THE MISSION OF GOD

God's Glory Among the Nations — A Research Report

THE CORNERSTONE CHURCH

SUMMARY

The Bible's story, read whole, is the story of a missionary God. From the call of Abraham to the worship of Revelation, God is at work on a single great purpose: to make his name and his glory known among all the peoples of the earth, so that he is worshipped everywhere and his blessing reaches every nation. Mission, therefore, is not first something the church does; it is something God does — what theologians call the
missio Dei, the mission of God. The church does not have a mission so much as God's mission has a church. And the goal of that mission is God-centred before it is man-centred: God seeks his own fame — his name proclaimed, his glory known, his praise sung — in every place on earth. The good of the nations and the glory of God are not rivals in this story; God is glorified precisely as the nations are blessed.

The short answer to the Old Testament question. If one passage must be named as the foundation, it is the call of Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, where God promises that "all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you." If one book must be named, it is Isaiah, the Old Testament's great missionary book, whose Servant is appointed "a light for the nations" (Isaiah 49:6). And if one passage gathers the whole theme into a prayer, it is Psalm 67, which asks God to bless his people "so that your way may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations." The sections below set out the evidence.

1. THE OLD TESTAMENT FOUNDATION

1.1 The foundational promise: Genesis 12:1–3

Immediately after the scattering of the nations at Babel (Genesis 11) — where humanity tried to make a name for itself (Genesis 11:4) — God calls one man and promises to make
his name great instead: "I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2). The promise then opens out to the whole world:

> “I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” **— Genesis 12:3, CSB**

This is the Old Testament’s Great Commission in seed form. The promise is repeated at every turning point of Genesis (18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14), and the New Testament treats it as nothing less than the gospel announced in advance: “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and proclaimed the gospel ahead of time to Abraham: All the nations will be blessed through you” (Galatians 3:8). Note the structure of God’s purpose: election is instrumental. Abraham is chosen and blessed
in order to be a blessing; Israel exists for the sake of the nations. Blessing received is always blessing to be mediated.

1.2 Exodus: God makes his name known

In the Exodus, God states his purpose openly to Pharaoh: he has spared him “to show you my power and to make my name known on the whole earth” (Exodus 9:16). The plagues and the deliverance are acts of self-proclamation — “you will know that I am the LORD” — and the fame of them runs ahead of Israel into the nations (Joshua 2:10–11; 4:24 — “so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD’s hand is strong”). At Sinai the purpose is given an office: Israel will be “my kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:5–6) — a people who stand between God and the nations, representing God to the world and the world to God. Centuries later, Ezekiel’s refrain — “then they will know that I am the LORD,” repeated some seventy times, often addressed to the nations — shows the same driving purpose: the knowledge of God filling the earth.

1.3 Israel’s witness among the nations

Deuteronomy expects Israel’s obedient life to be overheard: the nations will see God’s wise laws and say, “Indeed, this great nation is a wise and understanding people,” drawing them to ask after Israel’s God (Deuteronomy 4:6–8). Solomon builds that expectation into the temple’s dedication prayer, asking God to answer the prayer of the foreigner who comes from a far country “for the sake of your great name… so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name, to fear you as your people Israel do” (see 1 Kings 8:41–43, 60). The Queen of Sheba’s visit is the pattern in action (1 Kings 10:1–9), as are Rahab in Jericho and Ruth the Moabite — individual Gentiles drawn in, foretastes of a much larger ingathering.

1.4 The Psalms: Israel's songbook is a missionary songbook

No Old Testament book sings of the nations more than the Psalms. Psalm 67 is the theme in miniature. It opens with the priestly blessing of Numbers 6 — and immediately gives the blessing a purpose clause:

> "May God be gracious to us and bless us; may he make his face shine upon us — so that your way may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations." **— Psalm 67:1–2, CSB**
>
> "Let the peoples praise you, God; let all the peoples praise you." **— Psalm 67:3, CSB**

Blessing is requested not as a possession to hoard but as a witness to broadcast: God blesses his people
so that the nations may know his salvation and join his praise. The pattern repeats across the Psalter: "Declare his glory among the nations, his wondrous works among all peoples" (Psalm 96:3); "Be exalted above the heavens, God; may your glory be over the whole earth" (Psalm 57:11); "I will be exalted among the nations" (Psalm 46:10); "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD" (Psalm 22:27); and tiny Psalm 117, the shortest chapter in the Bible, summons *every* nation to praise the LORD and gives no other content at all.

1.5 Isaiah: the missionary book of the Old Testament

If the Old Testament has a missionary book, it is Isaiah. Its vision begins with the nations streaming to Zion to be taught (Isaiah 2:2–4) and widens steadily: a feast prepared "for all the peoples" (25:6); Egypt and Assyria — Israel's two great oppressors — blessed alongside Israel as "my people" and "my handiwork" (19:23–25); the Servant appointed as "a light for the nations" (42:6) and "my salvation to the ends of the earth" (49:6); a worldwide summons, "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth" (45:22); foreigners gathered into a house of prayer "for all nations" (56:7 — the words Jesus quotes in the temple); and a final vision of God gathering "all nations and languages" to see his glory, sending survivors out to proclaim it to peoples who have never heard his name (66:18–21). No other Old Testament book sustains the theme at this scale or with this warmth.

1.6 The promise echoed: Jonah, Habakkuk, Malachi, Zechariah

The theme runs to the end of the Old Testament canon. Jonah is the negative example — a prophet who must learn that God's compassion extends even to Nineveh, Israel's brutal enemy (Jonah 4:11). Habakkuk receives the summary promise of the whole Bible's plot:

> "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD's glory, as the water covers the sea." **— Habakkuk 2:14, CSB**

Zechariah sees the nations taking hold of a Jew's robe, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (Zechariah 8:20–23), and Malachi — even while rebuking Israel's corrupt worship — announces that "my name will be great among the nations" and that pure offerings will be made to God "in every place" (Malachi 1:11). Daniel's Son of Man receives dominion so that "all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him" (Daniel 7:14).

2. THE NEW TESTAMENT: FULFILMENT AND COMMISSION

The New Testament presents Jesus as the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise and the Isaianic Servant — the light for the nations in person (Luke 2:30–32). His commission to the church is the centrifugal form of the Old Testament's centripetal hope: where the nations once came to Zion, the church now goes to the nations.

- **Matthew 28:18–20** — "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations." The Abrahamic promise becomes a marching order; the authority claimed is universal ("all authority… in heaven and on earth") because the commission is universal.
- **Luke 24:46–47** — Repentance and forgiveness "will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem" — presented as the fulfilment of what "is written" in the Old Testament itself.
- **Acts 1:8** — The Spirit is given for witness "to the ends of the earth"; the book of Acts then quotes Isaiah's Servant song as Paul's job description (Acts 13:47, quoting Isaiah 49:6).
- **John 20:21** — "As the Father has sent me, I also send you." The church's mission is modelled on, and drawn into, the Son's mission: mission is God's before it is ours.
- **Romans 15:8–12** — Paul defends his Gentile mission with a chain of Old Testament quotations (Psalm 18; Deuteronomy 32; Psalm 117; Isaiah 11), summarised in verse 9: "that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy." The stated goal of mission is that God be *glorified* by the nations.
- **Revelation 5:9; 7:9–10; 21:24–26** — The story ends where Habakkuk pointed: people "from every tribe and language and people and nation" worshipping the Lamb, and the kings of the earth bringing their glory into the New Jerusalem. Mission is the means; multinational worship is the end.

Two further New Testament notes. First, the timing: the end comes as the gospel is proclaimed to all nations (Matthew 24:14) — mission is not a delay of the kingdom but part of its arrival. Second, the church's own identity is defined by the mission: "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood… so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9, quoting Exodus 19). The priesthood of Exodus becomes the priesthood of the whole church.

3. THE THEOLOGICAL CASE (EVANGELICAL SYNTHESIS)

God's glory is his own chief end. Evangelical theology begins the doctrine of mission where the Bible begins everything: with God's regard for his own name. He created his people "for my glory" (Isaiah 43:6–7); he acts in judgment and mercy alike "for the sake of my name" (Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22; 36:22–23); he declares, "My glory I will not give to another" (Isaiah 48:11). Mission is therefore not God reluctantly sharing heaven; it is God joyfully publishing his fame. John Piper's well-known sentence states the evangelical consensus memorably: "Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is the goal of missions." Humanity's need and God's glory converge: the nations lack what God delights to give, and God is honoured exactly as they receive it.

Mission belongs to God (missio Dei). The term missio Dei — "the mission of God" — gained currency in twentieth-century mission theology (associated with the 1952 Willingen conference and developed variously since). Evangelicals have adopted the term while anchoring it more strictly in Scripture: the Father sends the Son (John 3:17; Galatians 4:4); the Father and the Son send the Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; Acts 2); and the triune God sends the church (John 20:21–22). Mission is thus grounded in the very life of the Trinity — sending is something God is, before it is something we do. The practical consequence is humility and confidence together: the mission will succeed because it is God's (Habakkuk 2:14 is a promise, not a wish), and the church participates as servant and instrument, not as owner.

One covenant storyline: blessed to be a blessing. Read canonically, the Bible is one mission story: creation and the mandate to fill the earth (Genesis 1:28); the fall and the promise of the Seed (3:15); Babel's scattering (11); Abraham's election as the answer to Babel (12:1–3); Israel's priestly witness; the prophets' widening vision; Christ, the true Seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16), in whom the blessing reaches the Gentiles "so that we may receive the promised Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:14); the church's witness to the ends of the earth; and the multinational worship of Revelation. Christopher J. H. Wright's The Mission of God

(2006) is the standard evangelical statement of this "missional" reading of the whole Bible.

From attraction to sending — both are biblical. Scholars commonly note a difference of direction between the Testaments. The Old Testament pattern is largely centripetal: the nations are drawn toward Zion by the light of Israel's life and worship (Deuteronomy 4; 1 Kings 8; 10; Isaiah 60; Zechariah 8:23). The New Testament pattern is centrifugal: the disciples go out to the nations (Matthew 28; Acts 1:8). These are not two religions but two stages of one mission, and both remain live patterns for the church: a local congregation whose common life commends the gospel (John 13:35; 1 Peter 2:12), and a sent people who go — across the street and across the world.

Mission is temporary; worship is eternal. The task has a finish line. There will be no missionaries in the new creation, because there will be no one who does not know the LORD (Jeremiah 31:34; Revelation 21:24). What remains forever is the goal itself — every tribe and tongue worshipping. This eschatological frame keeps mission urgent without making it frantic: we work toward a completion God has promised, at a pace set by obedience rather than anxiety.

4. SO, IS THERE A MAIN OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OR PASSAGE?

A direct answer, in three parts:

- **The foundational passage is Genesis 12:1–3.** It is the hinge on which redemptive history turns — the answer to Babel, the charter of Israel's existence, and (per Galatians 3:8) the gospel in promise form. Every later mission text is commentary on it.
- **The main book is Isaiah.** Chapters 40–66 in particular develop the mission of God more fully than any other Old Testament writing: the Servant as light to the nations (42:6; 49:6), the universal summons (45:22), the house of prayer for all nations (56:7), and the nations gathered to see God's glory (66:18–19). It is no accident that the New Testament's missionaries reach for Isaiah constantly (Luke 4:18–19; Acts 13:47; Romans 10:15–20; 15:21).
- **The passage to preach is Psalm 67.** In seven verses it contains the whole theology of this report: God's blessing on his people is instrumental ("so that"), its purpose is the knowledge of God's salvation among all nations, and its goal is the praise of all peoples and the just rule of God over the earth. It is, in effect, the Abrahamic promise turned into a prayer — and a standing rebuke to any church that treats blessing as a private possession.

If a single summary sentence of the whole doctrine is wanted, Scripture supplies it: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD's glory, as the water covers the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14). That is where history is going; mission is simply the church's participation in getting there.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Scripture quotations are from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB). Scholarly and pastoral sources informing this report, in descending order of weight given:

- Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (IVP Academic, 2006) — the standard evangelical treatment; source of the canonical, "missional hermeneutic" framing used above. [Scholarly]
- Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (IVP/Apollos, 2001) — biblical-theological survey behind the Testament-by-Testament structure. [Scholarly]
- John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Baker, 3rd ed. 2010) — the God-centred, worship-as-goal framing of section 3. [Pastoral-theological]
- Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (IVP, 2004) — the New Testament mission in its historical detail. [Scholarly]
- David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Orbis, 1991) — an ecumenical work, included for the history of the *missio Dei* concept; its conclusions were used selectively and tested against Scripture. [Scholarly, non-evangelical]

Note on method: direct quotations in this report are confined to Scripture (CSB) and to Piper's widely published sentence in section 3; all other material is summary and synthesis, and contested scholarly questions (such as the precise definition of *missio Dei*) are flagged where they arise rather than settled by assertion.

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