

Mission in the Old Testament  
“Israel As A Light To The Nations”

Walter Kaiser

Preface

p. 7 – The last book of Scripture emphasizes the same concern for people: “every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 14:6). Thus this theme of a mission to the whole world forms one giant envelope (a figure of speech called an inclusion) framing the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

p. 8 – It would be incorrect to say that Abraham was the first to receive the “all peoples” target for the message of the gospel. Genesis 1-11 was far from being a nationalistic section that favored the Jews. It is one of the most universalistic sections of the Bible, ending with a list in Genesis 10 of seventy nations, the very “families” and “all peoples” that we to receive the blessing from God through Abraham and his collective seed in Genesis 12:3.

p. 9 – It is at this point that the thesis of this book participates in issues that are hotly debated today: Did this “kingdom of priests” serve Israel alone, or the entire world? Were they to be active or merely passive witnesses? Was Israel’s role as mission with regard to the world *centripetal* (inward moving, and therefore the people of that time are said to play a passive role in witnessing and spreading the Good News) or *centrifugal* (outward moving, and therefore the Old Testament believers were active in sharing their faith)?

## INTRODUCTION

p. 11 – Up until the 1950's, the subject of the missionary movement was referred to as "missions" in the plural form. In fact, the term "missions" was first used in its current context by the Jesuits in the sixteenth century. But the International Missionary Council discussions in the 1950's on the *mission Dei* convinced most that the mission of the Triune God was prior to any of the number of missions by Christians during the two millennia of church history. Consequently, since there was only one mission, the plural form has dropped out of familiar usage and the singular form, 'mission,' has replaced it for the most part. Nevertheless, most churches and laypersons hang on to the plural missions.

p. 11 – Mission points to a central action: the act of being *sent* with a commission to carry out the will of a superior. It is the God who commissions and God who sends.

p. 13 – Yahweh must send his people into exile in order for them to act in accordance with his desire that the nation of Israel should be his agents whereby he could bless all the families of the earth.

p. 13 – It is our hope that the formative theology of Genesis 12:3 may once again be seen for what it is and has always been in the discussion of mission: a divine program to glorify himself by bringing salvation to all on planet earth. Indeed, here is where missions really begins. Here is the FIRST Great Commission mandate of the Bible. It is this thesis that dominates the strategy, theology and mission of the Old Testament.

## Chapter 1

### God's Plan for Missions in the Old Testament

p. 15 – Genesis 1-11 is decidedly universal in its scope and outlook.

p. 16 – There were three such crises that fell on humanity as a result of their sin: (1) the fall, (2), the flood, and (3) the failure of the Tower of Babel. HOWEVER WITH EACH CRISIS CAME A PROMISE FROM GOD THAT FORMED THE WORLDWIDE BLESSING OF GOD TO ALL MORTALS.

p. 16 – Genesis 3:15 introduces us to the “Man of Promise”.

p. 16 – It may be fairly stated that Eve thought that the birth of her first son would be the answer to the promise of Genesis 3:15 and that this male descendant would be divine!

p. 17 – God gave special promise to Shem (Gen. 9:27), that God would “DWELL in the tents of Shem.”

p. 17 – Genesis 12:1-3 - After each of the successive failures of the fall, the flood and the flop of the Tower of Babel, our Lord had given a word of grace: Gen. 3:15; 9:27; and now Genesis 12:1-3

p. 18 – God's grace promised in Genesis 12:1-3, he repeats FIVE times his determination to “bless” Abraham, his seed, and ALL the families of the earth.

p. 20 – The ‘gospel’ mentioned in Galatians 3:8. Therefore without a doubt we are at the center of what is at the core of the gospel and mission in both Testaments.

p. 20 – The whole purpose of God was to bless one people so that they might be the channel through which all the nations on the earth might receive a blessing. Israel was to be God's missionaries to the world, and thereby so are all who believe in this same gospel.

p. 22 – Exodus 19:4-6. The election of Israel, far from meaning the rejection of the other nations of the world, was the very means of salvation of the nations. Election was not a call to privilege, but a choosing for service.

p. 24 – It is not an outlandish idea to think that the Lord was simultaneously extending the offer of salvation to others during the OT era in addition to Israel.

p. 25 – 2 Samuel 7 -To complete our study of the plan of God for the people of the earth, it is necessary to investigate the continuation of the promise first made to Eve, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but now announced to David in 2 Samuel 7.

p. 27 – Conclusion – The plan of God had from the very beginning the central figure of the “Seed” who was to come in the person of the Man of Promise, the Messiah. It was a message aimed universally at all people groups and nations from the very beginning.

## Chapter 2

### God's Purpose for Missions in the Old Testament

p. 29 – The Psalter is one of the greatest missionary books in the world.” There are more than 175 references in Psalms of a universalistic note relating to the nations of the world. Many of them bring hope of salvation to the nations. Especially Ps. 67, 96 and 100.

p. 30 – Psalms 67 – If a psalm was ever written around the promises to Abraham, that he would be both blessed and made a blessing, it could well have been such as Psalm 67.

p. 30 – Rather than saying Yahweh (=Lord), the covenantal and personal name used by those who have an intimate relationship to God, the psalmist substituted *Elohim* (“God”), the name used when one must express the Lord’s relationship to all people, nations and creation.

p. 31 – Genesis 12:2-3, Bless us . . . bless us . . . bless us . . . so that all the nations might come to know the Lord.

p. 32 – God has not blessed Israel and been kind to them because they were his pets, his favorites, or because his grace was limited to them for the period of the Old Testament. Instead, God’s mode of dealing with Israel was communicate to them a message that they in turn were responsible for disseminating to all the people of the earth.

p. 34 – Psalm 96 – Psalm 96 is another of the great missionary psalms, for the anonymous author orders the Jewish audience not only to “Sing to the Lord,” but to “proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples” (Ps. 96:2-3).

p. 36 – Psalm 117 – While this psalm is not as explicit a missionary psalm as Psalms 67 and 96, nevertheless, it does call for extolling the Name of God before all the nations and all the peoples. The international Gentile people groups (Hebrew: *goyim*, must be told of the loyal faithfulness of Yahweh. Accordingly, when all the peoples of the earth are called to praise and extol the Lord . . .

p. 36 – Conclusion – It is all too easy to conclude that the OT does not set forth a missionary mandate for Israel since, as George Peters claimed, “Nowhere in the OT was Israel ‘sent’ to the nations.” But Peters linked the word “send” with the NT’s definition of missions. Therefore he unnecessarily eliminated other, legitimate indications of the concept of missions from the older Testament.

p. 37 – When Jesus cleansed the temple and drove out the money changers, he drove them out of the Court of the Gentiles. Could it be that the concern for commerce in that day had crowded out the requisite concern for the Gentile nations?

p. 38 – Missions cannot be an afterthought for the Old Testament: it is the heart and core of the plan of God.

### Chapter 3

#### God's Use of Individuals to Reach Gentiles in the Old Testament

p. 39 – Genesis 12:1-3 – This promise that God would bless “all the families of the earth” is repeated in various forms in Genesis 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; and 28:14.

p. 40 – The “nations” and “Gentiles” were envisioned as equal recipients of that same Good News from the very beginning of time along with Israel herself.

p. 40 – Who were these Gentiles in the OT who were benefiting from the outreach of the grace of God? Melchizedek, Jethro was a priest of Midian.

p. 41 – Balaam son of Beor, who lived in Upper Mesopotamia at Pethor, near the River Euphrates in his native land.

p. 41 – Rahab the prostitute.

p. 42 – Ruth, the Moabite woman.

p. 43 – Naaman, commander of the Syrian army.

p. 47 – One thing is for sure: Naaman is the first one to mention (2 Kings 5) the name “Yahweh,” both before (v. 11) and after (v. 15) his healing. He could just as easily have used the plural noun “Elohim”, “God” to refer to the God of Israel. The OT is careful about the times it chooses to refer to Yahweh. That name was reserved for those who had a personal relationship to him, otherwise Elohim was accurate enough.

p. 50 – Conclusion – The divine revelation wanted us to see that Yahweh was truly calling all the families of the earth, even one's enemies, to the same Savior and salvation.

## Chapter 4

### God's Call to Israel to Be a Light to the Nations

p. 51 – In the polytheistic way of thinking, one's god was linked to the people and their homeland, but in the revelatory scheme of things, Scripture refused to put Yahweh in such a straitjacket. Yahweh was always the only one, true god who ruled over all creation and all nations and all peoples.

p. 52 – Can any of these idol-gods interpret past history in such a way as to bring to light history's underlying purpose?

p. 53 – Can they forecast or show anything that is going to happen in the future and thereby demonstrate that they are real gods?

p. 53 – All through this section of Isaiah 40-48 the prophet taunts these gods for how worthless they are in comparison to the Living God. The ridiculousness of depending on those who cannot speak, see, or do anything is mind-boggling. Isaiah 44:9-19 calls for those who make these 'nothings' to think for a moment: half of the wood you use for fuel and the other half for the image. The thing is blind and ignorant, and can profit its worshipers nothing.

p. 53 – If only the Gentiles would come to their senses and realize that the God of Israel is not a national God, but the Lord of all the earth. He alone is God of all the nations!

p. 54 – It is the theme of the nation Israel as witness that introduces our subject of mission in the OT prophets. "I will also make you a light to the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth. (Is. 49:6).

p. 55 - . . . worldwide missions could be found throughout the entire Book of Isaiah. Wodecki identified the Servant of the Lord with the Messiah, whom he believed Isaiah taught, will bring the Law and teaching of Yahweh to the ends of the earth through the witness of his people Israel.

p. 56 – Isaiah picks up the informing and antecedent theology of the Abrahamic promise and the message of Exodus 19:4-6 to remind the nation of her duty to be a witness (both actively or passively) to the pagan people groups around the world.

p. 57 – All Israel was regarded as God's "servants".

p. 58 – This Servant being a "light to the nations/Gentiles" (Is. 42:6; 49:6)? The nation of Israel, as "servant" is called to be that light to the nations. This is practically a replication of the



promise made through Abraham that “in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).

p. 61 – These NT believers saw Isaiah 49:6 to be an authorization addressed directly to them, just as surely as the audience of Isaiah’s day understood it.

p. 61 – The extent and scope of the witness are the same in both Testaments.

p. 63 – She must bring the religious teaching, usually translated “bring justice,” to the nations. The instruction as to what is right must come from those who have been entrusted with the oracles of God.

p. 63 – The peoples that were included in the blessings of these covenants were the same. They were initially given to Israel so that Israel could share them with all the peoples of the earth.

p. 67 – Jesus also referred to Jonah as a historical personage (Matt. 12:38-41; Luke 11:29-30, 32). It is difficult to argue that Jesus could not distinguish among allegory, parable and history.

p. 69 – THE MISSIONARY PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF JONAH

p. 69 – The text was written to help others avoid the trap Jonah fell into and to encourage their adoption of Yahweh’s heart for the nations, yes, even the most brutal enemies!

p. 69 - . . . the universal offer of the gospel or Jonah’s penchant for failing to accept the fact that God was also the God of their enemies.

p. 70 – The second paragraph begins with God’s ministry to the prophet. In fact, the final two verses involved both an appeal to Jonah and to each of us as readers. Whose attitude will we adopt: Jonah’s or Yahweh’s? Jonah expressed concern only for his own comfort and protection, as seen through the episode of the dying plant. But what about all the people, not to mention the cattle and more particularly 120,000 children that still do not know on hand from the other?

p. 70 – So what was the purpose of sending Jonah, against his will, to such a heathen land when the work in his own land was not yet finished?

p. 70 – The answer lies in the fact that the special work he had to do (against this almost unbounded evil in Assyria) was a sign to Israel of the mind of God. It consisted of a work that was being committed to this ambassador to a people who were clearly outside the territory of Israel, but who likewise needed to be subjected to the all for the moral rectitude and godliness.

p. 71 – Mission is one of the means God used to provoke those who claim to be his people to jealousy and repentance. The image of thousands of heathen casting off their former way of life

and crying out to God is repentance is to shame mediocre believers into repentance and mending of their ways. Such is one of our Lord's final and loudest calls to repentance. God is no respecter of persons.

p. 72 – The mission of the gospel is as broad as the human race!

p. 74 – Conclusion – Israel was called to be God's witness to the nations. She was to do so by life and demeanor: God's glory was to be seen in his chosen agents of blessing. But they were also to have witnessed these truths in words as well.

p. 74 – Only Israel's provincialism and chauvinism forced her into a jaundiced position of envy and partiality. But she was to pay for this by being deliberately scattered among the nations and by being put in exile more than once.

p. 74 – If Yahweh was the incomparably great God that Isaiah 40-48 declared, how could this be mediated in the nation's mission in any other way than faithfulness to the directive given to that people at the time of their election? It would be through the people of Israel that the nations of the earth were to hear the Good News of the coming Man of Promise and the blessing that God intended for all to hear.

## Chapter 6

### God's Call to the Missionary Paul Based on the Old Testament

p. 75 – The apostle Paul, in his trial before Felix, (Acts 24:14), he announced, “I believe everything that agrees about the Law and that is written in the Prophets.” The apostle never viewed his mission to be something that was brand-new and unattached to what God had been doing in the past or what he wanted to continue to do in the present. The Old Testament was Paul’s authoritative source for the mission on the which God was sending him. But can this claim be substantiated?

p. 77 – Ministry to the Gentiles was anchored in the Old Testament.

p. 77 – As Paul traveled along his journey, he gathered, from the various Christian Churches he had founded, Gentiles whose priestly serviced for the gospel of God he regarded at “fruit” (Rom. 15:16). These converts Paul saw as an “offering of the Gentiles” and a proof of this service (Rom. 15:31).

p. 78 – The Gentiles of the end times were to bring Jews from nations wherever the diaspora was found, but Paul would bring Gentile Christians, not Jews, to Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord Jesus. Paul obtained this idea from Isaiah 66:21.

p. 80 – Paul’s mission to the Gentiles was a direct effort to prepare this huge offering as a veritable sacrifice offered to the Living God.

p. 81 – The Gentile mission was not some sort of add-on; it had always been at the heart of all that God wanted to do and had called Israel and all believers to do.

p. 82 – But there could be no mistaking where Paul got his marching orders; they came from the OT. The case for evangelizing the Gentiles had not been a recently devised switch in the plan of God, but had always been the long-term commitment of the Living God who is a missionary God. This is the same case that is consistently, even it at times only rudimentarily, found in the entire corpus of the Old Testament!