

**T**he biblical story moves from the Garden of Eden to the vision of renewed humanity in the new Jerusalem of God. And this story has to do with a people and peoples as they relate to the center, the sent son of God, the true Israelite, and the glory-filled Son of Man who victoriously reigns.

The God-created and God-placed man in the earth is exhorted by God to fill the earth, to subdue it, and to have dominion over every living thing in it. After the flood the Lord affirms, "I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind" (Gen. 9:15). God's promise to Abraham included worldwide perspectives, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing . . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:2-3).

Jesus exhorted the early nuclear church concerning the divinely-ordained certainty that "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47), reminding them that they were the official witnesses on his behalf. "You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:48).

And the seer, John, envisioned the eschatological city of God with its gates open to the whole world, welcoming the glory and honor of the nations into it, making room for the nations to walk in its light, the lamp of which will be the Lamb of God (Rev. 21:24-26; cf. Is. 60:11).

It is this universal beginning and this universalistic vision of the end of history which form the divine parentheses of the Scripture. And at the heart of the parentheses is the story of our Lord Jesus Christ, a story which must be told to the nations.

The Apostle Paul in building up the great Epistle to the Romans provides a similarly evangelical parentheses in the words, "Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith (obedience of faith)" (Rom. 1:5), and his concluding words, "according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might

# UNREACHED PEOPLES THE BIBLICAL MANDATE



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believe and obey him (obedience of faith)" (Rom. 16:25-26).

The Epistle to the Romans reveals that Paul was gripped by the unresolved problematic of the Old Covenant, the dichotomy between Israel and the Goyim (Gentile). Romans, chapters 9-11, are evidence of Paul's attempts to deal with this mystery of God's workings in the course of salvation history, but there are many other relevant passages in his epistles. For Paul and other early New Testament Christians this was a theological problem with which they had to wrestle, and conclude that "there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him" (Rom. 10:12).

What was the meaning of God's so-called "particularistic" dealings with Israel? Was this merely a methodological approach on the part of God over against the nations, or was this a radical choice of God for Israel and thus against the Gentile world? It cannot be denied that in much of the Old Testament the Gentile world is pictured as temptation and threat to Israel (Bavinck, 1964:11). God Yahweh is presented as living in the bosom of Israel, whereas the Gentile nations were viewed as godless and without hope (Eph. 2:12). The only hope for such nations appeared to be found in a coming to Israel and thus a coming to the God who lived in the midst of Israel (Is. 55:5; 56:3-8; 60:1-5; Ruth 1:16). In that era to deal with the word and will of God, the seeker had to deal with Israel, and thus make peace with the God of Israel. Israel was in some sense a touchstone among the nations (Gen. 12:3). She would become a byword symbolic of blessing or of cursing.

What God did in the midst of and with Israel was not done in a corner. She was living her life as it were in the amphitheater of the nations (Bavinck, 1964:14-15). In her internal communal life she was to serve as a model to the nations, indicating what kind of a blessed life eventuated when both God and the neighbor are given their due. The law of the living God was to take incarnate form in her daily communal life. She was to show hospitality to the stranger and alien, with one law governing the life of the home-born and the stranger (Ex. 12:48-49; 20:10; Num. 9:14; 15:30, I Kings 8:41-43).

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The attitude of Israel to the sojourning stranger among them was to be that of love, and this mandate flowed out of the very nature of God Himself (Deut. 10:18-19; Lev. 19:34). Israel was reminded to recall its own history of wanderings (Gen. 15:13; 18:1-8, 24; Ex. 23:9). The stranger is not to be out of sight, and out of mind.

God's covenant with Abraham indicated that Israel was to fulfill a certain role with regard to the Gentiles, which role God succinctly summarizes as "being a blessing to all the families of the earth." At a later stage in Israel's life Zechariah was led to characterize the net historical result as more that of a curse than a blessing (Zech. 8:13). Prior to this judgment they had been reminded of God's command that they "not oppress the widow, or the fatherless, the alien or the poor" (Zech. 7:10). The book of Jonah would appear to be a critique of Israel's lack of love for her neighbors, when it is viewed in the light of the divine observation regarding Nineveh, "And should I not be concerned about that great city?" (cf. also Ezekiel 36:22-23, 36).

Something of this role of the people of Israel was again referred to in the context of the making of the Sinaitic covenant. God commanded Moses to communicate to Israel the challenging words:

Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6, R.S.V.).

Here Israel is clearly set in the midst of the peoples of the earth, in the midst of an earth which is declared to the God's; and her role in that arena is to be an obedient community of ministering servants on behalf of God, a nation which is dedicated to the service of God. The entire earth is pictured as the temple wherein the Israelitic priests of God serve (cf. Habakkuk 2:20). At a later date Peter in writing to the "exiles of the dispersion" does a commentary on this text, exhorting them to fulfill the role of a "holy priesthood," by declaring the wonderful deeds of God who called them out of darkness, abstaining from the passions of the flesh, and maintaining "good conduct among the pagans" that they might "see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits you" (I Peter 2:5, 9-12).

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That this was not simply theoretical speculation is shown in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of his temple, for he pictured the foreigner as coming to the temple to entreat the Lord, having heard of the good news of this God in a far country. Solomon implored God to hear that foreigner's prayer "so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, . . ." (I Kings 8:41-43). It is of note that the liturgical setting often appeared to evoke in Israel the consciousness of Yahweh's universal reign and of His significance for the nations (cf. Ps. 46:10; 47, 67, 95-100). The faith of Israel seemed to cry out for the universal recognition and service of this living God (Ps. 72:19; 67:2).

The prophet Isaiah envisioned a day when Israel would serve a mediating function among the nations. She would be the peacemaker among her historic enemies, and she would share her covenantal blessings with them. And thus in playing a servant role Israel would become a "blessing in the midst of the earth" (Is. 19:23-32, R.S.V.).

It must be recognized that on the whole the manner in which Israel was to fulfill her missionary role in the Old Testament context was that of the centripetal model (Micah 4:1-2; Is. 2:2-3; Zech. 8:20-23; Is. 45:14-17; 60:3), yet there are also intimations of centrifugal movement out of Israel toward the nations. This is not to be understood simply in the sense that the rumors of what God has done in and with Israel were carried to the ears of the nations, but rather that a conscious, intentional proclamation of the Lord to the nations is envisioned (Is. 42:1-4, 10-13; 45:6, 21-23; 49:6; 51:4-5; 52:10, 15; 54:3; 56:7; 59:19; 60:9; 61:6, 11; 66:19; Hab. 2:14).

J.H. Bavinck has rightly observed that this glorious anticipated future clusters around the appearing of the promised Messiah of God. He will be at the center of the promised renewal of Israel, and only thus will blessing come to the nations of the earth (1964:20). Though much of the centripetal movement is viewed as a spontaneous coming, nevertheless the significant impact of the dramatic communal life of Israel on nations must not be minimized. She was placed in the world-amphitheater as God gathered all the nations before him in a

cosmic lawsuit (Is. 43:8-13), and Israel was called upon to be Yahweh's legal witnesses in the earth. She was to witness to the truth, to the fact that Yahweh has saved, and that there is no God and Savior besides Him. "You are my witnesses" (Is. 43:10, 12; 44:8). The roles of the individual promised Servant of Yahweh and of the communal servant, Israel, are not sharply distinguished in the Servant Songs; there seems to be an interdependence built into the account. At the least we can affirm that the Princely Servant is the choice instrument in the hand of Yahweh to enlighten the Gentiles. And further that a beginning was made in this venture when Galilee of the nations saw a great light (Is. 9:1-2; Mt. 4:12-17). Shortly thereafter in the account Jesus called his disciples to follow him, saying, "I will make you fishers of men" (Mt. 4:19). And in the Sermon on the Mount he designated his followers as "the salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Mt. 5:13-14).

Thus it is not strange that Luke in the conclusion to his Gospel and at the beginning of the Book of Acts recorded that the Christ reached back for Isaianic language and affirmed that his followers were now to fulfill the old role of Israel among the nations with the saying, "You are witnesses of these things" (Lk. 24:48). And, "You will be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). And it is worthy to note the inclusive scope of this activity; once again the entire earth is to be the amphitheater of this witness.

It is also significant to note that both in the Isaianic and Lukan contexts there is a correlated emphasis on the Lord's pouring forth of His Spirit in order to qualify His agents in their witnessing role (Is. 44:1-5; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4; 32-33; cf. also Ezek. 36:23-27; Joel 2:19-29). This role of reclaiming the whole world in the name of Israel's Savior God will be fulfilled by the almighty power of the Spirit of God. A new witnessing power will thereby characterize the people of God and a new boldness in aggressive persistent outreach will mark the apostolic band (Acts 2:29; 4:13, 29, 31; 28:31), according to Luke. The new Israel of God will not be timid or shy (II Tim. 1:7), but even in the past they were characterized as a people "who through faith conquered

kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised, who shut up the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword, whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies . . . Others were tortured, and refused to be released . . . the world was not worthy of them" (Heb. 11:33-38). How much more should not boldness characterize them in the future. The Hebrew Christians are reminded to be grateful for "receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Heb. 12:29), and to offer to that ruling God acceptable worship, "with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29). The author's final blessing is a prayer to God that He might equip them "with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ . . ." (Heb. 13:21).

But before we go on with the New Testament material we must take another quick look at the role of the nations in the Old Testament. We are first of all reminded of the unity of the human race before the face of God, in that "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth, and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us, . . ." (Acts 17:26-27). Paul in his address in the Aeropagus affirmed the unity of all mankind in the context of his profession that "the God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24). This is the note on which the Biblical revelation begins. The history of all mankind takes off as it were from the very hand of God the Creator, the One who placed mankind on the earth.

Paul in his address indicated that all peoples are ruled over and provided for by this one God, and He is in some sense "near" to them, to the end that they might seek Him and find Him. The creation account in Genesis also indicates something of this nearness of God to His creature man. People are made in His image, and they are royal agents of that God in the earth, and thus responsible to Him. And much of the Genesis material

underscores this truth that God calls all peoples to account. There is a solidarity among men with relation to God's dealing with them. So all people in Adam fall into sin, are judged by God, and all mankind in Adam are driven from the garden. Furthermore, the flood is an expression of God's general judgment that "all peoples on earth had corrupted their ways" (Gen. 6:12).

The table of nations in Genesis 10 underscores this unity of the children of men, but it also highlights the fact of their geographical dispersion. Mankind is pictured as flourishing and multiplying in their divinely provided habitat. And in the tower of Babel-incident specific recognition is given of the divine word, "Behold, they are as one people, and they have all one language" (Gen. 11:6, R.S.V.). Verkuyl sees Babel as "a collective effort to organize the world without God (1973:37)" it was an expression of human self-deification, a rejection of His wisdom and providential control. And thus God's dispersing of the peoples was an expression of His judgment upon their sinful arrogance. They were dispersed in order to fulfill their role in the earth.

Abram, the one who was called out to be the father of Israel, became the symbol of faith and faithfulness. He manifested true love for his neighbors and proved to be a blessing to the kings and the people of the plain among whom he lived. And when God almighty again appeared to Abram, he is given the name Abraham, and assured that he would be "the father of many nations" (Gen. 17:4-6). And as a sign and seal of that covenant all the males of his household, including the foreigner, were circumcised (Gen. 17:27). They were placed in the arena of God's gracious activity.

The episode of Lot in Sodom indicated the other side of the coin, that undiscerning intimacy with wicked men will draw down God's judgment, heartache, and loss. Abraham and his seed, those who represent God in the earth, must maintain their distinctiveness in order to be a blessing to the peoples of the earth. The salt may not lose its flavor.

Even though living in the midst of the peoples of the earth, the identity of the people-of-God-in-the-earth required that they maintain some "distance" between

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themselves and other peoples. And yet the intensity of this "distance" and its extent seemed to vary somewhat according to the historical circumstances. The sons of Jacob appeared to live in much closer proximity to the surrounding peoples than could post-exilic Israel. When we seek to inquire from the Bible what things determine the measure of "distance," we are reminded of Abraham's remark to Abimelech, king of Gerar, that "there is surely no fear of God in this place" (Gen. 20:11). This would indicate that the style of our relationships is to be gauged by the level of the godlessness of the peoples about us. Lot was so guilty because he seemed to have lost his sensitivity to the depth of evil around him. His spiritual barometer completely failed him.

Paul says something similar in I Cor. 5:9-13, where he expressly rejects the notion that the believer must withdraw from the world. Rather he rejects an intimacy with immoral men, particularly within the household of faith. The immorality of which he was speaking was that of stealing, reviling, drunkenness, greediness, and idolatry. The incompatibility of idolatry and the identity of the people of God was always in the forefront of the considerations of the Old Covenant. Nothing was to dim the splendor and witness of the exhortation that "You shall worship and serve the Lord your God alone." Nothing was to compromise the claims of the Lordship of our God and Christ.

Paul speaks in the context of marriage of the "consent" of the unbelieving wife to life with the Christian husband. If we take this as a microcosm in human relations, it points us to the fact that our continued relationships with the unbelieving community around us is partly determined by their tolerance of or lack of tolerance of believers in their midst. Believers are exhorted to love and to pray even for their enemies, but at other times they must flee in order to protect their own lives. Yet as a general stance our love in Christ must overcome our fear (I John 4:18), and we are exhorted to look not only to our own interests, but to the interests of others, and to the things of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:4, 21). This is to have the mind of Christ.

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Concrete biblical examples of the truth that the level of tolerance in the unbelieving context about the people of God was an important determinant for their stance are: the sojourn of Israel in Egypt, the relationship of Joseph to the Pharaoh, the mandate given to Israel in exile to seek the good of the land, and the stance of Daniel and his associates over against the rulers of Mesopotamia. At a later time believers adjusted their stance in line with their new situation under the accord of Constantine, and later under the *pax Britannica*. Isaac had to come to terms with this stark given when the Philistines informed him, "Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us" (Gen. 26:16). But in God's providence the Philistines were forced to come to terms with Isaac and make covenant with him, for God was with him (Gen. 26:28-29). At a much later point in history modern missionaries came to terms with this when they were told that they were to behave as "guests" in the land. The sovereignty of God thus limits and curbs the autonomy of nations who seek to live apart from him, and influences and overrules the attitudes which they manifest toward the people of God. Not even nations who are zealous in their ungodliness are able to prevail with God and deny to God's people room to exist and fulfill their mandate in the earth, for all the earth belongs to God (Ex. 19:6).

Israel understood that the nature of their God was such that it implied a royal relationship to the entire earth. Hence the Psalmist could liturgically declare and celebrate at the religious center of Israel with these words:

Sing to the Lord, all the earth . . . proclaim His salvation day after day. Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deed among all peoples . . . Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns." He will judge the peoples with equity (Ps. 96).

The heavens proclaim His righteousness, and all the peoples see His glory. All who worship images are put to shame. . . . (Ps. 97:6-7).

The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations . . . all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God (Ps. 98:2-3).

Though it might be said that this is a prophetic celebration of an eschatological reality, even so it would have to be affirmed that this theological profession of faith

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transcended the day to day religious dichotomy which existed between Israel and the nations. As the Israelite bowed in worship before Yahweh, he was compelled to assert that the virtues of this saving God were to be recognized and acclaimed in the midst of the nations of the earth. The drama taking place between Israel and her God was of significance for the whole wide world of peoples.

So too, it was true of prophetic figures such as Isaiah, that their eschatological vision included not only a centripetal coming of many peoples to the mountain of the Lord for instruction in His ways, thus submitting to His judgments, and ushering in peace among the nations (Is. 2:2-4); but also that His judgments, His laws, His salvation, will move outward from Yahweh to the peoples to enlighten them, and the islands are pictured as waiting in hope for the active arm of Yahweh (Is. 51:4-5). Even the centripetal movement (Is. 49:22-23) is pictured as resulting in the knowledge and conviction of all flesh that Yahweh is Israel's Savior and Redeemer (Is. 49:26). The worldwide visibility of God's saving acts is underscored (Is. 52:10), and through the manifestation of Yahweh's righteous Servant, the nations will be anointed with wonder and Kings will be struck dumb with conviction (Is. 52:15).

A use is also made of the imagery of Israel entering in to possess the land, and that her tent prophetically is to be so enlarged that her seed takes possession of the nations and inhabits desolate, abandoned cities (Is. 54:2-3). Once again the theological warrant for this hopeful vision is to be found in the very nature of the Holy One of Israel, who is called the God of the whole earth (Is. 54:5). And this envisioned future is as certain as God's word of covenantal peace is sure. The old boundaries of the knowledge of the word of God will be transcended and nations will be annexed to Israel, because of the will and acts of Yahweh (Is. 55:5).

But the final vision of the old covenant is a liturgical vision in which it is declared that Yahweh's house will be "called a house of prayer for all nations" (Is. 56:7). And in a world where there is no other god the proclaimed is articulated: "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no

other" (Is. 45:22). And as surely as God lives and speaks, the assured expectation is intoned, "Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear" (Is. 45:23). And this enlarging vision broadens out into the vision of the divine creation of the new heavens and a new earth (Is. 65:27).

As one can quickly gather, the Old Testament vision of a new situation which will transcend the dichotomy between Israel and the nations was a royal vision, the vision of the victorious coming of the Kingdom of God. Thus the good news which Christ brought was declared to be the Gospel of the Kingdom, and Christ's coming to Israel was the event-announcement, certain and challenging, declaring, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mt. 4:17, R.S.V.). And in the encounter with the centurion of Capernaum and his expression of faith, Christ evoked the centripetal vision of the old covenant with the expectant and prophetic words, "I say to you, that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 8:11). The accretions here pictured are not added to the central site and symbol of Israel, Jerusalem; but to Israel's fathers of faith and obedience. The dichotomy is therefore transcended not only on the boundaries, but rather the distant boundaries of peoplehood are collapsed right into the very fount and heartbeat of the covenantal peoplehood of Israel, for they are intimately related to the historical patriarchs of Israel, and thereby to Israel's God. But even more startlingly, judgment also descends upon those who were subject to Israel's king, but in sharp contrast to Gentile faith and inclusion, they will be disowned as unworthy of their privileges and excluded from the fellowship.

Jesus called to himself the twelve apostles and sent them out. But in the early phase he confined their mission to the "lost sheep of Israel" (Mt. 10:6). Yet they too are exhorted to enunciate the Messianic message, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." And their representation is Messianically qualified and authoritative in virtue of His presence, for "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives the one

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who sent Me" (Mt. 10:40).

But even the salvation-historical timetable of the Messianic Servant of Yahweh is pushed forward by the impatient providential hand of Yahweh, and so the importunate Canaanite woman in the area of Tyre and Sidon lays claim to the mercy which will spill over the historic boundaries of the house of Israel (Mt. 15:21-28). And at a later stage of his ministry the awesome prospect of judgment and displacement is held out to Israel, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Mt. 21:43).

And as a microcosm of the people, Israel's religious leaders were confronted by their Messiah on two scores and condemned, because "You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to" (Mt. 23:13-14). And in the context of a sorrowful Messianic lament for Jerusalem our Lord prophesies, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Mt. 24:14). This same Messiah is presented as the final judge of the nations (Mt. 25:32), and the norm of that judgment will be that in their historical dealings the children of men have reacted as it were to the Messiah of God in a positive or negative fashion.

And in Matthew's perspective, finally the promised King of Israel enunciates the charter of his new universal kingdom, directing his followers to claim the nations in his name and authority, making disciples and baptizing people of all the nations (Mt. 28:19). And in such obedient activity the presence of the Messianic Lord is assured, exercising his all-encompassing authority in and through his messengers.

This royal vision of the Messiah is already set forth in Psalm 2:8, where the nations of the earth are given to him as his inheritance, and the remote recesses of the earth are challenging bits of turf to be reclaimed, and in kingly fashion he rules with a rod. John's vision of the Messianic work also fits in with this royal profile, in that "the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (I John 3:8). There is revealed in the ministry of Jesus a clash of kingdoms, and the

Christ engages in an historical and powerful expose of the false royal claims of the Prince of Darkness (John 12:31-32; 14:30-31; 16:8-11). Christ recognized this reality of the clash of competing kingdom claims, and proceeded to drive out the demonic forces as an expression of the Spirit's presence and as an evidence of the impinging claims of God's royal rule (Mt. 12:25-28). Christ's apostolic activity was proof that the Messiah had bound up the evil strong man, and so could despoil his house (Mt. 12:29).

In line with the Old Testament use of the yoke as a symbol of submission to a king's rule (Lev. 26:13; Ezek. 30:18; 34:27; I Kings 12:4, 9-14; Is. 9:3-4; 14:25; Jer. 27:8-12; 28:2; 30:8), and in direct contrast to the oppressive nature of many of the royal yokes alluded to in the old Testament, Christ's invitation to the weary and burdened to come to him, to take on his yoke, and to learn from his ways was and is attractive. Christ's royal yoke is recommended in that all things have been committed to this royal prince by the Father, in that the prince himself is gentle and humble, in that his yoke or rule is easy and the burden is light, and in that the end of the matter is rest for the invitees' souls (Mt. 11:27-30). The stance of the King here is that of one who woos the people to own his sovereignty with the assurance that the result will be rest, and not that of oppression.

The tone of the Great Commission in Mt. 28 is more aggressive with regard to the rightful claims of this bonafide representative and vice-regent of Yahweh. Paul too in looking over the course of salvation history picked up the accents of Psalm 2 and underscored the promised Messiah's exercise of the rod in subduing all the nations of the earth, and in destroying all opposing forces or dominions, until all of his enemies capitulate to his rule and are put under his feet (I Cor. 15:24-28). Then the Messianic Son will submit all of this to the Father in order that God may be all in all.

In all of this data there is an impetus toward universalizing of the scope of the reign of the Messianic Prince who would come out of Judah. The Isaianic vision of the coming one on whose shoulder the government would rest (Is. 9:6), and of whom the increase of his government and peace there would be no end, would appear to be the working out of the legitimate internal dynamic of the Abrahamic covenant. The gracious approach of God whereby he enters into covenant with

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men reveals a steadily widening horizon, and the royal claims of the representative divine prince can tolerate no geographic or intensive limitations. He increasingly expresses himself as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16).

It is not surprising that the apostle Paul understood and laid hold of this internal dynamic and so interpreted the promise which Abraham and his offspring received as that of being "heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13). Israel thus in the person of the Christ, as the offspring of Abraham, takes possession in the name of the Lord of the whole world. As the world was viewed as the arena of the judging activity of Yahweh in his lawsuit with those rebellious to his rule, so now the world becomes the turf of the Messianic Prince who rides on conquering and to conquer (Rev. 6:2; 19:11-16). And the outcome of that engagement is succinctly put, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

The Book of Revelation which with moving images reviews the grand sweep of salvation history from the first coming of Christ to his second coming, and which evaluates all things from the perspective of the Christ who rules in the midst of the seven candlesticks and who exercises judgment in the midst of the turbulent course of human history, pictures the giant angel with the gospel scroll in his hand with one big foot planted on the sea and the other on the land, thus symbolizing the all-encompassing scope of the claims and work of Jesus Christ (Rev. 10:1-11). And even the song of Moses which is picked up again in the vicinity of the throne of God includes the words, "All nations will come and worship before you" (Rev. 15:4).

The Apostle John in his writings is fascinated with the truth of the universal significance of the coming of Christ, for he is sent because of a love of God for that world (John 3:16), and thus the Messiah can be designated as sent "to be the Savior of *the world*" (I John 4:14). No national or ethnic boundary can delimit this vision. This Messiah cannot ethnically be fenced in!

Even Peter, in calling upon believers to be prepared to give the reason for the hope which they had (I Pet. 3:15), did so in the context of the royal odyssey of the

Christ "Who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him" (I Pet. 3:22). Christians are to remember this truth in the midst of a world which opposes the onward march of the gospel of Christ. And this is part of that internal activity in believing hearts which seek to own or reverence or consecrate Christ as Lord (I Pet. 3:15). And in this same context Peter plays with the old covenantal promises when he exhorts them not to return evil for evil, but rather to counter evil and insult with blessing, for to this end were they called in order to inherit a blessing (I Pet. 3:9). Thus the sons and daughters of Abraham will yet prove to be a blessing in the earth.

In Paul's pastoral epistles the universal dimension of the gospel and of the claims of Christ come to the fore. Intercession is to be made for all men, God our Savior would "have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4), there is only one Mediator between God and men "who gave himself a ransom for all" (I Tim. 2:6). And here the mystery of godliness is set forth in the pilgrimage of Jesus who was "taken up in glory," "preached among the nations," and "believed on in *the world*" (I Tim. 3:16). And such missionary godliness must be pursued by Christ's followers, with a hope set on the living God, "who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe" (I Tim. 4:10). And as Christ witnessed a good profession before Pontius Pilate, so too must his followers witness through a godliness which is blameless until the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is declared to be the only "Ruler, the King of kings and the Lord of lords" (I Tim. 6:15).

Paul's exhortations to Titus are founded as well on the firm foundation that "the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared *to all men*" (Titus 2:11). The believers are challenged to show meekness to all men, for it was God who sought us out; we did not find him because of our good works. Rather it was God who saved us by the appearance of the kingness of God our Saviour and his love for man (Titus 3:4). Thus believers are to manifest godliness and good works "so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive" (Titus 2:10).



James, the servant of God, was convinced that there is "only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy" (James 4:12). Jude in striving to deal with godless leaders affirmed Jesus Christ to be "our only Sovereign and Lord" (vs. 4), and ascribed to the "only God and Savior" all glory (vs. 25). In essence these New Testament witnesses picked up the central gospel message of the prophet Isaiah and applied it to the widening horizons of their day. And that message still is foundational:

I, even I, am the Lord,  
and apart from me there is no savior.  
I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—  
I, and not some foreign god among you.  
"You are my witnesses," declares the Lord,  
"That I am God." Isaiah 43:11-12.

This is what the Lord says—  
Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty:  
I am the first and I am the last;  
apart from me there is no God. Isaiah 44:6

I am the Lord, and there is no other;  
apart from me there is no God . . .  
I will strengthen you, . . .  
so that from the rising of the sun  
to the place of its setting  
men may know there is none besides me.  
I am the Lord, and there is no other. Isaiah 45:5-6

Those tall Sabeans—  
they will come over to you . . .  
saying, "Surely God is with you,  
and there is no other; there is no other god."  
Isaiah 45:14

It can thus be seen that the driving sweep of the two Testaments precipitates into the question of the unique nature of this one God and Savior who created, redeemed, reclaims, and restores his world. And that people which is aligned with this God cannot but stand and cry out as his representatives to the far corners of the earth, "In the name of God, and on behalf of Christ, Be reconciled to God" (II Cr. 5:20). The living God in whom we believe deserves nothing less than the world laid at his feet, resubjected to him.

Thus the Christ who declares himself to be the light of the world co-opts his followers into his passionate service of God and royally declares that they too are the

light of the world and the salt of the earth. His followers within their Christ-defined identity have no choice but to be witnesses of the mighty acts of God done in Christ on behalf of a lost world, witnesses of Christ's ministry, his death, resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God. They bear witness that he now calls on all men everywhere to repent and to believe on him, and that one day he will return to judge the living and the dead, with all flesh appearing before him (Acts 17:30-31; 10:36).

And furthermore the Church which is the temple of that Spirit (I Cor. 3:16) who commanded that the congregation at Antioch "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2), is the very same Christ-sent paracletal Spirit who "will convict *the world* of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8).

Thus it has been demonstrated from the wealth of material in Scripture that the inner dynamic of the Scripture, in both the Old and New Testaments, presses out to the ends of the earth and lays a claim on all *peoples*. The final commission of our Lord and Savior Christ therefore simply succinctly focuses the message and movement of the entire Scripture.

And though there are isolated texts in Scripture which refer to specific peoples, the most important Scriptural basis for this centrifugal dynamic is its accent on the nature of the triune God himself. It is because of the nature of this one and only living God, that he lays claim to the entire earth, and can do nothing less. This is without doubt the core gospel message of Isaiah, and again it is at the heart of the celebrative victory vision of the Psalmist in the temple. Jonah had to learn that it is the nature of Yahweh to have compassion on all *flesh*.

Thus too, the Christ of God reveals in unmistakable fashion that he is not only the Savior of Israel of old, but that in amazing fashion he is the Savior of *the world*. He is the one who shows mercy to the weak, to the obscure, and to the forgotten ones. He is the one who insures that the glorious, impinging, weighty presence of God fills the earth. And he it is who leads nation after nation, people after people, person after person, to capitulate to the claims of the living God, whose

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largeness is sufficient for all.

And the Holy Spirit who is sent by the Father and the Son applies to sinners everywhere the merits of the atoning-reconciling work of Jesus Christ. And he cannot be boxed in, for the arena of the Spirit's activities is *the whole world*, and he gives his gifts and his life to whomsoever he will. For this Lord is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9). The Spirit's target too is nothing less than the world, and as its Sovereign he will be its chief prosecutor, convicting it of sin, of righteousness and of judgment.

The church of Christ, which is the New Testament form of the people of God, represents this God (II Cor. 5:18-20), and is sent out by this Christ (John 20:21). As ten authoritative representatives of the Christ who claims all peoples as his realm (Mt. 10:40; Ps. 2:8-9; Rev. 5:6-10), Christ equips us his messengers with the indwelling Spirit (John 20:22; 14:16-18; 16:7-16). The church thus, as aligned with this God and powerfully indwelt by the Spirit of God, is missionary to the very core of its being. And living before the face of this God it must reflect the very nature of this God who so loved *the world* that he gave his only Son to save it. The Church is thus irrevocably set in the world, with its arms outspread after the pattern of Jesus, with an intercessory prayer in its heart, and with the divine gospel challenge on its lips: "O world, why will you die; be reconciled to God."

And there is no biblical delimitation of this representative task of the church in the Bible. As the representative of this saving God who must go out to all people, she must be willing to sit down and plead even with notorious sinners, and she must bring the claims of this King to all levels of life. This Lord cannot be circumscribed or provincialized; he is the Lord of all in both its extensive and intensive dimensions. And thus, "Your kingdom come," is the watchword of this redeemed community. When the love of God has entered a community, then the mind of Jesus inevitably follows, and those so influenced "look not only to your (their) own interests, but also the interest of others" (Phil. 2:4). And such a loving of the neighbor as self is the fulfillment of the law of this King, who self-sacrificially

emptied himself for the sake of others (Phil. 2:7).

And no people, or pocket of people, can be ignored, overlooked or written off. To be sure, no people is worthy of the attention and saving message of this God, but that is not the issue when we are speaking of a gospel of grace. The point is rather, that *this God is worthy of all peoples*, and that to know him in truth is life, health, and salvation. He is the only answer to the problem of the peoples of the earth who have a bent for self-destruction. He can lead them out of their smallness, frustration, jealousy, and fratricide into the glorious unity of redeemed humanity, and in this renewed and widened circle the richness of their own ethnic identity can flourish, come to fulfillment, and make a contribution to the richness of the entire mosaic.

And why have we as a church been so slow to fulfill this dynamic mandate of the kingdom of Jesus Christ? It is because the church has been too preoccupied with its own life, its own internal workings, the intricacies of its liturgical life, its organizational life, and its own nourishment. It has been careful to preserve its own life, apologetically defending its distinctiveness from other differing sections of the church of Christ.

The church has been inclined to forget that it is more blessed to give than to receive, that in losing her life she will find it, that in giving she will receive, and that in the way of sharing, the manna of the gospel will not spoil but be preserved for generations to come. The Church has forgotten that by an influx of new believers she herself will not be threatened, but rather invigorated.

The church has concentrated on proper Christological formulations and rightly so, but it is tempted to under-emphasize the challenge to go to stand with Christ outside of the camp, to come to know Christ intimately in his passion, to experience the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and feeling the power of his resurrection (Phil. 3:10). For looking into the face of our glorious Lord, we are changed into his glory (II Cor. 3:18; 4:6), and submitting to his rule, we are worked upon by that power which is able to bring everything under his control, and our lowly bodies become like his glorious body, fit instruments of the spirit which is attuned to God and his will (Phil. 3:21;

... the church has been too preoccupied with its own life ...

Eph. 1:19-20; Rom. 12:1-2; 6:4,13,22; 7:4,22; 8:11-17).

The eschatological vision of the Scripture also has something to say to the church in her pilgrimage on earth. In the redeemed city of God, and in the context of the particularistic, Israelitic symbolism of the old covenant, there stands a great multitude clad in white robes before the throne of God, and this numberless, acclaiming throng includes people "from every nation, tribe, people and language," standing in front of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9). This redeemed city is presented as a product of the mighty hand of God, for it comes down out of heaven, and it finally resolves all of the earth's dichotomies. Babble is reversed, and the leaves of the tree of life minister healing to the nations (Rev. 22:2).

We thus are called to go forward unabashedly with vigor and courage, for this God is not the God of the Jews only, he is also the God of the Gentiles, since there is only one God (Rom. 3:29).

Be silent before me, you islands!

Let the peoples renew their strength' (Is. 41:4)

Sing to the Lord a new song;

sing to the Lord, all the earth. (Ps. 96:1)

### Notes

1. The New International Version is the basic version that is used, except where otherwise indicated.

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