

Biblical Perspective – The Mission of God

I. Introduction: Honestly, what are we as human beings concerned about on a daily basis? Food, clothing and shelter? Enjoying our lives? Working hard enough to become well off? Finding that special something or someone that we believe will finally make us happy? Or are we seeking first the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33)? Contentment comes when we align our lives with God's plan and purpose... His Mission. Do we even understand God's Mission?

II. Key Article: ***The Living God is a Missionary God*** by John Stott

III. Key Bible Texts:

A. God the Father is Concerned about the Unreached People Groups:

1. Genesis 1:2-4a (Let there be light...). God is concerned about dispersing the darkness with His glorious light (1 John 1:5).

Notes:

2. Genesis 12:1-3. Abraham's seed will made a blessing to bless all the families of the earth.

Notes:

3. Exodus 34:5 and Deuteronomy 4:5-8. Israel was to be a Missionary Nation for God, representing Him well to all other nations.

Notes:

4. **God Inspired Many of His Old Testament Servants to Help Fulfill The Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:17,18; 26:4; 28:14 by Blessing the Gentile Families/Peoples/Nations of the Earth**

1. *Abraham* blesses **Egypt** (Genesis 12:10-20).
2. *Abraham* intercedes for **Sodom and Gomorrah** (Genesis 18:16-33).
3. *Abraham* blesses the **Philistines** (Genesis 20).
4. *Joseph* blesses **Egypt** (Genesis 37-50).
5. *Moses* blesses Jethro the **Midianite** and his daughter Zipporah (Exodus 2:15-22; 3:1; 18:1-12; Numbers 10:29-32).
6. *Moses* writes that God desires to bless **all aliens/foreigners** that draw near to Israel (Exodus 22:21, Deuteronomy 24:17, Deuteronomy 31:12).
7. *Joshua* blesses Rahab the **Canaanite** (Joshua 2).
8. *Joshua* blesses the **Gebeonites / Nethinims** (Joshua 9)
9. *Naomi* blesses Ruth the **Moabite** (Ruth 1-4).
10. *David* inconsistently blessed gentile nations. He made atonement to the **Gibeonites** who were nearly annihilated by Saul (2 Samuel 21:1-14), but defamed God before the **Hittites** and other gentile nations by murdering Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1-14).
11. *David* also blessed Obed-edom, the **Hittite**, by leaving the Ark of the Covenant at his home. His sons became temple servants and his grandsons “mighty men of valor” (1 Chronicles 13:13,14; 26:4-8).
12. *Solomon*, also inconsistent, blessed many nations (Particularly **Sheba**) by teaching them the Wisdom of God and constructing a “house of prayer for all nations” (1 Kings 4:29-34 and 10:1-9). He later defamed God before the nations by worshipping detestable pagan gods (1 Kings 11:4-7) and using gentiles people as slaves (1 Kings 9:20,21).
13. *Jonah* reluctantly blessed an entire **Assyrian** city - Nineveh (Jonah 1-4).
14. *Elijah* blessed a **Cananite** woman – the widow of Zarephath – with meal and oil as well as the resurrection of her son and was later welcomed in Seria (1 Kings 17:8-24).
15. A young *Hebrew slave* among the Assyrians blesses **Naaman** with (2 Kings 5:1-5).
16. *Elisha* blessed Naaman and all of **Syria** with the directions for their #1 General to be healed (2 Kings 5:6-15). No wonder he was so well received by king Ben-hadad in 2 Kings 8:7,8).
17. *Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego* blessed majorly the **Babylonians** (Daniel 1-5).
18. *Daniel* also blessed the **Medes** (Daniel 6).
19. *Ezekiel* also was a faithful witness of YHWH and a blessing to the **Babylonians** (Ezekiel 1:1-3).
20. *Ester* witness to and blesses the **Persians** (Ester 2-10).
21. *Mordecai* witnesses to and blesses the **Persians** (Ester 2-10).
22. *Ezra* witnessed to and blesses the **Persians** (Ezra 1).
23. *Nehemiah* witnesses to and blesses the **Persians** (Nehemiah 1).
24. *Israel* as a nation was a witness and blessing to all gentile peoples (Psalm 67:1,2,7; 72:17 – about a third of the Psalms have similar declarations; Isaiah 49:6; Jeremiah 1:5; 4:1,2; Amos).

How Interesting... Many of the most prominent figures of the OT spent seasons of their lives as missionaries, ministering cross-culturally the blessing of YHWH!

5. God Promised prophetically that His Servant (His Son Jesus Christ) would come to finish the Job in Isaiah 42:1-7

Notes:

B. Jesus is Concerned about the Unreached People Groups

1. Jesus centered his ministry in Galilee, the “Land of the Gentiles” that bordered or was near to Syria, Decapolis, Phoenicia, Tiberius, and Samaria (Matthew 4:13-16).
2. Jesus openly claimed that He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah that would bring righteousness to the gentile nation nations (Matthew 12:15-21).
3. His impact among gentiles was significant (Matthew 4:23-25).
4. Specific examples of ministry to gentiles:
 - a. A Centurion (Matthew 8:5-11 and Luke 13:29).
 - b. A Canaanite mother (Matthew 15:21-28). Note that Jesus uses satire/sarcasm in his teaching.
 - c. The feeding of the 4,000 was among the Greek and Aramaic speakers of Decapolis – a mostly gentile crowd! (Mark 7:31-8:10).
 - d. The Samaritans, though half Jew and half gentile, were completely despised and lost until Jesus gave them living water (John 4).
5. Matthew 10:5,6 gives only temporary limitations for the sake of the disciples' training mission.
6. Matthew 21:12,13 demonstrates The Father and Son's heart concerning the gentile peoples of the world; their desire to be in communion with them; and their rage toward all that would block or limit that fellowship.
7. Matthew 28:18-20 is where Jesus passes on his concern for the ethne to his Disciples.

C. The Holy Spirit is Concerned about the Unreached People Groups

1. He moved upon the 120 disciples in the upper room to plant the seed of the Gospel in hearts of "men from every nation under heaven."
2. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." Acts 2:4-11.

D. Paul is Concerned about the Unreached People Groups

1. Paul, full blooded Jew like Jesus, reveals his thinking about the “ethne” most clearly in Romans 15:18-24. Paul, here, after just 16 years or so of missionary travel is claiming to have “fully preached the gospel” in all of Israel, Asia Minor, and Macedonia.
2. Not knowing that he has just a few more years before his martyrdom at the hand of Nero, Paul is planning on launching another even more ambitious missionary journey into Europe via Rome and Spain (v. 24).

3. It is obvious that his measure of success is not the conversion of individual heathen, but rather the establishment of healthy congregations. If Paul thought *ethne* (v. 18) to mean “gentile individuals”, verses 19 and 20 would make no sense as he did not share the gospel with every person in those cities as he didn’t even visit all the cities of those regions! He did however establish churches in key cities amongst the “unreached peoples” of those regions and for him that was a mission accomplished. This should be the way we see our world as well. God certainly does not see the world according to man’s arbitrary and fluctuating political boundaries, but rather according to the “peoples” he created (Genesis 11:1-9 with the "Table of the Nations" Genesis 10) and for whom he gave his life.
4. This distinction is important because if we are to “fully preach the gospel” (v.19) among the gentiles until each individual hear, the missionaries would take forever with each group, never getting to the thousands of other unreached people groups that have yet to hear for the first time. Paul’s goal however was to establish an ongoing, witness amongst each *ethnos* or people group so that the church over time could over time reach the other individuals.
5. As well, Paul spoke of not duplicating efforts by “building upon another man’s foundation” (v.20). If someone else had an area covered, like Jerusalem and Judea, Paul avoided it except when necessary or to briefly encourage the brethren there. There are still many places in this world we can minister not only untouched by our particular denomination, but untouched by any church! There are 6,429 Unreached People Groups (out of 15,969 total people groups) identified and documented in the world, many of which the church of Jesus Christ has yet to even break ground! And these unreached peoples amount to about 30 - 40% of the world’s population!

E. All the Apostles were Concerned about the Unreached People Groups

Did the Apostles Consider The Great Commission of Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20 Mark 16 and Acts 1:8) a Command to Go and Preach Christ where He was Unnamed (Romans 15:17-24)?

Let’s examine **how** and **where** each of these disciples/apostles that audibly heard these words (except Matthias and Paul), spent and gave their lives in obedience to their Lord. The following is taken largely from the Fox’s book of Martyrs:

1. **James the Great**, the brother of John, served the early church in **Jerusalem** and in that city was the first of the Apostles to be martyred. He was beheaded about **44 A.D.** by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1,2).
2. **Philip**, preached Christ amongst the Gauls in **France** and in the City of Hieropolis in **W. Turkey**. He was crucified and stoned there by pagan priests in about **54 A.D.** The majority of that city eventually became Christians.
3. **Matthew** was an itinerant missionary reaching the Jews throughout the Roman Empire. He was beheaded about **60 A.D.** while evangelizing in **Ethiopia**.
4. **James the Less** (less mentioned in NT) was appointed to preach and minister in **Syria**. He was stoned by the Jews there about **63 A.D.**
5. **Matthias** traveled north and ministered in the vicinity of Sebastopol on the **north shore of the Black Sea**. He was stoned later however, around **70 A.D.**, when he returned to Jerusalem.
6. **Andrew** also traveled north but preached in **Scythia**, present day S. Russia. He also ministered in **Asia Minor**. He was eventually martyred in **Edessa Greece** about **70 A.D.** where he was crucified on an x-shaped cross. During the three days it took him to die, he continued to teach about Christ to the onlookers.
7. **Peter** had only begun to preach the Gospel in Acts 1-12. He also preached in the Land he called **Babylon** (1 Peter 5:13) which was most likely speaking figuratively of **Rome**. It was Rome where he was tortured in the Mamertine Prison and then crucified upside down in Nero’s Circus about **69 A.D.**
8. **Paul** traveled and ministered in **Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, Israel, and Rome**. He may have made it as far as **Spain** but his end was in Rome where he was beheaded outside its wall by order of Caesar Nero about **69 A.D.**

9. **Jude/Thaddaeus** ministered north and east of Jerusalem reaching as far as **India**. **Armenia** was his most fruitful place of ministry as it became a Christian nation by the 4th century. One tradition have him martyred there pierced by arrows or a spear around **70 A.D.** and another tradition has him being crucified in Edessa in 72 A.D.
10. **Bartholomew/Nathaniel** also ministered effectively in **Armenia** and **India**. He was tortured and whipped by pagan priest that left him flayed (skin removed). He was then crucified in his agony around **70 A.D.**
11. **Thomas** preached the good news of Jesus in **Babylon, Persia, India**. He was tortured and speared to death in Calamina, India around **70 A.D.** His tomb is in Mylapore, India.
12. **Simon the Zealot** traveled initially south and west of Jerusalem evangelizing across Northern Africa (**Egypt, Libya, Mauritania**) and then continued north through **Spain**, perhaps even reaching the **British Islands**. He was either sawn in half or crucified about **74 A.D.**
13. **John**, the “Apostle Jesus loved”, ministered largely in **Asia Minor**. Three different times martyrdom was attempted on him by boiling him in oil, leaving him to die exiled on Patmos, and giving him poison to drink. He survived all three and was the only apostle to actually die of natural causes at about **100 A.D.**

It is noteworthy that of the 13 apostles listed here (11 apostles were faithful to Christ, and two added in Acts – Matthias and Paul), 12 of them spent long years beyond Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, fulfilling our Lord’s great commission to “disciple all nations even to the ends of the world.”

IV. Other Key Concepts:

A. Ethne:

1. Strong’s concordance defines this term (#1484) as follows:

eynov ethnos *eth’-nos*; probably from **1486**; a race (as of the same habit), i.e. a tribe; specially, a foreign (non-Jewish) one (usually by implication, pagan):— Gentile, heathen, nation, people.

2. This is the term from which is derived our English term “ethnic”.
3. The singular use of *ethnos* always means “people” or “people group” without exception and never refers to a gentile or heathen individual. *Ethnos* is usually translated “nation”. See Matthew 24:7, Acts 2:5, and Revelation 5:9.
4. It is only the plural form (*ethne*) that has some possible variance of meaning. The first meaning is “gentile individuals” and the second, an ethnic or people group.
5. In the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew OT), of the approximately 100 appearances of the word in the phrase *panta ta ethne* or “all the nations”, ethnos always refers to ethnic/people groups. The OT concept is invariably that of peoples or races other than the Jews, and does not refer to political boundaries.
6. One text of particular importance is Matthew 28:19, often heralded as the “Great Commission” where Jesus commands his followers to “make disciples of *all the nations*” (*panta ta ethne*). Since this verse defines the target of our endeavor as being either groups of ethnic peoples or gentile individuals, our interpretation is critical.
7. The easy remedy is to compare his use here to other undisputed instances of the phrase. Since the vast majority undisputedly mean people groups I will only cite one now. Jesus shows us his vision of the Kingdom of God in Mark 11:17 as a “House of prayer for all the nations”, and that vision is clearly of ethnic people groups (Mark 11:17 is quoting Isaiah 56:6-7 that is clearly a reference to people groups). We can be certain then that his vision in Matthew 28:19 is one and the same. Jesus, a Jew with a Jewish cultural context and mind, obviously thought in terms of the Old Testament that consistently considers the *ethne* to be ethnic peoples.

B. Missions or Mission? That is the Question.

1. The term "missions" suggests a collection of cross cultural ministry efforts.
2. The term "mission" refers to the **central Biblical purpose of God for this world** which is...

... to glorify himself by the defeat of the devil and the destruction of his works in order to free and redeem many from every kindred, tongue, people, and nation, and with them establish his kingdom on this earth.

3. God may have other purposes beyond history and this planet which we get glimpses of, but this is it for us, right now.
4. Let's unpack the definition of God's Mission...
 - **To Glorify himself...**
 - Psalm 86:9 All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall **glorify** thy name.
 - John 14:4 I have **glorified** thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.
 - **By the defeat of the devil and the destruction of his works...**
 - Hebrews 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might **destroy** him that had the power of death, that is, the devil
 - 1 John 3:8 For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might **destroy** the works of the devil.
 - **In order to free and redeem many from every kindred, tongue, people, and nation...**
 - Titus 2:14 Who gave himself for us, that he might **redeem** us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.
 - Revelation 5:9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every **kindred** (or tribe – denotes extended *family* groupings of people), and **tongue** (denotes *linguistic* groupings of people), and **people** (denotes *ethnic* groupings of people), and **nation** (denotes *political* groupings of people).
 - **And with them establish his kingdom in all the earth.**
 - Matthew 6:10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
 - Matthew 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.
 - Romans 14:17 The kingdom of God is not meat nor drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.
 - Revelation 20:1, 2, 6 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years... Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

(Note that the kingdom of God has had and will have different expressions in Israel, the Church, the tribulation saints, and finally the millennial reign of Christ.)

V. Key Questions:

- A. Did you have any idea how much the Old Testament spoke of cross-cultural ministry?
- B. Is being a "light to the nations" a call for us all? Explain your answer.
- C. Were you under the impression that Jesus avoided gentiles? What about now?
- D. Is there anyone you are avoiding that God would like you to approach?