

GOD'S MISSIONARY MESSAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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John Moldovan, Ph.D.

Roy Fish School of Evangelism and Missions

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Mark Christy

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GOD'S MISSIONARY MESSAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The theology of mission must find its root in God and His initial revelation in the Old Testament so that the final revelation of Christ in the New Testament can be linked with the God of the OT and connected with His purpose for creation.¹ A proper understanding of God's missionary message starts with the acceptance of the Scriptures as the authoritative revelation of God and His mission to mankind.² As an authoritative witness, the OT serves as a foundation for the sending out of missionaries as Christ commands in the Great Commission. In the OT, God's reveals specifically His missionary purpose to restore the broken relationship with sinful humanity.

God's mission begins with a revelation of Himself and His purpose in the OT. God's unique revelation of Himself to humanity even through "the religious particulars of Israel" serves as the foundation of His missionary message.³ Paul, Peter, the author of

¹From this point forward, OT will be used to abbreviate Old Testament, and NT will used to abbreviate New Testament.

²D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). Carson provides an excellent discussion on the Bible's authority in chapter four.

³David Filbeck, *Yes, God of the Gentiles, Too: The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, 1994), 46, 75. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 28. Filbeck argues that Israel played primarily a centripetal role in God's missionary purpose. Kaiser, on the other hand, suggests that Israel was called to engage in centrifugal missionary efforts from the start. While both scholars may agree that God is a missionary God, their disagreement over Israel's missionary responsibility (centripetal or centrifugal) has implications for how one understands God's missionary message in the OT. The author of this paper will attempt to show that God desires all people to hear His message and even appoints human messengers in the OT to deliver it; however, God's decision to separate Israel from the Egyptians, to kill the inhabitants of Canaan, and to remain somewhat indirect in His missionary plans for the world through the nation of Israel (as a active missionary force engaged in centrifugal missionary work) suggests that God has a unique plan for Israel.

Hebrews, and all other NT authors, in one way or another, refer to the OT in delivering their missionary message of the universality of God and His unique message of salvation through the promised Messiah.⁴ This study of God's missionary message in the OT will focus on God's relationship with humanity, His unique purpose for Israel, His vision for mission, and conclude with pertinent implications and applications for missiology in the 21st century.

God's Relationship with Humanity

The Creation Account

In the Genesis account of creation, God's nature is revealed. As sole creator, God is portrayed as both omniscient and omnipotent. His omniscience and omnipotence can be seen in His creating everything from absolutely nothing. As sole creator, He alone is to be worshipped as God, since everything owes its existence to Him. Just as the Psalmists praise and worship God because of His creative work, all people need to respond in praise to God's self-revelation through His creation.⁵

Humanity, however, must understand, as the creation account illustrates, that "[n]ature is not to be worshipped; it is completely devoid of divinities."⁶ Throughout the OT, God is portrayed as the sole being deserving the worship of humanity since He created them. In Job 38-40, God Himself appeals to His creative witness which leads to a worshipful response from Job.

⁴Acts 17:24-28; Rom 1:20; 9; Gal 3:7-9, 28-29; Heb 11; 1 Pet 3:20-21; 2 Pet 2:4-9.

⁵Pss 8:1-9; 19:1-6; 33:6-9; 95:1-5; 148:1-14.

⁶Arthur F. Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 32.

So that humanity may worship the one true God, God unveils the nature of His unique relationship with all peoples throughout the OT beginning with the Genesis account of the creation. In the first two chapters of Genesis, God is identified as the sole Creator of everything including humanity; therefore, He possesses an exclusive relationship with all people. The nature of God's relationship with man is a major component in understanding God's missionary message in the OT.

The relationship between God and the human race is unique since He alone is their sole Creator. The relationship is personal since God chose to impart His image to people exclusively and entrusted the care of the world to them (Gen 1:26).⁷ The author of Genesis noted that everything created by God was good and observed that God rested at the end of His creative efforts (1:31; 2:2).

God's intention is to establish a peaceful relationship with humanity. God's love is first seen in His provision for their needs. Besides His provision of food, He also gives Adam a suitable mate so that he would not be alone (Gen 1:29; 2:18). God provides Adam and Eve with His presence in the Garden of Eden. Gregory K. Beale considers Eden to be the first temple since "God's unique presence" was there.⁸ Just as God has

⁷Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 29-32; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 134-38; W. Sibley Towner, "Clones of God: Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible," *Interpretation* 59 (2005): 349-50. A proper understanding of מַלְאָכַי "image" may be impossible to attain. The authors of the OT use מַלְאָכַי a total of seventeen times in various ways including idols (Num 33:52), models (1 Sam 6:5), pictures (Ezek 16:17), and philosophical comparisons to man's existence (Ps 39:6; 73:20). Etymological interpretation of the word from similar roots in Arabic and Akkadian are also inconclusive. After surveying many different interpretations, Towner concludes from the context that God's gift of His "image" to humanity seems to deal with humanity's ability to have a relationship with God, each other, and even animals.

⁸Gregory K. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (2005): 7.

loved mankind, God's desire and intention is for them to love Him in return (Deut 6:5; 10:12; Matt 22:36-38).

The creation account reveals the uniqueness of the relationship between humanity and God in several other ways. First, the creation account along with the rest of the OT is written strictly for the benefit of people. Second, it shows God's intentionality and purpose in creating the world in such a way that the creation was to be good and pleasing. Third, God's unique interaction with people to the exclusion of all other created works and beings gives them a special significance. God's interaction with Adam and Eve demonstrates that God's willingness to interact personally with mankind and their ability to respond.

Humanity's Response to God

More information on the uniqueness of God's relationship with humanity can be gleaned from the Genesis account of the original sin of Adam and Eve. God continues to express His love by providing a paradise for them (Gen 2:8-16). But within this paradise He plants a tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and He tells Adam not to partake of its fruit lest they die (Gen 2:8-17).⁹ By giving this command and the subsequent penalty of death for disobedience, God reveals that His unique relationship

⁹All biblical references in Hebrew in this paper are from the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Herold S. Stern, "The Knowledge of Good and Evil," *Vetus Testamentum* [VT] 8 (1958): 415; W. Malcolm Clark, "A Legal Background to the Yahwist's Use of 'Good and Evil' in Genesis 2-3," *Journal of Biblical Literature* [JBL] 88 (1969): 277. After considering and refuting several major views on the meaning of הַדְּעִת טוֹב וָרָע, Stern proposes that it refers to "the exercise of one's freedom of choice" (Deut 1:19; Isa 7:15-16). Clark seems to agree and adds that humanity has now gained legal and moral autonomy from God and become responsible to God for all judgments made by humanity. He points to several verses to support his argument including Genesis 31: 24 and 29, 1 Kings 3:9, 2 Samuel 14:17, 13:22, and 19:36, Isaiah 5:20 and 23, and Jeremiah 42:3 among others.

with humanity requires obedience. It also reveals that if people have the knowledge of good and evil, their relationship with God will be damaged.

When Satan appears in Eden in the form of a snake, he comes with a different understanding that opposes the warning given by God (Gen 3:1-4). By counteracting God's warning, Satan demonstrates that he is opposed to God. As a result, anyone who accepts his message also becomes opposed to God. When Adam and Eve choose to eat the fruit, they choose to oppose God by disobeying His command. It is at this point that God's offer of salvation becomes a necessity for humanity.

The unique relationship that God has with mankind is broken. Gilbert Guffin notes that Adam and Eve's "disobedience [is] in essence a rejection of God's rightful sovereignty over [them] and a voluntary submission to the authority of the tempter."¹⁰ By aligning themselves with the message of Satan and eating the forbidden fruit, they introduce death and separation from God to the whole of humanity. A special intervention of God is now desperately needed to solve the human problem of death and separation from God.

The initial response of God to Adam and Eve's disobedience is removal from Eden (Gen 3:22-24). This merciful act of God shows His unwillingness to allow humanity to exist eternally in sin.¹¹ God then responds to Adam and Eve's disobedience by pronouncing a curse of suffering and death upon them and a curse upon the earth (Gen 3:16-19). The death, of which God speaks, is "the death of being like God" and not the

¹⁰Gibert L. Guffin, *The Bible: God's Missionary Message to Man* (Birmingham, AL: Woman's Missionary Union, n. d.), 1:38.

¹¹Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom*, 42.

“death of non-being.”¹² Unlike God, humanity cannot physically exist eternally when it possesses the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:22). In spite of the death sentence, God chooses to preserve the life of Adam and Eve for some time in a “world between curse and promise.”¹³

Even though God condemns humanity to suffering and death in this life, due to their sin, He also gives them a promise (Gen 3:14-19). In His mercy, God gives the missionary message of victory over Satan, but He also promises that humanity will also be wounded in the process (Gen 3:15). In Genesis 3:15, God promises the ערֹו “seed” of the woman will crush Satan’s head.¹⁴ This word is also used in God’s covenant with Abraham and his “seed” in Genesis 17:7-12. Thus, as Kenneth A. Matthews notes, “the creation blessing,” which is tarnished by Adam’s disobedience, is to become “particularized through the Hebrew fathers, who will be instrumental in its realization.”¹⁵ Paul seems to apply the promise of victory of the woman’s seed over Satan (Gen 3:15) to Christ when He says, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom 16:20).¹⁶ God’s decision to preserve humanity momentarily and give a missionary

¹²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3*, trans. John C. Fletcher (London: SCM Press LTD, 1960), 88.

¹³Ibid., 85.

¹⁴Jack Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?” *Tyndale Bulletin [TB]* 48 (1997): 142-44. Collins discusses whether or not the woman’s ערֹו denotes a collective group (humanity) or to an individual. When ערֹו is collective, it can have “a singular verb inflection” (Gen 13:16), “a plural verb inflection” (Exod 32:13), singular adjectives (Ps 112:2), or plural pronouns (Gen 17:9). Collins notes ערֹו refers to a single person when it “appears with singular verb inflections, adjectives, and pronouns” (Gen 4:25; 21:13; 38:9; 1 Sam 1:11; 2 Sam 7:12-15; Isa 41:8).

¹⁵Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 246.

¹⁶All biblical references in English in this paper are from the New International Version (NIV); Francis X. Peirce, “The Protoevangelium,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 13 (1951): 246. Like Paul, Peirce

message of victory to humanity over Satan expresses the loving nature of God and gives hope to them, even while they struggle with God's message of wrath due to their sin. God also expresses His love for Adam and Eve by providing them with clothing, a need brought on by their entrance into a sinful state (Gen 3:21).

Throughout the OT, from the time of Adam and Eve, humanity struggles with the awfulness of sin. Adam's firstborn, Cain, never had access to the tree of life and his actions suggest that he seeks the fruit of death (that is the destruction of life) even more so. Cain's jealousy of his brother Abel, due to God's acceptance of Abel's sacrifice, leads him to murder his brother (Gen 4:3-8). After God confronts Cain for his horrific act, he asks God, אֲנִי אֶחָי הַשֹּׂמֵר "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9). Kristin M. Swenson connects Cain's question and the implied answer of yes with God's appointment of humanity to a caretaking role in Geneses 2-3.¹⁷ Like Adam and Eve, Cain chooses to disobey God's will that mankind care for the world (which includes people caring for one another) by harming his brother. Cain and Abel, as immediate descendants of Adam and Eve, represent the nature of the relationship of the human race within itself and with God after expulsion from Eden.

Cain's behavior shows the awfulness of the sinful nature within humanity. His conduct toward Abel and God's condemnation of Cain demonstrate the destructiveness of sin in regard to human relations with each other and God. Even in the midst of God's condemnation of Cain, He still demonstrates His grace to a fallen humanity by marking

understands the Protoevangelium (Gen 3:15) to be referring to Christ and appeals to the authoritative witness of OT prophecies and the NT revelation of Christ as proof.

¹⁷Kristin M. Swenson, "Care and Keeping East of Eden: Gen 4:1-16 in Light of Gen 2-3," *Interpretation* 60 (2006): 374.

Cain with a sign so that no one would kill him (Gen 4:15). God's sending of Cain away from His presence shows that a relationship with God must not be marred by sinful behavior (Gen 4:16). God's affirmation and acceptance of Abel's sacrifice proves that God is willing to pursue a relationship with people despite its newly proven fallen state. While this relationship is still unique, it now comes with certain conditions, introduced by the disobedience of the human race. God now serves as the universal judge of all nations who accepts the right actions but rejects the wrong ones.

God's Judgment of Humanity

God's judgment of humanity's disobedience which begins with His curse of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Eden is a universal theme in the OT. According to Genesis 6:5, the sinfulness of mankind becomes so great that God becomes willing to destroy every living being. God's decision to judge the nations, due to their sinful actions, demonstrates that all humanity is accountable for their behavior to God. "God's wrath" in response to humanity's sin, J. Hebert Kane observes, "makes the gospel necessary" and [h]is love makes it possible."¹⁸

While humanity is accountable to God, He proved many times throughout the OT that He is also merciful. Noah, a righteous man, receives salvation from God's judgment which comes in the form of a flood (Gen 6:9). While this salvation may have not been eternal, it does display God's desire to show mercy to humanity even in the midst of His great wrath due to their sinfulness. God's protection for the animals (which

¹⁸J. Herbert Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 20.

would have otherwise been destroyed) and the ark are further examples of His loving nature, despite the severe judgment that was about to occur.

After the flood, God renews His original blessing to humanity and makes a covenant with Noah and his sons (Gen 1:28; 9:1, 9). Since all humanity aside from Noah and his family were destroyed in the flood, the covenant and blessing that God renders to Noah and his sons are unique between God and all nations. As a righteous man who clearly receives special favor from God, Noah's actions toward God are instructive for every person who desires a right relationship with God. In Genesis 6:18, God promises to establish a covenant with Noah which Noah accepts by faith.¹⁹ Noah's faithful response is seen in his obedience to God's commands concerning the building of the ark and other preparations for the coming judgment (Gen 7:5, 9, 16). After the flood, Noah, the forefather of all humanity, further demonstrates how humanity is to relate to God by offering sacrificial worship that is acceptable to God (Gen 8:21-22).

Part of the Noachian covenant includes a command to humanity to scatter across the earth as they increase in population (Gen 9:1). Humanity, however, decides to disobey this command by building the tower of Babel that would reach to the heavens to prevent themselves from being scattered across the earth (Gen 11:4). Another reason for their construction of the tower is to exalt themselves (Gen 11:4).²⁰ Just like Adam and Eve, fallen humanity disobeys the command of God and seeks to exalt themselves at the

¹⁹Heb 11:7.

²⁰Theodore Hiebert, "The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World's Cultures," *JBL* 126 (2007): 36. Hiebert considers human actions in Babel to be an expression of their desire for cultural unity. He rejects the theme of "pride" because the word for pride is not found in the passage. Hiebert is right in saying that the word "pride" does not appear; however, as he even admits, most scholars see the concept (plot) of human pride and sinfulness in the story.

same time. At this time, there is no sign of acceptable worship of God (like that done by Noah); rather, people are arrogantly pursuing their own direction. God's judgment is to confuse their language and scatter them across the earth (Gen 11:7-8). It, however, is also graceful because He seeks to restrain the sinful behaviors of people who would have continued to descend further into depravity and disobedience by separating them.

God's judgment against human sinfulness continues to be expressed in His dealings with humanity through Israel. As Joshua and the Israelites come into Canaan, they kill many of the inhabitants, according to the will of God.²¹ In Deuteronomy 7, Moses expresses God's hatred for the sinful practices of the Canaanites, His judgment against them at the hands of Israel, and His desire for Israel to be holy and removed from such practices. God's judgment against the nations is expressed in many oracles throughout the Prophets.²²

God judges the nations for their sins just like He judges His chosen people Israel. He works through Israel to judge the other nations, and He uses the other nations to judge Israel.²³ In the course of serving God's purpose of punishing Israel's sins, those nations, who arrogantly mistreated the Israelites, are also judged by God (Isa 10:12-19; Jer 25:11-14). Thankfully, God's relationship with the nations is not limited to His judgment of their sins.

²¹Deut 7:21; Josh 6:21; 8:24; 10:28-42; 11:14.

²²Isa 13-23; Jer 46-51; Ezek 25-32; Dan 2; 7-11; Joel 3:1-16; Amos 1:3-2:3; Obad; Nah 1-3; Zeph 2:4-15; Zech 9:1-8; 12:1-9; 14:12-19.

²³Deut 9:4-5; Judg 4:1-3; Isa 7:18-20; Neh 9:27.

God's Love for Humanity

God's love for the nations can be seen through the interaction of Israel and the surrounding peoples. Pharaoh and the Egyptians, for example, treat Israel harshly before the Exodus. But God does not act immediately; rather He patiently prepares Moses and sends him to talk to Pharaoh. God allows Pharaoh to stubbornly refuse to submit to His will, despite the severity of his suffering and that of the Egyptians so that His "name might be proclaimed in all the earth" (Exod 9:16). God's intentions, however, go beyond His desire to be known as God: "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance" (Isa 19:25). John D. W. Watts considers this verse to be "one of the most universal statements of Yahweh's intentions in Scripture."²⁴ While His blessing is to occur in the future, this verse reveals God's ultimate intent to bless all peoples.

During the exile to Babylon, God commands His people to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jer 29:7). Commenting on this verse, Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers note the "transfer of blessing and protection from Jerusalem (26:6) and Babylon (29:7)" according to Jeremiah.²⁵ God shows amazing concern for both His people, whom He sends into exile, and the captors who attack His people. God now asks His people to pray to Him for the city's prosperity.

²⁴John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 24 (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 261.

²⁵Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 27 (Dallas: Word, 1995), 72; Jer 14:11-12.

God's love for humanity can be seen in how He chooses to deal with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who had become prideful (Dan 4:37). The king is living "content and prosperous" despite his sinfulness when God sends him a frightening dream (Dan 4:4-5). The king further displays his unwillingness to repent from his sinful state by turning to "magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners," who offer no comfort, until he finally turned to Daniel, whom he knows to be God's servant (Dan 4:6-8). Daniel tells the king that he is going to be driven mad until he acknowledges that God is over all the nations and even determines who will rule the nations. At the end of his experience, Nebuchadnezzar comes to the correct conclusion that God is the universal sovereign of all nations who is able to personally address the sinful behaviors of humanity (Dan 4:37).

God's actions toward the whole of mankind demonstrate His desire for a unique relationship with all people that comes with a unique mandate requiring obedience from all humanity. Even though humanity fails to relate to God obediently, God displays His mercy by taking measures "to avoid destroying the whole human race."²⁶ He removes them from Eden after they eat the forbidden fruit, scatters them after they build the tower of Babel, provides the ark for Noah before He sends the flood, and makes a covenant with Abraham to bless all nations through him.

God's Unique Purpose for Israel

God's Promise to Abraham

God, in Genesis 12:3, delivers a promise to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed

²⁶Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, 52.

through you.”²⁷ God reiterates His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob several more times (Gen 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). God’s particular choice of Abraham will lead to all peoples of the earth being blessed.²⁸ Gordon J. Wenham points out that God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is for the purpose of the restoration of humanity back to full relationship with God as they had originally in Eden.²⁹ Paul understands this promise to the Patriarchs of blessing to the nations as the gospel being announced in advance (Gal 3:8).³⁰

Other aspects of God’s message through Paul can be seen in God’s relationship with Abraham. When God promises Abraham a son in his old age, Genesis 15:6 states: “Abram believed the Lord, and [H]e credited it to him as righteousness.” Paul appeals to this verse multiple times when he delivers the Gospel of justification by faith (Rom 4; Gal 3). Paul observes that Abraham is called righteous by God for simply believing God as opposed to following the Law which, of course, is not even in existence at that time.

²⁷Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 277-78; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 374-76; Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 117-18; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 151-52. Much debate exists over whether not וְכָרַב in Genesis 12:3 is reflexive “will bless themselves” or passive “will be blessed.” Since God is the ultimate source of blessing in this passage as well as the rest of the OT, a passive translation is preferable. While the reflexive may be grammatically possible, it can only be acceptable if the authority of other books in the OT is placed in question.

²⁸John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God’s Word to Today’s World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 326. Stott considers Genesis 12:1-3 as “the most unifying text” in Scripture because it demonstrates that God’s particular choice of Israel is only in service to His divine plan to bless all humanity.

²⁹Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, li.

³⁰C. John Collins, “Galatians 3:16: What Kind of Exegete Was Paul,” *TB* 54 (2003): 85. Assuming that Paul is referring to Genesis 22:18 in Galatians 3, Collins affirms Paul’s argument that עַרְוֹ refers to a singular individual, namely Christ, since it takes a singular pronoun.

In Galatians, Paul notes that God's promises to Abraham are given to him and his seed (Gal 3:16). Some scholars debate whether or not God's promise to Abraham's seed refers to Abraham's descendants or a collective group. According to Robert A. Pyne, Genesis 22:18 applies God's promise to Abraham and his collective seed in a general sense.³¹ When God reiterates His promise to Isaac and Jacob in Genesis 26:4 and 28:14, He narrows His promise first to Isaac and his descendants and then to Jacob and his descendants. The twelve tribes of Israel were then formed through the twelve sons of Jacob. Afterwards, the OT revelation occurs primarily through God's relationship with Israel and their relationships with each other and the nations. Although Paul applies the promise of God to Abraham's seed to Christ, he also understands God's promise to Abraham's seed as having a collective sense (Gal 3:16, 29; Rom 9:7-8). In Romans 9:7-8, Paul calls the seed of Abraham those who possess the faith of Abraham, in other words, those who know Christ (Gal 3:29).

Abraham's Intercessory Prayer

After the call of Abraham, God displays His judgment on the sinfulness of humanity in His dealings with Sodom and Gomorrah. Unlike His previous judgments, this time God chooses to reveal His intentions to Abraham and then converses with Abraham before acting on those intentions. While God's missionary message of the awfulness of sin is quite apparent in the actions of those living in Sodom and Gomorrah and His subsequent actions to destroy both cities and their inhabitants, the most unique aspect is God's willingness to engage Abraham before displaying His wrath.

³¹Robert A. Pyne, "The 'Seed,' the Spirit, and the Blessing of Abraham," *Bibliotheca Sacra* [BS] 152 (1995): 212.

One may consider Abraham's supplications for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah as the first missionary act. As a called out representative of God, he engages in intercessory prayer for the peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah. Certainly, all missionaries must, like Abraham, rely on God's mercy, if they are to reach out to those who are by nature objects of His wrath. While God's wrathful judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah serves as a sign of His impending judgment, His actions toward Lot (whom he spared) show that there is hope for all people to be spared from His wrath. God's sparing of Lot also proves the importance of the intercessory prayer.

The Election of Israel

God's missionary message begins with His initial revelation of Himself in Genesis 1, but His missionary purpose is first revealed in His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. God assures Abraham in verse two that He will make him into a great nation. Whereas God scatters humanity after they try to make themselves great by constructing the tower of Babel, God Himself is now going to make Abraham and his lineage into a great nation. God chooses Abraham to be the particular conduit through which He will reveal His presence to all mankind. Abraham himself is a descendant of Shem who was born in Ur of the Chaldeans but later moved to Canaan (Gen 11:31; 15:7). His father, Terah, was an idol worshipper (Josh 24:2).

In Genesis 12:3, James Mulenburg suggests that God tells Abraham, "[D]estinies of men and nations are to be determined by their attitude and response to Abraham."³² The unique God has now elected a human being to have a unique

³²James Mulenburg, "Abraham and the Nations: Blessing and World History," *Interpretation* 19 (1965): 392.

relationship with all humanity. Though God's election of Abraham and his descendants serves a particular purpose in His mission, God's mission through Abraham to the nations is by no means particular to the Israelites. Roger Hedlund comments on God's missionary purpose for Israel: "The Old Testament constantly warns against syncretism (absorbing the world), but it also stands against resignation (giving up on the world). Israel was to maintain the uniqueness of her witness, and she was responsible to see that there was active witness."³³ This active witness does not, however, mean that the Israelites are responsible for sending out missionaries to the Gentile nations. Rather, as Robert Martin-Achard suggests, "The concrete form that the mission of Israel to the world has to assume is that Israel should be the People of God."³⁴

In Exodus 19:5-6, God's tells Moses that if the Israelites obeyed His commandments they will be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." At the same time, He claims possession of the whole earth (Exod 19:5). God's election of Israel as a "kingdom of priests" is to fulfill His mission to all humanity.³⁵ John I. Durham noted that Israel, as a "kingdom of priests, is called to be "a servant nation instead of a ruling nation," and the purpose for their calling is to extend "the ministry of Yahweh's [p]resence" throughout the nations.³⁶

³³Roger E. Hedlund, *The Mission of the Church in the World: A Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 26.

³⁴Robert Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations: A Study of the Old Testament Conception of Israel's Mission to the World*, trans. John Penney Smith (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 32.

³⁵George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 113-14.

³⁶John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 263.

Michael Williams explains the priestly role that is placed upon Israel:

As a kingdom of priests, Israel is called to represent the nations before God, to mediate God's redemptive purpose in the world. A priest stands between God and the people, representing each to the other. The fundamental purpose of priests in Israel was to represent the people before God through their sacrificial and intercessory ministry. Yahweh here summons Israel as an entire nation to act as a priest, a covenantal mediator between [H]im and the rest of the world. In priestly service, [H]e expects Israel to pray for, love, minister to, and witness to the nations.³⁷

To be a holy nation, Israel must remain separate from the other nations and stay unblemished by sin if they are to represent the holiness of God before the nations.

Though called to be holy by God through Moses and willfully embracing the call, the Israelites immediately fall back into sin after Moses delivers the law by worshipping a golden calf, despite God's redemptive actions on their behalf (Exod 19:3-7; 32).

Noting the nation of Israel's failure in responding to God in faith and obedience, Paul teaches that Israel is a remnant of all people (Jew and Gentile) who have faith in God through Christ (Rom 2, 9-11). Michael Cranford adds that the faithful remnant within "ethnic Israel," according to Paul in Romans 9:6-8, will be the exclusive heirs to God's salvation.³⁸ If God's salvation is only to be made available to a remnant Israel including Jew and Gentile within "ethnic Israel," then the election of ethnic Israel must have been purposed by God to bring His soteriological message to all peoples and not simply to select "ethnic Israel" as the sole recipients of His salvation.

³⁷Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 138; Lev 9:7; 10:17; 16:6, 11, 15-16, 19-22, 24; Ex 28:38; Num 18:1, 23. The priests of Israel represent Israel before God in the sacrificial rites that were commanded by God.

³⁸Michael Cranford, "Election and Ethnicity: Paul's View of Israel in Romans 9:1-13," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 50 (1993): 36. Cranford connects God's promise to Abraham to Christ and His followers. He argues based on Paul's writings that there is a remnant Israel within "ethnic Israel." While all Israel have received God's promises through Abraham, only the remnant has received God's salvation.

God's Vision of Mission

The First Missionaries

According to Rowley, Moses is “the first missionary,” since God sends him from Midian to Egypt with a message of deliverance and redemption for the Israelites.³⁹ When Moses comes back to Egypt, the Israelites respond to his message of God’s love by faith and are moved to worship (Exod 4:31). This faithful response of the Israelites, like that of Noah and Abraham, ultimately leads to their deliverance from the yoke of the Egyptians.

While Rowley is correct in saying that Israel’s deliverance is ultimately wrought by God, the familiar theme of God’s mighty actions of deliverance and redemption, following the faithful response of humanity to His love, must be acknowledged.⁴⁰ As author of the Pentateuch, Moses communicates God’s words to Israel. While Moses may have been the first missionary sent to a particular people, Abraham had already performed the missionary task of intercession.

This attitude of love for sinners, which must be in the heart of every missionary, is certainly the point of the book of Jonah. Jonah was sent by the Lord to the Ninevites with a message of judgment because of their sins (Jonah 1:1-2). Amy Newman observes that Jonah’s disregard for God (evidenced by his disobedient flight in the opposite direction of Nineveh) compares to the Ninevites’ disregard for God, especially

³⁹H. H. Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1955), 15.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 17.

since Jonah is a prophet of Israel and the people of Nineveh are mere Gentiles.⁴¹ Even the sailors, who are on the ship with Jonah as he flees from God, show regard for the God of Jonah in their hesitation to throw him off the ship (Jonah 1:13-16).⁴²

Though unwilling and disobedient at first, Jonah goes to Nineveh with his doomsday message. The Ninevites respond in faith to Jonah's message of God's impending judgment due to their sinfulness and actively repent by fasting, praying, wearing sackcloth, and discontinuing their evil ways (Jonah 3:5-7). The Ninevites' response, according to C. F. Keil, demonstrates "susceptibility on the part of [non-Israelites] for the word of God."⁴³ In reply, God shows mercy to the Ninevites by withholding His judgments and even expresses His concern for them to Jonah (Jonah 3:10; 4:11). The story of Jonah and the Ninevites reveals God's love and willingness to forgive those who were not Israelites; it also proves that God is willing to send a missionary to another people for the express purpose of delivering His message.

God's Unique Message

God's desire for exclusive worship. The Decalogue has two commandments which are of special interest to the discussion of God's unique message to humanity. First, the Israelites are to have no other gods other than God (Exod 20:3). Second, they are to fashion no idols (Exod 20:4). For His chosen people, God mandates monotheism

⁴¹Amy Newman, "Talking to the Ninevites," *Reconstructionist* 58 (1992): 13.

⁴²David F. Payne, "Jonah from the Perspective of Its Audience," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament [JSOT]* 13 (1979): 9. Payne argues that sailors' actions toward Jonah are based on their superstitions and fears as opposed to a genuine act of piety.

⁴³C. F. Keil, *Minor Prophets*, in vol. 10 of *Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 409.

explicitly and expressly forbids the worship of all idols. God's desire for exclusive worship and His missionary message that He is the only God in existence are constant themes found in His OT revelation of Himself through His chosen people.⁴⁴

Before the Decalogue, God reveals Himself as the only God without expressly warning humanity against the worship of other gods. Now God reveals to Israel that He requires exclusive worship. Israel, however, frequently forgets the exclusivity expected by God and engages in the worship of other gods until they are finally exiled to Babylon.⁴⁵

Perhaps the best illustration of God's desire for exclusive worship is the story of Elijah at Mount Carmel. At this point, God's messengers are being murdered by the Israelites, and all except seven thousand have descended into the worship of Baal (1 Kgs 18, 19:10; 19:18). Israel's worship of Baal is nothing less than a breach of covenant law. God's ultimate response to a breach in the covenant law is always judgment. At Mount Carmel, God shows the Israelites that He alone is God by sending fire upon the alter. He judges the prophets of Baal and has them all killed that day.

Israel's worshipful response to God's judgment at Mount Carmel is only skin deep, as evidenced by their continued relapse into the worship of other gods. In the time of Jehu, Israel has a temple for Baal and golden calves are worshipped at Bethel and Dan (2 Kgs 10:25-29). Even after the Israelites admit that God is to be worshipped exclusively, Elijah still sees the evil in their hearts and God Himself only claims the

⁴⁴Deut 32:39; Judg 6:10; 1 Kgs 6-7; 2 Kgs 17:7-20; Ps 106; Isa 45:45; Hosea 13:4.

⁴⁵Exod 25:1-4; Judg 2:11-13; 3:7; 8:33-34; 1 Sam 8:8; 1 Kgs 11:8; 14:9; 2 Kgs 17:7-8, 23; 22:17; 25:11.

seven thousand who had not worshipped Baal (1Kgs 18:39; 19:10, 18). This cycle of idolatry followed by God's communication through a prophet, His judgment, Israel's repentance (however short its duration), and God's deliverance is central to God's missionary message (Judg 10-11; 1 Sam 4-7; 12-14). In Joel 2:12-13, God tells Israel that despite all of their sinful behavior His mercy is still available to them if they will repent and turn back to Him.

God's desire to be known among the nations. Throughout the OT, God affirms His forgiveness of those who repent of their sins.⁴⁶ Through Jeremiah, God discloses that, while His desire is to show mercy when His people are disobedient, their evil desires cause them to remain disobedient (Jer 18:11-12; 25:4-7; 26:1-7; 35:12-17). Ultimately, Judah's refusal to repent of their sins leads to their expulsion from the Promise Land and exile to Babylon for seventy years (Jer 25:4-11). Even during the exile, God declares to Ezekiel His concern for His witness to the nations, His intention to be known by the nations, and His plan to have Israel return from exile:

Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes. For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.'⁴⁷

God's reveals Himself as a missionary God who wants to be known among the nations, but His missionary purposes of His dealings with Israel as well as Israel's actions

⁴⁶1 Kgs 8:46-51; 2 Chr 32:36; Isa 30:15; Jer 15:19; 18:8; Ezek 18:30-32; Hosea 14:1-3.

⁴⁷Ezek 36:22-24.

seem to have been centripetal (before the appearance of the Messiah and certainly before the exile). Even though God chooses Israel for His particular purpose, other peoples are allowed to exist alongside Israel. During the Exodus, various other peoples leave Egypt with Israel (Exod 12:38). Within the law, God makes provisions for the aliens whereby they are allowed to make sacrifices and expected to follow the Law.⁴⁸ Other passages reveal that God clearly cares about the aliens living among Israel and warns the Israelites not to oppress them.⁴⁹ In Leviticus 19:34, God commands the Israelites to give equal status to the aliens living among them: “The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”

As Israel enters the Promise Land and God’s judgments of the Gentile inhabitants are about to start, the Israelite spies find a friend in Rahab the prostitute of Jericho (Josh 2).⁵⁰ The authors of Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 both acknowledge the faith of Rahab in her actions toward the spies. Rahab herself expresses her faith that God will deliver the Promise Land into the hands of the Israelites; she also informs the spies that God’s actions on behalf of Israel are known by the inhabitants of the Promise Land (Josh 2:9-13). God’s desire to reveal Himself to the nations through His particular actions toward Israel is being met according to Rahab’s testimony.

⁴⁸Lev 17:8-15; 18:26; 20:2; 22:18; 24:16, 22.

⁴⁹Exod 22:21; 23:9; Lev 19:33; Ps 146:9.

⁵⁰K. M. Campbell, “Rahab's Covenant: A Short Note on Joshua 2:9-21,” *VT* 22 (1972): 243; Donald J. Wiseman, “Rahab of Jericho,” *Tyndale House Bulletin* 14 (1964), 8-9. Campbell and Wiseman note that Rahab may have not been a prostitute but a barmaid or innkeeper (albeit immoral) who was responsible for notifying the king of any newcomers.

In Luke 4:25-26, Jesus points to Elijah's ministry to the widow in Zarephath as proof that God's desire to have a loving relationship with humanity extends beyond Israel to the nations.⁵¹ After providing Elijah with something to drink, Elijah asks the widow to bring him a piece of bread (1 Kgs 17:10-11). Despite the certainty of her and her children starving, since they had only enough flour for one last meal, she chose in the midst of her suffering to obey the voice of God's prophet and believe God's promise through him to provide miraculously for her (1 Kgs 17:12-15). God's promise through His prophet Elijah came true for the widow in response to her obedient faith in midst of intense suffering (1 Kgs 17:16).

After appealing to the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, Jesus refers to the healing of Naaman, a highly respected Aramaean general, at the hands of Elisha (Luke 4:27). Walter Brueggemann sees Naaman as "a representative figure of the known and recurring world with all the show of well-being, but utterly without hope."⁵² The story of God's grace to Naaman begins with Israelite captive pointing Naaman toward God's messenger (2 Kgs 5:2-3).⁵³ When Naaman comes first to the Israelite king, the king responds in fear and faithfulness only to be rebuked by Elisha (2 Kgs 5:7-8). Naaman's sinfulness is clearly seen in his attempt to buy the Lord's blessing and in his

⁵¹Jerome T. Walsh, *1 Kings*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1996), 228-29. Zarephath is "a town in Phoenician territory north of Israel, on the coast between Sidon and Tyre."

⁵²Walter Brueggemann, "2 Kings 5: Two Evangelists and a Saved Subject," *Missiology: An International Review* 35 (2007): 265.

⁵³Jean Kyoung Kim, "Reading and Retelling Naaman's Story (2 Kings 5)," *JSOT* 30, no. 1 (2005): 60-61. Kim points out that many commentators quickly pass the slave girl's ministry to Naaman. He highlights the difference between the faithfulness of the captive and the unfaithfulness of Gehazi who attempted to deceive Elisha. While the slave girl (like Elisha) willingly shares the message of God's power and grace, Gehazi begrudgingly seeks payment from Naaman.

initial response of anger to God's command through Elisha (2 Kgs 5:5-12, 15-16). God however shows mercy to Naaman when he finally obeys the word of His prophet (2 Kgs 5:13-14). Though Naaman came to God's messenger as a sinner focused on his earthly problem of leprosy and even first responded to Elisha in anger, his ultimate obedience to Elisha's command to wash in the Jordan led not only to his repentance but also his commitment to walk in faithfulness to the Lord (2 Kgs 5:14-18).

In the context of Luke 4, Darrell L. Bock notes that God's blessing of salvation through Jesus Christ is to be given to all mankind because Jesus will go beyond Israel to the nations.⁵⁴ John Nolland adds that the many widows and lepers in the land of Israel during the time of Elijah and Elisha were able to receive the benefit of God's blessing due to their unbelief.⁵⁵ As with Elijah and Elisha, God's soteriological message will be carried by God's messengers, but it must be received faithfully by all lest God chooses to send His messengers elsewhere.

In Psalm 87:4, God affirms that foreigners are to be recipients of His salvation: "I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—and will say, 'This one was born in Zion'."⁵⁶ In his dedication of

⁵⁴Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 418.

⁵⁵John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35A (Dallas: Word, 1989), 201. Nolland concludes from Jesus' message in Luke 4:25-27 that "unbelief has created a situation where possibilities are not realized and benefits do not flow" because the Israelites were unwilling to respond in faith to God's messengers.

⁵⁶Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 187-88; Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 386-87; John A. Emerton, "The Problem of Psalm LXXXVII," *VT* 50 (2000): 186. Kraus argues that רַהַב "Rahab" is simply another name for Egypt, and יָדַעַי "one's knowing me" refers to the Jewish Diaspora in the places mentioned. Tate, however, argues that this verse refers to the people of the various regions mentioned. The NIV interprets שָׁם "there" as Zion in vs. 4-6. Much debate, however, exists over whether or not שָׁם refers to Zion, the places listed in vs. 4, or wherever the people in vs. 6 live. While

the Temple, Solomon anticipates the coming of foreigners to the Temple and asks for their prayers to be answered so that God may be glorified throughout the world (1 Kgs 8:41-43). The worship of foreigners at God's Temple in Jerusalem also has an soteriological component. A passage of Isaiah, part of which is quoted by Jesus when He cleanses the Temple, prophecies the coming of aliens to worship at the Temple (Isa 56:6-7; Mark 11:17).⁵⁷

God's salvation extended to the nations. The Psalmists declare that God and His promised Messiah are enthroned in Jerusalem (Pss 2:6; 9:1; Isa 59:20). The Psalmists also proclaim that God's presence and His salvation emanate from Zion (Pss 14:7; 50:2; Isa 8:18). Isaiah verifies that God will reign from Zion in the future, and the nations will come bearing gifts (Isa 18:7). Along with Zechariah, Isaiah also anticipates the joy of those who receive salvation and enter into Zion and God's eternal presence.⁵⁸ Zechariah, in chapter fourteen, prophecies a future time when God will appear in Jerusalem, strike the nations that had fought against Israel, bring eternal peace to its inhabitants, and rule as king over the nations.⁵⁹ After being struck by God, the nations will worship the Lord in Zion year after year (Zech 14:16).

this debate has merit within the text of Psalm 87, the NIV interpretation certainly conforms to corporate witness of OT and NT revelation.

⁵⁷God's eschatological intention to have foreigners gathered at the Temple for worship is also prophesied by other Prophets and Psalmists (Jer 3:17; Pss 86:9; 102:21-22).

⁵⁸Isa 51:3-5; Zech 2:10; 8:3; 9:9.

⁵⁹Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9-14: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 25C (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 407-507. These authors provide one of the most exhaustive studies of Zechariah 14.

The emphasis on Jerusalem as the world's religious center does nothing to compel Israel to the centrifugal missionary action. The Psalmists, however, do speak of God's rule over the nations and how His actions toward Israel will spread His soteriological message to the nations resulting in praise from the nations unto God (Pss 22:27-28; 45:17; 67). The Psalmists also declare that they will praise God among the nations and call for others to do likewise (Pss 18:49; 96; 105:1; 108:3). This triumphant message of God's monarchy being established throughout the world with Jerusalem as its center stands in stark contrast to the message of warning of the looming judgment of God's people at the hands of the Assyrians.⁶⁰ Even so, God promises to show mercy to Israel in the midst of judgment of their sins by returning them to the Promise Land (Isa 10:12-27; Mic 4:10).

God's Promised Messiah

The missionary message in the OT foretells not only the prostrating of the nations before the God of Israel but also their sharing in the faith of Israel. While Isaiah 2:2-5 does not announce a centrifugal mission, it does show that the faith of Israel will be sought after and shared by the nations. The Genesis 1-11 portrayal of God as universal, which is somewhat clouded by particularistic purpose for Israel after God's calling of Abraham in Genesis 12, comes back to prominence in the OT messianic promises and the resulting global impact when those promises are fulfilled.

Throughout the period of the Judges and the monarchy that followed, Israel continues to fall back into disobedience. During the time of the Judges, Israel continually

⁶⁰Isa 10:1-2; Jer 21; Mic 4:10.

descends into idolatry only to be oppressed by other nations. When the oppression becomes unbearable, they seek God’s deliverance. God’s deliverance comes through a judge who brings Israel back to the Lord and leads them in overcoming the oppressors. David Filbeck observes, “[T]his cycle of events—idolatry, oppression, deliverance only to revert to idolatry once more—repeated itself twelve times during the time of the judges.”⁶¹

From the time of Moses through the period of the Judges, God remains the king of Israel. Israel, however, rejects God as their king and their covenant to be a “kingdom of priests” by seeking to become like other nations by having an earthly king (Exod 19:5-6; 1 Sam 8). Though God provides Israel with earthly kings, none of them follow His directives in Deuteronomy 17:14-20; moreover, they frequently lead the Israelites back into the detestable practices of the Canaanites.⁶² Despite the sinful practices of the Israelite kings, God promises that a descendant of David, the promised Messiah, will reign forever (2 Sam 7:12-17; Isa 9:7; Ezek 37:25).

Just as Israel’s election is for “the service of God in the service of men,” the prophesied Messiah is elected by God to be a “light of the nations [s]o that [His] salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6).⁶³ God’s election of the Messiah is to serve His purposes of establishing a centrifugal mission to the Gentiles which begins upon the Messiah’s arrival. The mission, established by the Servant, is founded upon His

⁶¹Filbeck, *Yes, God of the Gentiles, Too*, 82.

⁶²1 Kgs 11:1-6; 16:30-33; 2 Kgs 8:18; 16:3-4; Patricia Dutcher-Walls, “The Circumscription of the King: Deuteronomy 17:16-17 in Its Ancient Social Context,” *JBL* 121 (2002): 604. According to Dutcher-Walls, the stipulations placed on Israelite kings in Deuteronomy demonstrate “an intent to limit royal power and thereby abuse, and to enjoin royal allegiance to Yahweh.”

⁶³Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament*, 55.

suffering and death whereby He will bear the penalty for the sin of humanity (though He Himself was without sin) and bring justification to many people (Isa 52:13-15; 53). The Servant's mission of sacrificial suffering reveals the redemptive nature of God which is also observed in God's dealings with Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, and the people of Israel.

In Isaiah 11, the prophet delivers a messianic prophecy that discusses the Messiah's lineage, His infilling of the Spirit, His righteousness, and His message of judgment which brings peace. The prophet then foretells the spread of the knowledge of God throughout the nations and the gathering of His people (Gentile and Jew) from the nations and the Diaspora:

They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to [H]im, and [H]is place of rest will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out [H]is hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of [H]is people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea (Isa 11:9-11).

The universal God, whose unique love for people (expressed through His actions with Adam, Noah, and Abraham) is revealed first in Genesis, has a unique message which leads to a unique faith available to all mankind. God's unique message to Israel will become centrifugal not only in its content but also in its delivery when the Messiah is revealed. Just as God elects and sends Moses to be His voice to Israel, God will also elect and send a Messiah to both Israel and the nations to carry His message and gather them unto Him. According to Isaiah, God's Servant (the Messiah) will have God's presence and will be a new covenant:

I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the

Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness (Isa 42:6-7).⁶⁴

Appealing to Isaiah 42:7, Mark A. Smith observes, “The nations no longer represent the archetypal enemies but are the object of [God’s] salvation and Israel’s mission.”⁶⁵ The new covenant will be established by the suffering and death of the Servant who is “acting as substitute who is incurring the judgment of God which was properly due not only to Israel but to all the peoples and nations” (Isa 53).⁶⁶ This Servant will “bring salvation to the ends of the earth” by partaking of the suffering that comes to all humanity through the curse given to them when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit (Isa 49:6; Gen 3:16-19). Isaiah 54:10 notes that the new covenant will be one of everlasting peace. This new covenant of everlasting peace, however, is only for those who repent of the sins and will be sealed by the presence of God’s Spirit upon them (Isa 59:20-21). Whereas Israel is to be a “kingdom of priests” descended from Abraham, those under the new covenant will be priests to the Lord who come from the nations (Isa 61:6, 9).

The suffering Servant of Isaiah will also be a righteous king who brings salvation and establishes peace throughout the world through a gentle approach that will be quite dissimilar to the previously mentioned, wrathful approach used by God at times

⁶⁴John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 117-18. Much debate exists over whether or not the recipients (עַם) of the covenant mentioned in Isaiah 42:6 are the Israelites or all humanity. Oswalt provides three reasons for the argument that the covenant referred to by Isaiah is with all humanity: (1) עַם is used in Isaiah 42:5 to refer to all humanity; (2) עַם will usually have the article when the author is speaking of the Israelites; (3) עַם parallels עַמֵּי in the same verse.

⁶⁵Mark S. Smith, “Berît ‘Am/Berît ‘Ôlam: A New Proposal for the Crux of Isa 42:6,” *JBL* 100 (1981): 242.

⁶⁶J. Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*, ed. and trans. Dale Cooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 93.

among the nations.⁶⁷ This promise of a messianic king who will reestablish the throne of David in righteousness leads many Israelites to hope in an earthly messiah whose purpose is to restore prosperity and strength to the nation of Israel.⁶⁸

As a descendant of David, the Messiah is to be a man, yet Jeremiah revealed that this human king will bear the name יהוה ונקדצ “The Lord Our Righteousness” (23:6).⁶⁹ William L Holladay observes, “The first-person plural moves the attention of the hearer to the people; the future king will embody the faith of the whole people in the realization of righteousness that has its source only in Yahweh.”⁷⁰ Jesus Himself, according to Luke, points out that the Messiah, while being the son of David, was also called God by David (Ps 110:1; Luke 20:41-43). In Isaiah 7:14, the prophet refers to the coming messianic king as עִמָּנוּ אֵל “God with us” and His being born of a virgin.⁷¹ Isaiah and Jeremiah foresee His coming will follow the exile of the Israelites into Babylon (Isa 7:17-25; Jer 30:9-10). Isaiah prophecies that the Messiah will have exclusive power, bestowed upon Him by God, in deciding who can enter the everlasting kingdom: “I will

⁶⁷Ps 89:1-37; Isa 9:6-7; 42:1-4; Jer 23:5-6; Zech 9:9-10.

⁶⁸Ezek 34:23-24; Matt 21:1-11; John 6:14-15.

⁶⁹Hugo McCord, “The Meaning of YHWH Tsidhkenu (‘The Lord Our Righteousness’) in Jeremiah 23:6 and 33:16,” *Restoration Quarterly* 6 (1962): 121. After surveying the various interpretation of יהוה ונקדצ in Jeremiah 23:6, McCord concludes that “The Lord Our Righteousness” is preferable based on “textual, grammatical, and syntactical evidence.” He also argues that the context “indicate[s] as human being equal to YHWH.” Isa 9:6 says the Messiah will be called several names: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, [and] Prince of Peace.” Isa 16:5 affirms the humanity of the Messiah.

⁷⁰William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 619-20.

⁷¹Charles L. Feinberg, “The Virgin in the Old Testament and Isaiah 7:14,” *BS* 119 (1962): 255. Much debate exists on whether or not המלע in Isaiah 7:14 refers to a woman or a virgin. Since Matthew attests that of Jesus Christ was born on a virgin, it seems acceptable to interpret this passage in light of that revelation for the purposes of this paper.

place on [H]is shoulder the key to the house of David; what [H]e opens no one can shut, and what [H]e shuts no one can open” (22:22).

While many pluralists attempt to depersonalize God by referring to Him as the ultimate reality and making all religions relevant paths to Him, Isaiah pointed to the Messiah as a personal agent of God with the sole power to decide the eternal fate of all humanity.⁷² God’s declaration that no other god exists, His desire for exclusive worship, and His revelation that soteriological hope rests in Him and the promised Messiah seems to circumvent the arguments for pluralism if God’s revelation in the OT is accepted as authoritative.⁷³ If people seek to enter into God’s eternal presence, Isaiah affirms that they must establish a relationship with and be granted entrance by God’s messianic king.

God’s Mission in Isaiah 66:18-21

God not only promises to send the human race a Messiah, He also promises to send witnesses to the nations. In Isaiah 66:18-21, God says,

‘And I, because of their actions and their imaginations, am about to come and gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory. I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations—to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers), to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations. And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord -on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels,’ says the Lord. ‘They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the Lord in

⁷²John Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 164. The Ultimate Reality, according to Hick is “that putative reality which transcends everything other than itself but is not transcended by anything other than itself. The Ultimate, so conceived, is related to the universe as its ground or creator, and to us human beings, as conscious parts of the universe as the source both of our existence and of the value or meaning of that existence.” For Hick, the reality is putative because he rejects the revelation of God found in the Bible.

⁷³Isa 43:10-11; 44:6; 45:21-22.

ceremonially clean vessels. And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites.⁷⁴

In verse nineteen, אִיּוֹ “sign” is “often used of something which [God] gives . . . as an enduring reminder of [H]is presence or activity.”⁷⁵ Scholars debate over whether or not this sign refers to the person of Christ, some non-personal sign, or simply God’s activity in sending out witnesses.⁷⁶ After God promises to send a sign, He then promises to send His witnesses to the nations. Westermann considers this to be “the first sure and certain mention of mission” if one defines mission as the sending out of God’s messengers to other peoples.⁷⁷

In Isaiah 66:21, God says that some of those brought back to Jerusalem will be His “priests and Levites.” Much debate exists as to whom מִקֵּהֶם יִגְמָ “some of them” is referring. While some commentators (such as Brueggemann and John D. W. Watts) suggest that “some of them” refers only to Israelites since they are the subject of the preceding verse, Jan L. Koole offers a view that seems more in line with God’s revelation

⁷⁴W. Bryant Hicks, “Old Testament Foundations for Missions,” in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John M. Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 58-59. Hicks calls this passage “the high-water mark of missions in the Old Testament” since it involves “an explicit sending” of God’s messengers to the nations.

⁷⁵Emmanuel Uchenna Dim, *The Eschatological Implications of Isa 65 and 66 as the Conclusion of the Book of Isaiah* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 181.

⁷⁶Dim, *The Eschatological Implications of Isa 65 and 66*, 181; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, 688-89; Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 1998), 258-59; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 25 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 365; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, trans. David M. G. Stalker (Philadelphia: The Westminster, 1969), 425. Dim provides an excellent overview of the debate among scholars over the meaning of אִיּוֹ. Brueggemann, Oswalt, Watts, and Westermann all agree that Isaiah 66:19 refers to a centrifugal mission although there is still some confusion over whether or these missionaries are Jew, Gentile, or both.

⁷⁷Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, 425.

in the NT by asserting that “some of them” refers to both Jewish and Gentile converts.⁷⁸ Agreeing with Koole, Dim notes that וְאֵלֶּיךָ connects verse twenty-one with verse twenty suggesting that “some of them” must at least include the Israelites and it also should be connected to the Gentiles in verses eighteen and nineteen since the Israelites in the Diaspora “would already be divided by heredity into laymen, priests, and Levites.”⁷⁹ This interpretation of verse twenty-one in concert with other NT authors illustrates the abolishment of the Levitical priesthood that was mandated by the Law and the establishment of a new priesthood including worshippers from all nations (Heb 7; 1 Pet 2:5-9; Rev 1:6).

From Isaiah 66:18-21, one discovers God’s plans for a centrifugal mission to the world. While God’s love for all humanity is clearly seen in His creative works and His dealings with Adam and Noah, the extent of God’s love for mankind will be expressed through His Messiah and His representatives who carry forth His missionary message. Isaiah 66:19, in particular, demonstrates that God’s election of Israel was not an offer of His presence solely to Israel. Rather, it was an offer to demonstrate His presence to the world. Since Israel failed to accomplish the mission, God will now send missionaries to take the good news of His presence to the world. For God’s desire is to not only redeem Israel but all people.

⁷⁸Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 258; Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 365. Jan L. Koole, *Isaiah: Part 3: Chapters 56-66*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, trans. Antony P. Runia (Belgium: Peeters, 2001), 519-20.

⁷⁹Dim, *The Eschatological Implications of Isa 65 and 66*, 189.

Missiological Implications for the 21st Century

In the 21st century, the rise of pluralism, relativism, and New Age spiritualism have caused new questions to arise over the uniqueness of the missionary message in the global world. While the modern criticisms concerning the inerrancy of the Scriptures still persist, the postmodernist of the 21st century questions the relevancy of Scripture. To be able to engage these criticisms, the missionary must understand from a careful study of the Scriptures that God's missionary message remains unchanged since the creation of the world and its inhabitants.

The OT bears witness to the faithfulness of God and His desire to redeem the human race, despite the sinful disobedience of all humanity since the fall of Adam and Eve. In the Genesis account, God's shows His amazing love for mankind through His provision for all their needs. When people choose to respond to God's love by disobeying His command to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God demonstrates the penalty for sinful disobedience by His judgment to send humanity from His presence into a life of death and suffering. Even so, His relations with the human race through Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, and many others prove His desire to have a relationship with all people that begins with Him and requires a faithful response (obedience) from each person.

God chooses Israel in particular to be known among the nations. Through Israel, the nations can learn that God is a holy God who requires exclusive worship and obedience from His people. They learn that God judges all people for their sinful behavior, shows mercy to those who repent and turn from their wicked ways, and grants salvation to those who are obedient.

When the people of Israel prove themselves unable to walk in an obedient relationship with God, God sends them into exile but also promises a Messiah to bring not only Israel but all of humanity back into relationship with God. While the people of Israel collectively fail as God's servant nation, the Messiah as God's servant will overcome Satan and bring a message of peace and forgiveness of sin to all humanity. After His appearance, the Messiah's witnesses (Jew and Gentile) will spread God's missionary message of salvation throughout the whole world.

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