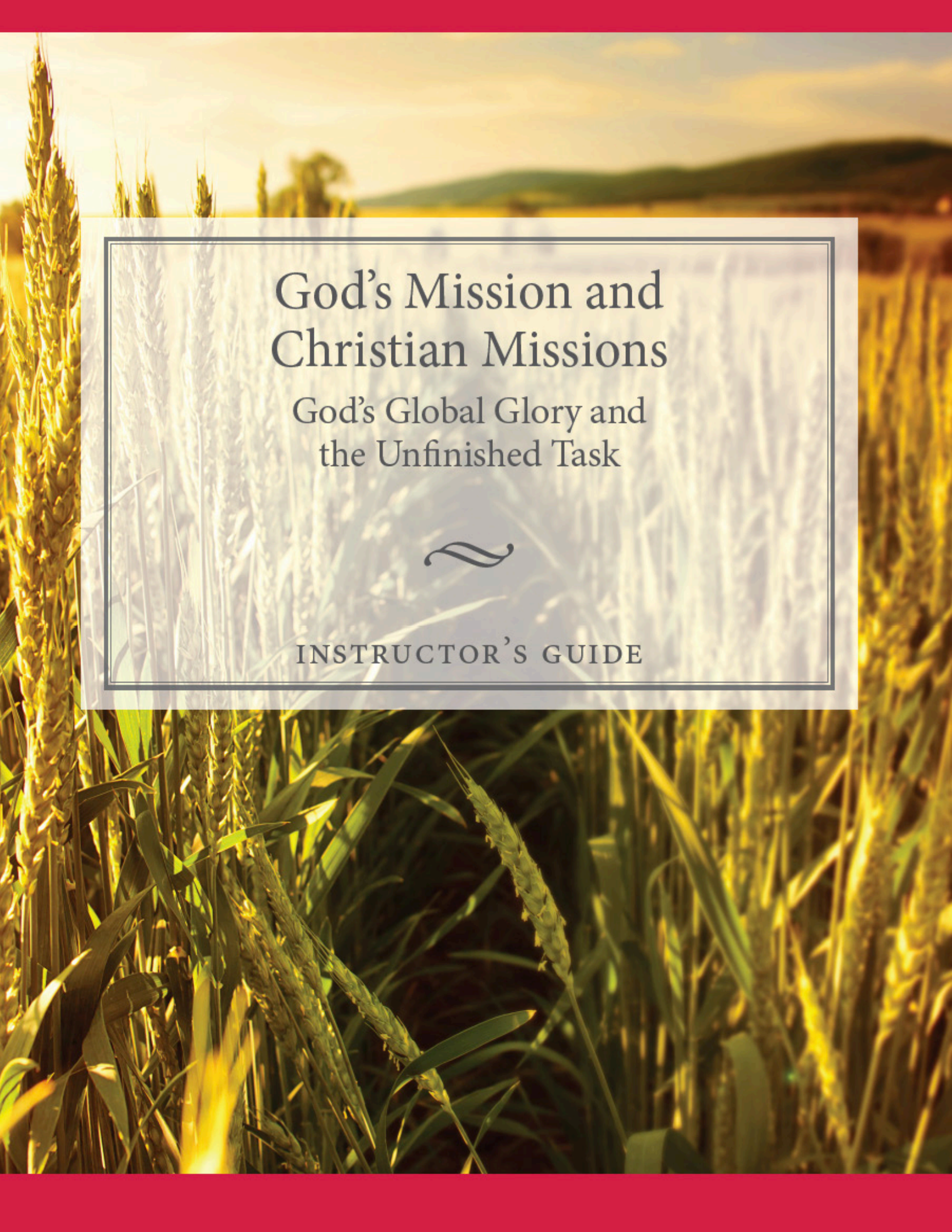




God's Mission and Christian Missions

God's Global Glory and
the Unfinished Task



INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

✠ God's Mission and Christian Missions *God's Global Glory and the Unfinished Task*

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

Bethlehem College & Seminary
720 13th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55415
612.455.3420
info@bcsmn.edu | bcsmn.edu

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Instructor's Introduction

It is our hope and prayer that God would be pleased to use this curriculum for *his* glory. Thus, the intention of this curriculum is to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. This curriculum is guided by the vision and values of Bethlehem College & Seminary which are more fully explained at bcsmn.edu. At the Bethlehem College & Seminary website, you will find the God-centered philosophy that undergirds and motivates everything we do. May God be glorified in us as we are satisfied in him alone!



COURSE DESCRIPTION

God's Mission and Christian Missions: God's Global Glory and the Unfinished Task is a six-week course advancing the truth that God is on a mission to fill the earth with his glory through his redeemed people. The course will assert that ambassadors of Jesus Christ and his gospel should be sent to every people group, and will seek to provide a biblical and theological grounding for Christian missions from a God-centered perspective. Students will gain a deeper understanding of this issue by closely examining key biblical passages relevant to the issue of missions, answering provocative questions, and considering sermons and writings from the ministry of John Piper.

OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. A student successfully completing this course should be able to:

- ▷ magnify the worth of the missionary God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their heart above all else. This is the ultimate objective of the course. We recognize that this is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ▷ understand the Scriptures—especially showing how the Bible reveals God on mission from beginning to end—more fully as a result of studying them diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be “Bereans.” The Bereans were people who “received the word with all eagerness” and examined “the Scriptures daily” to see if what they were being taught was actually true (Acts 17:11). Therefore, examine the Scriptures in the lessons to see how God is on mission and how he uses his people for his mission.
- ▷ comprehend and thoughtfully interact with five of John Piper’s sermons and messages on the topic of Christian missions. To this end the student will fill out note-taking sheets for every sermon they are assigned to listen to or watch.
- ▷ set forth a basic defense for Christian missions, emphasizing how Christian missions relates to the mission of God.
- ▷ discuss with others the biblical vision of God’s global plan and make appropriate personal application.

IMPLEMENTATION

As the instructor of this course, it is imperative that you are completely familiar with the curriculum. We therefore recommend that you read this entire section carefully and then skim through the rest of what is contained in this binder.

This course is designed to be taught in 6 lessons. Ideally there should be one hour of in-class instruction and approximately one hour of homework for each lesson. We urge you to establish an expectation among your students that this course will require more concentration and commitment than a typical Sunday School course would. A tone of serious and earnest study should be set by the instructor before the course even begins.

Before the first class session, you will need to decide when and where this course will be offered. Record this information on the syllabus in the box labeled: “Course Information.” You may also want to include your contact information in this box. The schedule incorporated in the syllabus does not have assigned dates. Please write the intended dates for each lesson in the corresponding column or boxes. Once you have completed filling out the syllabus, photocopy it so that you may distribute one copy to each student enrolled in the course. The *Student’s Workbook* does not include a syllabus, so your students will not have a syllabus until you distribute one. Photocopying the syllabus is the only photocopying that is required of you by this curriculum.

During the first lesson, we recommend the following outline for your time:

Welcome / Prayer (5 min): Greet the students as they arrive. Open the lesson by exalting God in prayer.

Personal Introductions (15 min): Ask each student in the room to introduce themselves briefly by answering the following questions (and answer these questions yourself): What is your name? Can you tell the class a little about yourself and your line of work? Why are you enrolled in this course and what are you hoping to gain from it?

Syllabus Review (5 min): Distribute your customized course syllabus and then guide the class through it, reading each item and answering any questions that the students might have.

Global Realities and the Mission of God (30 min): Guide the class through Lesson 1, reading each section together until a question is reached. After allowing a few minutes for the students to answer each question, pause to discuss their answers. You may also choose to discuss each question immediately with the class (and not allow time for individual reflection) in the interest of time.

Lesson 1 is the only lesson you will take your students through without their prior preparation. For all subsequent lessons, students will work through the lesson on their own before coming to class. To prepare for Lesson 1 as the instructor, you should attempt to answer the questions yourself before consulting the suggested answers (where given) in the *Instructor’s Guide*.

Overview of the Next Lesson / Closing (5 min): Ensure that your students understand what is required of them in preparation for the next class session. Then thank them for coming to the class and dismiss in prayer.

Subsequent Lessons

As the instructor, you will be expected to do all the preparation for each lesson that is required of the students and more. We strongly recommend that you obtain a *Student's Workbook* and attempt to complete the homework on your own before consulting this *Instructor's Guide*. The *Instructor's Guide* provides our suggested answers. Some questions in this curriculum are open-ended and could be answered in different ways. You may find that the answers contained in this manual may not be the clearest or most accurate answers possible. Therefore, we encourage you to improve upon our answers if you can.

It is essential to understand that this *Instructor's Guide* is meant to be a resource; the real authority is God's Word.

Furthermore, we have deliberately omitted lesson outlines for Lessons 2–6. Our recommendation is for you to open the class in prayer and then immediately proceed through each day's study, discussing how the students answered the three lesson questions and reflecting on the biblical passages. You then might want to cover the sermon or discussion questions. You will notice that **the material in each lesson should provide you with much more material than you can cover in an hour of thoughtful interaction.** This is not an oversight in design and you should not feel obligated to provide the students with answers for every question. Rather, as the instructor, your responsibility should be to focus on areas where students have questions or interest.

You will also notice that the *Instructor's Guide* has material in the form of Teaching Notes that is not included in the *Student's Workbook*. Consult these notes after thoroughly reviewing the lesson on your own, but before you meet with the class.

It is our conviction that the best teachers foster an environment in the classroom which engages students. Adults learn by solving problems or by working through things that provoke curiosity or concern. Therefore, we discourage you from lecturing for the entire lesson. Although an instructor will constantly shape conversation, clarifying and correcting as needed, they will probably not spend the majority of the session talking or lecturing. This curriculum is meant to facilitate an investigation into biblical truth—an investigation that is shared by the instructor and the students. Therefore, we encourage you to adopt the posture of a “fellow-learner” who invites participation from everyone in the class.

It might surprise you how eager adults can be to share what they have learned in preparing for each lesson. Therefore, you should invite participation by asking your students to share their discoveries. Here are some of our “tips” on facilitating discussion that are engaging and helpful:

- ▷ Don't be uncomfortable with silence initially. Once the first student shares their response, others will be likely to join in. If you cut the silence short by prompting the students, they are more likely to wait for you to prompt them every time.
- ▷ Affirm answers whenever possible and draw out the students by asking for clarification. Your aim is to make them feel comfortable sharing their ideas and learning, so be extremely hesitant to “shut down” a student's contribution or “trump” it with your own. This does not mean, however, that you shouldn't correct false ideas—just do it in a spirit of gentleness and love.
- ▷ Don't allow a single student or several students to dominate the discussion. Involve everyone and intentionally invite participation from those who are more reserved or hesitant.
- ▷ Labor to show the significance of their study. Emphasize the things that the students could not have learned without doing the homework.
- ▷ Avoid talking too much. The instructor should not monopolize the discussion, but rather guide and shape it. If the instructor does the majority of the talking, the students will be less likely to interact and engage, and will therefore not learn as much. Avoid constantly adding the “definitive last word.”
- ▷ The instructor should feel the freedom to linger on a topic or question if the group demonstrates interest. The instructor should also pursue digressions

that are helpful and at least somewhat relevant. The instructor, however, *should* attempt to cover the material. So avoid the extreme of constantly wandering off topic, but also avoid the extreme of limiting the conversation in a way that squelches curiosity or learning.

- ▷ The instructor's passion, or lack of it, is infectious. If you demonstrate little enthusiasm for the material, it is almost inevitable that your students will likewise be bored. But if you have a genuine excitement for what you are studying, and if you truly think inductive Bible study is worthwhile, your class will be impacted positively. Therefore, it is our recommendation that before you come to class, you spend adequate time working through the homework and praying, so that you can overflow with genuine enthusiasm for the Bible and for God in class. This point cannot be stressed enough. Delight yourself in God and in his Word!

It may be necessary to again stress that **this curriculum is a resource**. As the instructor, you should feel the freedom to structure the class time and to discuss through the material in a way that promotes the maximum learning and enjoyment of your students. Lingering on certain questions, pursuing *helpful* digressions, examining relevant portions of Scripture, adding other supplemental material, and customizing the curriculum to fit your situation are all heartily approved.

Questions or Comments?

If you still have questions after reading this introduction and surveying the curriculum, you may contact Bethlehem College & Seminary at info@bcsmn.edu. We are also eager for your comments and suggestions! Thanks!



God's Mission and Christian Missions

God's Global Glory and the Unfinished Task

SYLLABUS



COURSE DESCRIPTION

God's Mission and Christian Missions: God's Global Glory and the Unfinished Task is a six-week course advancing the truth that God is on a mission to fill the earth with his glory through his redeemed people. The course will assert that ambassadors of Jesus Christ and his gospel should be sent to every people group. The course will also seek to provide a biblical and theological grounding for Christian missions from a God-centered perspective. Students will gain a deeper understanding of this issue by closely examining key biblical passages relevant to the issue of missions, answering provocative questions, and considering sermons and writings from the ministry of John Piper.



OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. A student successfully completing this course should be able to:

- ▷ magnify the worth of the missionary God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their heart above all else. This is the ultimate objective of the course. We recognize that this, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ▷ understand the Scriptures—especially showing how the Bible reveals God on mission from beginning to end—more fully as a result of studying them diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be “Bereans.” The Bereans were people who “received the word with

- all eagerness” and examined “the Scriptures daily” to see if what they were being taught was actually true (Acts 17:11). Therefore, examine the Scriptures in the lessons to see how God is on mission and how he uses his people for his mission.
- ▷ comprehend and thoughtfully interact with five of John Piper’s sermons and messages on the topic of Christian missions. To this end the student will fill out note-taking sheets for every sermon they are assigned to listen to or watch.
 - ▷ set forth a basic defense for Christian missions, emphasizing how Christian missions relates to the mission of God.
 - ▷ discuss with others the biblical vision of God’s global plan and make appropriate personal application.

REQUIRED BOOK (TEXTBOOK)

- ▷ An English version of the Bible, preferably the *English Standard Version* (ESV) or *New American Standard Bible* (NASB)

Please note that in addition to inductive study of the Bible, students will be required to listen to four sermons and a conference message preached by John Piper. This will require Internet access to the *desiringGod* website (www.desiringgod.org).

(NOTE: *desiringGod* permits the reproduction and distribution of any of its material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of production. If you lack internet access, talk to your instructor about the possibility of receiving a CD with the sermons copied onto it.)

REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to prepare for Lessons 2–6 by completing the lesson pages in a sequential order. Therefore, for each lesson the student should read the Introduction and the Lesson Objectives first, then read the remainder of the lesson, answer the three questions contained therein, and listen to the assigned sermon. As the student listens to the sermon, they should take notes on the corresponding sheet included in each lesson. The student may then review the discussion questions and record their own discussion question.

 SCHEDULE

Lesson	Date	Lesson Title
1		Global Realities and the Mission of God
2		The Missional Movement of the Old Testament
3		The Sending of the Son and His Church
4		The Only Salvation for All Nations
5		How the Kingdom Will Advance in the World
6		The Sovereign God of Goers and Senders

Global Realities and the Mission of God

1

INTRODUCTION

We live in an exciting time in the history of Christian missions and in the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The world is changing very quickly and so is the church. New challenges lie before us, but the unfinished task is now closer to being completed than it ever has been. We live, as John Piper explains, in a third era in the unleashing of modern missions:

Carey was the morning star of modern missions. Between 1793 and 1865, a missionary movement never before seen in the history of the world reached virtually all the coastlands on earth. Then in 1865, Hudson Taylor founded the China Inland Mission, and from 1865 until 1934, another wave of missionary activity was released so that by 1974 virtually all the inlands—all the geographic countries of the world—were reached with the gospel. In 1934, Cameron Townsend founded Wycliffe Bible Translators which focused not on geographic areas or political states but on people groups with distinct languages and dialects and cultures—and gradually the church awakened, especially at the Lausanne Congress in 1974, to the biblical reality of “every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9; 7:9)—and the missionary focus of the church shifted from unreached geography and to the unreached peoples of the world.

*We are in the midst of this third era of modern missions. Today the great reality, as documented in Philip Jenkins’ *The Next Christendom*, is that the center of gravity is moving away from Europe and the United States to the South and East.¹ Places we once considered mission fields are now centers of Christian influence and are major missionary sending forces in the world.²*

¹ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

² John Piper, “Holy Faith, Worthy Gospel, World Vision,” an online conference

Most of the global church is now in the majority world (Latin America, Africa, and Asia). What was once an endeavor largely “from the West to the rest” has drastically changed as missions is now “from everywhere to everywhere.” This great new reality demands a rethinking of how we should “do” missions. Rapidly-changing global realities must be weighed with wisdom in the pursuit of planting and strengthening Christian churches. Yet these new global realities and the implications for strategy that they may hold for contemporary Christian missions are not the focus of this course. In this course, we will explore the deeper and more fundamental realities that drive Christian missions.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ restate some of the global realities of which we must be aware in thinking about contemporary Christian missions
- ▷ explain why an awareness of these realities is not the most important feature of a study of Christian missions
- ▷ articulate the difference between how this course will use the terms “mission” and “missions” and why this difference is critically significant

message available at the desiringGod website (www.desiringgod.org). Throughout this curriculum we will only provide titles (and not the full web addresses) for online sermons and articles at the desiringGod website. Use the search bar in order to locate these resources.



As the instructor of this course your most important task in the discussion of Lesson 1 will be to introduce the focus of this course (a biblical vision of God and missions) and why this, rather than something else, will be the focus. The lesson does begin by noting some of the new global realities which a study of contemporary Christian missions must account for. It is good and right to be aware of the changes that have taken place in the last century or even the last 40 years. Our contention, however, is that sometimes “strategic” and pragmatic concerns dominate the conversation. It is therefore the hope of this course to lay some of the important biblical foundations upon which a full-orbed discussion of missions can take place. This brief six-week study is not meant to be an exhaustive or comprehensive study of missions by any means, but it does mean to present the core of Christian missions.

If you are making your way through Lesson 1 in a class discussion, please note that students are meant to give their own opinion as a response to Question 3 before reading the quotation that follows from Timothy Tennent. If your students anticipate the distinction this course will make between the two terms, press them to articulate why this distinction is an important one to make. And please remember that the entire course, in some sense, will demonstrate the importance of the truth that God’s mission creates, orients, enables, and motivates our missions.

The concept of *missio dei* is not a new one, but it is important. Consider Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 264:

Contemporary Christians need to recognize that Jesus’ mission is the fundamental mission in the Scriptures. He is the Messiah and Lord who has fulfilled the purposes of God through his coming, and especially in his death and resurrection.

The next lesson will concentrate on certain aspects of God’s mission, with a special focus on the Old Testament, while the third lesson will address the coming of Jesus and the commissioning of the church in the task of global gospel proclamation.



NEW GLOBAL REALITIES IN CONTEMPORARY MISSIONS

Anyone with a desire to study contemporary Christian missions must confront how our world is changing and what these changes imply for the practice of Christian missions.

Though these changes have been described in many ways by many authors, we will briefly look at how Mark Noll discusses “The New Shape of World Christianity.” Piper quotes Noll in his book, *Let the Nations Be Glad!* to demonstrate the massive shifts in global Christianity.

- “Active Christian adherence has become stronger in Africa than in Europe.”
- “The number of practicing Christians in China may be approaching the number in the United States.”
- “Live bodies in church are far more numerous in Kenya than in Canada.”
- “More believers worship together in church Sunday by Sunday in Nagaland than in Norway.”
- “More Christian workers from Brazil are active in cross cultural ministry outside their homelands than from Britain or from Canada.”
- “Last Sunday... more Christian believers attended church in China than in all of so-called ‘Christian Europe.’”
- “This past Sunday more Anglicans attended church in each of Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda than did Anglicans in Britain and Canada and Episcopalians in the United States combined.”
- Last Sunday, “more Presbyterians were in church in Ghana than in Scotland.”
- “This past week in Great Britain, at least fifteen thousand Christian foreign missionaries were hard at work evangelizing the locals. Most of these missionaries are from Africa and Asia.”
- “In a word,” Noll says, “the Christian church has experienced a larger geographical redistribution in the last fifty years than in any comparable period in its history, with the exception of the very earliest years of church history.”³

³ This table is cited by John Piper in *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd edition. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2010). 17–18. Piper cites this information from: Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American*

Our second summary of new global realities comes from the Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town, South Africa (2010) which identified “six issues that are of paramount importance to the future of the church and world evangelization, in terms of profound theological reflection and strategic action.” More than 4,000 Christian leaders from around the world met to discuss these issues:

1. ***The Challenge of the New Atheism.*** World evangelization is based on foundational truth claims about the uniqueness of Christ, the centrality of the cross and the authority of Scripture. In light of the aggressive attacks on truth by the New Atheism, we must make a compelling case for TRUTH.
2. ***The Impact of Hedonism.*** We are bombarded everyday with images and messages that serve to undermine our moral and biblical foundations. The church is being impacted by nominalism, superficiality and the troubling consequences of the prosperity gospel. We must respond with a prophetic critique of the church which calls us to AUTHENTICITY and INTEGRITY. We must call Christians to a deeper level of repentance, renewal, and discipleship.
3. ***The Reality of Islam.*** Islam is a missionary faith with a global vision. With a very deliberate strategy, Islam’s mission and impact has spread beyond the Arab world to significantly influence universities and governments in Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas. The church must develop an equally deliberate strategy that enables us to live in fidelity to the gospel, influence public institutions, and faithfully witness to men and women in all WORLD FAITHS.
4. ***The Globalized World.*** Mega-cities, Diaspora, New Technologies, Social Networking, Political Corruption and Uncertain Futures for the Next Generation, are only a sampling of the challenges and opportunities of a Globalized World that require us to establish NEW PRIORITIES for world evangelization.
5. ***The Brokenness of Our World.*** If our witness is to be prophetic, we must identify with the pain and suffering in the lives of individuals, families, communities and nations. Not only must we connect with the brokenness but we must also be people of hope and peace as agents of RECONCILIATION, emphasizing the core theme of Cape Town 2010, “God in Christ Reconciling the World to Himself.”
6. ***Seismic Shifts in Global Christianity.*** Global PARTNERSHIPS for world

Experience Reflects Global Faith (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, Academic, 2009), 10, 20–21.

evangelization, unlike anything possible in the previous twenty centuries, are now attainable as we develop relationships that are based on mutual respect – acknowledging that God has called us to be one in Him. These new partnerships, increasingly led by visionary leaders from the majority world, will also involve more lay people who comprise the vast majority of those who bear witness to Christ in this Century. By sharing the best available resources and best practices, together “the whole church (will) take the whole gospel to the whole world.”⁴

This “great reality” is only one among many new global realities that are shaping—or should be shaping—our discussion of contemporary Christian missions.⁵

1. How do or should these new global realities impact how we understand Christian missions today? Why? How should we approach missions knowing that missions is no longer simply “the West to the rest” but from “everywhere to everywhere?”

• **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary.*

THE UNCHANGING CORE OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

A study of Christian missions can certainly benefit from insights from sociology, anthropology, economics, and history. These disciplines do help to illuminate the new global realities which were listed above. Yet in the end, Christian missions cannot be founded upon any of these disciplines. Indeed, if our study of Christian missions only focuses on the pragmatic, cultural, or strategic aspects of missions, we will fail to penetrate to the core of Christian missions.

At the core of Christian missions are theology, biblical truth, Christian doctrine, the Scriptures, and ultimately the living God who revealed himself

4 Cited from “Why Cape Town 2010? A Case-Statement for the Third Lausanne Congress,” by Doug Birdsall, Executive Chair. Available online at <http://www.lausanne.org>.

5 For other possible sets of “new realities” that must be considered in the practice and theory of missions, see J.D. Payne’s *Pressure Points: Twelve Global Issues Shaping the Face of the Church* (Thomas Nelson, 2013).

among Israel and in the Word made flesh.⁶ If we only focus on the ever-changing contemporary issues and trends, then we will be tossed about and misguided like a ship without a rudder. Therefore, this course will focus on a true and biblical vision of the missionary God and what he reveals about Christian missions in the Bible. All of the other needed conversations about contemporary Christian missions must radiate from this center.

Georg Vicedom provides a helpful definition to better understand what we mean by God's mission. In his book *Missio Dei* he states that,

*The Missio Dei is the work of God through which everything that He has in mind for man's salvation—the complete fullness of His Kingdom of redemption—is offered to men through those whom He has sent, so that men, freed from sin and removed from the other kingdom, can again fully come into His fellowship.*⁷

John Piper explains the aim of his book *Let the Nations Be Glad!* in the following way. What he says is also the aim of this course.

My passion is to see people, churches, mission agencies, and social ministries become God-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-powered, soul-satisfied, Bible-saturated, missions-mobilizing, soul-winning, and justice-pursuing. The supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ is the central, driving, all-unifying commitment of my life. . . .

*As we get closer and closer to the finish line together, [Missions Pastor Tom Steller and I] want to give our lives to creating, sending, and sustaining world Christians who live and die “for the sake of the name.” Increasingly, what burns inside us is the question, Where do such God-centered, Christ-exalting, missions-driven people come from? We believe they come from God-besotted, Christ-addicted, Bible-breathing homes and churches and schools and ministries. That is what this book aims to nurture.*⁸

6 “Theology of mission can be reduced to the wonderful yet challenging task of unpacking just what that means—to be sent by God on his assignment into the world.” Craig Ott et al., *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010). xi.

7 Georg F. Vicedom, *Mission of God* (Concordia Publishing House, 1965). 45.

8 John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (3rd edition;

Notice how Piper states that world Christians who glorify God are characterized by a God-centered orientation, a passion for Jesus Christ, and a deep understanding of the Bible. The aim of this course is to participate in the creating and sustaining of that kind of Christian, whether they serve as senders of missionaries or go themselves.

Timothy Tennent likewise diagnoses the man-centered approach that often plagues discussions of Christian missions:

The starting point of missions must be the missio dei. Missions must first and foremost be about what God is doing in the world, not what we are doing. Missions must step back from the competitive, pragmatic, market-driven impulses, which tempt us to think about missions in anthropocentric or institutional ways. Instead, missions must be conceptualized within the larger framework of God's redemptive plan, not ancillary actions of the church for self-aggrandizement through institutional expansion, even on a global scale. If we are honest, we must recognize that much of our missionary activity is overly preoccupied with human plans and institutionally driven strategies built largely upon the foundation of the social sciences. While acknowledging the abiding value of the insights of the social sciences, and even insights from the business world, we nevertheless insist that missions cannot be built upon or constructed in this fashion without, in the long run, producing missionary movements that have fundamental design flaws. The "nuts and bolts" of missions must be theologically driven.⁹

2. Do you agree with John Piper and Timothy Tennent? Must a biblical vision of God be at the core of a study of Christian missions? Do you agree with Georg Vicedom's definition for missio Dei? Explain your answer in your own words.

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary.*

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), 9, 10.

9 Timothy Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel 2010).487-488.

AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

Notice that the title of this course is “God’s Mission [singular] and Christian Missions [plural].”

3. Before reading below, what distinction do you think this course might draw between the terms “mission” and “missions”? Is this an important distinction to make? Why or why not?

• **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary.*

This course will adopt the distinction drawn by Timothy Tennent, described below, between the terms “mission” and “missions”:

The word mission (or missions) as a reference to people sharing their faith around the world, extending the church, and fulfilling the Great Commission is a relatively recent application of that word. It was in the sixteenth century that the Jesuits first began to use the term mission in reference to spreading the gospel to people who were not Christians. Until that time mission was “used exclusively with reference to the doctrine of the Trinity, that is, of the sending of the Son by the Father and of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son.” In short, the word mission was originally about God and His redemptive initiative, not about us and what we are doing. However, in its popular usage within the church, it seems that mission has now come to refer almost exclusively to various tasks the church is doing. . . .

The word has slowly migrated from a theocentric connotation to a more anthropocentric one. In other words, there is a vital difference between a word that is applied primarily to the Trinity and the inner life of God’s action and a word that is primarily understood to refer to human endeavors and the actions of the church. . . .

In this book the word mission refers to God’s redemptive, historical initiative on behalf of His creation. Mission is first and foremost about God and His redemptive purposes and initiatives in the world, quite apart from any actions or tasks or strategies or initiatives the church may undertake. To put it plainly, mission is far more about God and who He is than about us and what we do.¹⁰

¹⁰ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 54-55.

By focusing on God's mission in the world, we are neither neglecting nor denigrating the local church's mission or any individual's participation in world missions. Rather, what we are arguing is that it is vital to recognize the relationship between God's missionary activity and our own. We are arguing that *mission* is about God and by God, more than it is about us and what we do.

Read how Craig Ott and Stephen Strauss define *mission* and *missions*.

The word mission derives from the Latin word mitto, "to send," and missio, "sending." The word mission was first used in 1544 by the Jesuits Ignatius Loyola and Jacob Loyner to describe the spread of the Christian faith. In 1588 Loyola wrote, "By mission I mean journeys and undertakings carried on from town to town for the sake of the word of God" (cited in K. Müller 1987, 30).

The term missions (plural) has come to be more narrowly used to describe the various specific efforts of the church to carry out the task of mission in the world, usually related to the spread of the gospel and the expansion of the kingdom of God...

Mission describes "the sending activity of God with the purpose of reconciling to himself and bringing into his kingdom fallen men and women from every people, nation, and tongue." The church is God's primary agent for mission in this age."

Lastly, Tennent explains the distinctive concepts of mission and missions again below:

A biblical missiology must be built firmly on the foundation of Trinitarian theology. Furthermore, it must be simultaneously God centered and church focused. In order to capture both of these realities, we need to make an important distinction between the words mission and missions. In this book, as noted earlier, mission refers to God's redemptive, historical initiative on behalf of His creation. In contrast, missions refers to all the specific and varied ways in which the church crosses cultural boundaries to reflect the life of the triune God in the world and, through that identity, participates in His mission, celebrating through word and deed the inbreaking of the New Creation. Missions is made possible only at God's

¹¹ Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. A. Scott Moreau, Encountering Mission (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), xiv–xvii.

invitation.¹²

In short, God's *mission* is for him, about him, and from him, whereas *missions* is the church's involvement in God's great *mission*. The relationship between God's mission and Christian missions will be a focus throughout the course. We will begin to explore this relationship in the next lesson.

¹² Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 59.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- ▷ Miriam Adeney, *Kingdom Without Borders: The Untold Story of Global Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2009).
- ▷ Paul Borthwick, *Western Christians in Global Mission: What's the Role of the North American Church?* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2012)
- ▷ Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2003).
- ▷ Martin Klauber and Scott M. Manetsch, eds. *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions*, (Nashville, Tenn: B&H Academic, 2008).
- ▷ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001)
- ▷ Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation*, 7th edition. (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2010).
- ▷ Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2009)
- ▷ Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. A. Scott Moreau, *Encountering Mission* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010)
- ▷ J.D. Payne, *Pressure Points: Twelve Global Issues Shaping the Face of the Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2013)
- ▷ Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*, 1st ed. (Chichester, U.K. ; Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)
- ▷ Edward L. Smither, *Mission in the Early Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).
- ▷ Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 2010)
- ▷ John Mark Terry and Robert L. Gallagher, *Encountering the History of Missions: From the Early Church to Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017)
- ▷ Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004)

The Missional Movement of the Old Testament

2

INTRODUCTION

Christopher Wright used to teach a course entitled “The Biblical Basis of Mission” at All Nations Christian College in southeast England. He would introduce the course, however, by telling his students that he wanted to rename the course, “The Missional Basis of the Bible.” This was his rationale for the change in title:

I wanted them to see not just that the Bible contains a number of texts which happen to provide a rationale for missionary endeavor but that the whole Bible is itself a “missional” phenomenon. The writings that now comprise our Bible are themselves the product of and witness to the ultimate mission of God. The Bible renders to us the story of God’s mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s world for the sake of the whole of God’s creation. The Bible is the drama of this God of purpose engaged in the mission of achieving that purpose universally, embracing past, present and future, Israel and the nations, “life, the universe and everything,” and with its center, focus, climax, and completion in Jesus Christ. Mission is not just one of a list of things that the Bible happens to talk about, only a bit more urgently than some. Mission is, in that much-abused phrase, “what it’s all about.”¹³

This lesson will examine only a few of the keys texts in the Old Testament which bear witness to the mission of God. These texts are not meant to be “proof texts” to support something Christians already believe in. Rather, our hope is that

¹³ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2006), 22.

these few texts will be read as signposts pointing to the much broader highway running throughout the Scriptures—the highway of God’s global purposes in the world which will end in the glory of God filling the earth as the waters cover the sea (see Numbers 14:21; Psalm 72:19; Habakkuk 2:14).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ gain a sense for the “movement” of God’s global purposes throughout the Old Testament.
- ▷ explain the connections between missions, worship, joy, and God.
- ▷ begin to reflect on whether it is proper to speak of Old Testament “missions”.



John Piper's theology of Christian Hedonism ties into every other dimension of his theology. Therefore, in presenting some of Piper's views on missions, you might have some explanation to do with regard to Christian Hedonism. If you are not as familiar with Christian Hedonism, there are plenty of resources to help you understand the concept on the [desiringGod](#) website. Use your discretion to determine how much time to invest on each of the three sections of this lesson.



THE GREAT COMMISSIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The missional “movement” of the Old Testament does not begin in Genesis 12. Rather, it begins in Genesis 1 with the foundational “cultural mandate”:

Genesis 1:26-28

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

In creating men and women in his image and after his likeness, God intended his image-bearers to “image” him in creation—that is, to represent his likeness. The fundamental expression of God-likeness is for the man and woman to have dominion, because God himself is the sovereign ruler of all creation. In exercising a benevolent and wise dominion over creation, Adam and Eve would have shown forth in the world what God is like.

When this understanding of the image of God is combined with the command “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28) it can be seen that, from the very beginning, God wanted his likeness, his image, his glory to fill the earth. Genesis 1:26-28 is the first great commission of the Old Testament.

We all know, however, that Adam and Eve failed in this commission and that their offspring, rather than filling the earth with the likeness of God, filled the earth with wickedness instead (see, for example, Genesis 6:5). So God brought a flood to “wipe the slate clean” and start again with Noah. Noah and his descendants, however, failed as Adam and Eve did. At the Tower of Babel mankind is united in an effort that is contrary to God’s purposes (Gen 11:1–9). God created mankind to spread across the earth and show his glory. At Babel, humans tried to make a name for themselves, not for God. They huddled

together to do that instead of spreading the image of God across the face of the whole earth.

Genesis 1-11 forms the backdrop, then, for the justly famous words God speaks to Abram (Abraham), which can be viewed as the second “great commission” of the Old Testament:

Genesis 12:1-3

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

The divine summons of Abram and the promises to him are of momentous significance. God’s intention to bless him, his seed and all peoples of the world is a reassertion of his original purpose for humankind.¹⁴

1. When read in light of both the immediate context as well as the first eleven chapters of Genesis, why would the LORD want to make of Abraham a great nation (Genesis 12:2)? Why would the LORD want to bless Abraham and make his name great so that he would be a blessing (12:2)? Why would the LORD want to bless all the families of the earth in Abraham (12:3)?

• **ANSWER.** *God enters into a covenant with Abram and his descendants for the sake of his own name. The LORD wants to make Abraham into a great nation so that that nation (Israel) will make him known in the world. Likewise, the LORD wants Abraham to be a blessing and for all the families of the earth to be blessed in him so that the nations will praise the LORD as a God of might and mercy, and as the only true God. [It is crucial to understand that the purpose driving God’s mission does not terminate on humans, on our benefit and blessing. God does intend to bless the people whom he has made, but his blessing has the design of bringing glory to himself. (For a further defense and explanation of these ideas, listen to the assigned sermon for this lesson.)]*

¹⁴ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 30-31.

Later in the biblical narrative we learn that Israel, as the nation born out of Abraham and his descendants, is also charged with the task of making God known in the world:

Exodus 19:3-6

³ . . . The LORD called to [Moses] out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ⁴ You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

Deuteronomy 4:5-9

⁵ See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ⁶ Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” ⁷ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? ⁸ And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? ⁹ Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children’s children . . .

Jeremiah 13:11

¹¹ 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.

Exodus 19:3-6, and the much broader idea of Israel being charged to bring glory to God among all the other nations of the earth, can be regarded as a third great commission, following the initial multiplication mandate to Adam and Eve and then the charge given to Abraham.

As Adam and Noah had failed so too Israel failed to bring God glory among the nations. Rather, Israel wickedly conformed to the idolatry and sin of the nations and therefore God sent them into exile. God’s purposes for Israel did not

end in exile, however, as he promised one day to bring them back from exile and to again work through the nation for his glory.

Isaiah 43:1, 5-7

¹ But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. . . . ⁵ Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. ⁶ I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, ⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

Ezekiel 36:16-17, 19-24

¹⁶ The word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁷ “Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. . . . ¹⁹ I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them. ²⁰ But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land.’ ²¹ But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came. ²² Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³ And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.

The Old Testament clearly attests to the mission of God in the world—a mission to bring himself glory through people whom he created in his image.

REFLECTIONS ON THE GOAL OF MISSIONS AND MISSION

The missional movement of the Old Testament is expressed not only through narrative and prophecy but also poetry. The following psalm, Psalm 67, is a well-known expression of missionary zeal. It is especially relevant to our

study because it connects missions, worship, joy, and the glory of God. Read it carefully:

Psalm 67

¹ To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song. *May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, Selah* ² *that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.* ³ *Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!* ⁴ *Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Selah* ⁵ *Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!* ⁶ *The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, shall bless us.* ⁷ *God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him!*

In reflecting upon this psalm and many other biblical texts, John Piper arrived at the following insights which are foundational to the perspective of this course:

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.

Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God. . . .

But worship is also the fuel of missions. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish. Missionaries will never call out, "Let the nations be glad!" if they cannot say from the heart, "I rejoice in the Lord. . . . I will be glad and exult in you, I will sing praise to your name, O Most High" (Pss. 104:34; 9:2). Missions begins and ends in worship.

If the pursuit of God's glory is not ordered above the pursuit of man's good in the affections of the heart and the priorities of the church, man will not be well served, and God will not be duly honored. I am not pleading for a diminishing of missions but for a magnifying of God. When the flame of worship burns with the heat of God's true worth, the light of missions will shine to the darkest peoples on earth.¹⁵

¹⁵ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 35, 36.

Christian missions will never be rightly understood if this God-centered perspective on the goal – and fuel – of missions is not embraced and celebrated.

The above quotation has to do with Christian missions. But what shall we say about God's mission? What is the fuel and goal of mission for God?

Missions is not God's ultimate goal, worship is. And when this sinks into a person's heart everything changes. The world is often turned on its head, and everything looks different—including the missionary enterprise.

The ultimate foundation for our passion to see God glorified is his own passion to be glorified. God is central and supreme in his own affections. There are no rivals for the supremacy of God's glory in his own heart. God is not an idolater. He does not disobey the first and great commandment. With all his heart and soul and strength and mind he delights in the glory of his manifold perfections. The most passionate heart for God in all the universe is God's heart.

This truth, more than any other I know, seals the conviction that worship is the fuel and goal of missions. The deepest reason why our passion for God should fuel missions is that God's passion for God fuels missions. Missions is the overflow of our delight in God because missions is the overflow of God's delight in being God. And the deepest reason why worship is the goal in missions is that worship is God's goal.¹⁶

2. Are the declarations that “God is central and supreme in his own affections” and that “worship is God's goal” good news? Why or why not?

• **ANSWER.** Yes. This is good news because “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” In other words, for God to pursue his global glory is for him to pursue the global satisfaction, joy, and peace of his redeemed people.

Romans 15:8–9 is a New Testament passage that describes the work of Christ in relation with the Old Testament and God's goal in mission:

Romans 15:8–9

⁸ For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

¹⁶ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 39.

Here is the important conclusion to draw from these verses:

The motive of mercy and the motive of God's glory are not two different motives, because the glory we want to see exalted among the nations is supremely the glory of God's mercy. . . .

Therefore, extending God's mercy and exalting God's glory are one.

A heart for the glory of God and a heart of mercy for the nations make a Christ-like missionary. These must be kept together. If we have no zeal for the glory of God, our mercy becomes superficial, man-centered human improvement with no eternal significance. And if our zeal for the glory of God is not a reveling in his mercy, then our so-called zeal, in spite of all its protests, is out of touch with God and hypocritical.¹⁷

It is the best news in the world for God-dishonoring sinners to hear that God is passionately seeking to glorify himself by choosing, forgiving, and adopting people as trophies of his grace and mercy.

Ephesians 1:3-14

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

¹⁷ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 53–54.

WAS THERE OUTWARD MISSIONARY MOVEMENT UNDER THE OLD COVENANT?

A debated issue in the biblical study of missions is whether Israelites were called to be “missionaries” in the sense that most people understand the term today. Did God expect Israelites to travel to foreign nations proclaiming the supremacy of the God of Israel? Though this is a complex issue, the perspective of this course is that Israelites were not given a mandate to go to distant lands preaching about the one true and living God.

To contend that Israel had a missionary task and should have engaged in mission as we understand it today goes beyond the evidence. There is no suggestion in the Old Testament that Israel should have engaged in “cross-cultural” or foreign mission. “The nation of Israel witnesses to the saving purposes of God by experiencing them and living according to them.”¹⁸

This contention, however, does not imply that in the Old Testament God shows no concern for foreign nations nor that God is not interested in being recognized and praised by all people.

Köstenberger and O’Brien offer further explanation for how Israel was to relate to the nations that surrounded it:

Israel is called because the whole earth belongs to Yahweh. His people, who are set apart to serve him as a holy God, are to mediate his presence and blessings to the surrounding nations. This does not mean that Israel is enjoined to engage in intentional cross-cultural mission. Rather, as the recipient of the divine blessings, the nation is to exalt God in its life and worship, attracting individuals from among the nations historically by incorporation and eschatologically by ingathering.¹⁹

The following prophetic passages represent the ideal image of Israel’s relationship with the foreign nations. Although it is clear that Israel in the end did not represent God accurately and was therefore sent into exile, the prophets foresee a time in which Israel would mediate the presence and blessings of God.

¹⁸ Köstenberger and O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 35.

¹⁹ Ibid, 252.

Isaiah 2:2-3

² *It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, ³ and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

Isaiah 60:1-6

¹ *Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. ² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. ³ And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ⁴ Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. ⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. ⁶ A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD.*

Isaiah 66:18–21

¹⁸ *“For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, ¹⁹ and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. ²⁰ And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. ²¹ And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.*

Zechariah 8:20-23

²⁰ *Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. ²¹ The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, “Let*

us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going.”²² Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.²³ Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”

Köstenberger and O’Brien comment on such passages as the ones above:

Three important features of this eschatological pilgrimage of the nations need to be noted in relation to the question that was raised earlier about Israel’s supposed missionary outreach. First, the pilgrimage of the nations is an eschatological event. . . . Secondly, the ingathering of the nations is the work of God, not Israel. . . . Finally, all these prophetic passages speak of the nations coming to Israel, not Israel going to them. The movement is centripetal, not centrifugal.²⁰

Therefore, the perspective of this course is that if it can be said that there is missional movement in the Old Testament, it is mainly of an inward movement from the nations toward Israel more than an outward movement from Israel to the nations. We will discuss next the ways in which the centripetal mission of Israel, the eschatological ingathering of nations declared by the prophets, and the Church’s missionary movement today are related.

HOW DOES THE MISSIONAL MOVEMENT RELATE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS?

This idea of *centripetal* (inward) movement, of the nations being attracted to God by Israel’s holiness, has been discussed. Israel was called by God to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exo 19:4–6). Notice how one purpose for Israel’s holiness was to be God’s light to the other nations.

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5–8

¹ “And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.

²⁰ Köstenberger and O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 42.

⁵ See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ⁶ Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ⁷ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? ⁸ And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

So how does the missional movement of the Church today connect with Israel's? It is in the fact that there is still a *centripetal* aspect (inward) of the Church's mission today. Holy living is a part of the Christian's witness to unbelievers so that they see our good and holy God at work in, through, among, and for us. Jesus tells us that we are the salt of the earth. Jesus tells us that our light is not to be hidden under a basket. Jesus tells us to let our light, which is our good works, shine before others so that they would give glory to our Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:13–16

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

To drive this point home further, notice the New Covenant continuation of the priesthood. Notice how every Christian today is made by God to be part of a holy nation and a royal priesthood.

Exodus 19:4–6

⁴ 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

1 Peter 2:9–12

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for

his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Living today in obedience to God's commands matters a great deal as part of our witness as God's people, both in missionary endeavors and "local" ministry. Our honorable conduct will prove attractive to those whom God is drawing to faith in Christ. Jesus also tells us that the world will know we are his disciples by our love for one another (John 13:34–35). The unity of believers in fellowship with one another corroborates the gospel message to the watching world (John 17:23). In fact, our good works toward one another and for those outside the church actually "adorn" the doctrine of God (Tit 2:10). The fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:23) makes the church an alternative community standing in contrast to the world and the unbelievers way of life.

Another way to understand this centripetal aspect of missions is looking at the temple language in the Bible. In the Old Testament God made his presence visible and known by dwelling in a moveable tabernacle and then later in a stone temple in Jerusalem. In the New Testament the temple theme continues. Jesus came and "tabernacled"²¹ among us. Jesus replaced the Jerusalem temple as the true and living temple of God (John 2:18–22). God's dwelling among his people didn't end with Jesus's physical presence on earth, but it continues with the church.

The church became God's temple at Pentecost with the receiving of God's Holy Spirit. Paul tells us plainly that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). "We are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people'" (2 Cor 6:16). And the church as God's living temple is meant to be a reconciled, holy, and attractive dwelling place for God comprised of living stones (1 Pet 2:5–8) from every nation. Notice how Paul explains this in Eph 2:11–22 when discussing what Jesus has done to bring Gentiles and Jews together into one temple body.

21 The Greek word for "tabernacled" can mean quite literally to "pitch one's tent."

Ephesians 2:11–22

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Finally, notice the trajectory of God’s mission. The final stage is when God dwells forever with his people in his holy city, the new Jerusalem, that will come down out of heaven (Rev 21:1–8, 22–27). This is the Jerusalem that the nations will have streamed to as they responded to the gospel, and as our triune God brings history to its great and glorious goal at some point in the future.

Ott and Strauss well summarize the way in which God has been missionary in both Testaments:

The Bible is from start to finish a missionary book, for it is the story of God himself reaching into human history to reconcile a fallen and rebellious humanity to himself and to reestablish his reign over all creation. In this sense God is a missionary God—a God who sends his emissaries, messengers, and ultimately his Son as agents in this story of salvation. This salvation will ultimately reach out to include persons of every people, nation, tribe, and tongue. It is God’s initiative, and it is God who receives all glory. At first he sends primarily angels and prophets, after which he forms a people, Israel, to be sent as a witness to his righteousness and glory amid the nations. The story climaxes with the sending of his Son to purchase salvation and defeat evil at the cross. But the story then continues with the sending of a new people of God in the power of his Spirit, the church, to become

*his instruments and as signs of his kingdom. The story will conclude triumphantly with the return of Christ, the ultimate establishment of his kingdom, the final defeat of evil, and the universal confession that Christ is Lord.*²²

Faith in Jesus has spread not only to Jerusalem and Samaria but also to the ends of the earth. Jesus promised us his Holy Spirit who clothes us with power to be witnesses of God's great salvation (Acts 1:8). The "mystery" that "Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (Eph 3:1–6) was not made known to Israel in the Old Covenant but has been revealed to us now in the New Covenant (Rom 16:25–27).

God demonstrated his sovereignty and great patience by so gradually unfolding his plan to save the world. God's kindness and patience is meant to lead to repentance (Rom 2:4). God has vindicated his righteousness in passing over sins from the Old Covenant period by giving Jesus to be the propitiation that pays for them after the fact (Rom 3:23–26). Now there is a gospel of the Christ crucified. Now is the time for missions to the nations.

3. Why is it important to recognize the centripetal movement of Israel's mission? How does recognizing this practically affect our mission today? What are the similarities and differences between Israel's mission and the Church's today?

- **ANSWER.** *First, we should say that an accurate understanding of "missions" in the Old Testament helps bring clarity to missions in the New Testament. It is important to see the centripetal movement of Israel's mission because it helps us understand the centripetal movement of our own mission today. Conversely, we might appreciate the distinctiveness of New Testament missions better by understanding the Old Testament. Second, discerning the differences between Old and New Testament missions can help us avoid constructing unwarranted positions or practices on a reading of the Old Testament disjointed from the New. Third, perceiving God's passion for his glory throughout the Bible helps us to see an aspect of the main storyline of the Bible. Even if we argue that Israel was not called to be a "missionary" nation we must not thereby conclude that God had no concern for his name among all the peoples.*

²² Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. A. Scott Moreau, Encountering Mission (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 3.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. If God's passion for his own glory is either not understood or rejected, what effect does this have upon a theology of Christian missions?
2. Why might it be important for Christians to study the Old Testament when they are studying the topic of missions?



A SERMON ABOUT CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

Listen to the sermon **“God’s Passion for His Global Glory”** by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the desiringGod website (www.desiringgod.org). Clicking on the sermon title will allow you to listen to the sermon. You may also download the sermon onto your computer.



YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2014)
- ▷ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), chapters 2-3
- ▷ Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. A. Scott Moreau, *Encountering Mission* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), chapter 1
- ▷ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (3rd ed; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), chapter 1
- ▷ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2006), chapters 3, 6-8

God's Passion for His Global Glory

JOHN PIPER, 1998

Prayer

“The most God-centered person in the world is _____. . . . God, and not you or I, is uppermost in his own affections. Or, God is not an _____.”

Worship in the Godhead

The existence of God

“When God undertakes to resolve to create the universe it’s not out of need; it’s not out of deficiency; it’s not out of loneliness; it is the overflow of worship aiming to externalize the enjoyment that God has in _____.”

“The chief end of God is to glorify _____ and enjoy himself forever.”

The radical God-centeredness of God

predestination

creation

incarnation

salvation / death of Christ

sanctification

return of Jesus

“Missions is the radical commitment of the church of Christ to join God in the global enterprise of his _____-glorification.”

“Is God’s love toward you his merciful making much of _____ or is God’s love towards you his mercifully enabling you to enjoy making much of _____ forever?”

The Sending of the Son and His Church

3

INTRODUCTION

There is no other event in the mission of God in the history of the world like the sending of God's Son. The incarnation of God's Word in Jesus of Nazareth is an unprecedented and unrepeatable divine act upon which all of Christian missions is built. God chose from eternity past to accomplish his intention of filling the earth with his glory by redeeming a people for himself through the blood of his Son. Therefore, any course in missions cannot neglect the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It also cannot neglect seeing that the resurrected and enthroned King Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on his church, thus empowering them to be sent out as his ambassadors in his authority and power.

Notice the parallel between how the Father sends Jesus and how Jesus sends his church:

John 17:14-18

¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

John 20:19-21

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

Jesus's apostles, and the church they founded, are sent into the world with the

same authoritative commission and message that characterized Jesus' mission. God is continuing the mission of his Son Jesus through a people whom Jesus has redeemed and who are filled with God's Spirit. We as the church now embody God's mission in the world.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ discern the differences between missions in the Old Testament and missions in the New Testament.
- ▷ understand how important the concept of “sending” and “being sent” is.
- ▷ understand the parallel between the Father sending Jesus and Jesus sending the church.
- ▷ understand the structure of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).
- ▷ explain the centrality of the church in the mission of God.



Given the limited scope of this course we have chosen to examine only a few New Testament texts in greater depth. If time permits, you might choose to cover other texts in your class discussion that could not be included in this lesson. Tennent argues that the phrase “Great Commission” should designate “an entire range of texts found in the New Testament, not simply the well-known passage found in Matthew 28:18-20.” He continues: “Each of the Gospels, as well as the book of Acts, records a dramatic pericope of commissioning to a group of gathered disciples. These texts are found in Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:19-23; and Acts 1:7-8” (*Invitation to World Missions*, 128). These other Great Commission texts could be some of the other texts you inspect in class.

You could also discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian missions, a vital topic that unfortunately could not be covered in much depth in this course.

Tennent offers some additional commentary on these texts (*Invitation to World Missions*, 157):

This survey of the final commissions given by Jesus Christ and recorded in all four Gospels reveals that the Great Commission is actually multi-faceted. Only by listening to the distinctive message of each do they collectively provide the theological basis for the wide range of redemptive works that the church engages in, which we call missions. Matthew emphasizes the role of discipleship and planting the church across ethnic and cultural boundaries among every people group in the world. Although we do not have the original words of Mark’s commission, the received version is consistent with Mark’s emphasis on perseverance in persecution and the central role of proclamation. Luke’s commission emphasizes the importance of Spirit-empowered, holistic missions as we bear witness to the ongoing, mighty deeds of God. John’s commission emphasizes the sending role of the church. Taken collectively, the commissions demonstrate the Father’s initiative in missions. The Father imparts all authority to Jesus in Matthew’s gospel. In Luke, the church fulfills only what the Father has promised. In John, the Father send the Son, who, in turn, sends the church. Thus, all of the commissions are set within the larger context of the mission dei and God’s original promise to Abraham that He would bless “all nations on earth” (Gen. 22:18).

In arguing for the centrality of the church in the mission of God, we do not mean to imply that parachurch missions organizations have no role to play. However, we do believe that, whether intentionally or not, parachurch missions organizations have often taken over aspects of Christian missions that should fall to local churches. Consider Robert Plummer, *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* (Waynesboro, Ga.: Paternoster, 2006), 144:

A missionary theology which places the missionary task in the hands of a few church leaders or with a para-church body lacks support from the Pauline letters. Modern para-church missions can be an attempt to solve the problem of the church's anemic missionary vision by removing the missionary task from the church. Missions, rather, should be returned to the church. The most effective way to do this is to teach and preach the gospel accurately.



THE ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

In the previous lesson we learned from the Old Testament that God intends for his glory to fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. The global display of the glory of God is God's mission in this world and therefore is our mission as well. We also learned that the Old Testament prepared for and predicted the blessing of the nations through Israel and Israel's Messiah. Christian missions finds its roots in the Old Testament but it does not begin to flower until the coming of the Messiah.

After dying and rising again Jesus made the following comments to his disciples, instructing them how to read the Old Testament:

Luke 24:44-49

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

In commenting this passage, Christopher Wright makes the following insightful statements:

The whole sentence comes under the rubric "this is what is written." Luke does not present Jesus as quoting any specific verse from the Old Testament, but he claims that the mission of preaching repentance and forgiveness to the nations in his name is "what is written." He seems to be saying that the whole of the Scriptures (which we now know as the Old Testament), finds its focus and fulfillment both in the life and death and resurrection of Israel's Messiah and in the mission to all nations, which flows out from that event. Luke tells us that with these words Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures," or, as we might put it, he was setting their hermeneutical orientation and agenda. The proper way for disciples of the crucified and risen Jesus to read their Scriptures is from a perspective that is

*both messianic and missional.*²³

Wright's insight confirms again that the Christian Scriptures are all about the mission of God. We find not only a "biblical basis for mission" in the Old Testament but also that there is a "missional basis for the Bible." As Wright says, the Scriptures are to be read "from a perspective that is both messianic and missional."

Christian missions cannot ultimately be explained by anything other than God's eternal plan, testified to in the Old Testament and carried through by the person and work of Christ.

*The mission of the early Christians was unique. It was rooted in Jesus' appropriation of Old Testament messianic prophecy and his inauguration of Old Testament eschatological expectations regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles into the orbit of God's salvation, and it was carried out in fulfillment of his commission to disciple the nations and to extend the good news of salvation and forgiveness to the ends of the earth.*²⁴

How do Christian missions differ from what we learned about "missions" in the Old Testament?

Christopher Wright summarizes Israel's mission by saying, "Israel had a missional role in the midst of the nations—implying that they had an identity and role connected to God's ultimate intention of blessing the nations."²⁵ Wright goes on to clarify that "Israel had a missional reason for existence," but this does not mean, he says, that "they had had a *missionary* mandate to go to the nations (whereas we could certainly speak of the missionary role of the *church* among the nations)."²⁶

23 Christopher J. H. Wright, "Mission as a Matrix for Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Out of Egypt* (ed. Craig Bartholomew et al.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004), 107.

24 Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 71.

25 Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2006). 24–25.

26 Ibid. Parentheses original.

THE GREATNESS OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

The so-called Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 is often conceived of as “great” because of the magnitude of the task and it is a task of almost impossible size and scope. And yet this is not what ultimately makes the Great Commission great. The task can be completed and will be completed because of the greatness of the one who commissioned it. Read the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 again, focusing on the God who commands it and how our work in missions is established and enabled by the mission of God.

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

2. How do these three statements (A, B, and C) relate to each other, i.e. what is the logic of the passage?

Statement A: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Statement B: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . .

Statement C: Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

- **ANSWER.** Both statement A and statement C give support to statement B, the command to make disciples of all nations. Statement A reassures Jesus’ disciples of the legitimacy of their task: when we call for new disciples we call people to follow the one person in the universe who has all authority. There is no one else who is worthy of universal allegiance and worship. Statement C reassures Jesus’ disciples of the possibility of their task: when we go out into all nations we know that Jesus is with us, even to the end of the age, to strengthen, protect, and encourage us. Christ’s authority and presence, then, are the two great supports for his command to make disciples.

Here are some reflections from Tennent on the mission of God in Matthew 28:18-20:

Before we can speak of the church doing missions, we must first see God as the God of mission. Everything must be founded on the prior nature, character, and initiative of God. Even the Great Commission, arguably the greatest example of a church called to action, in Matthew's expression of it, begins with an affirmation of who God is: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18). Missions begins with who God is; only then can it be cast as specific duties or responsibilities of the church in the world. Only when we capture a glimpse of the sovereign glory of God can we properly respond to the imperatives that are given to Christ's holy church.²⁷

And here is an extended mediation by Piper on Jesus' claim to have all authority (Matthew 28:18):

All authority. He has authority over Satan and all demons, over all angels—good and evil—over the natural universe, natural objects and laws and forces: stars, galaxies, planets, meteorites; authority over all weather systems: winds, rains, lightning, thunder, hurricanes, tornadoes, monsoons, typhoons, cyclones; authority over all their effects: tidal waves, floods, fires; authority over all molecular and atomic reality: atoms, electrons, protons, neutrons, undiscovered subatomic particles, quantum physics, genetic structures, DNA, chromosomes; authority over all plants and animals great and small: whales and redwoods, giant squid and giant oaks, all fish, all wild beasts, all invisible animals and plants: bacteria, viruses, parasites, germs; authority over all the parts and functions of the human body: every beat of the heart, every breath of the diaphragm, every electrical jump across a million synapses in our brains; authority over all nations and governments: congresses and legislatures and presidents and kings and premiers and courts; authority over all armies and weapons and bombs and terrorists; authority over all industry and business and finance and currency; authority over all entertainment and amusement and leisure and media; over all education and research and science and discovery; authority over all crime and violence; over all families and neighborhoods; and over the church, and over every soul and every moment of every life that has been or ever will be lived.

There is nothing in heaven or on earth over which Jesus does not have authority, that is, does not have the right and the power to do with as he pleases. Both the right and the power. The scope and the magnitude of the authority of Jesus is infinite, because Jesus is one with God the Father. The Father has given him all authority

27 Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 488.

*not because the Father can give up being God, but because Jesus is God. And when deity shares infinite authority with deity, he neither loses nor gains anything, but remains infinitely full and triumphant and all-sufficient. This is the lofty claim. Our Lord, Jesus Christ, has all authority in heaven and on earth, because our Lord Jesus is God.*²⁸

Also notice the beautiful reality that this all-powerful and all-authoritative Jesus brings a universe-sized reconciliation:

Colossians 1:13–23

¹³ *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,* ¹⁴ *in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.* ¹⁶ *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.* ¹⁷ *And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* ¹⁸ *And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.* ¹⁹ *For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,* ²⁰ *and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

²¹ *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,* ²² *he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,* ²³ *if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

To understand and do missions rightly, we must fix our eyes on Jesus firstly and always primarily.

²⁸ John Piper, “The Lofty Claim, the Last Command, the Loving Comfort,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.org) website.

THE SENDING FATHER AND THE SENT CHURCH

The aspect of sending and being sent is a prominent theme in the Gospel of John. This undergirds the Great Commission. Before Jesus commissioned the church to be sent out, the Father had already taken the initiative of sending his own Son.

Tennent describes the prominence, intimacy, and purpose that the concept of sending contains:

John's understanding of mission is primarily found in his use of the verb to send (pempo or apostello). John's entire gospel is structured around the Father sending John the Baptist, sending Jesus, sending the Holy Spirit, and culminating in His sending of the church.

The verb to send in John's gospel contains two ideas, one internal and one external. Internally, it "implies a personal relationship"; namely, that those who are sent are sent by somebody. Externally, it implies that the one who is sent is "sent for some purpose."²⁹

Tennent goes on to point out how both John the Baptist and Jesus use "sent" language in both a personal and missional way. "The intimacy between the Son and the Father and the sense of purpose and mission for which Jesus was sent are conveyed regularly in John's gospel."³⁰

It is also important to note that the one who is sent is the one who obeys. The Father sends the Son and the Son obeys the Father. This reality extends to the church. The Father, as well as Jesus (Matt 28:18–20), send the church and the church is to obey them both.

Tennent provides multiple examples from John's Gospel below:

- "My food... is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (4:34).
- "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life (5:24).
- "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of

29 Timothy Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd edition. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010). 154. Tennent cites his own quote as well James McPolin SJ, "Mission in the Fourth Gospel," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 36 (1969): 114.

30 Ibid, 154-155.

him who sent me" (6:38).

- "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me" (7:16).
- "I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true" (7:28).
- "I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me" (7:33).
- "He who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell to the world" (8:26).
- "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone" (8:29).
- "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me" (9:4).
- "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me." (12:44–45).
- "Whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me" (13:20).
- "They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me" (15:21).
- "Now I am going to him who sent me" (16:5).

These texts all culminate in John's Great Commission text (John 20:21). Here is the last of forty occurrences of the title "sent one" as applied to Jesus in John's gospel.³¹ The resurrected Jesus says to his disciples, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." In John's Gospel alone do we read of Jesus sending the disciples as the Father sent him. Tennent points out three important aspects of Jesus's commission to the church in John 20:21:

First, the mission of the church is not a new development but a continuation of the ministry of Jesus as the ongoing express of the Father's redemptive act of sending Jesus into the world. The Father's redemptive work is not finished with the ministry of Jesus but continues to unfold at Pentecost, in the life of the church, and ultimately in the New Creation...

Second, the mission of the church is clearly set within a Trinitarian framework in John's gospel. The Father is the sender. Jesus, as the sent one, sends the church. The Holy Spirit is imparted to the disciples for His presences, guidance, and empowerment of the mission....

Third, this commission forms the basis for the ongoing sending ministry of the

³¹ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*. 155. All the references are as follows: John 3:34; 4:34; 5:23–24, 30, 36–38; 6:29; 38, 44, 57, 7:16, 18, 28, 29, 33, 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42, 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44, 45, 49, 13:16, 20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; and 20:21.

church in missions today. Just as Jesus, who was sent into the world, becomes a sender, so we who have been sent into the world continue to reflect Jesus' ministry as we send out workers into the harvest field.³²

This aspect of being sent is a prominent, intimate, and purposeful theme in the way the Triune God carries out his mission to be known and glorified. The obedience of the sent one to the sender involves love, joy, and intimacy.

For example, look at what Jesus says in John 14:21, 23: "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." Or notice how Jesus says that the reason his Father loves him is due to his ultimate obedience to the Father by dying on the cross: "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again" (John 10:17). The resurrected King Jesus baptized the church with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1:4–5; 2:1–47) to fulfill his promise that they would "receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The humble surrender of rights and privileges for the sake of serving others to the glory of God (Phil. 2:3–8) is the manner of missions in which followers of Jesus imitate him. That is the meaning of "incarnational" ministry.

TO HIM BE GLORY IN THE CHURCH

In discussions about Christian missions and studies of it, it is easy for talk of pioneering historical figures, statistical analysis, strategic initiatives, contextualization, and missions organizations to dominate the topic. What can often be lost in these conversations is the place of the church in missions—the church universal and local churches. Yet it is clear from the New Testament that the church is at the center of the mission of God.

We learn from the book of Acts that local churches were the focus and the fruit of Paul's missionary labors:

Acts 14:21–23

²¹ *When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,* ²²

³² Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*. 156.

strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. ²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

The Apostle Peter also speaks of the importance and role of the church:

1 Peter 2:9-12

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

There is perhaps no more momentous passage about the church in the mission of God than Ephesians 3:1-13. Study this passage carefully.

Ephesians 3:1-13

*¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—
² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have*

boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. ¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

In arguing for the centrality of the church in the mission of God, we do not mean to imply that parachurch missions organizations have no role to play. However, we do believe that, whether intentionally or not, parachurch missions organizations have often taken over aspects of Christian missions that should fall to local churches. Consider this stance from Robert Plummer:

*A missionary theology which places the missionary task in the hands of a few church leaders or with a para-church body lacks support from the Pauline letters. Modern para-church missions can be an attempt to solve the problem of the church's anemic missionary vision by removing the missionary task from the church. Missions, rather, should be returned to the church. The most effective way to do this is to teach and preach the gospel accurately.*³³

3. What role does the church play in the cosmic plan of God?

- **ANSWER.** *The church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, was a great mystery hidden for generations but is now revealed through the ministry and letters of Paul. It is through the church that God manifests his “manifold” wisdom to the heavenly domain. The church, created by Christ Jesus, is both the realization of God’s eternal plan as well as the agent of carrying out God’s eternal plan.*

As one final text, consider what Paul writes later in Ephesians 3 and notice how God glorifies himself:

Ephesians 3:20-21

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

³³ Robert Plummer, *Paul’s Understanding of the Church’s Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* (Waynesboro, Ga.: Paternoster, 2006), 144:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. Does Matthew 28:18-20 receive too much attention as a biblical text for missions? Or is the attention it commands justified? Explain your answer.
2. From your experience, do modern discussions of missions appreciate the central role of the church enough? Are these discussions sufficiently Trinitarian? Explain your answer.

A SERMON ABOUT CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

Listen to the sermon “**The Unfathomable Riches of Christ, for All Peoples, Above All Powers, through the Church**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringgod.org) website (www.desiringgod.org). Clicking on the sermon title will allow you to listen to the sermon. You may also download the sermon onto your computer.

YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), chapters 4-9
- ▷ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Gospels According to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998)
- ▷ John Piper, "The Lofty Claim, the Last Command, the Loving Comfort," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.org) website
- ▷ Robert Plummer, *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* (Waynesboro, Ga.: Paternoster, 2006)
- ▷ Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. A. Scott Moreau, *Encountering Mission* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), Chapter 8: The Church and Mission

The Unfathomable Riches of Christ, for All Peoples, Above All Powers, Through the Church

JOHN PIPER, 2004

Opening prayer

Moving backward through Ephesians 3:8-10

The painting of the wisdom of God

“manifold”

1. The display of God’s manifold wisdom

“The final glory of the painting of missions is that every brush stroke will add to the infinitely intricate display of God’s _____.”

2. The gathering of God’s global church

“The _____ is the main historical reality on the canvas, because the _____ in its preparation, salvation, and ingathering is the display of the wisdom of God.”

3. The preaching of Christ’s unsearchable riches

“Missions happens by the preaching to the nations of the unsearchable riches of _____. Missions happens by lifting _____ up and pointing people to him with words and actions that describe how valuable he is—how unfathomably rich he is. That’s what missions is, it’s making _____ known to the Gentiles, to everyone.”

4. The service of God’s ordinary missionaries

“There’s never been a stroke ever put on the canvas of redemptive history by any of these sinners on the back of this sheet that will not redound to the glory of the wisdom of Jesus Christ—not _____.”

Sitters and comers and closing prayer

The Only Salvation for All Nations

4

INTRODUCTION

This lesson will examine the biblical understanding of the term “nation.” The term “nation” is synonymous with what missiologists call a “people group.” What is a people group then? Creating an exact and precise definition seems to go beyond what Scripture clearly indicates. Here’s how Piper addresses the issue:

What we have found, in fact, is that a precise definition is probably not possible to give on the basis of what God has chosen to reveal in the Bible. God probably did not intend for us to use a precise definition of people groups. That way we can never stop doing pioneer missionary work just because we conclude that all the groups with our definition have been reached.”

For example, the point of Matthew 24:14 (“This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come”) is not that we should reach all the nations as we understand them and then stop. The point rather is that as long as the Lord has not returned, there must be more people groups to reach, and we should keep on reaching them.”³⁴

Two major considerations for defining people groups are *ethnicity* and *language*. These two components are often lumped together into the single word: *ethno-linguistic*.

In most parts of the world lack of understandability acts as the main barrier to the spread of the gospel. It is appropriate to define people group primarily by language, with the possibility of sub-divisions based on dialect or cultural variations. Such a list may be referred to as an ethno-linguistic list of peoples.

In other parts of the world, most notably in portions of South Asia, acceptance is a greater barrier than understandability. In these regions, caste, religious tradition, location, and common histories and legends may be used

³⁴ Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!* 212.

to identify the primary boundary of each people group. In these instances, language can be a secondary boundary.

Ideally, “people group” would always be defined to mean (a) all individuals in the group understand each other reasonably well and (b) cultural / relationship barriers aren’t so high that the transmission of the gospel is seriously impeded.

According to these criteria, the Joshua Project states that there are 16,883³⁵ distinct people groups (counted by country) in the world today. Of these 16,883 people groups, 6992 people groups (3.16 billion individuals) are considered to be a part of the unreached or least-reached.

An unreached or least-reached people is a people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group without outside assistance... The original Joshua Project editorial committee selected the criteria less than or equal to 2% Evangelical Christian and less than or equal to 5% Professing Christians.³⁶

Of these 6992 people groups that are unreached, 1510 of them are entirely unengaged by missionaries. This is approximately 46 million people.³⁷ “An unengaged unreached people group (UUPG) has no known active church planting underway among them. According to the Global Research Office of the Southern Baptist Convention’s International Missions Board: “A people group is engaged when a church planting strategy, consistent with evangelical faith and practice, is under implementation.”³⁸ Not only are unengaged people groups unreached, but there is also no known active plan by anyone to bring them the gospel. They remain in complete darkness.

The concept of people groups comes from missiologists trying their best to understand the task ahead of us. Although “people group” is not an exact phrase found in the Bible it is a missiological term, describing biblical concepts, that helps us know how to pursue what was commanded. Jesus tells us to make disciples of “all nations” and we know that there will be peoples “from every

35 Statistics accessed from The Joshua Project (http://joshuaproject.net/global_statistics) accessed November 23, 2017.

36 The Joshua Project, (<https://joshuaproject.net/help/definitions#unreached>).

37 Finishing the Task, (<http://www.finishingthetask.com/>).

38 The Joshua Project, (<https://joshuaproject.net/help/definitions>).

tribe and language and nation and people” around God’s throne at the end of time (Rev 5:9). Identifying people groups is critical for organizing the task Jesus gave us in the Great Commission.

Understanding people groups also helps us also know how to contextualize the gospel message. Different cultures and different languages require different ways of translating the Word of God, communicating the gospel with clarity, and living out the lordship of Christ. Recall Paul’s words when he says,

1 Corinthians 9:20–23

²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Simply put, the concept of people groups is important because 1) we need to know which people are still not being engaged and reached with the gospel, and 2) we need to know how to best live among, serve, and communicate most effectively with different unreached peoples.

What is the only hope for these unengaged and unreached peoples? And what is the biblical basis for our thinking about people groups? It is to these important questions that we now turn.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ explain why missionaries who preach the gospel must be sent for the salvation of the nations.
- ▷ explain what Jesus meant when he said that his followers should make disciples of “all nations” (Matthew 28:19).
- ▷ describe the missionary ambition and strategy of the Apostle Paul.



Once again this lesson presents three interrelated topics. As the instructor you may choose to focus on one or two of them, or you may want to cover all three.

1. The exclusivity of Christ. We are presuming that most if not all of your students will agree that salvation is only to be found in Christ, but you could extend this discussion by tackling Christian inclusivism more thoroughly, by looking at more biblical evidence, or by interacting with the truth claims of other major world religions (see Ajith Fernando's book *The Supremacy of Christ* in the Additional Resources list). You might want to look at the section of *Let the Nations Be Glad* that is cited in the lesson and deal more in depth with that. In that section Piper offers a reading of Acts 11, for example.
2. The concept of people groups. Again, you could extend the discussion of this topic by looking at more biblical evidence—although Rev 5:9 will be examined in Lesson 6, so you will probably not want to introduce that text here—or by introducing more statistics. If your church supports missionaries you could look at the various people groups that your church's missionaries are working with. If you have the technical capability, you could go to the Joshua Project website during the class discussion and show your students the site. Remember, though, that this course (at least as it was designed) is focused on the theology that drives missions more than the practical aspects of Christian missions.
3. The relationship between frontier missions and unreached people groups. There is obviously a lot of material that could be covered under this topic. For the relationship between foreign missions and domestic ministries, see John Piper's 1984 sermon on that topic. Or consider the following conviction from John Piper and Tom Steller, "Driving Convictions Behind Foreign Missions" (an online article at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.org) website):

Conviction #7—Domestic Ministries Are the Goal of Frontier Missions

This conviction addresses the tension that develops in a mission-driven church between those who have a passion for ministering here to our own desperately needy culture, and the radical advocates of taking the gospel where they don't even

have access to the Source of any ministry at all.

By domestic ministries I mean all the ministries that we should do among the people in our own culture. For example, ministries relating to evangelism, poverty, medical care, unemployment, hunger, abortion, crisis pregnancy, runaway kids, pornography, family disintegration, child abuse, divorce, hygiene, education at all levels, drug abuse and alcoholism, environmental concerns, terrorism, prison reform, moral abuses in the media and business and politics, etc., etc.

Frontier missions, on the other hand, is the effort of the church to penetrate an unreached people group with the gospel and establish there an ongoing, indigenous, ministering church.

Now stop and think about that. What this means is that frontier missions is the exportation of the possibility and practice of domestic ministries in the name of Jesus to unreached people groups

Why should there be tension between these two groups of people? The frontier people honor the domestic people by agreeing that their work is worth exporting. The domestic people honor the frontier people by insisting that what they export is worth doing here. A crucial training ground for frontier missions is on the home front engaging in domestic ministries.



NO MISSIONARIES = NO SALVATION

In the previous two lessons we saw that the revealed plan of God and the history he has ordained both testify to God's great mission in the world. While Israel never became a nation of missionaries, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection created a church who would spread the glory of God among the nations. The message that Jesus preached and that his apostles declared was that there is salvation, forgiveness, reconciliation, and justification only in him.

John 14:6-7

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Acts 1:8

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Acts 4:8-12

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

1 Timothy 2:5

⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

That Jesus and no one else is the mediator between God and humans is a

fundamental conviction of Christian missions. Without the exclusivity of Christ, there would be no basis for Christian missions. John Piper put it this way:

*The New Testament makes clear that the atoning work of Christ is not merely for Jews or merely for any one nation or tribe or language. It is the one and only way for anyone to get right with God. The problem of is universal, cutting people off from God. The solution to that problem is the atoning death of the Son of God offered once for all. This is the very foundation of missions. Since the work of Christ is the only basis for salvation, it must be announced to all nations*³⁹

There are some who hold, however, that even though salvation can only be achieved by Christ, “God-seeking” pagans can nevertheless be saved by Jesus by responding to the limited revelation given to them apart from the gospel. This position, sometimes called Christian inclusivism, maintains that faith and salvation are possible through Jesus apart from the work of Christian missionaries.

Though we cannot respond in detail to this position, consider the following text:

Romans 10:8-15

⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

1. Using this passage, interact with the following claim: “People who have never heard the gospel can still be saved by Jesus by responding

39 John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 147.

positively to the revelation given to them.” Does this passage support this claim? Why or why not?

- **ANSWER.** *The sequence described in vv. 14-15 invalidates this claim. The rhetorical question, “How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?” (v. 14) implies the answer, “They cannot believe in him of whom they have never heard.” Furthermore, these verses make it clear that “hearing” about Jesus cannot happen through general revelation; hearing refers to hearing the preaching of the gospel. This gospel is preached by human missionaries who are sent to declare the salvation of the Lord.*

For an extensive defense of the idea that people must hear the preached message about Christ in order to be saved, see John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 147-176.

WHO ARE THE “NATIONS”?

In the previous lesson we examined Matthew 28:18-20, but we did not consider in depth one important phrase in the passage. When Jesus commands his disciples to make disciples of “all nations,” what does he mean? Who are the proper recipients of Christian mission?

In order to answer this question, we will examine the Greek phrase that is translated as “all nations” in our English Bibles.

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations [Greek: *panta ta ethnē*], baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

THE OLD TESTAMENT UNDERSTANDING AND USE OF “NATIONS”

The Greek phrase *panta ta ethnē* occurs 73 times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Studying these occurrences unlocks the meaning of Jesus’ command in Matthew 28:19.

In the passages that follow we reproduce four important occurrences of this

phrase (using the English Standard Version translation of the Hebrew for our study):

Deuteronomy 7:1-2, 6

¹ When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations [Greek: ethnē] before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than yourselves, ² and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. . . . 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 [Greek: panta ta ethnē] who are on the face of the earth.

Jeremiah 9:25-26

²⁵ Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh— ²⁶ Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, for all these nations [Greek: panta ta ethnē] are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart.

Daniel 3:7

⁷ Therefore, as soon as all the peoples [Greek: panta ta ethnē] heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples [Greek: panta ta ethnē], nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

2. According to these passages, who are “all nations”? Defend your answer with specific textual evidence.

- **ANSWER.** It is important to see how these nations are not geo-political entities in the modern sense, but rather people groups that share a common language, ethnic identity, and culture. It is anachronistic to understand the biblical term “nations” as modern, political nation-states. The “nations” of Deut 7 were people groups such as the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. In Jer 9, more “nations” are listed: “Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair.” Again, we would be

mistaken if we conceived of these “nations” in terms of modern “countries” such as Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Distinct ethnicity, language, and culture have more biblical weight to understanding the meaning of “nations” and “peoples” than does understanding them as contemporary geo-political entities (i.e. Germany, France, England, Sudan, India, etc.)

THE NEW TESTAMENT UNDERSTANDING AND USE OF “NATIONS”

How does the Bible’s use of “nations” and “peoples” occur in the New Testament? Short and simple answer: in the same way. πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (*panta ta ethne*) shows up 58 times in the Greek NT, under this specific construction of the phrase.⁴⁰ And from the verses below notice the parallel between the Old and New Testament with the concept of a shared language, cultural, and ethnic identity for how the Bible understands “nations” and “peoples”.

Acts 2:5–11

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation (*pantos enthous*) under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak **in his own language**. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us **in his own native language**? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling **in our own tongues** the mighty works of God.”

Revelation 5:9

⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from **every (pantes) tribe and language and people and nation (ethnous)**).

⁴⁰ The New Testament doesn’t translate *panta ta ethne* exactly the same into English with every use.

Revelation 7:9

⁹ *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation (pantos ethnous), from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,*

Acts 2:5–11 uses the phrase παντὸς ἔθνους (*pantos ethnous*) which means “every nation.” It then goes off to list specific people groups with their own specific languages.

Both of the Revelation passages reveal nation (*ethnous*) as having a shared cultural and language identity. We see this from the parallel format with the other words in the text, *namely, language, tribe, and people*.

Here is a comment on Matthew 28:19 from John Piper, who points out that the word “nation” in English sometimes does get to the meaning of the Greek:

The words “make disciples of all nations” must be closely examined. They contain the very important phrase “all nations,” which is often referred to in the Greek form panta ta ethnē (panta = all; ta = the; ethnē = nations). The reason this is such an important phrase is that ethnē, when translated as “nations,” sounds like a political or geographic grouping. That is its most common English usage. But this is not what the Greek means, nor does the English always mean this. For example, we say the Cherokee nation or the Sioux nation, which means something like “people with a unifying ethnic identity.”⁴¹

THE FLEXIBILITY OF THE WORD “NATIONS” AND HOW IT IS USED SYNONYMOUSLY WITH “PEOPLE GROUPS”

There is overlap in how the Bible uses different terms such as language and people and nation. A precise biblical definition for people groups is not possible. Yet, as previously stated, we must understand how God sees different peoples and all nations because we need to know the task ahead of us and how to reach different peoples accordingly to fulfill Jesus’s Great Commission.

John Piper will be quoted at length because he helpfully navigates and explains these different points:

“People” (laou) and “nation” (ethnous), for example, are virtually synonymous and

⁴¹ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 183.

interchangeable in Genesis 25:23 (“Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided”). Sometimes Israel as a whole is called a “people,” but in Acts 4:27 we read about the “peoples (laois) of Israel.” Nevertheless, in Revelation 21:3, “peoples” (laoi) refers to all the groups and individuals in the new earth. These facts prevent us from forming precise definitions of the people groups missionaries are to reach.

How small is a family?

The fact that all the families of the earth will be blessed alerts us to the fact that the groupings God intends to reach with his gospel may be relatively small. The modern nuclear family is not in view but rather something like a clan. For example, Exodus 6:14–15 reveals the sort of grouping that is probably in mind:

14 These are the heads of their fathers’ houses: the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the clans of Reuben. 15 The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the clans of Simeon.

Thus, “families” are smaller than the tribes of Israel (cf. also 1 Sam. 10:20–21). But they are not as small as households. The case of Achan in Joshua 7 shows this. After Achan had sinned and was to be found out, Joshua said that there would be a test of all the people to find out who the culprit was.

14 In the morning therefore you shall be brought near **by your tribes**. And the tribe that the LORD takes by lot shall come near **by clans** [mishpehot (“families” in the RSV and NASB)]. And the clan that the LORD takes shall come near **by households**. And the household that the LORD takes shall come near man by man (Joshua 7:14).

What this shows is that the “family” of the Old Testament is better thought of as a “clan” (which is why the ESV has translated it this way). It is between the size of a tribe and a household.

Thus, the missionary task of the New Testament is to reach not only every people the size of Israel and every tribe the size of Reuben or Simeon or Judah, but also all the clans, such as those of Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, Carmi, and Achan.

The fact that *ethne* is used so often in the Old Testament and the New Testament

to designate the focus of missions should not limit our focus to the larger groupings. The word is flexible enough to provide an inclusive designation for groups of various sizes. In fact, Karl Ludwig Schmidt concludes his study of ethnos in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament by contrasting it with laos, glossa, and phyle: "Ethnos is the most general and therefore the weakest of these terms, having simply an ethnographical sense and denoting the natural cohesion of a people in general."⁴²

Thus, panta ta ethne would be the most suitable term for including the others, which is in fact what we find in Revelation 22:2. Here ethne refers to all the people in the new earth, including the "languages" and "peoples" and "tribes." So panta ta ethne is probably the simplest way of giving a summary designation not only to the larger but also to the smaller groupings.

So what is the significance of all our findings and discussion on "nations" and "people groups"? There are at least two very important implications from what we've learned about what "all nations" means. First, even though there are now Christians in every country of the world, *the task of Christian missions is far from over*. Second, the meaning of this phrase causes us to rethink what God's priority is in the missio Dei.

The church should prioritize the reaching of *all nations* as well as the engagement of every individual. God commands that we make disciples from *all nations*. Paul wrote to Timothy that God desires all lost individual sinners to be saved (1 Tim 2:4). There is much joy in heaven over *any* sinner that repents and believes in Jesus (Luke 15:7, 10). So, both "pioneer" church planting and "saturation" church planting are worthy goals. We shouldn't neglect one for the other. Of course, saturation church planting can't yet happen until a nation is reached by way of pioneer church planting. Once a nation is reached, that body of believers can, theoretically, reach the rest of their people.

It is important to understand this distinction because it can guard against two errors. The first being that we should only go to the "receptive" peoples of the world so that we can maximize the number of souls to know Christ. This is a problem because if many of the unreached people groups are unreceptive they still must be prayed and sought out because it is not all *receptive* nations that

42 Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10th edition. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977). vol 2, 369.

Jesus included in his Great Commission but rather people from *all nations*.⁴³

The second error is thinking that the global church shouldn't also strive to maximize the total number of churches planted and individuals saved in every place. A saved soul is a beautiful thing, whether they are from a nation already considered reached or unreached. No one would deny that last statement; but a false dichotomy is made, and a "finishing strategy" is elevated above a more biblical understanding of the whole Great Commission, when a church's emphasis on reaching all nations excludes the ministry of strengthening those churches already established (i.e. "discipling" them) and partnering *with them* in saturation church planting and missions.

PAUL'S MISSIONARY AMBITION

The Apostle Paul is presented as the model Christian missionary in Scripture. Therefore, in studying Christian missions we cannot overlook one of the passages in which Paul speaks most directly about his own missionary ambition.

Romans 15:17-21

¹⁷ In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. ¹⁸ For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of

43 For example, in *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, John Piper argues that "God may have in mind that the aim of the rescue operation should be to gather saved sinners from every people in the world (from both ocean liners), even if some of the rescuers must leave a fruitful reached people (the first ocean liner) in order to labor among an (possibly less fruitful) unreached people (the second ocean liner)... In other words, the task of missions may not be merely to win as many individuals as possible from the most responsive people groups of the world but rather to win individuals from all the people groups of the world... God's call for missions in Scripture cannot be defined in terms of crossing cultures to maximize the total number of individuals saved. Rather, God's will for missions is that every people group be reached with the testimony of Christ and that a people be called out for his name from all the nations" (178–179). However, Piper also states, "I believe that this definition will in fact result in the greatest possible number of white-hot worshipers for God's Son. But that remains for God to decide. Our responsibility is to define missions his way and then obey" (179).

the gospel of Christ;²⁰ and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation,²¹ but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

Notice two things in particular about this passage. First, notice that the work that Paul has done for God has been accomplished by Christ through Paul—in other words, the mission of God is being embodied in Christian missions. Second, notice what the effect of Christ's work through Paul is, described in verse 19. John Piper highlights the startling claim in this verse:

First, verse 19b: "From Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ." That's from Jerusalem up through Syria, across Asia Minor (Turkey), down through Greece on the east side and up the west to northern Italy where Albania is today. Paul says he has fulfilled the gospel there. And he underlines that astonishing statement in verse 23 by saying, "I no longer have any room for work in these regions." And then in verse 24 he says, "I go to Spain."

What in the world did he mean that he had no room for work from Jerusalem to Illyricum? It is not a risk to say that there were tens of thousands of people yet to be evangelized in those regions. We know this because Paul writes to Timothy at Ephesus (in this very region) and commands him to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5). In other words, there are people that need to be evangelized. And Paul says his work is done in this region.⁴⁴

3. How is it that Paul "fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ" in this vast region where there were undoubtedly many unbelievers still?

• **ANSWER.** *It must be that the phrase "fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ" does not refer to the total evangelization of the region, but something else. From vv. 20-21 we learn that Paul's ambition is to preach the gospel where Christ has not yet been named, lest he "build on someone else's foundation"—that is, work among a people who have already heard the gospel from someone else. Therefore, we can understand that fulfilling the ministry of the gospel of Christ for Paul was simply to make an initial*

44 John Piper, "Holy Ambition: To Preach Where Christ Has Not Been Named," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.org) website.

proclamation of the gospel in a region and to make disciples there who could effectively continue the work of evangelization. Since Paul had already preached the gospel and planted churches throughout this vast region, he was now concentrating his eyes elsewhere, to Rome and then on to Spain.

Also, notice the connection in this passage with the unreached and unengaged people groups in the world still today. These are the people groups that Paul was aiming to reach.

In meditating on this passage and others like it, John Piper and Tom Steller arrived at the following conviction (number 9 of 14) concerning “Paul-type” missionaries and “Timothy-type” missionaries:

Conviction #9—The Need of the Hour Is for Thousands of New Paul-Type Missionaries, A Fact Which Is Sometimes Obscured by the Quantity of Timothy-Type Missionaries.

Timothy left Lystra, his hometown (Acts 16:1), and became a church worker (a Timothy-type missionary) in a foreign place, Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3), which had its own elders (Acts 20:17) and outreach (Acts 19:10). This is the model of a Timothy-type missionary: going far away to do Christian work where the church is fairly well established. It has biblical precedent and it is a good thing to do, if God calls you.

But that’s not what Paul was called to do. His passion was to make God’s name known in all the unreached peoples of the world. He said that he made it his ambition “to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named” (Romans 15:20). One of the most stunning things Paul ever said is in Romans 15:19, 23: “From Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fulfilled the gospel of Christ . . . I no longer have any room for work in these regions.” This stunned me, when I finally saw its implications.

No room for work between Jerusalem and northern Greece! His work there is done in spite of all the unbelievers that remain! He is now moving on to Spain. How could he say this? The answer is that he was a frontier missionary, not just a cross-cultural missionary. He was called to reach the unreached peoples, where there is no church to evangelize its own people.

What most Christians don’t know today is that there are probably ten times more

Timothy-type missionaries in the world than there are Paul-type missionaries. And yet there are still thousands of people groups—especially Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and tribal peoples—who have no access to a gospel-preaching church in their own culture.

Patrick Johnstone and others published in late 1996 a book entitled The Unreached Peoples (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 1996). In it the 2000 least-reached people groups are listed on pages 102–111. This gives you an idea of the remaining urgent need for missionaries who are willing to cross language and culture for the fame of Christ and the salvation of the perishing.

Therefore, our prayer for Bethlehem is that we put a very high priority on raising up and sending frontier missionaries—Paul-type missionaries. Not that we diminish the sacrifice and preciousness of the Timothy-type missionaries, but that we realize what the utterly critical, uniquely missionary need is in the world, namely, there are thousands of people groups with no access to the saving knowledge of Jesus.

Only Paul-type missionaries can reach them. That must be a huge priority for us. Without the gospel everything is in vain. A crucial role that the Timothy-type missionaries play is to raise up Paul-type missionaries among the peoples with whom they are working.⁴⁵

We need Paul-type missionaries in order to fulfill the Great Commission. It is important to note, however, that Paul-type missionaries are not rugged, individualists carving their own path into the unknown and unreached territories. Paul did not do his missionary work alone. He was often with Barnabas, and worked alongside many others in all of his church planting efforts. We can see this throughout Acts as well as in the greeting sections of Paul's various epistles. Another important point to note is how Paul and Barnabas were approved and sent out by a local church, under guidance from the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1–4). They did not work apart from the blessing of and connection to the sending church.

45 John Piper and Tom Steller, "Driving Convictions Behind Foreign Missions," an online article at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.org) website.

THE GREAT IMBALANCE

If there is to be any salvation for all the remaining people groups who have not yet heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, then the church must identify these peoples and send Paul-type, pioneer church planting teams to them so that they might be saved.

There is a disheartening and tragic imbalance of missionary deployment today. This is often called the Great Imbalance. Acts Research explains that, “Missions experts today have told us that 90% of the world’s 250,000 Christian missionaries are focused in places that already have a witness of the Gospel, and the remaining 10% labor in the 10/40 window, where nearly 98% of the world’s unreached are. Missiologists have called this ‘the great imbalance.’”⁴⁶

We are not saying that we should uproot or shame Christians reaching lost souls in places that are already reached or serving the church in other ways there. However, when there is only 10% of the missionary labor force devoted to where 98% percent of the unreached and unengaged lost souls exist, there is a major problem. 41.6% of the world’s population, (or 3,144,717,000 people), are unreached and/or totally unengaged. So, when Jesus says to make disciples of all nations, and yet only 10% of our missionary efforts are devoted to only half of the nations yet unreached, a major change of the situation is called for.

Consider Paul’s words in the following passages:

Romans 10:13–17

¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Romans 15:17–21

¹⁷ In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. ¹⁸ For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from

⁴⁶ “The Great Imbalance,” Acts Research, <http://www.actsresearch.global/about/great-imbalance>.

Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;²⁰ and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation,²¹ but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

Again, we are not dismissing cross-cultural ministry happening in places already reached. "Reached" and "unreached" are missiological terms to help determine and understand the task that still remains ahead of us. A people group being "reached" does not necessarily mean that it is anywhere near to having the majority of people in the people group saved. Remember that organizations such as Joshua Project define unreached as "2% Evangelical Christian and less than or equal to 5% Professing Christians."⁴⁷ A reached group might still be in much need of outside assistance.

We should celebrate faithful ministry everywhere it is happening. But we should also prioritize investing efforts where the Great Commission is being grossly neglected; namely to the unreached and unengaged.

⁴⁷ "Definitions," Joshua Project, <https://joshuaproject.net/help/definitions>.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. What mistakes might be made in Christian missions if it were assumed that the term “nation” in the Bible meant something like a modern, political nation-state?
2. If your church supports missionaries, how many are “Paul-type” missionaries (according to Piper’s terminology) and how many are “Timothy-type” missionaries?

A SERMON ABOUT CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

Listen to the sermon **“Everlasting Truth for the Joy of All Peoples”** by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the Desiring God website (www.desiringgod.org). Clicking on the sermon title will allow you to listen to the sermon. You may also download the sermon onto your computer.

YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, chapters 4-5
- ▷ The Joshua Project website (www.joshuaproject.net)
- ▷ Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Biblical Publishing, 2010)
- ▷ Ajith Fernando, *The Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1995)
- ▷ Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, “Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Hawthorne, Steven C., 4th ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 531–46.

Everlasting Truth for the Joy of All Peoples

JOHN PIPER, 2003

Opening prayer

Psalm 117

“Nations” or “peoples”

“He didn’t mean Germany and America, he meant all those _____—those ethno-linguistic groups that are out there, distinct in the world, being cut off from each other, [in] some measure by language, some other by customs, some by ancient hostilities . . .”

How many (unreached) nations are there?

“The missionary question is not the _____ question. . . . The missionary question is ‘Are there any people groups in Minneapolis who have no disciples in them, who have no church planted in them?’—or other countries or cities of the world.”

Is the day of Western missions over?

Global Prayer Digest

“God is a God who says, ‘I got a purpose for the world. Do you want to get on board with me?’ You might get healthy. Your soul is made to expand with God around a _____ purpose.”

The world is changing

God’s purpose for the nations

“Missions is a cross-cultural movement aimed at helping people stop making much of themselves and start making much of _____.”

Why does God demand praise?

“We delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but _____ the enjoyment.”

The basis of the peoples’ praise

How the Kingdom Will Advance in the World

5

INTRODUCTION

When asking the question of how the kingdom of God will advance in the world, many Christians today would probably turn to missions strategy: How can our message be “contextualized”? How can we connect with leaders in the community? What is being done in relief and development? What technology can we employ? Where are significant spiritual conversations being held? What can we do to reach different economic classes or different members of the family? How can we form partnerships that won’t foster unhealthy dependence? What are the most needed resources and how can we avoid making the mistakes of previous generations of missionaries?

These kinds of questions go on and on, and they are important. Our concern, however, is that if these practical and strategic issues dominate the study of missions, then it is easy for missions to become pragmatic, man-centered, and self-reliant. Therefore, in this lesson we will put down some of the biblical building blocks that further conversations must build upon.

Here are some of John Piper’s reflections on how missions can be stirred up within the local church. Notice that he doesn’t mention short-term mission trips, guest speakers, missions conferences, video updates, or the like (though, again, these things certainly have their place).

My pastoral strategy for the kindling of missions fervor and the recruiting of missions candidates and the building of missions budgets and the cultivation of a missions lifestyle is fairly simple. I would sum it up like this—to teach and preach and live the centrality and supremacy of God in everything.

When you put the supremacy of God at the top of your pastoral agenda, and when you aim to be radically God-centered in all that you do and preach, it's almost inevitable that deep, earnest, heartfelt, passionate, worship takes on tremendous importance in the life of the church. Because worship is the echo of the supremacy of God in the heart of the believer.

Another way to express our strategy at Bethlehem to kindle a heart for missions is to say that missions for us is not the ultimate goal of the church. The ultimate goal of the church is worship. The only reason missions exists is because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate and missions is penultimate. Because God is ultimate, and man is penultimate. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of the God and of the Lamb, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.

Until we see the greatness of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and until we bow stunned at the majesty of God's power and the freedom of his grace, we have no lasting mission in the world.⁴⁸

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ comprehend the centrality of the preached word to Christian missions.
- ▷ understand the role of prayer and its relationship to the preached word.
- ▷ explain why God has ordained suffering in the advancement of his kingdom.
- ▷ understand the Holy Spirit's role in advancing God's kingdom.

⁴⁸ John Piper, "Worship and World Missions: A Pastoral Strategy," an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.org) website.



You will notice that the Additional Resources list and the sermon for this lesson are focused on the place of suffering in Christian missions. That is not because we consider suffering more important than the preached word or prayer, just that it is not as addressed as frequently and is sometimes misunderstood. Once again, you will need to use your discretion in how to best invest the class discussion.

As a practical application of what is covered in this lesson, you could spend the last part of class actually praying for the missionaries that your church supports.



THROUGH THE PREACHED WORD

That salvation is only possible through hearing the preached word has already been demonstrated in the previous lesson. Here is Romans 10 again, this time adding two more verses to what we've already examined.

Romans 10:13-17

¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

The reason that salvation is only possible through hearing the preached word is that "faith comes from hearing" (Romans 10:17) and there is no salvation apart from faith in Christ. Since faith first comes through hearing and is ever after strengthened through hearing the preached word, the preaching and teaching of God's Word must hold a central place in Christian missions.

Here are a few more texts taken from various New Testament authors that witness to the central and important place of God's Word for conversion and sanctification:

John 17:6-8, 18-20

⁶ I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. . . . ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰ I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word . . .

1 Corinthians 1:17-24

¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. ¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Peter 1:22-25

²² Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, ²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; ²⁴ for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

James 1:18

¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Some of the most persuasive New Testament evidence for the primacy of the preached word in missions is from the book of Acts. In what follows, observe the repeated emphasis on the place of the spoken word in the establishment of the Christian church and its growth in the Roman Empire. These numerous passages form a mighty precedent and should shape our own thinking about missions and practice of it.

Acts 2:41

⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 4:31

³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Acts 5:19-20, 42

¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰ “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” . . . ⁴² And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

Acts 6:2-4, 7

² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” . . . ⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Acts 8:4-5, 12

⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. . . . ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Acts 8:25, 40

²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. . . . ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Acts 9:28

²⁸ So [Paul] went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.

Acts 10:44

⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.

Acts 11:1

¹ Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

Acts 11:19-20

¹⁹ Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

Acts 12:24

²⁴ But the word of God increased and multiplied.

Acts 13:5

⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.

Acts 13:46-49

⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" ⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.

Acts 14:3

³ So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

Acts 14:24-26

²⁴ Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. ²⁵ And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, ²⁶ and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.

Acts 15:35

³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

Acts 16:9-10

⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Acts 16:30-32

³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”³¹ And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

Acts 18:4-5, 11

⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks. ⁵ When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. . . .¹¹ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Acts 19:10, 20

¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. . . .²⁰ So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Acts 28:30-31

³⁰ [Paul] lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

1. In view of this theme in Acts, can the kingdom of God advance in the world through ministries that focus on deeds of mercy and justice?

- **ANSWER.** The kingdom of God can advance through ministries that focus on deeds of mercy and justice as long as those good deeds serve as confirmations of the preached message about Jesus Christ.

John Stott gives voice to how important the Word of God is to the work of missions:

Without the Bible, world evangelization would not only be impossible but actually inconceivable. It is the Bible that lays upon us the responsibility to evangelize the world, gives us a gospel to proclaim, tells us how to proclaim it and promises us that it is God's power for salvation to every believer.

It is, moreover, an observable fact of history, both past and contemporary, that the degree of the Church's commitment to world evangelization is commensurate with the degree of its conviction about the authority of the Bible. Whenever Christians lose their confidence in the Bible, they also lose their zeal for evangelism. Conversely, whenever they are convinced about the Bible, then they are determined about evangelism.⁴⁹

THROUGH PRAYER

If the kingdom of God will not advance without the preached word, neither will it advance without prayer. Yet, we often misunderstand the nature and purpose of prayer. The kind of prayers needed for the advancement of the kingdom are not prayers for greater comfort, prosperity, and security, but rather bold prayers for gospel victory in the clash between light and darkness:

Life is war. That's not all it is. But it is always that. Our weakness in prayer is owing largely to our neglect of this truth. Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den. God has given us prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie so that we can call headquarters for everything we need as the kingdom of Christ advances in the world.⁵⁰

But why would God accomplish his mission in the world through prayer? Why

49 John R. W. Stott, "The Bible in World Evangelization," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (4th edition; edited by Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne; Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2009), 21.

50 John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 65.

equip the soldiers of his army with walkie-talkies? John Piper again explains:

This is why God has ordained prayer to have such a crucial place in the mission of the church. The purpose of prayer is to make clear to all the participants in this war that the victory belongs to the Lord. Prayer is God's appointed means of bringing grace to us and glory to himself. . . .

Prayer puts God in the place of the all-sufficient Benefactor and puts us in the place of the needy beneficiaries. So when the mission of the church moves forward by prayer, the supremacy of God is manifest and the needs of the Christian troops are met.⁵¹

Without prayer it would not be clear who is in need and who is strong and sufficient. With prayer, however, God may accomplish his mission in such a way that draws attention to his glory.

Prayer often precedes Christian missions, as the following two passages show:

Matthew 9:36-38

³⁶ *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.* ³⁷ *Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*

Acts 13:1-3

¹ *Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.* ² *While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* ³ *Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*

Prayer also sustains and empowers mission. David Wells explains what we need to believe in order to pray as we should for the work of missions:

I believe that petitionary prayer flourishes only if we believe two things: First, that God's name is hallowed too irregularly, his kingdom has come too little, and his

⁵¹ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 78, 79.

will is done too infrequently. Second, that God himself can change this situation. Therefore, petitionary prayer expresses the hope that life as we encounter it can and should be different.⁵²

What is the relationship between the preached word and prayer? Are these two means by which God advances his kingdom in conflict? Do these means operate independently of one another? Study the following passages, looking for how the preached word and prayer are related:

Acts 4:29-31

²⁹ “And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Ephesians 6:16-20

¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Colossians 4:2-4

² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2

¹ Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, ² and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.

⁵² David Wells, “Prayer: Rebelling Against the Status Quo,” in *Perspectives*, 160.

2. According to these passages, what is the relationship between prayer and the word of God? Underline words and phrases that support your view and then write your answer below:

• **ANSWER.** *In each of these passages it is clear that prayer is to serve the proclamation of the word. In Acts 4 the apostles pray for boldness in speaking the word and God answers that prayer. In Eph 6 Paul exhorts the believers to take up the sword of the Spirit, [while] praying in the Spirit. The sword of the word of God is wielded through prayer. He also asks for prayer so he can declare the word boldly as he ought to. In Col 4 Paul again asks that the Colossian believers pray for Paul to have an opportunity to preach about Christ clearly. Paul also asks in 2 Thess 3 that the Thessalonian believers pray for the success of the preached word. Thus, these four passages uniformly attest that Christian missions will be carried on by the preaching of the word but that the possibility and power of that preaching is dependent upon prayer.*

Here is how John Piper describes the relationship between the roles of prayer and the preaching of the gospel:

It is almost impossible to overemphasize the awesome place of prayer in the purposes of God for the world. But a caution is needed here. I sense the danger of overstating the role of prayer in relation to the Word of God and the preaching of the gospel. I am not comfortable, for example, with calling prayer “the work of missions.” . . . I believe the proclamation of the gospel in Word and deed is the work of missions. Prayer is the power that wields the weapon of the Word, and the Word is the weapon by which the nations will be brought to faith and obedience. . . .

God has ordained that saving faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ because faith is a response to Christ. If Christ is to be glorified in the mission of the church, he must be heard and known. This happens only through the Word. No prayer can replace it. Prayer can only empower it. . . .

Now we can say again, safely and stunningly, what the awesome place of prayer is in the purpose of God to fill the earth with his glory. Not only has God made the accomplishment of his purposes hang on the preaching of the Word, but he has also made the success of that preaching hang on prayer. God’s goal to be glorified will not succeed without the powerful proclamation of the gospel. And that gospel will not be proclaimed in power to all the nations without the prevailing, earnest, faith-

*filled prayers of God's people. This is the awesome place of prayer in the purpose of God for the world. That purpose won't happen without prayer.*⁵³

THROUGH CHRIST-LIKE SUFFERING

Finally, we will look at a third means by which the kingdom of God advances in the world in the work of Christian missions—a means somewhat more controversial and neglected than the previous two. We would argue that God has ordained that the work of Christian missions happen through the preached word, through prayer, and through the Christ-like suffering of God's people.

This third means of kingdom advancement directly contradicts a “Christian” theology that is currently very prevalent in the world and continuing to grow in its influence. This theology is known by different names but is commonly called the “health and wealth gospel” or the “prosperity movement.”⁵⁴ At the core of this theology is the belief that God always rewards the faith of his children with material prosperity and health now in this life.

Such a theology has devastating effects upon Christian missions. Read Piper's concern:

My biggest concern about the effects of the prosperity movement is that it diminishes Christ by making him less central and less satisfying than his gifts. Christ is not magnified most by being the giver of wealth. He is magnified most by satisfying the soul of those who sacrifice to love others in the ministry of the gospel.

*When we commend Christ as the one who makes us rich, we glorify riches, and Christ becomes a means to the end of what we really want—namely, health, wealth, and prosperity. But when we commend Christ as the one who satisfies our soul forever—even when there is no health, wealth, and prosperity—then Christ is magnified as more precious than all those gifts.*⁵⁵

53 John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 84, 85.

54 For additional understanding of the prosperity gospel's prominence in certain parts of the world and John Piper's critical response to it, see John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 15–32.

55 John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 31.

Among the many problems with the prosperity movement is that it ignores that clear teaching of Scripture on the subject of suffering. Read the following passages which attest to the necessity and purpose of Christian suffering:

John 15:18-20

¹⁸ *If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.* ¹⁹ *If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.* ²⁰ *Remember the word that I said to you: "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. . . .*

Acts 14:21-22

²¹ *When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,* ²² *strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*

1 Thessalonians 1:6-8

⁶ *And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,* ⁷ *so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.* ⁸ *For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.*

2 Timothy 3:12-13

¹² *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,* ¹³ *while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

1 Peter 4:12-14

¹² *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.* ¹³ *But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.* ¹⁴ *If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*

1 Peter 5:8-10

⁸ *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like*

a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

When Paul was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles, Jesus made it very clear that his call as a missionary was inseparable from his call to suffer (Acts 9:15-16). Paul speaks of these sufferings in a very provocative way in Colossians 1:24.

Colossians 1:24-27

²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

What does it mean that Paul is “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Colossians 1:24)?! What kind of lack could there possibly be in Christ’s afflictions? Does this mean that Christ’s atoning death was somehow not sufficient?

For help in understanding this puzzling phrase we look to the only other place in the New Testament which offers a close parallel construction to the Greek of Colossians 1:24 (underlined above). The parallel construction is underlined below and a second passage from Philippians is given to provide the necessary context for Paul’s remarks in Philippians 2.

Philippians 2:25-30

²⁵ I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹ So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰ for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Philippians 4:10-19

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. ¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

3. In view of the parallel between Colossians 1:24 and Philippians 2:30, what do you think it means that Paul is “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Colossians 1:24)?

- **ANSWER.** *It seems that Epaphroditus completed what was lacking in the financial gift of the Philippians not by adding more money to it but by making a personal delivery of it. Likewise, Paul fills up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions not by adding anything to the perfect, atoning sacrifice that Christ has already made but by presenting those sufferings in his own suffering so that the message is credibly delivered to those Christ came to save.*

So then, what can we say by way of summary? Why does God will that the mission of the church advance through suffering? Piper lists six reasons:

1. Suffering deepens faith and holiness (2 Cor 1:8–9 Heb 5:8, 12:10)
2. Suffering makes your cup increase (Matt 5:11–12; 2 Cor 4:17–18)
3. Suffering is the price of making others bold (Phil 1:14)
4. Suffering fills up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions (2 Cor 1:5–6; Col 1:24; 1 Thes 1:5–6)
5. Suffering enforces the missionary command to go. (Acts 8:1; 11:19; cf. 1:8)
6. The supremacy of Christ is manifest in suffering (2 Cor 1:9, 12:9–10; Phil

3:7–8; 1 Pet 1:6–9)⁵⁶

Similarly, Tennent declares that persecution serves four main purposes within the *missio dei*:

1. Persecution authenticates our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ (Luke 9:23–27; John 15:20)
2. Persecution is a normative part of training the church in discipleship and nurturing perseverance as we await the full consummation of the rule and reign of God (Matt 5:11–12, 10:22; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pet 4:12).
3. Persecution provides a context for the effective witness of the church (Luke 21:12–19)
4. Persecution is the normative expectation of a church living in the reality of the “not yet,” as we wait patiently for the full measure of suffering before the final consummation of the kingdom of God (Rom 8:18–25; 1 Pet 4:12–19)⁵⁷

When discussing how the kingdom of God advances in the world, we must also stress the role of the Holy Spirit who was given for the empowerment of Jesus’ disciples. In the work of the Holy Spirit the Trinitarian mission of God is complete.

THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

We can gain more confidence that our triune God will advance his gospel and kingdom by understanding the role the Spirit plays. Tennent addresses three major themes that “summarize the purpose and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the early church.”⁵⁸ He states:

First, the Holy Spirit empowers the church for a global mission... Just prior to the Ascension, Jesus tells His disciples to wait until they have been “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). Jesus goes on to say, “You will receive power when the Holy

⁵⁶ For John Piper’s explanation of these six points, see Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 108–125.

⁵⁷ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 483, 484.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 412.

Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8).

When the Day of Pentecost dawns... the Holy Spirit dramatically descends in a violent wind and with fire, two of the central images of the presence of God in the Old Testament. The fire immediately calls to mind Yahweh’s appearance to Moses in “flames of fire” at the burning bush (Exod 3:2), the pillar of fire that protected and guided the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod. 13:21–22), and Yahweh’s descent onto Mount Sinai in fire at the giving of the Law (Exod. 19:18). Pentecost is, after all, the time when the Israelites celebrated the giving of the Law. The wind recalls the breath of God, which gave life at creation (Gen. 2:7), or the manifest presence of God to the prophets (1 Kings 19:11–12; Ezek. 1:4; Nah. 1:3).

The disciples begin to “speak in other tongues” as the Spirit enables them (Acts 2:4). This manifestation should be understood as more than a mere sociological event that enables foreign visitors who were in Jerusalem... Rather, it was a theological statement whereby God takes the initiative to overturn the chaos of Babel, which symbolized the global rebellion against God (Gen. 11:1–9), and in its place empowers the church for a global mission of redemption to the ends of the earth.

Second, the Holy Spirit endues the church with God’s authority. Max Turner makes the observation that several of the key manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts are not linked to an empowerment-for-witness theme...⁵⁹ The Holy Spirit serves not only to empower the church to witness but also is the “teacher of the church” and the “executor of Christ’s will in the world” (John 15:26; 16:14–15).⁶⁰ The Holy Spirit conveys the revelation to the church by communicating to the church the will of God, thereby helping to bring the church under the authority of Christ. The early church regularly confesses that it is the Holy Spirit who inspired the biblical authors and, thereby, delivered to the church the Word of God (Acts 1:16; 4:25).

Third, the Holy Spirit extends the inbreaking of the New Creation through the

59 Max Turner, “The ‘Spirit of Prophecy’ as the Power of Israel’s Restoration and Witness,” in *Witness to the Gospel The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 341.

60 John A. Studebaker Jr, *The Lord Is the Spirit: The Authority of the Holy Spirit in Contemporary Theology and Church Practice* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008), 12, 19.

powerful manifestation of signs and wonders and holiness of life... *The signs and wonders were understood to accompany the preaching of the Word to provide divine confirmation of God's presence working through the church, bringing a unity of word and deed. For example, in Acts 4:30–31 the church prayed, "Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.' After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." Later, Luke records that in the ministry of Paul and Barabas in Iconium they "spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders" (14:3)...*

The same Spirit who empowers us for witness is the one who empowers us for holy living. The same Spirit who transforms the unbelieving nations of the world is the one who transforms our hearts, teaching us to say "no" to sin and to embrace the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Jesus's Great Commission is that we make *disciples* of all nations (who obey all Jesus commanded) not merely *converts*. It is crucial that we depend on the Holy Spirit who aims to glorify the Father and the Son in everything he does (John 16:7–15). This includes both empowering for witness and empowering for holy living as Tennent states. The Holy Spirit who convicts sinners so they can *confess* Jesus is Lord (1 Cor 12:3; 1 Thess 1:5) is the same Spirit who empowers those same sinners to *obey* Jesus as Lord (Rom 8:12–17; Gal 5:16–26).

In order to proclaim the gospel, we need the Spirit. In order for those anyone to see and love Jesus, they need the Spirit. In order for sinners to repent and obey Jesus, they need the Spirit. This is how Christ's kingdom advances, as the Spirit subdues more hearts and minds to the lordship of King Jesus.

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ROLE IN THE MISSIO DEI?

God promised that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham (Gen 12:1–3). The blessing promised by God to every nation through the Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ, is the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:1–14). And God's Spirit empowered witnesses to bless the ends of the earth with the gospel of Jesus (Acts 1:8).

The Holy Spirit was present at key turning points in the Book of Acts. See Tennent below:

The ethnic and geographic movement of the book of Acts from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the “ends of the earth” provides an important testimony to the larger global mission to which the church has been called. It reminds us of God’s promise and initiative in Genesis 12 to bless all the nations on earth. The witness and growth of the church, therefore, must be seen through the larger frame of God’s initiative and action in the missio dei.

Many of the key missiological turning points in Acts are precipitated by supernatural visions, including the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (9:3–6), Ananias’s obedience (9:10–16), Cornelius’s conversion (10:3–6), Peter’s obedience (10:9–20), and the direction of Paul’s missionary journeys (16:9), giving testimony to the Holy Spirit’s role as the director of God’s mission in and through the life and witness of the church.

Through visions, words of revelation, and signs and wonders, the Holy Spirit leads the church, not only in effective evangelism and witness, but also into a deeper understanding of the missio dei, often in ways that surprised the early Jewish Christians by challenging many of their attitudes and preexisting ideas about God’s work... The Holy Spirit took the initiative in the Gentile mission and is portrayed as the central actor in both speaking and sending.

Acts 13 records the sending out of Paul and his companions on the first of several church-planting initiatives, widely known today as the missionary journeys of Paul... While the church (of Antioch) was worshipping and fasting, “the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’” (13:2). The church obeyed and became the sending church for the apostle Paul... However, seen through the lens of the missio dei, it is clear that Antioch’s role as the sending church is clearly subordinate to the prior sending agency of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit not only initiated, called, and sent the missionaries into the Gentile mission, He also continued to direct the mission on the field...⁶¹

Tennent concludes with these important words to understand the Holy Spirit’s

⁶¹ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 428–30.

role in the *missio dei*:

*The unfolding story of Acts is certainly about the obedience of the early church to the Great Commission of Christ. However, it is also the story of the ongoing initiatives of God the Father through the Holy Spirit to direct and guide His church to extend the missio dei and fulfill His promise to Abraham. The Holy Spirit is still the agent of initiating, calling, sending, and directing the unfolding of the missio dei as He was in the life of the early church.*⁶²

⁶² Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 430.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. How does the Holy Spirit relate to the preached word, prayer, and suffering?
2. John Piper has written, “Loss and suffering, joyfully accepted for the kingdom of God, show the supremacy of God’s worth more clearly in the world than all worship and prayer.”⁶³ Do you agree with this provocative statement? Why or why not?

A SERMON ABOUT CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

Listen to the sermon “**Doing Missions When Dying Is Gain**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the Desiring God website (www.desiringgod.org). Clicking on the sermon title will allow you to listen to the sermon. You may also download the sermon onto your computer.

YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

⁶³ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 93.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ Jonathan K. Dodson, *The Unbelievable Gospel: Say Something Worth Believing* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2014).
- ▷ Randy Newman, *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2004)
- ▷ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3 edition. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2010). Chapters 1–3.
- ▷ John Piper, “You Will Be Eaten by Cannibals! Lessons from the Life of John G. Paton,” an online conference message at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ John Piper, “Prayer: The Work of Missions,” an online conference message at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. A. Scott Moreau, *Encountering Mission* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010). Chapter 10: Spiritual Dynamics and Mission
- ▷ William D. Taylor, Antonia Van Der Meer, and Reg Reimer, *Sorrow & Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom* (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2012)
- ▷ Timothy Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd edition. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010). Chapter 14.
- ▷ Josef Tson, “Courage in Christian Ministry,” an online conference message at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2004)

Doing Missions When Dying Is Gain

JOHN PIPER, 1996

Piper's prayer at Wheaton chapel

Bethlehem's mission statement and Matthew 24:14

The promise [of Matthew 24:14] is sure

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Optional starting point (13:06): Steve Saint's testimony

The price (and means) is suffering

"It seems to be woven into the very fabric of our consumer culture that we move toward comfort, toward security, toward ease, toward safety, away from stress, away from trouble, away from danger—and it ought to be exactly the _____!"

Colossians 1:24

"Christ intends for the Great Commission to be a presentation to the nations of the sufferings of his _____ in the sufferings of his _____."

J. Oswald Sanders and Raymond Lull

The prize is satisfying

Hebrews 10:32-34

"Doing missions when death is _____ is the greatest life in the world."

Closing prayer

The Sovereign God of Goers and Senders

6

INTRODUCTION

Thus far in this course we have asserted that God is on a mission to fill the earth with his glory. He plans to do this through the preaching, praying, and suffering of a people whom he has redeemed by the blood of his Son and empowered with his Holy Spirit. God's people will be sent out into the world to all nations to proclaim salvation in Christ and to make disciples.

What hasn't been emphasized in this course yet is the absolute certainty of God's success in his mission and the resultant success of Christian missions. In serving the sovereign God as a "goer" or a "sender" we participate in a cause that cannot fail. Consider two passages from the Old Testament.

Numbers 14:20-23

¹⁹ "Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now."²⁰ Then the LORD said, "I have pardoned, according to your word. ²¹ But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, ²² none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, ²³ shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it."

In this first passage God gives an oath to guarantee his judgment that the rebellious Israelites will die in the wilderness. The oath God gives has two grounds (underlined above): 1) "as I live" and 2) "as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD." As John Piper has pointed out, this parallel construction indicates that "God's intention to fill the earth with the glory of the

Lord is as certain as his very existence.”⁶⁴

Another passage that makes a similar point is Malachi 1:8-11.

Malachi 1:8-11

⁸ *When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts.* ⁹ *And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts.* ¹⁰ *Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.* ¹¹ *For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.*

God declares that his name *will* be great among the nations. It *will* happen. Even the disobedience of God’s own people cannot thwart the global fame of God’s name.

So in this last lesson we will celebrate the inevitable triumph of God’s mission and Christian missions. The glory of God will be truly global and the unfinished task will be completed.

John Piper writes, “The modern missionary movement did not arise in a theological vacuum. It grew out of a great Reformed tradition that put the sovereignty of God square in the center of human life.”⁶⁵

As we consider God’s sovereignty and the certainty that he will fulfill his mission, we will allow space for you to consider what God might be calling you to do in order to join him in his purposes for the world.

64 John Piper, “He Commanded and They Were Created,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

65 John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 74-75.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ explain how the heavenly vision of Revelation 5 relates to Christian missions.
- ▷ explain what effect Jesus' promise in John 10:16 is meant to have.
- ▷ list practical points of application that flow from what has been learned in the course.



Since this is the last lesson of the course, it might be appropriate to spend about 15 minutes at the end of class either discussing any remaining questions or discussing ways in which the students' view of God and missions has changed during the course. (The second discussion question is related to this.) Either of these options might help draw things together in their minds and give them a sense of closure.

Another helpful way of concluding the course would be to focus on the list of application points from the third lesson question. You might even want to discuss with your students ways in which they can hold each other accountable for things they believe the Lord has laid on their heart.



THE LION-LAMB HAS CONQUERED!

Another text that underlines the definite triumph of God's mission through Jesus Christ is the well-known heavenly vision of Revelation 5. Though it is not our focus in this lesson, contemplate how John seems to understand the term "nation" in verse 9 by noticing what other terms are put in parallel with it.

Revelation 5:5-10

⁵ And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." ⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, ¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

1. How might Revelation 5:9 in particular be a great encouragement for those involved in Christian missions?

- **ANSWER.** Here is an answer given by John Piper, "A Theology for Missions" (an online conference message at the *Desiring God* website):
"The ransomed children of God will be found in every people reached by the gospel." Patrick Johnstone says (p. 36 of a previous edition of *Operation World*), 'All the distinct races, tribes, peoples and tongues of the world must be so disciplined that there are at a minimum some representatives of every one of them among the redeemed before the Throne of the Lamb (Revelation 7:9-10).' So we may be sure on the authority of God's Word that among all the peoples of the world we will find people who belong to God's

flock. That is a great encouragement to get on with the task of frontier missions and to reach the hidden peoples.”

Here are other texts in the book of Revelation which speak of the ultimate triumph of God among all the nations of the earth:

Revelation 7:9-10

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Revelation 15:2-4

² And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. ³ And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! ⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

Revelation 21:22-27

²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

It is this great, biblical vision of the sovereign, triumphant God that will provide us with the courage, confidence, hope, and joy to preach the gospel throughout the earth and make disciples among all nations even when we are opposed, reviled, discouraged, and even killed.

There are four reasons we can be absolutely sure that the mission of God will

triumph in the world. First, the word of Jesus is more sure than the heavens and the earth (Matthew 24:35). Second, the ransom has already been paid for all God's elect, and God did not spill the blood of his Son in vain (Revelation 5:9). Third, the glory of God is at stake and in the end he will not share his glory with another (Isaiah 48:9-11). Fourth, God is sovereign and can do all things and no purpose of his can be thwarted (Job 42:2).⁶⁶

I HAVE OTHER SHEEP

At present, the task is unfinished. God still has other people to save and other sheep to call. Again, the fact that God's mission is not yet complete but one day surely will be is a bedrock for hope in Christian missions. Everything hangs on the sovereignty and mercy of God.

The Apostle Paul encountered resistance nearly everywhere he went. In Corinth we learn that Paul was opposed and reviled (Acts 18:6). He must have been tempted to give in to fear, despair, exhaustion, bitterness, loneliness, and anxiety. So God comes to him in a vision to encourage him. Notice what God says:

Acts 18:8-11

⁸ Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. ⁹ And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." ¹¹ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

The Lord strengthens Paul by telling him that he is with Paul. No man can prematurely end God's plan for Paul's life because God is going to use Paul to bring certain chosen people to God. We may take the Lord's encouragement to Paul as encouragement for us as well. God has many people in many cities throughout the world who will believe when they hear the gospel. These elect will certainly believe at some point, yet it may not happen during our ministry to them. When we go out in faith (or support those who do), God will use us in some way to reach his elect. Our ministry may be simply tilling up the soil so it is

⁶⁶ John Piper, "A Passion for the Supremacy of Christ—Where He Is Not Named," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.org) website.

more fertile for those that come after us.

God is sovereign and he is jealous for his glory (Exo 34:14; Eze 39:25). He will certainly fulfill his promise that his glory be prized by every people, tribe, language, and nation. We must trust this promise and remain faithful even if there are not evident signs of fruit during our own ministry. In short, remember the balance between God's certainty to accomplish his plan and our privilege to partake however he chooses to use us.

God's words to Paul are echoed by Jesus during his earthly ministry:

John 10:11-16

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

2 Timothy 2:8-10

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

There will always be people who argue that the doctrine of election makes missions unnecessary. But they are wrong. It does not make missions unnecessary; it makes missions hopeful. John Alexander, a former president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, said in a message at Urbana '67 (a decisive event in my own life), "At the beginning of my missionary career I said that if predestination were true I could not be a missionary. Now after twenty some years of struggling with the hardness of the human heart, I say I could never be a missionary unless I believed in the doctrine of predestination." It gives hope that Christ most certainly has "other sheep" among the nations.⁶⁷

67 John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 75-76.

2. Drawing upon the passages above and everything you have learned in this course, put into your own words how you would express the relationship between God's mission and Christian missions.

· **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary.*

GO, SEND, OR DISOBEY

We have arrived at the end of this course and now it is time to think about what God's mission in the world and throughout history means for *you*. You cannot escape God's global purposes. You will either be working with him or working against him.

Consider this second thing that Bethlehem Baptist Church has learned to feed their passion for the supremacy of God among the nations:

We discovered that God's purpose to be known and praised and enjoyed among all the nations cannot fail. It is an absolutely certain promise. It is going to happen.

Jesus said, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come." The ground of this certainty is the sovereignty of Jesus: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). Nothing can stop him: "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

From this discovery we saw that if we as a church are disobedient, it is not ultimately the cause of God and the cause of world missions that will lose—we will lose. God's counsel will stand and he will accomplish all his purpose (Isaiah 46:10). His triumph is never in question, only our participation in it or our incalculable loss. We can be drunk with private concerns and indifferent to the great enterprise of world evangelization, but God will simply pass over us and do his great work while we shrivel up in our little land of comfort.

The purpose of God in world missions will not fail.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ John Piper, "World Missions and the End of History," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.org) website.

It is probable that most people who complete this course will not go, nor should they necessarily. One does not have to be a frontier missionary to participate in the mission of God.

Read the following passage very carefully to learn about another way in which Christian missions can be engaged apart from going:

³ John 1:2-8

² Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. ³ For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. ⁴ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. ⁵ Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, ⁶ who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. ⁷ For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸ Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

Here are some comments on this passage from Tom Steller:

The reason we must send [missionaries] in a manner worthy of God is that they go out for the sake of the name. The name of God is at stake in how we treat our missionaries. God is glorified when we support them substantially with our prayers, our money, our time, and myriad other practical ways (notice the “whatever” in verse 5). God is not glorified when our missionaries are simply a name on the back of the church bulletin or a line item in the budget.

It is not of secondary importance to be engaged in this ministry of sending. It is a very high calling. It is walking in the truth. It is the manifestation of a healthy and prospering soul. Senders are fellow workers with the truth. To send in a manner worthy of God is a call to excellence in the support of missionaries. It is a direct participation in God’s purpose. . . .

Not every Christian is called to be a missionary, but every follower of Christ is called to be a world Christian. A world Christian is someone who is so gripped by the glory of God and the glory of his global purpose that he chooses to align himself with God’s mission to fill the earth with the knowledge of his glory as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14).⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Tom Steller in the *Afterword to Let the Nations Be Glad*, 262-263, 264.

As John Piper has said, we can only have one of three responses to the glorious vision of God's mission and Christian missions: we can either go ourselves, send others, or disobey.

3. Do you feel called to go or to send? List below some practical things that you can do in response to what you have learned in this course:

- **ANSWER.** *Answers will vary.*



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. If God had simply offered salvation to all the people groups and had not accomplished it for some (or “purchased” some), what might change in the way we talk about the mission of God?
2. What is one thing that you learned during this course which will help you to be (or become) a “world Christian”?



A SERMON ABOUT CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

Listen to the sermon “**Other Sheep I Have**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the Desiring God website (www.desiringgod.org). Clicking on the sermon title will allow you to listen to the sermon. You may also download the sermon onto your computer.



YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.



- ▷ Borthwick, *Western Christians in Global Mission*.
- ▷ David A. Livermore, *Serving with Eyes Wide Open: Doing Short-Term Missions with Cultural Intelligence*, Updated ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012).
- ▷ Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth: The Whole Gospel Wholly by Grace Communicated Truthfully & Lovingly*, 04 edition. (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2013).
- ▷ Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. A. Scott Moreau, Encountering Mission (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010). Chapter 7: The Motivation for Mission
- ▷ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, Americanized edition. (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2012).
- ▷ John Piper et al., *Finish the Mission: Bringing the Gospel to the Unreached and Unengaged*, ed. John Piper and David Mathis, 1 ed. (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2012).
- ▷ John Piper, “I Will Build My Church’—From All Peoples,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ John Piper, “The Lord Stood By Me . . . That All the Nations Might Hear,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ Stiles, Mack and Leeann Stiles, *Mack and Leeann’s Guide to Short Term Missions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2000).
- ▷ Ralph D. Winter and Hawthorne, Steven C., eds., “The Lausanne Covenant,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, 4th ed. (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2013), 764–68.
- ▷ Dustin Willis and Aaron Coe, *Life on Mission: Joining the Everyday Mission of God* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2014).

Other Sheep I Have

JOHN PIPER, 2009

“Missions . . . can be and should be driven by a glorious _____ of God.”

Carey’s vision of God

John 10:16 in context

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

John 10:16’s historical effects

Why John 10:16 empowers missions

- 1.

John Alexander’s testimony

Paul in Corinth

- 2.

“You will not go to any single people-group on the planet where God doesn’t have a _____ —
amazingly powerful for these early missionaries.”

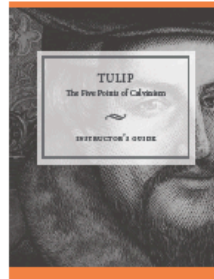
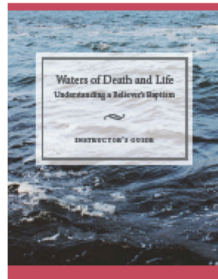
- 3.
- 4.

God's Mission and Christian Missions

God's Global Glory and the Unfinished Task

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