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# The Mission of God's People in the Old Testament

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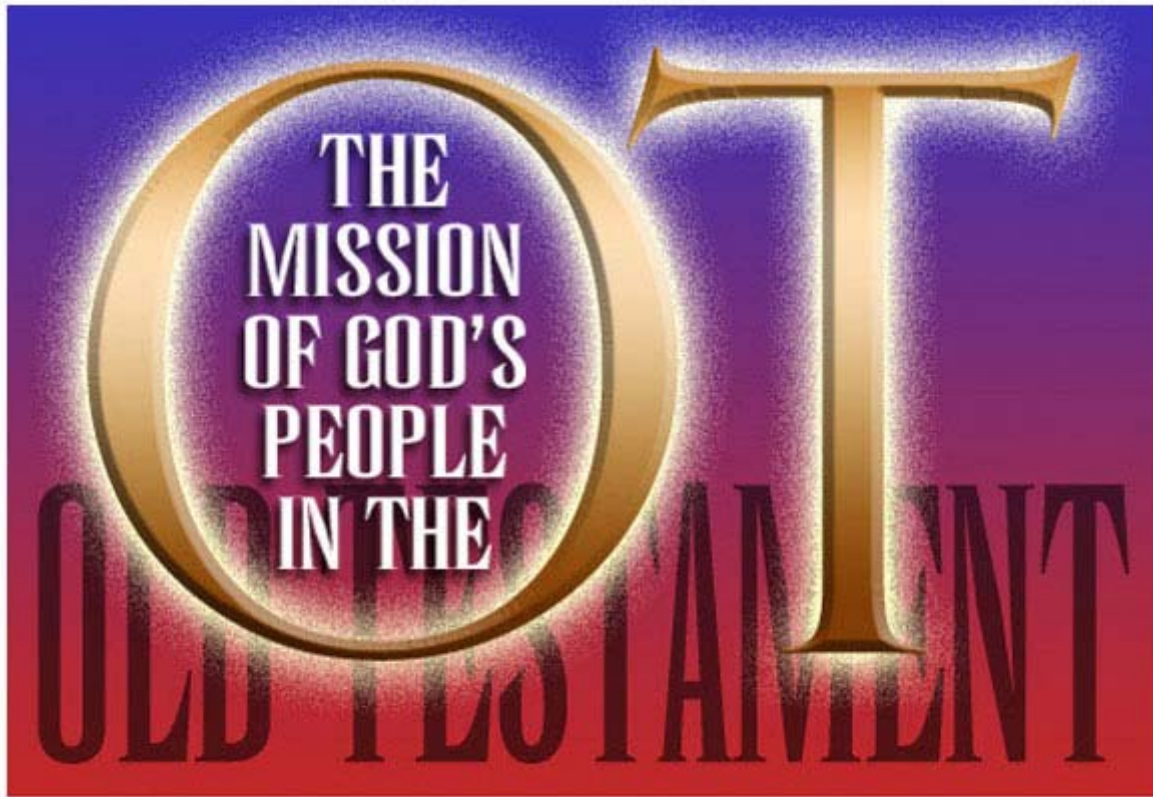
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***God's great commission truly began in the Garden of Eden.***

**By Jirí Moskala**

When God calls His people into existence, He gives them a mission. There were no Old Testament people of God without a mission; there is no election without a commission. God's call presupposes a call for action. Biblical theology is a mission-oriented theology.

The Hebrew Scripture knows nothing about an election for salvation but knows an election for mission (Ex. 3:7-10; 7:1, 2; 19:5, 6; Jer. 1:5). The mission and the message of the Old Testament people, even though both issues can be separated, belong firmly together. The mission includes the proclamation of the message.<sup>1</sup>

Some scholars, however, argue that in the Old Testament

there is no specific call to evangelize the world. Eckhard J. Schnabel, for example, challenges Old Testament scholars, theologians, and missiologists by claiming that there is no commission in the Old Testament (in contrast to the New Testament) to go and evangelize the world. Abraham, Israel, and others, Schnabel says, were only passive witnesses for God, a light to the world, but not actually engaged in mission per se. He argues that there was nothing like an active programmatic plan to proclaim God's message to the whole world during the times of Israel's monarchy or intertestamental Judaism; thus, they did not engage in mission.<sup>2</sup>

In response to this claim, one must first acknowledge that the modern reader of the Hebrew Scripture might have different questions and expectations than one can readily find answered in the biblical text because the basic characteristic of the Old Testament is that of a storybook with a metanarrative on salvation. It is neither a handbook on mission with a philosophy, nor a blueprint for a programmatic missiological behavior. Also, the biblical language and imagery employed in regard to the mission are different from what we use today.

One should not be surprised to find a lack of direct commands to mission, but instead there are stories in which are expressed hints and observations as well as some explicit statements that uncover the mission of God's people in Hebrew Scripture. These incidental expressions witness about the mission strategy in a different form, and they are not as straightforward as one could wish.

In addition, the metanarrative of the Old Testament unfolds only progressively God's universal plan for the whole world. It helps to realize that God had a global plan, a blueprint for the people of God to fulfill, but it has not always been plainly perceived. Christopher Wright fittingly states that "the mission of God is to bless all nations on earth. . . . Israel in the Old

Testament was not chosen over against the rest of the nations, but for the sake of the rest of the nations."<sup>3</sup> God's plan for humanity can be expressed by the statement found in Isaiah: "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other" (Isa. 45:22).<sup>4</sup>

David J. Bosch wittily states: "If there is a missionary in the Old Testament, it is God Himself who will, as his eschatological deed *par excellence*, bring the nations to Jerusalem to worship him there together with his covenant."<sup>5</sup> If this is so, then one can deduce that God will not do it Himself, but His working method will utilize humans to accomplish His objective (Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 19:4-6). John A. McIntosh defines God's mission as doing everything possible to communicate salvation to the world.<sup>6</sup> Thus, God's universal purpose is actually the "basis for the missionary message of the Old Testament."<sup>7</sup> God has a mission, and the believers in Him are to participate in it.

## A Twofold Mission

The mission of the Old Testament people was twofold:

- For Israel's children and the following generations, there was to be an inward focus (centripetal). Parents were expected to repeat the stories of deliverance to their children (Ex. 12:24-27; Deut. 6:4-9; Isa. 38:19): "One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts. They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works" (Ps. 145:4, 5). The account of God's goodness was to be passed on from each generation to the next. "Tell your children and grandchildren" (Ex. 10:2) is God's crucial instruction.
- For the other nations, the Gentile world (even to the distant islands [Isa. 66:19])—there was an outward focus (centrifugal). The mission of the people of the Old Testament was directed toward others who did not belong to the community of

faith. There is a growing number of scholars who take the Old Testament as a basis of biblical mission. Harold Henry, for example, speaks about Moses as “the first missionary of whom we have any knowledge.”<sup>8</sup> Bosch mentions that “stories of pagans like Ruth and Naaman who accepted the faith of Israel”<sup>9</sup> indicate the missionary nature of the Old Testament. Others recognize individuals such as Abraham, Melchizedek, Jethro, Balaam, and Jonah as agents of God’s mission.

Prophets of God were not only speaking to their own people, but they also prophesied about many nations as well; God will judge all (e.g., Jeremiah 46–51; Eze. 25–32; Amos 1–2; Jonah; Obadiah). God was concerned with all nations, and the message of the Old Testament people transcended Israel’s borders. God did not provide warnings to people without a purpose; He always wanted to steer them to repentance (see Genesis 6:3; Jonah 3).

### **Universal Mission**

The mission of the people of the Old Testament began only after the appearance of sin, when two different ways of life were chosen (see two lines of genealogies—Cain and Seth—in Genesis 4; 5). The followers of God were to carry the message of salvation to others (Isa. 66:19; Ps. 67:2; 96:3). This mission was universal in scope. Unfortunately, God’s people did not always succeed in their mission.

Because of his fall into sin, Adam failed in his mission to lead all his family to God. Allusion to this function can be seen in Genesis 1:28. This implicit role for Adam and Eve derives also from the fact that they were directly created by God Himself and created first. It follows that they should keep the creation order and lead humanity in respect, admiration, and obedience to God in order to maintain a right relationship with Him.

Arthur F. Glasser aptly states: “God called Adam and Eve to

accept responsibility for this world as his viceregents, to serve and control it under his direction and for his glory."<sup>10</sup> The power of evil was such a destructive force that it broke down good while letting evil triumph and degrading people to such an extent that God had to intervene with the Flood (Gen. 6:5, 6, 11-13).

The first hint about intentional mission activities in the Bible can be detected in Genesis 4:26 when Seth began to proclaim/preach the name of the Lord. This possible translation can be found in Martin Luther's and Robert Young's versions. It seems that this mission was first family oriented and gradually enlarged as humanity grew more numerous. Seth's descendants continued the proclamation, as is suggested by the phrase that "Enoch walked with God" (Gen. 5:24). But as they mixed with the descendants of Cain's line, they failed, and faithful people almost disappeared (Gen. 6:1-8).

Genesis 1 to 11 is universal in scope. Before the Flood, when the iniquity was rapidly growing, the Spirit of God was striving with people to call them to repentance, unfortunately in vain (Gen. 6:3, 5). In addition, God called Noah to be His messenger, to be a preacher of righteousness to the antediluvian world (2 Peter 2:5), and to call all people to make the right decision for God and enter the ark. The biblical flood was worldwide; therefore, his mission had to be worldwide, too. He was like a savior for his generation, but the Tower of Babel soon finished the good beginning after the Flood (Gen. 11:1-9). God, for the third time, had to start from scratch, but this time with Abraham (Gen. 12:1; 15:7).

The universality of the mission was explicitly mentioned for the first time in regard to Abraham. The Great Commission of the Old Testament declares: "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). The Lord stresses it three times to Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). He is to be a light to the whole world. God's seven-fold blessing contained the key

imperative phrase (in the center position): "I will bless you. . . . Be a blessing. . . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:2, 3).

Note the imperative in the divine statement, which is usually overlooked. God commands Abraham to be a blessing to others because He blessed him. The Lord's blessing cannot and should not be taken selfishly. Abraham needed to live for others. Genesis 12:2, 3 was therefore God's programmatic statement for Abraham and those who would follow the same faith. Walter Kaiser accurately articulates that this text provides "the formative theology" for "a divine program to glorify himself by bringing salvation to all on planet earth."<sup>11</sup> Abraham thus became the special messenger, missionary, to the entire world, with a mission that would only later be carried by Israel and fully fulfilled by *Ebed Yahweh* (Isa. 42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-9) on an even larger scale because He would be the Salvation (not only that he would declare, bring, or proclaim it) for the whole world (49:6).

In many places where Abraham traveled and lived, he built altars and called on the name of the Lord (Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:4, 18). In this way, he witnessed about his unique God. Abraham's first "missionary" journey to Egypt failed, however, because of his disbelief, and he had to be escorted out (12:10-20). Later, he fulfilled his prophetic role in regard to the king of Sodom (14:17-24). He grew through his defeats (described in Genesis 16; 20), struggles, and victories (18:16-33; 22:1-19) in such a way that at the end God stated that "Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commandments, my decrees and my instructions" (26:5). The knowledge about the God of Abraham was to grow in the world in such a way that even "the nobles of the nations [will] assemble as the people of the God of Abraham" (Ps. 47:9). Abraham's God would meet them, and they were to follow Him. "All nations on earth will be blessed through him" (Gen. 18:18) because God's ultimate wish is

always to bless all humanity. Abraham is a model of God's mission.

Genesis 10, a previous chapter containing a table of 70 nations (a symbolic number standing for the totality of nations), introduces the narrative about Abraham, which means that Abraham was to be a blessing to the whole world. Abraham also needed, however, to be a teacher to his children. He was to teach them about the true God, instruct them about God's ways, and direct them to keep His law in order that they might live according to "the way of the Lord" (Gen. 18:19) and do everything according to the will of God.

Abraham's universal mission was repeated to Isaac (26:4), and reaffirmed to Jacob (28:13-15; 35:11, 12; 46:3) and Moses (Ex. 3:6-8; 6:2-8). Moses together with Israel needed to continue this universal mission to the whole world, starting as being light to the Egyptians, spreading out by the Exodus (Josh. 2:8-12), and continuing on throughout the many centuries (Isa. 42:6, 7). The purpose of the ten plagues in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea was not only to show that the Egyptians' gods were nothing (Ex. 12:12), but also to demonstrate to the Egyptians that God was the Lord (Ex. 7:5, 17).

God called Israel to an ethical distinctiveness (Lev. 11:44, 45; 18:3; Micah 6:6-8). They were to be committed to a holy life, because only in this way could they live to the glory of God and His name, attract people to Him, be a light to the nations, and the nations could see their wisdom (Deut. 4:6; Isa. 58:8; Eze. 36:23). Moses' speech to Israel, when he stressed the importance of obedience to God and His law (Deut. 4:5-8), implies the visibility and some kind of missionary activities of Israel.

The mission of the Old Testament people can be summarized by God's ideal for Israel: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will



be for me a kingdom of priests [thus, a mediatorial role of Israel for other nations is anticipated; they should be the means of bringing people to God] and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:5, 6).

### **Specific Examples of Missionary Activities**

The question remains: Was Israel’s witnessing passive or active? Did they actually go to foreign countries to speak about their living, loving, and holy God? As mentioned above, opinions differ. There are only a few examples of active witnessing. One may consider the following cases of how God called specific individuals or people and sent them to accomplish particular tasks:

- Joseph was brought to Egypt by jealousy and the intrigues of his brothers, but God changed it in such a way that he became a savior for Egypt and his family and a witness for a true God (Gen. 45:5-8; 50:19-21).
- God called Moses and sent him to Egypt to encounter Pharaoh and the Egyptian gods (Ex. 12:12). It is explicitly stated that God sent him there, which means that Moses was commissioned by God to present to Egypt a living Lord (Ex. 3:10-15; Deut. 34:11).
- For Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aram, it was through the initiative and witness of a young slave Israelite girl in Syria that he became acquainted with the true God of heaven (2 Kings 5:15).
- The prophet Elisha went to Damascus. When he was there, Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, sent his messenger to him to inquire if he would recover from his illness (2 Kings 8:7-15).
- The most obvious missionary activity is recorded in the Book of Jonah. This prophet was not willing to go and fulfill God’s commission. At the end, he wondered what was wrong with God when He saved the cruel Ninevites. Jonah saw the salvation of

Ninevites as evil, and he refused to agree with God's compassion (Jonah 3:10; 4:1). In a dramatic way, God taught His prophet about the universality of God's salvation (4:6-11). The Lord demonstrated His unselfish love for all, even for the enemies of His people.

- The Prophet Isaiah, at the conclusion of his book, declared that God will send missionaries to the whole world (Isa. 66:19). The result will be that "from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the Lord" (vs. 23, NKJV).

- A number of Old Testament prophets (Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) dedicate large portions of their books (Obadiah's whole book) to pronounce judgments against other nations, which suggests that God was purposely working for these nations. They were responsible for their behavior and accountable to the Lord.

Jeremiah sent Seraiah to Babylon with a scroll, which first had to be read aloud, and then a symbolic act of sinking the scroll had to be performed (Jer. 51:59-64). Seraiah's case offers a unique example of a prophetic message that could be heard in a foreign land and provides the evidence that the oracles against foreign nations could be actually delivered in the foreign countries. Daniel and his three friends witnessed to Babylon's top officials and the king about the true God (Daniel 1-3). They helped Nebuchadnezzar to know the Most High God.

After his conversion, described in Daniel 4, he wrote a letter to all nations about the mighty Most High God who had humbled him and about the King of heaven who would reign forever (Dan. 4:1-3, 37). Daniel also witnessed to the last Babylonian king, Belshazzar (Daniel 5), to Darius the Mede and the high Medo-Persian officials (Daniel 6), and possibly even to Cyrus (Dan. 1:21; 6:28; 10:1), who issued the decree to allow the Jews to return home from Babylonian captivity (2 Chron. 36:22, 23; Ezra 1:1-4). Glover rightly describes Daniel as a missionary.

- Witnessing to Gentiles is presented in the Psalms, the missionary book *par excellence*: “I will praise you, Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples” (Ps. 57:9); “Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples” (117:1, 2).

It is also true that the geographical location of Israel (placed at the main crossroads of Middle East international routes, between Egypt and Assyria or Babylon) was a very significant factor in the Israelites’ being witnesses for their God and an object lesson for the nations. Different cultures, merchants, religions, nations, and people were meeting there, and people were confronted with a different system of beliefs.

The importance of the worldwide mission of Israel is underlined in the fact that the temple in Jerusalem would be the mega-world center for a true worship (Isa. 2:2) and that everyone would come there and learn how to worship the true God (Isa. 2:3, 4; 56:2-8; 62:9-11). The Israelites would become teachers of righteousness: “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, “Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you”’” (Zech. 8:23).

During the time of the Exile, Daniel pronounced a blessing on those who would lead others to righteousness (Dan. 12:3). It is noteworthy to stress that his message has an international connotation and perspective (2:31-47; 7:1-14). It is God who “changes times and seasons; . . . deposes kings and raises up others” (2:21).

### **Additional Biblical Support**

The righteous acts of God during the Exodus were heard about by many other nations (e.g., Joshua 2:8-11). Hiram, the

king of Tyre, spoke very highly about the Lord, God of Solomon: "Because the Lord loves his people, he has made you their king. . . . Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who made heaven and earth!" (2 Chron. 2:11, 12). The queen of Sheba visited Solomon because his fame had reached her far country (1 Kings 10:1-9; 2 Chron. 9:1-8). These narratives suggest that other nations also heard about the God of Israel and Solomon's wisdom.

Paradoxically, sometimes God's people needed to go through troubles or even be sent into exile so that they might accomplish their primary mission—to be a light to the world.

Two missionary Psalms (67; 96) express very eloquently a universal mission and focus on God's promise to Abraham that he and his posterity would be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Psalm 67 is built on the Aaronic benediction from Numbers 6:24-26 in which the name of the Lord, *Yahweh* (which expresses the idea of a personal God of His covenant people), is changed for God (*elohim*) to stress the universal call of God to all nations to praise Him: "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us—so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth. May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you. The land yields its harvest; God, our God, blesses us. May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him" (Ps. 67:1-7).

In Psalm 96:2-9, the psalmist calls believers to proclaim God's salvation among the nations: "Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him;

strength and glory are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.”

There are also other texts in Psalms that call for missionary activities among the nations: “Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts” (Ps. 105:1, 2). “I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame” (119:46). “Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them.’ The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy” (126:2, 3). “They [the Lord’s faithful people, according to verse 10] tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that all people may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom” (145:11, 12). “My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever” (vs. 21). The psalmists thus declare that they will praise God among the nations (57:9; 108:3), and the kingdoms of the earth should “sing to God” (68:32). Thus, the whole earth will “be filled with his glory” (72:19).

As a result of these witnessing exercises, Egyptians and Ethiopians will submit to the Lord (Ps. 68:31); all kings will bow down to him and all nations serve the Davidic King, the Messiah (72:11), God will be “feared by the kings of the earth” (76:12), and will judge all the nations as His inheritance (82:8), and “all the nations . . . will come and worship” before the Lord (86:9). Foreigners then will be like the natives enjoying the benefits of citizenship (87:4–6), and “all people” will know of God’s “mighty acts” (145:12).

The Prophet Isaiah explained that the descendants of Israel

would be a spectacle to all nations of God's goodness to them: "Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed. I delight greatly in the Lord; . . . he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations" (Isa. 61:9-11).

God foretells the bright future of Zion and Jerusalem in these terms: "The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow" (Isa. 62:2). Isaiah speaks about missionaries who "will proclaim [the Lord's] glory among the nations" (66:19). Isaiah continues by stressing what the Lord will do: "I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites" (vs. 21). The Book of Isaiah ends with the international and worldwide dimension of worship: "From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me" (vs. 23, NKJV). In this context it is interesting to notice Isaiah's rebuke to King Hezekiah for not fulfilling his God-given mission by not sharing God's salvation message with the Babylonian emissaries but instead showing off his royal treasures (2 Kings 20:12-19; 2 Chron. 32:31).

The Prophet Zephaniah strikingly notes that "the nations on every shore will worship [the Lord]," not only in Jerusalem, but "every one in its own land" (Zeph. 2:11), and remarkably states that God will "purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder" (3:9). God projected that even from beyond Cush (Ethiopia) will come His worshipers who are called His people to serve Him:

“From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings” (vs. 10). The NIV Study Bible comments: “Israel’s God will be acknowledged by the nations, and God’s people will be honored by them (cf. vss. 19, 20).”<sup>12</sup> Greg King underlines that God’s true worshipers “will be the recipients of international fame and honor”<sup>13</sup> and that “peoples from the most distant places . . . will experience salvation and will worship Yahweh on His day. He is the redemptive King not only of the Judahites, but also of people from many nations.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, “on two occasions (2:11; 3:9, 10), Zephaniah depicted worship of Yahweh taking place on a worldwide basis by those who are delivered from the judgment. . . . There will be so many that they will stand shoulder to shoulder, serving Yahweh unitedly (3:9).”<sup>15</sup> Because of that, God is depicted in a unique activity (never again mentioned in the entire Old Testament). He is singing over His people with joy: “The Lord your God is with you, the mighty warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you, in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing” (3:17).

The prophetic word of God was to be promulgated to others, but this word needed to be accompanied by godly behavior. In this way, the God of Israel would be attractive to all nations, and they would come and worship Him (Isa. 56:6, 7; 61:9-11; 62:2). As a result of such activities, kings would issue edicts in favor of Jerusalem’s temple (Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes). Otherwise, the people of God would be a byword and object of scorn (Joel 2:17; Eze. 36:20, 21). God is either dead or alive in people’s minds. Consequently, it depends to a great degree on the behavior of His followers; their deeds are a stronger witness and speak louder than words as to whether their God is in their lives or not (Eze. 20:41; 36:23; Hosea 1:9; 2:21-23).

If God’s remnant people truly accomplish His task, then people will come to the Lord and become His faithful followers.

Isaiah and Micah prophetically envisioned a time when "Many peoples [nations] will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to . . . the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths' " (Isa. 2:3). Zechariah underscored it very emphatically: "Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people" (Zech. 2:11).

The people of God in the Old Testament were to be an object lesson for other people and nations. When nations saw what God had done for them, they should have recognized the God of Israel as a living God and followed Him because He was the true King. Thus, God was showing Himself holy through His people in the sight of many nations (Joshua 2:9-14; Isa. 61:9-11; Eze. 7, 27-29). This is a different type of evangelism than what Christians usually have in mind: not so much by proclamation, but by being a living example of God's intervening grace. Witnessing without practical lifestyle support is empty, harmful, and destructive. It can never be overemphasized that the exemplary conduct of God's people was and is the best witness for the Lord. "I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Sovereign Lord, "when I am proved holy through you before their eyes" (Eze. 36:23).

### **God's Working With Gentiles (Outside of Israel)**

God called His people to a certain mission, and His people needed to fulfill that mission, but God also worked outside of Israel. The Old Testament remnant was not an elect elite group who would be uniquely saved, but they were elected for a mission. This does not mean, however, that God did not also use other individuals or did not work for other people outside of the main community of faith. How this was done is not always



revealed to us; it is simply stated.

Examples of God's working with different people outside of Israel include:

- Melchizedek, king of Salem and the priest of the God Most High (Gen. 14:18-20). Melchizedek appears suddenly on the scene as an unknown character, blesses Abraham, and expresses his strong belief in the Creator God who gave victory to Abraham over their enemies. Abraham, as an expression of his love and gratitude to God for all he received from God, gave his tithe to Melchizedek. Because Melchizedek faithfully served the Lord, he became a type for Christ (Heb. 7:1-3, 11-17).

- Jethro, the priest of Midian and Moses's father-in-law (Ex. 18:1). After hearing from Moses what the Lord had done for Israel in Egypt, Jethro praises Yahweh: "Praise be to the Lord, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly" (Ex. 18:10, 11).

- Balaam, a prophet of God. Balaam pronounces messianic prophecies (Num. 24:17-19) in the midst of his apostasy (Numbers 22-24), which cost him his life (31:8).

- Rahab, the prostitute in Jericho. Rahab heard about the God of Israel, believed, helped two Israelite spies, saved her family from destruction, and joined the people of God (Joshua 2:1-21; 6:17, 25). Rahab later married Salmon, son of Nahshon, one of the prominent princes of Judah (Num. 7:12), and became an ancestor of the Messiah.

- God worked with other nations, e.g., the Cushites, Philistines, and Arameans. The prophet Amos boldly proclaims God's intervention for these nations: "Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?" declares the Lord. 'Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?" (Amos 9:7). There are no historical records

about these activities of God, and there is no other biblical passage that witnesses about them except this text in Amos.

- God gave the Canaanite people 400 years of grace to repent and return to Him (Gen. 15:13-16). Similarly, before the Flood, God offered 120 years of grace (6:3). In both cases, however, rebellion against God continued.

- The nations were judged by God. As already mentioned, many prophets uttered oracles against foreign nations (Isaiah 13-23; Jeremiah 46-51; Amos 1-2). This suggests that God has revealed to them the truth and that they were accountable for their actions to God (see especially the books of Jonah and Obadiah).

- Nebuchadnezzar, the famous Babylonian king, wrote a letter to the pagan world about his dramatic conversion story and powerfully witnessed about God's eternal kingdom and the Most High God who humiliated him and revealed His sovereignty to him (Daniel 4).

God ultimately puts together these two different groups (God's faithful remnant—people from the mainstream of His church, and people who work outside of this pattern). "Insiders" and "outsiders" belong together. Melchizedek came in contact with Abraham (Gen. 14:18-20); Rahab with Israel (Joshua 2); Jethro with Moses (Exodus 3; 18); Naaman with Elisha (2 Kings 5); Nebuchadnezzar with Daniel (Daniel 1; 2; 4); Ahasuerus [Xerxes] with Esther (Esther 1-9). Moabite Ruth expressed this so eloquently to Israelite Naomi: "Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

Isaiah describes this multiethnic relationship with amazing words and provides a vivid picture: "In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will

bless them, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance' " (Isa. 19:23–25). This is a stunning statement. Not only Israel, but also Egypt and Assyria are called the people of God, and they are to worship together.

### **God, the Missionary**

God has a breathtaking mega-plan to bless and save the whole world. For that purpose, however, He uses human instruments, and through them He leads people to Himself (Isa. 45:22). From the very beginning, the horizon of mission for the Old Testament people was to be worldwide. Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others had their mission to fulfill.

The ultimate, intentional purpose of God in electing Abraham, or Israel, was to become a blessing, light, and witness to the entire world about the true God so that everyone could come to a saving knowledge of the living and loving Lord. The goal of God's plan was always to invite all human beings to salvation. From the very beginning, the plan of redemption was never concealed nor reserved only for one family, group, or nation. Through Abraham and his posterity, all the families of the earth were to be blessed. The Old Testament vision of mission was all-inclusive.

Mission is about more than merely going somewhere, sending someone, or doing something. Mission is primarily about being—being a special people with a special message that needs to be modeled in real life. This has implications for Christian ecclesiology, and particularly for Adventist ecclesiology, which can be summarized in several points:

- Mission means identification with God's ultimate goal for saving humanity and working out this plan.
- Being is more important than sending. The call to an ethical lifestyle and living tangibly the message of God was a

crucial focus that is to be emphasized in our modern times.

- The worldwide scope of the mission of God's people did not change. As God had a deliberate plan to save the world during the time of the Old Testament dispensation, so He has it today.

- The mission and message are inseparable. The essentials of the message did not change. It has had new and different emphases during the passing of time, but basic principles of salvation were valid all the time. Paul, for example, built the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ on key texts derived from the Hebrew Scripture according to the structure of the Hebrew canon: Genesis 15:6 (Torah); Habakkuk 2:4 (prophets), and Psalm 32:1, 2 (writings). God's people of today ought to proclaim the "eternal gospel."

- The Old Testament community of faith and its message was eschatological and future oriented. The biblical-eschatological paradigm should provide a pattern for our thinking today. God is coming to establish His eternal kingdom. This eschatological focus provides powerful fuel for mission. The hope of the second coming of Jesus Christ is the hope of all hopes.

- Prophets constantly spoke against false religious systems and warned against the infiltration of paganism into true worship. So the task of God's people today is to present first of all the true picture about God, reveal His true character, who He is, and point the attention of all to Jesus Christ while also unmasking firmly, but lovingly and wisely, the Antichrist with its apostate religious system.

- God uses two different groups: insiders, the faithful remnant (principal stream of the community of believers); and outsiders, those who serve God faithfully according to their light but work outside of His eschatological movement. The faithful remnant has a special God-given mission, but outside the mainstream, God has His messengers, individuals, or

communities who also proclaim the truth. The Lord desires to put these two different streams together by drawing them closer to each other because His ultimate goal is to have only one flock (Isa. 14:1; 56:3-8). As a part of our commitment to mission, we need to recognize God's work outside our own community of faith.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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