**THE MISSION**

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Lecture 9

**Introduction**

Well, we are back together again for another session. It’s an immense pleasure to have this opportunity of sharing with you in thinking about God's mission and the mission that’s been committed to us. I hope you are taking the opportunity if you are able to possess Dr. Wright's book to work through it.

A Couple of Suggestions

A couple of suggestions, I’ll repeat them, but it may be worth keeping in mind that with this book you may like to consider using it as a basis for your own personal Bible reading for a period of time. You know, to work through the material here in a way not just to stimulate your mind, but to use it as a basis for prayer and thought is a thing that's worth doing. Or if you’ve got the opportunity of being with other people, to look through it as a group study. That's something you could do together and you could stimulate not only yourself, but others. You might like to use it if you have the opportunity of conducting say, Bible study groups, you might like to use it as a basis for Bible study. Now I’ll let those suggestions percolate and I’ll repeat them again but think of ways in which you can take this material and incorporate it into your thinking, into your life, and into your ministry because it does cover a hermeneutic that helps you to expound and look at the whole Bible. Now, if you’ve had the opportunity of having extensive theological training you’ll have had hermeneutical structures to look through the Bible. If that’s not been your privilege, then this is a valuable one to help you understand and make use and properly expound the Bible when you have the responsibility of doing so.

When I was a young man, not long out of theological training, we had an eminent scholar visit us and we were chatting with him and he passed us on a comment, a bit of wisdom, that I share with you. I found it valuable. He said, “Gentlemen, these three or four years that you’ve spent in study you may never get the opportunity of that sort of extended time of concentrated study again, so let me suggest to you that to keep up your reading if you've got access to books. Get a good book and put it on your desk or your table, or where ever you sit, and work at reading two or three pages a day. In that way, every year you’ll read quite a lot of material. And I’ve found that to be valuable so I commend it to you.

Also, another beloved theological teacher used to say, that for every one modern book you use read a couple of old ones. What was he saying? Well, not all of the wisdom is here in the present, a lot of it is in the past. And up until now, it may be a doubtful thing now, but I used to be able to say that the greatest number of Christians who ever lived, have lived in the past. Well, things are changing in the world and perhaps that’s not quite as true. But let’s remember, you don't want to disenfranchise those who’ve gone before us. So, just a few thoughts. I’ll repeat them and make some other suggestions to you as we go on.

**GOD AND THE NATIONS IN OLD TESTAMENT VISION**

Let's get on with our topic today which is in the closing sections of Dr. Wright's book. Those last four sections are dealing with the arena of mission and we've already looked at the question of mission and God's earth, and commission and God's image. And I hope you’ve been able to work through those and perhaps deal with the questions. As we turn today now to think about God and the nations in the Old Testament vision, it’s a reminder as you see on the slide that the nations of the world are the matrix of Israel's life. That is, Israel operates in the Old Testament within the context of wider nations.

A. ALL NATIONS PART OF GODS CREATED PATTERN

Let me read to you the introduction to this chapter from Dr. Wright.

“The nations of humanity preoccupy the Biblical narrative from beginning to end. When they are not in the foreground, they are in the background. When they are not the subject of great international events they are the object of divine inspection or accusation. When they are not the direct focus of God's attention they remain the surrounding context for good or ill of the life of God's people. The obvious reason for this is that the Bible is of course, preoccupied with the relationship between God and humanity. (We’ve already thought about this, haven’t we?) And humanity exists in nations. Where the Bible focuses especially on the people of God, that people necessarily lives in history and in the midst of the nations. So it is clear that Israel as the light to the nations, is no peripheral theme within the canonical process. The nations are the matrix of Israel's life a “razon detra” (meaning, “a reason for being/existence”)(French: raison d’être) for her very existence.

So the story, and we’re thinking now particularly about the Old Testament and the next session we’re thinking about the New Testament, and how Israel exists within the nations and her life is conditioned first by the calling of God that she should be a light to the nations but also conditioned by the impact that the nations have upon her. And as we know in the story, some of that impact is disastrous. Israel is conditioned often much more by what she sees around her than by her calling to be priests of God, to worship God alone and to make Him known to the nations roundabout as they observe the life of the people of God.

I'm going to ask you do the work through this just now, to take your Bible again and to look at what is now a familiar passage, the last two chapters of the Bible, Revelation chapter 21 and Chapter 22. Chapter 21 begins by saying that John saw,

(Read Revelation 21: 1 – 8)

(verse 3 – “of God is with men”, with men and women of every nation)

But as he goes on through that passage he talks about the city with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, and the names of the 12 tribes of Israel inscribed on it.

Just come down the page to verse 22:

(Read Revelation 21: 22 – 24)

(verse 24 – “by it’s light shall the nations walk…)

So here the focus is the nations, yes, the people of God now are drawn from not just ancient Israel but from all the nations. If we look into chapter 22, it says,

(Read Revelation 22: 1 – 5)

(verse 2 – here it is, “and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations)

So, here are the nations healed and drawn into the fellowship of God. You may remember that we talked about the triangle that Dr. Wright gave, the smaller triangle of God, Israel, and the land inside the bigger triangle of God now, and the nations and the whole world as the gambit of mission.

Now Dr. Wright goes on. He says,

“The nation's first appear in the Biblical grand narrative in the context of life before the flight (exodus), God’s catastrophic judgment on human wickedness. By Genesis 11 the nations have been scattered in confusion. The conflict of nations mirrors the brokenness of humanity as a whole. (That’s a good picture of it.) With undoubtedly deliberate intent the final book of the Bible comes to its climax with the picture of the nations purged of all sin walking in the light of God, bringing their wealth and splendor into the city of God, contributing their redeemed glory and honor to the glory and honor of the Lamb of God. (And we read that in chapter 21 verses 24 to 27). The brokenness of humanity is healed at the river and the tree of life in 22: 1 to 2. (as we’ve already read). In between these two great scenes in Genesis and Revelation (that is, the fall of man and the confusion of the nations and the spread of the nations in Genesis 11 to Revelation here for the healing of it) The primal and ultimate state of the nations the Bible records the story of how such cosmic transformation will have been accomplished. It is in short, the mission of God as we've been seeking to elucidate in the preceding chapters God's mission is what fills the gap between the scattering of the nations in Genesis 11 and the healing of the nations in Revelation 22. It is God's mission in relation to the nations arguably more than any other single theme that provides the key that unlocks the biblical grand narrative.”

That’s why I’ve said this book and the themes and the way it develops, provides you with an appropriate way of reading the Bible story as a whole, right throughout. And I commend it to you for that reason and for your study for that reason. He says,

“In this book we will survey the great sweep of biblical teaching and expectation since it lies at the heart of a fully Biblical understanding of mission.

And that's what we’ve been thinking about. We’ve talked about the fact that we could just pin before us Christ’s commands to go out and make disciples of all nations, that is, that's a bannerhead, but it falls within the wider context of mission and if we only choose that, we will miss much of what God has wanted to say to us about His mission, about our mission as human beings, and our mission as the church. He says,

“Then we will observe that the experience of Israel's faith and worship if not always the outcome of their practice was of the nations should come to benefit from the history of salvation and give thanks for it. This means that the nations will eventually acknowledge and worship Israel's God Yahweh with all the covenant responsibilities and blessings. More remarkably yet, there are voices and visions within the Old Testament that looked for a day when nations would be included within Israel in such a way that the very word ‘Israel’ would be radically extended and redefined. All this constituted the horizon of mission to the nations in the New Testament and provided the strong scriptural justification for such mission for those who engage in it.

So there we are. We see Genesis 11, the nations divided, and the history of the nations and Israel within that life often badly influenced by it, we come to the end and we see what God is purposing - that all humanity in its life as nations will ultimately participate, those redeemed out of every tribe and every tongue and every nation, participating in the new heaven and new earth.

B. THE NATIONS IN CREATION AND PROVIDENCE

THE NATIONS AS PART OF CREATED AND REDEEMED HUMANITY

So, when we turn to think now about the nations, we move on to think of the nations in creation and providence, and the nations as part of created and redeemed humanity. This is how he takes his heading. He says,

“Although we first meet the nations in the context of the falleness and arrogance of humanity even after the flood, the Bible does not imply that ethnic and national diversity is in itself sinful or the product of the fall. Even if the deleterious effects of strife among nations certainly are, rather nations are simply there, they are a given part of the human race as God created it to be. God rules over the nations, amply affirmed throughout the Old Testament, is simply a function of the fact that He created them in the first place. Speaking as a Jew to Gentiles in an evangelistic context Paul takes for granted the diversity of nations within the unity of humanity, and attributes it to the Creator, to His world-governing providence. (And quoting from Acts chapter 17 verse 26, he goes on to say, that) “From one man He made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth and he determined the time set for them and the exact places where they should live.” Although Paul goes on to quote from Greek writers (and as you read Acts 17:26, your remember that he makes reference to certain of their poets, he says) His language in the verse is drawn from the Old Testament from the ancient song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:8. When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He divided all mankind, He set up boundaries for the peoples. So, national distinctives then, are part of the kaleidoscopic diversity of creation at the human level analogous to the wonderful prodigality of biodiversity at every other level of God's creation.”

So as God's called creation, there is a blessed and glorious proliferation of God's grace, therefore diversity of human beings. So we’re thinking now of the nations as a part of the created and redeemed humanity and we’ve read from Acts 17:26, with its background in Deuteronomy 32 verse 8. If you have the book you can see that there, if you don’t, then please look up those passages and let them dwell in your mind. He goes on to say,

“Furthermore, the eschatological vision, that is, of redeemed humanity at the end and the new creation, points to the same truth. The inhabitants of the new creation are not portrayed as a homogenous mass, or as a single global culture, rather they will display the continuingly glorious diversity of the human race throughout history.”

It’s a marvelous thing, isn’t it? That even in the new heaven and the new earth there may be that glorious diversity which actually brings praise to God for that diversity and the particularities that each nation and race of people brings to it.

“People of every tribe and language and people and nation will bring their wealth and their praises into the city of God. (And that is in Revelation 7:9 and 21: 24 to 26. We’ve read that.) The image we might prefer for the Bible’s portrait of the nations is not a melting pot in which all differences are blended, but a salad bowl in which all the ingredients preserve their distinctive color. The new creation will preserve the rich diversity of the original creation.”

A wonderful thing to consider and to look forward to. Just contemplate what it will be like. Presumably we won't have the difficulties of coping with language differences there. We’ll all speak the language of heaven. People argue whether it's Hebrew or Aramaic or whatever it might be, but there will be a commonality but there will be that diversity. And that's, it's a lovely thing to think about. So, all nations are part of creation, and part of the redeemed humanity. Nations nationalized are significant.

C. ALL NATIONS STANDING UNDER THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

Alright, he goes on to think about all nations not only being part of God's created pattern, but all nations standing under the judgment of God. Let me read some of his words:

“For those of us who have ascribed a predominantly individualistic way of thinking about life,

That is, particularly those of us in the Western world think of us very much as individuals, we are individualistic, we think of ourselves as almost isolated units, there are others there and we relate to them in various ways, but there’s not a sense of human solidarity as there is in other cultures. So to those of us who have absorbed a predominantly individualistic way of thinking about life, faith, and our relationship with God, one of the more difficult biblical concepts to get *our* minds around, is the idea that God can and does deal with nations as a whole. You may be from a culture where that is a natural way to think, but for people particularly in the Western world, it's not necessarily one that we come to easily and we have to grapple with it. He says,

“The Bible unquestionably affirms it and not only affirms it, but illustrates it in graphic detail over the long stretch of history. From the book of Exodus onwards nations play their part in the biblical narrative. In the opening story it becomes somewhat paradigmatic. The battle between Yahweh, God, and Pharaoh (as we read about in the exodus and we've touched on that) it's not just between God and one recalcitrant individual, Pharaoh, it’s the whole nation of Egypt is implicated in the sin of oppression and suffers in the process of God's liberating justice.”

So when it’s speaking about Pharaoh it’s speaking of him as heading a nation and that is a challenge for us as individuals to think of it, but there it is.

“The narrative goes on to show how successive nations either set themselves against Yahweh and his people out of their own malicious initiative, such as the Amalekites, the Moabites and the Amorites, or have become so incorrigibly wicked that they are to be destroyed in the execution of God's punishment. (Like the Canaanite nations. Remember when we were thinking about Abraham, their iniquity had not yet been filled up but later when God sent his people into the land, it was a judgment on them.) Thus while Israel is warned against arrogantly imagining that their victory over the Canaanites will be on account of their own righteousness, God confirms that it will be on account of the wickedness of those nations.

And if you take a moment to look at Deuteronomy chapter 9, looking at verses 4 to 6 where it says,

(Read Deuteronomy 9: 4 – 6)

So, it was judgment in one case, the gift of the land, it was grace on the other hand. He goes on:

“The image we might prefer for the Bible's portrait of the nations is not a melting pot, (as we've said) it is more a salad bowl.”

We’re thinking now of the nations standing under the judgment of God. God intended to use Israel as the agent of His historical judgment on the wickedness of Canaanite nations. He quotes a scholar by the name of Walter Brueggemann. He says he thinks that his treatment of this is not as encouraging as he thinks it ought to be, he speaks of Israel’s preferential or exceedingly harsh presentation of the nations in the interest of Israel which is has says, ideological because of the sovereignty of Yahweh is drawn most blatantly and directly into the service of Israel's political agenda. The destruction of the nations negatively serves to establish the legitimacy of Israel's claim. But Dr. Wright wants us to consider that Deuteronomy 9 that we've read, makes precisely the opposite case. Israel has no legitimate claim to the land at all, she has no greater righteousness than the nations, indeed, the chapter stresses that if anybody deserves to be destroyed it was Israel. Israel still existed only by God's forgiving grace. So there is grace and judgment. He said,

“The prophets in their oracles against the nations though they do have remarkable words of hope and potential restoration, express the overwhelming conviction that the nations in general stand under the imminent judgment of God for a variety of reasons which are mainly ethical because of their behavior. Isaiah portrays the grim reality in the searing words near the beginning of the apocalypse…”

and he quotes that in Isaiah 24. So I’m going to ask you to turn to Isaiah chapter 24, verses 5 and 6:

(Read Isaiah 24: 5 & 6)

It's a word of searing judgment as Dr. Wright says. That universal wickedness is spoken of. He goes on to say,

“Universal wickedness faces universal divine judgment. It is abundantly clear throughout the Bible that this is the default position that the human race is in, for nations as much as for individuals.

The nations are under the judgment of God for very real reasons, for their moral and spiritual failure. It is tragic in it’s the record of history that nations rise and fall. My country of Australia was part of the great British Empire. When I was a boy you could look at a map of the world, and it stretched across the world. It had its strengths and its weaknesses, and it has collapsed to something much less. It has its own weaknesses and sins as do the other nations. And he says,

“Against such a bleak background God's mission to bless the nations and the mission of God's people as the vehicle of such blessing constitute very good news indeed.”

National life carries within it in a sense, the seeds of its own decline and disaffection. And that has been true of nations everywhere in history. So they lie under the judgment of God here, and that's what we're thinking about. Also, the remarkable fact that it is true that any nation can be used by God as an agent for His judgment. He goes on to say,

“In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, God delivered His judgment unmediated (it was something that He did directly). That is why the narrative acquires such proverbial force as a symbol of the naked wrath of God which reaches a biblical climax, of course, in the book of Revelation (and the judgments that we read about there). However, in the more normal course of history God uses one nation or another as the instrument of His sovereign justice. The classic first interest of this in the Bible is the way the conquest of the Canaanites by the tribe of Israel is repeatedly interpreted as the outworking of Yahweh's judgment on a society where iniquity was full.

And that's expressed in Genesis 15:16, so let’s turn to that so that you’ll have it in your mind. Remember this is the passage in which we look before some time ago, at God’s promises to Abraham. Start inverse 15.

(Read Genesis 15:15 – 16)

Israel was to be a judgment. The Israelites were severely warned not to interpret their victory over the nations of Canaan as attributable in any way to their own righteousness. They could certainly infer correctly that it was on account of the nation's wickedness, as we’ve looked at before. In this instance God was using the Israelites as the agent of His judgment on the Canaanites and that's Deuteronomy 9 verses 4 – 6. He goes on to say,

“The lesson Israel had to learn from this single part of their own history, however, was far from comforting. The fact was that if God could use Israel as the agent of His judgment on wicked nations, He could readily apply the same principle in reverse. Warnings to this effect abound in the Torah.”…and he gives a list.

Let’s look at it. Let’s turn to Leviticus 18: 24 – 28. He says,

(Read Leviticus 18: 24 – 28)

Why? Because the land will vomit you out and that God will ultimately bring other nations to bring judgment upon you, as He actually did. Have a look while we’re in Leviticus at 26: 17. Starting in verse 14:

(Read Leviticus 26: 14 – 17)

The threat that God will bring nations to judgment on Israel. As he comes down, he says,

“In the long history of Israel in the Old Testament period it is the latter, the direction of God's judgment that predominates. Judges Chapter 2 describes the pattern set in the early generations after the settlement of the tribes in the land of Canaan.”

You remember how it goes? Let’s just quickly turned to Judges. Judges chapter 2 sets the parallel after the burial of Joshua, verse 11:

(Read Judges 2: 11 - 15)

“They were in sore straights”, it was tough going. So he’s making the point and reminding us that God can use any nation to be the agent of His judgment, and He actually did in the history of Israel and the nations round about. He says,

“Time and again Yahweh brought other nations as the tools of His anger against Israel's rebellion and apostasy.”

And he encourages us to look at Amos 6 and Isaiah 10 and Isaiah 7:18 and 9:11.

“In the latter centuries of the monarchy even the greater empires of the world were seen by the prophets as no more than a stick in the hand of Yahweh, a rod to punish Israel.”

And it's worth turning to Isaiah chapter 10. So let’s turn there to see that. It’s a powerful statement. And God raises up are not only the Babylonians here, but then the Persians ultimately on the Babylonians, but Isaiah 10: 5 & 6…let’s look at that. He’s talking here of Assyria, ahh! Assyria, the great nation of Assyria which came down and decimated the northern kingdom of Israel.

(Read Isaiah 10: 5 – 7)

But he is seeing them as the instrument of God's judgment on His people. So, it's a remarkable thought and undoubtedly, though we don't necessarily have the prophetic minds to interpret it for us, God uses nations today I guess in that same point. He certainly operates in the role of the nations. So, he goes on,

“Then the Babylonian becomes God's agent of judgment not only on Israel but on the other smaller nation-states who are urged by Jeremiah to recognize the sovereignty of Yahweh, the God of Israel, and submit to His servant Nebuchadnezzar.”

Let’s turn to Jeremiah chapter 25 and read those words. It's a reminder of how God uses the nations as instruments of His judgment. Chapter 25, verse 9

(Read Jeremiah 25: 8 – 9)

So here is God not only using Assyria, using Babylon, and as he goes on,

“Indeed the principle that God can use the nations as His instrument agents of judgment on other nations applies not only to His dealings with Israel, Gods judgment on Egypt also will be carried out through Nebuchadnezzar, according to Ezekiel.”

You may like to have a look at that. Ezekiel 30, verse 10 to 11, is the prophecy,

(Read Ezekiel 30: 10 – 11)

So, he uses nations against nations, and he said, later of course Babylon itself falls under the prophetic word of judgment. Even though God had used it to punish Israel, its excesses put Babylon in turn into the blast-path of God's wrath, which will be delivered this time through Cyrus of the Medes and Persians. Have a look at Isaiah 47. Do look up these verses and reflect on them and let them fill your mind again with how the sovereign hand of God fulfils His purposes in a multitude of ways.

(Read Isaiah 47: 6 – 7)

Because of that failure He will bring them down. In the beginning of that chapter it reads,

(Read Isaiah 47)

“… sit on the ground without a throne…”because God will bring His instrument of Cyrus, king of the Persians upon them, to bring judgment. So he says, and it’s concluding this,

“So the overwhelming message is consistent - all the nations are in the hands of Yahweh, the Living God. Their victories too are not to be attributed to their own gods but rather to the sovereignty of Yahweh and sometimes God may use a nation, any nation, as the agent of historical justice in the arena of international affairs. That in itself does not make the nations they used any more righteous than another, as Israel was categorically told, all it means is that God remains sovereign.”

And you and I, whatever we nation we may belong to, and whatever happens within it, ultimately, we look to the sovereign hand of God. That doesn't mean that we should not where we are do all that we can to maintain our nation and in righteousness and truth and in good behavior, but whatever ultimately befalls the situation in which we live, we belong to another kingdom. And we look to God and see His hand working in the affairs of the world. We may not always be able to understand why it’s happening and how it's happening, but we trust God. So he then says,

D. ALL NATIONS ALSO RECIPIENTS OF GOD’S MERCY

“Any nation can be the recipient of God's mercy.”

Not only have the judgment, but also any nation can receive mercy at the hands of God.

“The same universality by which all nations stand under the judgment of God for their wickedness and idolatry is also used or deployed in the Old Testament thinking about the mercy of God.”

**1. In Exodus**

He talks about Exodus 33 and Exodus 34. They’re worth turning to and looking at. So let’s go back to Exodus. Exodus 33, and looking at verse 19. Let’s start at 17.

(Read Exodus 33: 17 – 23)

The Lord passes by in a form that somehow Moses could see. But this statement about God, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy”, is repeated in chapter 34, at verses 6 & 7, when Moses was told to cut two tables for the statement of the Commandments,

(Read Exodus 34: 5 – 7)

God is gracious, and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and mercy, and as we read from 33, that can be shown to whomsoever God will. And we know that God wills to show it to the nations.

**2. In Jeremiah**

Jeremiah 18 is a well-known passage. Let me ask you to turn to that. Jeremiah 18, the story of the Potter, when he goes down to the Potters House and as Wright goes on to say,

“The clearest articulation of this impartiality in God's dealings with the nations is given by Jeremiah after visiting a potter at work. The lesson that Jeremiah draws from his observation of the potter who declared an initial intention but then changed his plans, and therefore the end result became some response in the clay is, that God likewise responds to human response to His declared intentions. The focal point of the Potter metaphor in Jeremiah 18 is not so much on the unquestionable sovereignty of the divine potter, but on the potential that resides in the clay to cause the potter to change his intension.”

So, as you look at Jeremiah 18, “and the Lord came to me and said,” and he went down to the potter’s house and he saw the piece of pettery he was making spoiled in the potter’s hands, and he reworked it into another vessel as it seemed good to the Potter, so, the Lord says in verse 5,

(Read Jeremiah 18: 5 – 11)

This was a word directed to Israel, but as you read it, you see that God's dealings in this way extends to the nations beyond Israel.

**3. In Jonah**

He goes on then to talk about the book of Jonah and that is worth a consideration. He says,

“The book of Jonah could have been written as a case study of this passage in Jeremiah 18. Jonah proclaims the impending doom of Nineveh from king to beggar, the city repents. (That’s the story of Jonah as you may recall.) So God also repents and withholds His judgment. But the amazing twist of the book is that this signal demonstration of the mercy of Jehovah, of Yahweh, as God, in dealing with foreign nations is an embarrassment to Jonah.”

Jonah knew the Exodus accounts of Yahweh perfectly well and quotes the key proof text in Jonah 4: 1 & 2. Let’s just look at that.

(Read Jonah 4: 1 – 2)

Here is the word that we read from that Exodus account, Jonah knows it and he knows that it indicates that God will show mercy to any who actually turn to Him, and he doesn’t particularly want this to happen. But it does.

“But what should have been a matter of praise (in the repentance of this city) or even merely grudging admiration that Yahweh should turn out to treat other nations with the same amazing mercy that He lavished on Israel, it becomes a matter of bitter complaint in the mouth of Jonah.”

And this book of Jonah is really, in a sense, a missionary handbook of God's concern for other nations and for their wellbeing. But sadly, the prophet Jonah is not of a mind that shares God's mind on that point. It is important that we should pray that we will have the mind of God as we set about the mission that God has given to us. He goes on,

“The book of Jonah has always featured in biblical studies of mission, sometimes as almost the only part of the Old Testament deemed to be of any relevance. Here at least is someone who had some semblance of being an actual missionary sent to another country to preach the word of God. However, for all the fascination of the character and adventures of Jonah, the real missional challenge of the book undoubtedly and intentionally lies in its portrayal of God. If Jonah intended to represent Israel, and it seems likely, than the book issues a strong challenge to Israel regarding their attitude to the nations, even enemy nations, that prophets placed under God's declared judgment and regarding their understanding of God's attitude to the nations, and concluding open-ended quest of the book as an enduring warning- rebuke to our tendency to foist our own ethno-centric prejudices on the Almighty.”

God says, should He not have mercy on that great nation? He said,

(Jonah 4- 11) “Should I not pity Nineveh that great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle.”

God would have an intention to bless and to save. He said,

“It’s interesting to compare and contrast the response of Jonah to the word of divine judgment on a pagan nation to that of Abraham, commissioned to proclaim Nineveh scorned. (Jonah ran away and jumped in a boat,) but informed by God's intention to investigate the outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham jumps to intercession and finds Yahweh prepared to be even more merciful than he initially bargained for.”

Quite a contrast. He quotes Nathan McDonald. He says,

“He finds a thread running through the text such as Genesis 18, Exodus 32 – 34, Psalms 103, and Ezekiel 18, that is, as it occurs in Genesis 18, the judge of all the earth who will unquestionably do what is right, (and He does do what is right by all nations) is also the gracious and compassionate God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but rather that they should turn from their ways and live. The character of the Lord is exercising forgiveness and mercy extended to all nations not just to Israel.”

So, we’re considering the role of the nations and it is that, they too can be the recipients of God's mercy, as God looks at the nations, the ones that He’s created. Jeremiah 12 is the passage that I ask you to return to and consider. And he concludes this certain this section by saying,

“This surely has to be one of the most foundational elements of the Old Testament contribution to our theology of mission.”

Let’s have a look at it. Jeremiah chapter 12, verses 14 to 17 where he says,

(Read Jeremiah 12: 14 – 17)

So writes Dr. Wright,

“This surely has to be one of the most foundational elements of the Old Testament contribution to our theology of mission. First, if it were not the case that all nations stand under the impending judgment God, there would be no need to proclaim the Gospel. But if it were not for the fact that God deals in mercy and forgiveness with all who repent, there would be no Gospel to proclaim.”

Okay. So all nations may be recipient of God's mercy, and we recognize that as we heed the words of the Master ‘to go and make disciples of all nations.’

E. ALL NATIONS ARE UNDER GOD’S CONTROL

All nations’ histories are under Gods control. It’s worth considering. Wright says,

“In previous chapters I've stressed the uniqueness of Israel's relationship with Yahweh. Their understanding of election, redemption, covenant and holiness, set them apart from the nations at a fundamental level. God has chosen and called Israel as no other nation has done.”

And he directs us to Deuteronomy 7 and Amos 3:2, which I ask you to look at. But,

“God has redeemed Israel in a way that He has done to no other nation. God has revealed His Law too and entered into a covenant relationship with Israel, (Psalm 147 says), and this nation was called to embody and demonstrate all this uniqueness in practical, ethical distinctiveness from all the other nations.”

Look at Leviticus. It’s mentioned there, but let’s look at that. Leviticus 18, and the first 5 verses:

(Read Leviticus 18: 1 – 5)

So, there was to be a distinctiveness. In these respects, the relationship between God and historical Israel in the Old Testament period was unprecedented. He had not done anything like this before. Unparalleled. He had done nothing like this anywhere else. Not before or anywhere else.

“Furthermore, we’ve explored the missiological implications of these great unique claims. All of them flow from God’s own mission in the world, (from creation to new creation), Israel's identity and their role within that mission to be a people that display the character of God in their life and were a light to the nations. God's mission is to bless all the nations of the earth in that context. For that universal aim He chose a very particular means, the people of Israel. The uniqueness was for the sake of God's universality.”

And that's an important thing to remember as we read about Israel being so particular, to remember that all nations and their histories are under God's control, and He had brought Israel into being for the sake of their redemption. The unique story of Israel's redemption was to be a paradigm of what God would ultimately accomplish through Christ for the deliverance of all nations from bondage. Their unique stewardship of God's revelation was so that ultimately the Law of God could go forth from them to the nations.

So, all nations histories are under the control of God, He works through them, the uniqueness of Israel was for the point of view of God's universality. It’s important to keep that in mind as you read through the Old Testament. Remember, we’re trying to work with a hermeneutic which will help us understand the Bible as a whole, so we need to see Israel called as Abraham was, to be blessed, but also that they might be a blessing. And what was true with their forefather Abraham was to be true of them. He goes on to say,

“However it would be quite wrong to construe these affirmations, as Israel's uniqueness is tantamount to an absence of involvement by Yahweh in the affairs of other nations. On the contrary, it was part of the bold claim of Israel that Yahweh, their God, was the Supreme mover on the stage of international history. All the nations and their kings, wittingly or unwittingly weave their stories under the master plan of Israel's God, not their own gods.”

So whatever the nations thought that their gods were accomplishing it was in actual fact under the hand of Yahweh. He goes on to say,

“The uniqueness in that reduced generic sense, is not what the Old Testament Israel claimed for Yahweh (that it was just for them). It was a much more exalted and universal claim, a claim that would be the grossest arrogance if it were not true. The claim was, that Yahweh was in fact, the sovereign God of all the earth, ruling the histories and destinies of all nations, and in that context, the universal involvement with all nations, Yahweh had a unique relationship with Israel.”

So this is an important thing to bear in mind. He goes on to say,

“An example of the former, (that is, that comes out of the warnings to Israel given in the wilderness, not to attempt to take any land from Edom, Moab or Ammon as they were moving, you remember, coming up into the promised land, that God had given to them. That was theirs and they were to bypass it. And so they did because God had His interest there.) He says,

“Three times in the passage, when Deuteronomy's prominent land theology in relation to Israel's possession of Canaan is taken into account, this direct statement that Yahweh has given other lands to other people supported by the parenthetical notes that follow is quite remarkable. Three times this passage says that Yahweh has given the land of Edom (that’s in Deuteronomy 2:5), to Moab (Deuteronomy 2:9), and to Ammon (Deuteronomy 2:19), using the same vocabulary as is characteristically used of his land gift to Israel.”

So here is an indication of the fact that God has given, in His own purposes, the nations their territories. And they are all under His control. So it's fascinating to think of that and to hold it in our minds as we consider it. Wright goes on to say,

“There is more theology tucked away in these obscure notes, (these references to His purposes and His control of the other nations) than the NIV translation’s understandable use of the parentheses as it does, might suggest, some of it explicit, some more latent.

**First,** these notes unambiguously assert God's multi-national sovereignty. The same God who declared to Pharaoh that the whole earth belong to Him, had been moving other nations around on the chessboard of history long before Israel's historic exodus and settlement.

**Second**, these notes relativized Deuteronomy's land gift itself, though not in the sense of questioning it or undermining it. The affirmation of Yahweh's gift of land to Israel in fulfillment of His promise to Abraham is one of the fundamental pillars of Deuteronomy's whole worldview. However, it was in principle and at a purely historical level, no different from what God had done in other nations. In the immediate context, Israel’s defeat and territorial takeover of the lands of Zion and Og was no different from the other nations earlier migrations and forceful settlements. All are attributed to the sovereign disposition of Yahweh.”

Well, there we are. “It's clear in Amos (and that’s a quotation from Amos 3:2, let’s just turn that up at this moment…

(Read Amos 3: 1 - 2)

In chapter 9 of Amos, and verse 7, we read,

(Read Amos 9: 5 - 8)

“It’s clear that Amos is here, undermining Israel's false confidence in the mere language of their covenant or in the mere historical fact of their exodus. They could not claim, “we belong to Yahweh” as if no other nation mattered to Him. They could not point to their history without observing that other nations had similar histories in which Yahweh had been active. Instead of being God's priestly kingdom as they were in Exodus, they have become the sinful nation. They might still want to be called Yahweh's people but it was now open to question whether He would be called their God. The uniqueness of their election, far from making them immune from judgment actually exposes them to more of God's punishment.”

He’s got a quote from an Old Testament scholar Alex Martia (?)

“There is a sense in which there is no difference between Israel and other nations. The Lord is alike the agent in every national history, every racial migration. In this regard, it is no more a privilege to be an Israelite than to be a Hottentot. Our Lord rules all, appointing the place they shall leave, the distance they shall move, and the spot where they shall settle. The Exodus as a historical fact, enshrines no more of God than does the coming of the Philistines from Kaftor, the Assyrians from Kier (?), and no more brings automatic benefit than do those other divinely engineered events. The historical act of God can by His will, become a means of blessing, but it does not ever of itself convey the blessing. In this sense, the Israel of the Exodus is level pegging with the Philistines who came from Kaftor and the Ethiopians who for all Amos tells us never went anywhere. One divine government rules all and a day on moral providence observes all, and judges all. The Lord does not look on people in the light of their historical past, but in the light of their moral present. Every nation is equally under this moral scrutiny.”

So it is with Israel. So here we’ve been thinking about all nations being under the control of God and he summarizes this subject by saying,

“The connection may be portrayed in four ways which builds on one another theologically.

1. The nations are witnessing observers of what Yahweh does in and to Israel.
2. The nations can be beneficiaries of the blessing inherent in Israel's covenant.
3. The nations will come to know and worship Israel's God.
4. The nations will ultimately be included within the identity of Israel as God's people.

These four perceptions we will now think about. They are part of the four ways in which Israel was to be a light to the nations and to connect with them, and we are now going to witness these four things.”

Let's look at those individually.

1. First of all, thinking of t*he nations as witnesses to Israel's history: they were to watch what God did*. He quotes Exodus 15:14 and I ask you to turn to that now. See how God's purposes were working out all the way. God is sovereignly at work in *all* human history, and what was true, as we read the Biblical record, is true of our own time. We need to trust God in that fashion and know that it is in obedience that we find our blessings wherever we are. That is both nationally true and individually true. This is the song of Moses after they’ve come out of Egypt .

(Read Exodus 15: 13 – 16)

So he’s indicating that what God does in Israel is for the purpose of being a witness to them, and the nations are meant to learn from it. He says,

“With these words the song of Moses envisages the effect on surrounding nations of the great deliverance that has just taken place at the Sea of Reeds. Such a manifest defeat of the most powerful empire in the region, the Pharaoh’s Egypt, would doubtless engender fear among the many smaller nations in Israel's pathway. Even a generation later, this anticipated effect on the nation's proved accurate as Joshua’s spies heard from the mouth of Rahab.”

And when the spies went into the city Rahab said that the fear of God and what they were doing and what God had done to Egypt in deliverance of Israel had become known, and it was known amongst the inhabitants of Jericho.

“Even before the crossing of the Red Sea however the mighty acts of God in Jacob itself occurred in the eyes of all the Egyptians.”

It’s worth remembering that. He says,

“So the signs given by Moses and Aaron are done in the eyes of Pharaoh and the eyes of his servants and the actual departure from Egypt happened in the eyes of all the Egyptians, indeed in the eyes of all the nations it says in Exodus chapter 7.

So that was an important role that Israel had. He goes on to go to say,

“Ezekiel later on holds the same understanding of the great acts of God in Israel's early history. Whereas God would have been fully justified in acting in judgment against Israel, in fact He had withheld His wrath repeatedly and continued instead to preserve and deliver them. And all of this was precisely in order to protect the reputation of His name among the nations, in whose sight He had brought Israel out of Egypt. He says, “But for the sake of My name I did what would keep it from being profaned in the eyes of the nations that lived among and in whose sight I had revealed Myself to the Israelites by bringing them up out of Egypt.”

Let’s have a look at that in the Ezekiel chapter 20, verse 9

(Read Ezekiel 20: 8b - 10)

And then again in the same sense, in chapter 14.

So what are we seeing here? We’re seeing that part of the destiny of Israel was as a witness in their history by what God was doing in and through them to the nations round about. They were witnesses of that to God, and that they should recognize in Israel's history the hand of God.

In addition, Israel's covenant obligations were a witness. Wright goes on to say,

“Treaties and covenants in the ancient world, as today, had to have witnesses. In the case of the international treaties contemporary with Israel's Old Testament era, the witnesses were usually the different gods of the parties concerned or the deified natural order: heaven, earth, seas, mountains. In the case of Israel of course, no other gods could by definition be called on to witness the covenant between Israel and Yahweh, the God of heaven and earth. Beside Him, there was no other. So, personified nature was summoned to the task.

In phrases like this, “I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you this day.” These are references from Deuteronomy in those passages that are quoted in Jeremiah and in Micah.

“But the earth is the inhabitation of the nation's, and so by extension (with these quotations of calling the heaven and earth to witness) the nations are also portrayed as witnesses to the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. Micah calls on both as he embarks on his great covenant lawsuit against Israel.”

Let’s have a look at that. Turn to Micah chapter 1, it begins with, “The word of the Lord that came to Micah…

(Read Micah 1: 2)

They are the same summons to the nations as witnesses of God's covenant with Israel. It’s found also in Jeremiah and in Amos 3: 9, where the nations are actually specified as Assyria and Egypt, two great world powers.

So they were being called to witness to the fact that God had a covenant relationship with His people and as He delivered the lives of His people, brought them out of Egypt, established them in their land. They would to learn of God through that covenant relationship. He says,

“But the nations are not just summoned to witness the making or breaking of the covenant, ideally they should be able to observe Israel living by it. In fact such testimony to the nations of the wisdom of God's ways embodied in the social life of God's people, is presented as a major motivation for obedience to God's law. In a passage we've had occasion to notice before for its missiological implications, Deuteronomy 4: 6 - 8.”

Talking about God’s statutes…

(Read Deuteronomy 4: 6 – 8)

So, the nations are witnesses in Israel's history to Yahweh and to the benefits of knowing Him. He says,

“This chapter portrays the nations as interested and admiring spectators of Israel in terms of both the nearness of God, and the effectiveness of the God they worship and pray to, and of the justice of their social system embodied in the whole constitutional project that is Deuteronomy.

They were to be visible witnesses in what had happened to them in their history and in their social life for the reality of God.

“So the nations were in principle invited not only to watch all the wonderful things God did, but were supposed to be able to see the response of righteousness of which Israel living with the terms of the government provided. In other words Israel's visibility to the nations was meant to be not merely historically remarkable but radically and ethically challenging. God's mission involves God's people living in God's way in the sight of the nations.”

We talked before about the power of Christian social concern in the early days that impressed people.

**a. The nations witness God’s judgment on Israel**

Alright. We move on to think of Israel and its life and the nations as witnesses to God's judgment on Israel. It’s a sad story. Let's look at Deuteronomy 29.

(Read Deuteronomy 29: 23 – 27)

From the very beginning it was indicated by Moses to the people that if they forsook Him, disobeyed Him, the nations would learn a lesson from the judgment that would fall upon them. And it's a signal reminder of how they were called to serve the purposes of God, and they served the purposes of God even in their obedience or disobedience. God will have His name honored and His purpose served, and this was to take place. It was to be a blessing if they were obedient, it was to be judgment if they did not obey.

Ezekiel chapter 36, let’s just turn to that briefly.

(Read Ezekiel 36: 19 – 21)

Ezekiel’s reminder that the judgment of Israel spoke to the nations, for they asked, “Why did this happen?” and they realize it was because of disobedience to the words of their God, and they are witnesses to it.

**b. The nations witness God’s restoration of Israel**

“All nations as well as witnessing to the judgment of God, are witnesses to God's restoration of Israel”,

which is our next point. And this in a sense, brings a message of hope. Let’s look at Ezekiel 36, and look at verses 22 and 23.

(Read Ezekiel 36: 22 – 26)

In the restoration of Israel the fact that God would call them out of Babylon under the influence of the Persian conquest of Babylon, the nations were again to witness not just the judgment of God in the past, but the salvation of God. That lovely passage out of Ezekiel 36 becomes the subject of the New Covenant in the New Testament in which God says He forgives our sins and writes His law on our hearts.

“But here in God's dealings with His people there was the indication that there was hope both for Israel in its isolation from God and its disobedience, and from the nations.”

Well, let's move on to consider that

2. *the nations may be beneficiaries of God's blessings*.

Would you turn to Psalm 47? I hope that you will do this yourself so that you can give it more thought. But do look it up. And I do encourage you to work on this book yourself or if you don't have the book, go back and go over the material.

(Read Psalm 47: 1 – 4)

Dr. Wright goes on to say,

“The Old Testament is not content to leave the nations in the passive role of spectators of all that God was doing in Israel. The nations will come to see God's dealings with Israel were to be for them not just a matter of alternating admiration or horror. The whole story was for their ultimate good. Or to pursue the metaphor of spectators, the whole drama was for the benefit of the audience. Two Psalms illustrate that, t(he one we've just read) and Psalm 67.”

So let's turn to Psalm 67. The nations were not meant to be just spectators of what was happening, but it was in a sense for them.

(Read Psalm 67)

So significant is that passage that the worshiping tradition from which I come, we sing that, regularly, in Sunday worship, to remind us of these things. Wright says that,

“Psalm 47 a particular focus as the center of Psalm 4 is the just rule of God, and the nations were to learn from that so they too were able to be blessed in their life.”

Let’s turn on now to recognize that

3. *the nations will come to know and worship Israel's God*. It's a theme in the Psalms, and Chris Wright says,

“The theme of the worship of the nations being offered to Yahweh the God of Israel occurs from the beginning to the end of the Psalter., the Psalmist. So we can only point out a few key texts without a lot of comment on them. The anticipated praise of the nations is said to occur in response to His mighty acts, in response to the justice of His sovereign cosmic rule, in response to His restoration of Zion and is a part of the outpouring of the universal prose of all creation. The mighty acts of God in the Psalms are to be a way in which the nations will come to know and worship God.”

So the point that Dr. Wright is asking us to consider is that the nations not only may observe and learn, but in actual fact all these things were a positive encouragement that they would come ultimately to know God.

“Not only the Psalms, but the prophets sing about it, God's universal praise is part and parcel of it, that the nations will ultimately come to know and worship Israel's God.”

It's a moving testimony throughout the whole of the Psalms, of the prophets, and he draws our attention to Isaiah 66, which I encourage you to turn to now as we conclude that section. Isaiah chapter 66, which is a marvelous passage.

(Read Isaiah 66: 1 – 2)

Where ever that occurs God opens the hearts of people, therefore all may indeed come to Him. So at verse 22,

(Read Isaiah 66: 22 – 23)

And so, the identity is that the nations will indeed come to know Him. They will be included in that great company that He will encourage. So, notice how this mission of God that we’ve thought about from the very beginning is working through to the climax at the end.

“The choice of Israel as to be the vehicle of the revelation of God, both as an indication of His blessing upon the quality of His blessing, and what it was meant to produce in the life of a nation, its closeness to God and the quality of its life. This was to be observed and to be learned about by the nations.”

But more positively in that, the witness of the Old Testament was that all the nations could not only as it were passively observe, they could actively and would actively be involved in it.

And then perhaps as we draw near towards the end of the session, to think finally about the fact that

4. *the nations will actually be included in Israel's destiny*. Let’s look of these things because they are very significant. From the history of the Old Testament it was intended that Israel was to be a representative thing and that ultimately the nations would be gathered in to an extended and expanded Israel. Turn with me if you would to Psalm 47.

(Read Psalm 47)

The vision of the Psalm is that the nations will be included with Israel as part of the people of God. God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne, the princes of the peoples gather, as the people of the God of Abraham. A wonderful promise about it. So that’s Psalm 47. You can read Psalm 87. Registered in God’s city, they'll be a part of it. Let's look at Isaiah 19, verses 16 to 25.

(Read Isaiah 19: 16 – 25)

So here not only are the nations to be registered in God’s city, but they are to be blessed with God's salvation, and they are to be accepted in God's house. Look at Isaiah chapter 56

(Read Isaiah 56: 3 – 8)

God will register them in His house as being blessed with His salvation. They will be accepted in His house. So we've got registered in God's house, we’ve got blessed with God’s salvation, we’ve got accepted in God's house.

Look at Amos 9.

(Read Amos 9: 11 – 12)

And you'll remember of course, that this was quoted at the Council in Jerusalem in Acts chapter 15. Okay, they are called by God's name. So registered in God’s city, blessed with God’s salvation, accepted in God's house, called by God's name, finally there to be joined by God's people.

Zechariah chapter 2 verses 10 and 11.

(Read Zechariah 2: 10 – 11)

The nations will ultimately be included: registered in God’s city, blessed with God's salvation, accepted in God's house, called by God's name, joined to God's people. A wonderful testimony of what was to come, there from the very beginning part of God's whole mission for the restoration of creation.

Do read back over those passages. Do read them for yourselves. Do look at the questions that are set to be answered by those who have the book. And those who don't, the questions that are set before you. Thank you very much.