universe is intensely interested in right conduct, fair play, unselfishness, courage, good faith, honesty and truthfulness.”²

Since creation God planted a device in all men which sounds an alarm on sin. True, the device can be tampered with, as Cain did in attempting to escape responsibility for his brother. Human beings can rewire their consciences so that the alarm sounds only faintly or infrequently, as with the new moralists. Certain cultures pattern the conscience with blurry, inaccurate data concerning right and wrong. Still, because God conceived it, it works. It demands response in obedience born out of faith in Him because of the kind of person He is.³

Let us not underestimate the power of God’s voice in creation and in conscience. He speaks clearly and effectively through these media. He broadcasts the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Romans 10:18 says, “But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have: their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.” We find the evidence of the same universal message in Colossians 1:23, which directs our attention to “the hope of the Gospel you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven.”

But some might protest: The Christian message had not yet permeated

the globe, nor even the Roman Empire. What does Paul mean here? The answer lies in the fact that the Gospel written on the scroll of the heavens and in the hearts of men had reached them.

Don Richardson calls this “the Melchizedek factor,” that gives men of all races, times and cultures “eternity in their hearts.” It encompasses God’s general revelation to all men everywhere, speaking as He does through their conscience, and linking it with God’s special revelation embodied in Abraham. Richardson calls the latter “the Abraham factor.”⁴

Co-Laborers with God

The above indicates that God has always been evangelizing the unbelieving lost world, including the lost unreached peoples on the other side of the world in every culture. Nowhere do we ever start from scratch without God’s prior witness.⁵

Our listeners are never theologically blank or morally untutored. As co-laborers with God we should reemphasize what God has already said, beginning where each person is in his own culture.⁶

When the Church encounters the lost, two things are known:

- * The lost know God in some way.
- * They do not honor Him as God intends, giving Him thanks (Rom. 1:21).

When we preach in the name of our Heavenly Father, we must require men to first recognize and honor the Creator as the only, true and living God, in repentance born of the Spirit (Acts 11:18). Secondly, men must offer thanks to Him. This is the essence of repentance. Men must stop ignoring God and begin to worship Him. Men must turn from indifference and begin to praise their Maker in gratitude for life, food, family and goods, as God ordained since Adam. Martin Luther emphasized this same teaching in his ministry and writings.⁷

Often we try to explain the atone-

ment, somehow expecting theological understanding to inspire repentance. Sometimes it does, especially in Christianized cultures. However, the man without the Bible⁸ seldom understands and very seldom sees the need to repent. He sees no relation at all between the message he reads in his environment and the message he sees in the missionary’s presentation. Why? We fail to build on God’s universal communication—“the Melchizedek factor.”

When the apostles confronted their pagan audiences, they zeroed in on the great truths pregnant in creation and conscience.⁹ Paul and Barnabas asked:

Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the Gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them. He did not leave Himself without a witness, in that He did good and gave you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:15,17 NAS).

The pagan hearer is more likely to sense that he is in the presence of truth when he hears of the God who sends the rain and the crops and who made heaven and earth. He can understand the clear demand to “turn from these vain things to the living God” long before he can master the concepts of propitiation and justification (Rev. 14:6,7; Mark 13:10).

God’s revelation in the outer universe and in the inner mind unite to call for repentance, worship and thanks. Paul makes this clear from Romans 2:14, “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness, forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” With a natural and moral revelation urging men to repent specifically of their ingratitude and indifference, should our Gospel fail to do likewise? If we are co-

laborers with God, then we should join His chorus. We sing the same song and preach the same message. Notice this in Paul's address to the Athenians, "What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands ...He gives to all life and breath...He made from one all nations of mankind to live on all the face of the earth...that they should seek God" (Acts 17:23-27 NAS). We too must challenge men to respond to God, the God of whom they instinctively, and initially know. "God is now declaring to men that all, everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30)

Consider Apollos, a man mighty in the Scriptures, a Spirit-directed preacher who knew "only the baptism of John." Was he saved? Certainly! Did he have an effective ministry? Yes! What did he preach? John's message: Repent! We should not prize theological ignorance, but we must insist that it does not prevent people from being saved. The minimum requirement for salvation is a heart-felt cry for the God who is there! Watchman Nee emphasizes, "For what is it to be reckoned righteous? It is to touch God."¹⁰ As men obey this summons, they call out and fulfill the divine promise, "Whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:12, 13).

Touching God in Repentance

When the publican cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner," his prayer reached the heart of God. The man was saved! We are not told how much theological knowledge he possessed. Certainly, it was less than that of the pharisee. But we do know that the publican went down to his house justified (Luke 18:13,14).

The thief on the cross prayed, "Remember me." The Lord Jesus might have used this opportunity to explain

the plan of salvation, or expounded on the significance of His death. Rather, He simply promised, "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:42,43).

Are there heathen who are ready to touch God? Do some individuals and whole unreached people groups ripen under the influence of God's sermons in the cosmos? History clearly answers in the affirmative.

In the last century a young Japanese lad named Neesima renounced idolatry at an early age and began to search for God. Later, after reading Genesis 1:1, he prayed, "Oh, if You have eyes, look upon me; if You have ears, listen to me."¹¹ Neesima became one of Japan's mightiest evangelists.

Nee records meeting a man who at the age of twelve, while worshipping an idol, began to think to himself, "You are too ugly and too dirty to be worshipped! What is the sense of worshipping you?" The boy slipped away to touch the true and living God. Finding an open space, he poured out this prayer, "O God, whoever You are, I do not believe You can dwell in that shrine. You are too big, and it is too small and dirty for You. You surely must dwell right up there in the heavens. I do not know how to find You, but I put myself in Your hands; for sin is very strong and the world pulls. I commit myself to You wherever You may be."¹²

Entire peoples become receptive in a similar fashion. When an animistic Ayore tribe of Bolivia was reached by missionary, Bill Pencille, a large number trusted Christ. The Ayore chief told Pencille that missionary effort would have failed with an earlier generation. "They would have killed you." But the chief's prior observation of the marvelous majesty and rhythm of the seasons stirred him to cry out, "Oh God of creation, reveal Yourself to me". He dreamt that a white man would come with that very revelation. As his tribe searched and waited, his generation ripened to a new receptivity.¹³ Christ

promised, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asks receives and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened" (Luke 11:9,10).

The Decision Making Process

Individuals and groups of people as described above go through various steps in coming to Christ and deepening their discipleship. It appears that the Great Commission imperative of "make disciples" can be broken down into four basic participles: 1. Going 2) Teaching, 3) Equipping 4) Sending. Part of the problem with gathering in the harvest among the *ethne* comes from failing to discern where the audience is in this mission process.

Every receptor appears some were along this continuum. All peoples have some awareness of the Supreme Being through God's general revelation in creation and conscience. However, at this stage there is no effective awareness of the Good News of the possibility of forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. Other receptors will have an awareness and grasp of the implications of the Gospel from exposure to Christian proclamation. When awareness is accompanied by a strong felt need for change, designated as personal problem recognition, does the individual open his life to Christ. Prior to this moment of truth, there in neither sufficient understanding nor the felt need to allow a valid response. Once a person is persuaded to receive Christ, he enters a process of spiritual growth through obedience to the Word under the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

The Pendulum of Responsibility

To summarize, we may ask, "How swings the pendulum of responsibility for evangelizing the lost?" The same sustaining God of creation who causes the fields to ripen, wants to guide us to the repentant seekers, as He did with Carey, poring over his crude

Melchizedek and Abraham Walk Together

maps and charts of the world. When we arrive we must coordinate our mission to confirm and emphasize what God has been saying and doing prior to our arrival. We must call out, "Turn to the true and living God," knowing well that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses the sin of the ignorant as well as that of the scholar. Whoever truly cries out and touches God in repentance will be justified, even if he has never understood the doctrine of justification. Thus, every responsible witness must capture the universal message of the Innocent dying and rising again for the guilty. This is the supracultural significance of blood sacrifice (Gen. 3:21; Lev. 17:11).

Conclusion

God shoulders the burden for world evangelization through us. Our responsibility is to obey the Lord of the harvest. He plants us where He wants us as we will lift up our eyes to go to His fields. He does not depend on our frenzied efforts. God works through obedient followers who conscientiously disciple those whom God has ripened to faith and repentance. We share with God in evangelizing the two and half billion. Responsible believers like Philip, Peter, William Carey and Bill Pencille are lead by the Holy Spirit in their daily "going, baptizing and teaching" (Matt. 28:19,20; Acts 8 and 10).¹³

The responsibility never was, nor ever will be, ours alone. Moreover, our failures and mistakes do not stymie God's program of redemption. We can and must harmonize with Him in His harvest to disciple the lost whom He wants to save.

Every few years International Congresses on World Evangelization focus on mission strategy and the dynamic process of reaping the harvest among the remaining unreached peoples of the earth. In that light, no strategy is sufficient which does not begin

with what God is saying and doing through cosmological media to reach each man, woman and child where they are. World evangelization can be speeded; reaping can be accelerated when the Church understands God's prior ministry in every culture. Will we, like William Carey, learn to discern the discontinuous cultural assumptions from the continuous, biblical universals? Will we begin with "the Melchizedek factor" to introduce "the Abrahamic factor" especially among the unreached?

It is time for the Christian Church to recognize the biblical basis for her responsibility to the lost, especially the lost with no access to the Good News. We must not minimize or exaggerate our duties. We must not think of our guilt more solemnly than we ought to think. We have some theological repenting to do which will make us feel better, as well as live healthier and work more fruitfully with God as His co-laborers. It is time to nudge the pendulum of Christian responsibility gently back into balance with what God has always been saying and doing. He is a jealous God. Until Christ's soon return, may we be found moving in rhythm with Him as we become more responsible in discipling the unreached peoples of the world as His co-laborers until completion around the Lamb's throne. (Rev. 5:9).

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The Biblical Basis and Priority for Frontier Missions

We need to encourage those who have the gift and calling to keep moving to the peoples on the frontiers—the peoples of the earth WHO live beyond the hearing and seeing of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

by William R. O'Brien

A few years ago the *Ft. Worth Star-Telegram* carried an Etta Hume political cartoon. In each of the four squares the reader sees a poor mother with an empty bowl between her and her starving child. She speaks to the child: 1. "Whenever you have no food in your bowl at mealtime, you should think of... 2) all of the poor bureaucrats in the world who never have...3) enough imagination to figure out how to distribute food surpluses... 4) They have to go to bed with empty heads every night."

It was an indicting statement that gripped me. Beyond the physical and moral implications of the statement, I thought of its application related to Christian world mission. Can you imagine a poor lost mother saying to her child: 1) "Whenever you don't have Christ in your heart, you should always think of... 2) all the poor missiological bureaucrats in the world who never have...3) enough imagination to figure out how to distribute the gospel... 4) They have to go to bed with empty heads every night."

One of the mysterious paradoxes of the late twentieth century is the gap between the great love of our Lord confessed by those in our churches, in missions agencies, and by missionaries on the field, and their inability or unwillingness to close that gap between the Good News "haves" and Good News "have-nots." Have we missed something of the heartbeat and purpose of God? If so, does that mean we have missed something of that revealed will in the Word of God?

Is there a biblical basis for missions, on the one hand, and a different biblical foundation for frontier missions on the

other? The title of this article may say more about the age of specialization than it does about a biblical foundation and priority for frontier missions. Or, it may have more to do with the etymology of the word "frontier" than it does with missiology in general. Why bother differentiating between missions and frontier missions?

To be sure, there is but one foundation for world missions. We may not be talking so much about a difference in kind as we are a difference in degree. But in this case the "degree" is very important. To understand the crucial nature of that "degree," one must understand what we mean by "frontier." In one sense, we might say that the last great frontier in the world Christian mission is the frontier of collaboration. Certainly the task is too large for any single agency, church, denomination, or group of missionaries. The essence of covenant is the interconnectedness of all the parts. Collaboration is not compromise; it is a mark of humility in the presence of all the other gifts within the Body of Christ.

But that kind of frontier is not the one we are talking about here. Neither are we talking primarily about geographic frontiers. To speak of frontiers in terms of real estate reflects a type of arrogance that defines one's own turf as settled, familiar, and developed. To move beyond the familiar to some frontier "out there," requires a bit of pious condescension that reflects a self-serving sacrifice.

When we define "frontier missions" we do not first ask the "where" nor the "what" questions, but rather, the "WHO." Maybe we ought to coin a new

word: Who-tier missions. The "who" of frontier missions comprises any and all who still live beyond the hearing and the seeing of the gospel. Areas and peoples of the earth with no church, with few or no believers, no Bible in the written language, no Christian presence for them to see and hear the word, no broadcasts of the Good News is the focus. They are the peoples of the world with no exposure nor access to the Word of any kind, just human beings, created in the image of God, left to their own inner-longings which pass in and out of the hole in the heart, finding nothing solid on which to find repose and relief. They are the modern day "Gentiles" who are peoples "a hope not having."

William Owen Carver was perhaps a mission scholar without peers, who taught at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky from 1896-1943. His translation and interpretation of the Greek text of Ephesians led him to the following conclusion:

The promise, which became the only line of messianic hope and of divine promise, was that embodied in covenants, such as that with Abraham and the other patriarchs. It was historically a covenant with the descendants of Abraham and fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Saviour. Having no share, by claim or concession, in that line, the Gentile peoples were peoples "without a hope" – literally, in emphatic construction, "a hope not having".¹

Carver talks about the Gentiles being God-less, not in the sense that we define atheists. Rather, it is those "who do not have God as he is, and must be known for salvation. Such, then, is the hopeless plight of the nations before

God came to them in the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”²

The modern Gentiles who comprise the Who-tier of missions today may be clustered in a geographic region such as the 10/40 Window. But due to migration patterns that have already reached staggering proportions on a global scale things have changed—many of those beyond the hearing and seeing of the gospel, have moved next door! We distinguish them within population segments, like people groups, limited access nations, and even unreached cities. So back to the original question: What is the biblical basis and priority for engaging in Who-tier/Frontier missions focused on the unreached or unevangelized peoples of the earth?

Principles Inherent in Scripture

There are “golden texts” within the Bible that are often used on “Missions Sundays”, like Matthew 28, Acts 1, Romans 10, etc. They are so obvious they stand out as proof of the world mission mandate. But proof texts can be used like a hammer to create guilt or to intimidate. When used to instruct and inspire, the focus on isolated texts separates those very “proofs” from the larger body of literature that reveals the nature and purpose of God. David Bosch says “one of the main reasons for the existence of this body of literature is the missionary self-understanding and involvement of the people who gave birth to it.”³ Or, it may be that in looking for a biblical basis for mission, missionary advocates as a matter of course took it for granted that it was the enterprise they knew and were engaged in that had to be justified biblically.

William Owen Carver used to ask students in his introductory mission course, “What’s the Bible all about? Is it ALL about ANYTHING?” The remainder of the course was the unfolding of the whole of Scripture as the basis for understanding the mission of God. Bosch helps us at this point in focus-

ing on four cardinal missionary motifs in Scripture: compassion, *martyria*, God’s mission, and history. One could say, then, that through the whole of Scripture we view mission from the standpoint of the nature of God, *modus operandi*, ownership, and location.

Compassion

God’s nature is that of compassion. The all-encompassing compassion of God for the cosmos and all its contents evidences itself in a litany that includes: accounts of creation, inclusion of Adam and Eve in the plan, protection of fallen humanity in removing them from the presence of the Tree of Life, guarding Cain by placing a mark on his forehead, the call to Abram and shaping of a covenant community, denouncing boundaries of narrow ethnocentrism through the Jonah experience, and the ultimate word of compassion in Jesus the Christ. These few examples are magnified greatly when one reads the whole Bible sensitive to how the compassionate God wills and acts, “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

Martyria

This Greek word for “witness” encompasses both definition and style, or *modus operandi*. It obviously gives us the English word, “martyr.” How contrary is this concept to much of the style of Western Protestant mission endeavors manifested in strategy, strength, and triumph. Biblically speaking things are different: the strength of the task flows through weakness. The mind of Christ is to be the mind of mission, which willingly empties itself and takes the form of servant. Increasingly in this century we see servanthood taking on more of the suffering qualities, even unto death.

God’s Mission

The Church has no mission primarily its own. God is the author of mission. Again, David Bosch: “Mission is what God is doing to and through the Ser-

vant, not what the Servant does.”⁴ As loving and obedient children, the more we understand mission as God’s work, the more we as his children want to get involved with it. Divine and human activity must be held in countertension. Bosch warns that if we separate God’s activity from human involvement we land in one of two untenable positions: either we become fatalists because we overemphasize God’s activity or we go the other extreme and focus on human endeavor and become fanatics.

4. History

The mission of God happens in real time, among real people, in real places. The Bible contains the most important drama ever staged, and the reader is in front-row center. The God who acts in real time, real place has come among us. The risen, reigning Christ still acts among the 1.2 billion who do not know anything about him. He still acts in the earthly arena characterized by migration, urbanization, poverty, tribalization, violence, AIDS, and martyrdom. Christ-followers, by definition, neither sit still nor retreat into safe havens. They follow the Lord of the harvest to all those places where Christ still acts in real time and real places to accomplish and complete His redemptive purpose and plan for the world.

A Scriptural Model

Do we need now to look at some specifics from within the larger context of Scripture that would give us a clue about concern for the unreached peoples of the world? The Spirit speaking through Isaiah reminded Israel that the task of the covenant community was far greater than raising up the tribes of Jacob and restoring the survivors of Israel. God would give them as a light to the nations (Gentiles, i.e., ethnic peoples) that God’s salvation might reach to the end of the earth (Isaiah 49:6).

In the great “resurrection seminar” Jesus held with his disciples during

the last forty days on earth, he “opened their minds” so they could understand the Scriptures and all that was written about him in Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Then, specifically, as recorded by Luke, Jesus said, “This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Again, the “all nations” is not speaking of nation-states, but all the ethnic peoples of the world (Luke 24:44-49). Since various groups hold to differing definitions of what constitutes unreached peoples, the numbers range anywhere from 1685 to 6000 or beyond. However, and this is the point to drive home, even if 4,000 of those ethnic people groups have never heard the Good News of Jesus, it must mean the hands and the feet of the Body are not moving the same direction as the Head intends them to go!

As believers moved out of Judea and Samaria because of persecution, other ethnic groups besides Jews were evangelized and were added to the Church. The church at Antioch affirmed the “*apostolos*” gifts of Paul and Barnabas and “sent” them to still other *ethne* (ethnic groups) beyond the reach of existing churches.

To a new group of believers Paul wrote his most comprehensive word on the nature of God’s calling to the Church and the churches. In Ephesians Paul prayed that believers in that area might “grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ...” To grasp the width of the love of God is to say that the scope of God’s love is all inclusive of all the peoples and comprehensive of the whole world.

But how will they know they are included if our actions as his people virtually exclude them? It seems that our actions, money, and placement of missionary personnel narrows the “width of God’s love” to include only those nearby and easy to reach. Furthermore,

our apathy toward the totality of the mission reflects the assumption that God would never allow anyone to live in eternal lostness.

Paul never thought in those terms. In fact he shared with believers in Rome his joy at the opportunity to preach the gospel all the way from Jerusalem around to Illyricum, or modern-day Albania. Then he said, “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation” (Romans 15:20). Paul went so far as to tell them that he had no more place to work, and therefore, would be moving on. The reason he might be able to visit the believers in Rome was not because Rome was his destination or even his next mission assignment. Rather, it would be a stopping-off place on his way to Spain where Christ was not known. In his great closing doxology to the Romans Paul indicates the reason that the mystery hidden for long ages was now an open secret and none other than “that all nations (ethnic peoples) might believe and obey him (God)” (Romans 16:26). We note that Paul certainly planned to do his share in helping all the Good News “have-nots” to get God’s Word firsthand and without delay. Knowing Paul’s spirit, I doubt he even saw Spain as an end in itself.

When Paul indicated there was no more work to do in the vast region where he worked it did not mean that everyone had become a believer and was active in a new church, nor that unbelievers in Antioch, or anywhere else, were unimportant, nor that no more churches needed be planted. However, the question of the matching of spiritual gifts and calling with needs and opportunities is a crucial matter that must be kept in proper balance. And here is the imbalance: When 99% of all missions dollars and personnel continue to work in areas where over and over the gospel is proclaimed and already received it can only mean the hands and the feet of the

Body are not in sync with the Head.

Conclusion

In light of the above, the matter of degree and priority of missions becomes increasingly important. Through the mission of the compassionate suffering-Servant, God acts in behalf of all creation, all peoples, and all humanity. If almost twenty-five percent of all that humanity has never heard the Good News of God’s love, the fault does not lie with God.

It is time for the whole Church to work together to find ways to express compassionate, suffering service in real time and difficult places to those WHO have never heard. Since there is such imbalance in the stewardship of human and financial resources as applied to Christian world mission, the Church and the churches must readjust their priorities to give a greater equalizing focus to this larger part of the unfinished task. The Church must give greater encouragement to those who continuously stay out beyond the reach of the already reached—of existing planted churches. We need to encourage those who have the gift and calling to keep moving to the peoples on the frontiers WHO live beyond the hearing and seeing of the gospel of Jesus Christ. After all, there is a biblical basis, a biblical model as well as a biblical priority for doing so!

End Notes

1. Carver, William Owen, *The Glory of God in the Christian Calling*, Broadman Press, Nashville, 1979, p. 93
2. *Ibid.* p. 93
3. Phillips and Coote, *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission*, Orbis, 1993, p. 178
4. *Ibid.* p. 184

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