

Notes from Dr. Charles [Chuck] Gailey's workshop at the 2009 General Nazarene Missions International Convention and Global Mission Conference. All scripture references are from the New International Version unless otherwise stated.

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOD DOING?

Why do we have Missions anyhow?

1. God is a missionary God!
2. The Bible is a missionary book.

In the beginning...

After the sin of Adam and Eve, God began his rescue or salvage operation for the world. This begins in Genesis 3:15 and continues throughout the entire Bible.

Genesis 1 – 11 refers to all of the human race.

God's promise to Abraham

In Genesis 12:2-3 God chooses one man to give his blessing and to be used to bless others through a restored and personal relationship with God. This individual was Abram, who would be called Abraham. God promised Abram,

"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."

This was a promise to bless Abram and his descendants personally. And it was also an introduction to how God intended to rescue and bless all other people who would live on the earth. Abram would be used by God to play a central role for all of humankind in restoring relationship with the Creator.

This plan and promise is repeated many times throughout scripture. At the time Abraham and Sarah were foretold of the coming birth of Isaac, the Lord again repeated his promise to Abraham. *"Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him."* (Genesis 18:18)

When Abraham's faith and trust in God was tested with the life of Abraham's son Isaac, God promised, *"I will surely bless you . . . and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."* (Genesis 22:17-18)

God's mission in the Old Testament

We find in scripture the fulfilling of the promise and the plan through Abraham's descendants. To Isaac God said,

"For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all"

these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed . . .”(Genesis 26:3-5)

To Isaac’s son Jacob God said, *“I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac . . . All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.”* (Genesis 28:13-15)

God’s rescue operation was to bless Abraham and his descendants. But it was not just to be selfishly absorbed and stop there. God clearly intended from the outset that he would use Abraham and the people of Israel to be the conduit to bless all peoples and nations of the earth.

Because they were to be used to bless those beyond themselves, the Psalmist was able to say in Psalm 96:3, *“Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.”*

And also in Psalm 67:

“May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.”

The Psalmist understood the individual, the national, and the global aspect to God’s redemption plan. God’s blessing was one that they could personally experience and one with a global purpose, beyond their context.

This is acknowledged and repeated many times throughout the scriptures.

During the dedication of the temple, Solomon blessed the people, *“ . . . so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God and that there is no other.”* (I Kings 8:60)

Jeremiah was appointed by the Lord *“as a prophet to the nations.”* (Jeremiah 1:5, 10)

Daniel had a dream about what was to come of *“ . . . all the peoples, nations, and men of every language.”* (Daniel 7:1-29)

The Lord spoke to Amos about Israel’s restoration.

“In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, And wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins And rebuild it as in the days of old; That they may possess the remnant of Edom And all the nations who are called by My name,” Declares the LORD who does this.” (Amos 9:11-12, NASB)

The Lord said in Isaiah,

"I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness." (Isaiah 42:6-7)

Further, he says,

"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6)

God's heart and intention is revealed again with his dealings with Ninevah. In his words with Jonah, who had been called and sent by God to proclaim a message to the people of Ninevah, God said, *"Should I not be concerned about that great city?"* (Jonah 4:11)

God is concerned about every person, language group, culture, and nation. That is why God had to send someone into the world greater than Jonah, Solomon, David, or Abraham.

God's mission in the New Testament

In the New Testament Jesus is introduced as the *"son of Abraham"*. (Matthew 1:1) Jesus demonstrated in many ways besides his ultimate death and resurrection that God loves and desires a restored relationship with all peoples of the world. One example of this was when Jesus intentionally went through Samaria instead of taking great lengths to avoid the area, as commonly done by the Jews at the time. He used the opportunity to speak with the woman drawing water (also culturally inappropriate), share about the eternal water of life (fellowship with God), and *"many more became believers."* (John 4:1-42)

Peter knew of God's promise to Abraham, *"Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed."* (Acts 3:25) However, it was not until his vision and experience with Cornelius that Peter finally understood that God loved all people equally and wanted fellowship with each of them. (Acts 10)

In the letter to the Galatians Paul wrote,

"The scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'" (Galatians 3:8)

He continued,

"He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit." (3:14)

And then he declared,

"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:26-28)

And finally, John's vision of what is to come in Revelation 7:9 includes " . . . a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."

Conclusion

Missions is the story of the *whole* Bible.

God always has been, is today, and always will be a missionary God.

This is the reason why we have missions in our church, why there is NMI (Nazarene Missions International), the Jesus Film, Work and Witness teams, and many other tools to be involved in God's mission.