

What is this study about?

I hope to give you a whole bible understanding of mission and to show you that you are supposed to be on mission right now (weeks 1-4)! In these first four weeks we will be looking at how Abraham's mission, Israel's Mission, Jesus' Mission, and the church's mission fit into God's mission. I hope to give you some very practical ways to pursue your mission right where you live (weeks 5-6). In week five we will be examining specific ways in which we can be more attractive in our Christian relationships before a watching world (centripetal). In week six we will be looking at specific ways we, with our busy schedules and our many other hang-ups, can go out into a hurting world and incarnate the love of Christ (centrifugal). I hope to make you into a "faucet Christian" rather than a "sink Christian"! The difference is stated well by Trevin Wax:

"There are two kinds of Christians:

'Sink Christians' view salvation like they would a sink. The water of salvation flows into the sink so that Christians can soak up all the benefits: eternal life, assurance in the present, strength in times of trial. Those who adopt this mindset concentrate solely on what the Bible says God has done and will do for them.

'Faucet Christians' view salvation differently. They look at the world as the sink and themselves as the faucet. The blessings of salvation flow *to* them in order to flow *through* them out to the wider world. They rightly see that the Bible describes salvation as something that God not only does for them, but also through them."

I. Fundamentals

A. Defining Mission

Here is the definition from last week that was too wordy:

"Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation" (Chris Wright, *The Mission of God*, 22-23).

A simpler definition:

"Our call to participate in God's mission to redeem God's creation."

Defining Our Terms:

Call: You cannot be part of God's mission unless you have been invited/called by God into a loving relationship with him and accepted the invitation (repentance from sin and faith in the atoning work of Christ). Everyone he calls into a relationship with him, he invites into his mission as well. Titus 2:14???

Participate: There is mission before there are missions. Every one of the individual missions has to fit into God's larger mission for it to be legitimate. I think there is the possibility that much of what goes on under the label of "missions" is actually not part of God's larger mission and much that is not under the label, actually should be!

Redeem God's Creation: God made the world and loves it all. God's mission is not simply to save souls, but to bless as "far as the curse is found." This should keep us from reducing our mission either to a "share the gospel message only"—word only mission or a "soup only"—deed only mission. They both go together and authenticate one another. More on that in session #6. *Romans 8:20-21*

The Two Directions of Missions

Centrifugal: I said that the church has largely focused on the centrifugal aspect of missions based on Matthew 28:18-20. It is the outward movement of the mission and it is what we mean when we say

missionary. The word has almost come to mean “far-flung evangelism. So much so that it is nearly an oxymoron to say “I am a local or domestic missionary.”

Centripetal: I also said that Israel did not have a missionary role but a missional role in the world. By that I meant that they had a centripetal emphasis. That is their role was to attract the nations to them and thereby to their God.

Simpler Terms

Centrifugal=Export Centripetal=Import

Let's replace the words centrifugal and centripetal and replace them with export and import. The bottom line here is that God desires to be represented to the world. Jesus Christ was God in the flesh. He has now given us his Spirit and now we are God in the flesh to the world. Sometimes we export God to the world by sending a missionary to incarnate God to far away people. Sometime we import people to God by inviting people to the body gathered or to our small groups so that they can see God in us as we love one another.

II. The Mission of Abraham—continued

In our last study we examined the pivotal place of Genesis 12:1-3 in the Scriptures. It is the launch pad for the mission of God. It is God's plan to reverse the curse through Abraham and his descendants by making them a great nation and thereby to bless all the families of the earth. Let's look at one more important text that will give us a bit more of an understanding as to just how God planned to use Abraham and his descendants to bless the nations.

Turn to Genesis 18. We are going to read the whole chapter.

The context of this passage is Abraham has received the promise from God that he would have a son and his descendants would be a great nation and they would bless all the families of the earth and it was reconfirmed in chapter 17. But time passes. Abraham was minding his own business in the heat of a middle eastern desert day and along comes three visitors. Abraham is a gracious host to them. They turn out to be two angels of God and God himself (many text equivocate on this because the presence of the angel of the Lord is often said to be the Lord himself) sharing an intimate meal with Abraham. God hangs out and talks with Abraham.

I want to focus in on verses 17-33. This is a unique text. God is thinking out loud and considering the logic of a decision he is about to make (v. 17-19). I want to focus in here and then makes some general comments about the dialogue that follows. Notice the logic of verses 17-19. God has just finished asking a rhetorical question to be answered in the negative: should I hide what I am about to do? No. Why not? Because it is certain (“surely”) that Abraham will become a great nation and he will bless the nations (v. 17-18). Why is this so certain? Verse 19 opens with a reason “*For* I have chosen him.” So election or God's choosing of Abraham makes it certain. Then God reveals an ethical purpose behind his election of Abraham: “*that* he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice.” This is then followed by another statement of purpose “*so that* the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.” God wants to talk to Abraham about the fate of Sodom because of the certainty of Abraham's successful role in God's mission. He wants to talk to Abraham about it to reveal something about how God works that will help Abraham on his mission. I'll expand on that thought in a moment. Abraham's purpose in God's mission is to command his children to keep God's law by doing righteousness and justice and in this way—in the doing of righteousness and justice—the nations will be blessed.

Chris Wright comments on this: “ethics stands as the mid-term between election and mission, as the purpose of the former and the basis for the latter. That is, God's election of Abraham is intended to produce a community committed to ethical reflection of God's character. And God's mission of blessing the nations is predicated on such a community actually existing” (TMOG, 368).

“We cannot speak biblically of the doctrine of election without insisting that it was never an end in itself but a means to the greater end of the ingathering of the nations” (TMOG, 369).

Side Note #1 Friendship: It is also quite amazing that we see friendship between God and Abraham in this text. They share a meal together and God tells Abraham his plans. Abraham is on God’s mission and Abraham is God’s friend. I hope that is true of you and me. I hope God is revealing himself to you in his word and that you are being a friend to God by listening and wrestling and obeying.

Side Note#2 The Compassion of God: The moment God begins to explain the situation about Sodom to Abraham he tells Abraham about the cry of oppressed people against Sodom. This is important. We are getting a glimpse into the character of our God! God is incredibly attentive to the heartfelt cry of the oppressed. This is who God is and how God works. He hears the cry of the oppressed and he acts (Psalm 22:24, 34:17, Deuteronomy 22:24, 27). Are you like God in this? How are you at being attentive to the cry of the afflicted and the oppressed in your family? Neighborhood? Church? Job? Etc. (John 15:14-15)

Why does Abraham go into this dialogue with God about his judgment in relation to the number of the righteous left in the midst of a wicked people? It is important to note that Abraham is not simply concerned with the welfare of the righteous. Think about Abraham’s mission. His job and the job of his descendants is to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. He knows that his righteous cousin Lot and his family are in Sodom. He wants to know how many righteous people it takes to act as leaven in a city. As long as a sufficient number of righteous people remained in a city, the possibility of blessing/saving the wicked remained. But when does God decide that enough is enough? “How small can the minority be and still be allowed to have impact? This is an important issue for Abraham to explore because his family is to be the righteous minority among the nations, with Sodom standing as a representative microcosm” (John Walton, NIV Application Commentary *Genesis*, p. 483). I said earlier that God wanted to speak to Abraham about Sodom to reveal something about how God works that will help him to complete his mission. That which God reveals in this dialogue is wonderful and disturbing all at once. All it takes is a small number of righteous people doing righteousness and justice to preserve many wicked people from the judgment of God and have a leavening/saving effect on a whole city. That is wonderful news. Just a handful of people who love God can really make a difference for God’s kingdom. But there is a minimum number that must be in the city living out their faith or God’s continued mercy would only reward wickedness and further entrench them in their wicked ways.

III. Israel’s Mission

Now we are going to examine the mission of Israel. Turn to Exodus 19. We will look at verses 5 and 6.

This is the hinge between the story of the exodus and the giving of the law. It reveals Israel’s identity and their mission or role.

Let’s read these verses.

Last week we looked at this text and asked the question: **If all of Israel are priests, who are they supposed to be priests for?** The answer is that they were supposed to be priests for the nations. This fits so nicely with what we have learned about God’s mission for Abraham and his descendants.

My Theory

But why did only one tribe wind up being priests? The Bible does not say. But here is my theory. It seems to me that the golden calf incident was pivotal in God’s relationship with his people. At first, the whole nation was to be priests, then God was going to kill them all. It was at this pivotal moment that the Levites

chose at great cost to be on the Lord's side. So they were ordained to service. Thanks to the mediation of Moses, the faithfulness of the Levites, and the grace and mercy of God, the Israelites had the Levites as priests to represent them to God and God to them. Exodus 32:25-29

Now this explanation does not explain the presence of priests as distinct from the rest of the people in Exodus 19. In addition, I just read today about the Aaronic priests in Exodus 29. Now I am wonder if the event in Exodus 32 affected the Aaronic priesthood but the general priesthood of the nation is a different idea altogether. I wonder if it is possible that Israel as a whole is to be priests to the nations, but the general population needed their own priests and this was the plan from the beginning. That is my theory for now.

Exodus 19:5-6 Balancing Election and Mission

Well, let's look at the some details in the text. Let's examine this phrase "treasured possession." Let's look at that a bit more closely.

Treasured possession: This word is used in several places in the OT but here is a helpful use for us to determine its flavor: 1 Chronicles 29:3. It describes the personal treasure of a monarch and his family. The king owns everything. It is not that God only owns Israel. He owns everything and takes delight in that fact. Although the king might take delight in his whole kingdom, He had particular delight in his personal treasure, Israel.

But Israel was not to simply revel in their "treasured" status. Like Abraham, they were elected for a purpose, for mission. "The particularity of Israel here is intended to serve the universality of God's interest in the world. Israel's election serves God's mission" (TMOG, 257).

Two texts that use treasured possession and therefore echo Exodus 19 emphasize the particularity or distinctiveness of Israel, which was vital to their mission:

1. Read Deuteronomy 7:1-11. Deuteronomy 7:6 echoes Exodus 19:5-6. "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." But this whole section in Deuteronomy 7 is concerned with Israel's particularity. Their distinctiveness from the nations. It is important to note that the issue was not ethnic exclusiveness but religious protection. There were a variety of ways that the nations could be brought into the worshipping community of Israel.

2. Read Deuteronomy 14:1-8. Consider Exodus 14:2 "you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." This section is concerned with the Israelites behaving differently than the nations. It is about Israel keeping their particular identity and the effect their identity as God's treasured possession and their behavior as a holy nation should have on the nations of the world.

There are two echoes of Exodus 19 in Deuteronomy that we need to look at. There we see both "treasured possession" and "holy nation" used regarding Israel in relation to the nations.

1. Read Deut 26:18-19

2. Read Deuteronomy 28:9-10

"God...declares the purpose of Israel's election in relation to the rest of the nations. It is that there should be 'praise, fame and honor.' To whom do these belong? On the surface of the text in Deuteronomy 26:19 they are for Israel. But the closely linked Deuteronomy 28:9-10 shows that the nations will not merely show high regard for Israel but will do so because they recognize the God to whom Israel belongs: "All the peoples on earth will see that your are called by the name of the Lord." So the reputation of Israel and of

YHWH are bound up together. Such is the inescapable nature of covenant. This is what is at stake in Israel's covenantal obedience (or lack of it).

Such also is the necessary implication of election. If YHWH chooses to attach Israel to himself, he chooses in consequence to attach himself to Israel. What the nations think of Israel will translate into what they think of YHWH—a high risk mission strategy” (TMOG 258).

So, the point is that Israel had to keep her particular identity as one chosen by God, but she also had a purpose or function that was in relation to the nations. If she forgot who she was and started to worship other God's that was a problem. But an equally bad problem is if she forgot why she was who she was, and that was for the sake of the nations and making them worshippers of YHWH, she would fail at completing her own mission. Here are two texts in Jeremiah that bring this point home in a vivid way:

“For as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the LORD, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they would not listen” (Jeremiah 13:11).

“I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. 9 And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it” (Jeremiah 33:8-9).

“Whatever levels of renown, praise, and honor may come Israel's way among the nations is actually for YHWH, the God who chose them as his covenant people. The imagery of Jeremiah's acted parable in chapter 13 expresses this well. A bright, new piece of clothing (probably a sash, not just a belt) would be selected, bought and then worn with pride as something that was beautiful in itself. But the point of wearing it was to bring pleasure and praise to the wearer. That was how God regarded Israel. He wanted to ‘wear them.’ Election here is expressed under the figure of choosing a piece of clothing to put on. It may indeed be ‘an honor’ for the tie that gets chosen instead of the others, but that is not the point of the exercise. The intention is to enhance the wearer. Similarly, it was doubtless an incredible privilege and honor for Israel to be chosen as YHWH's covenant partner, but that in itself was not the reason for YHWH making the choice. God had a wider agenda, namely, the exaltation of his won name among the nations through what he would ultimately accomplish ‘dressed with’ Israel” (TMOG 259).

Conclusion: Israel's mission was to be a blessed, treasured possession of God and be so affected by this that she would obey God's law and live righteously and justly. This way of living would draw in the nations to give glory, honor, and praise to God. Here election was supposed to feed her mission. The story of the Old Testament is a story of Israel's failure to believe God's promises and treasure the God who made them. She was a garment God picked out to make Himself look glorious to the nations and Israel made Him look shameful.

Although there is much to say about our mission in the coming weeks, one thing we can say now is that we too have been selected to be God's treasured possession. We have been chosen as a wonderful garment to make God look good to the world. How can we make him look good as he wears us before the watching world?

There are many very important secondary ways, but first and foremost we must grasp our “treasured possession” status. This is what Paul prays for in Ephesians 3:14-21 and it is a fitting conclusion to our study this evening. Read...