**THE MISSION**

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Lecture 10

**Introduction**

Welcome, again, to another session. Indeed, this is the final session in this series of ten that make up the consideration of mission. We’ve based these substantially, particularly in these last four study sessions that we've spent together, on the book of The Mission of God, by Chris Wright. I’ve encouraged you all the way along to find the book and read it. If you can't find that, of course, work off the notes. I commend you the questions, both for those who have the book and for those who don't. You could work on them yourself individually, or it would be good if you could do it in association with someone else so that you can stimulate someone else’s thoughts. I encourage you, also, if you have issues or questions that grow up out of this, to discuss them. If you have no one to discuss them with, you could direct your questions to Tom Mangham, who is responsible for all this. I'm sure he’ll be glad to respond to them. If he wants to pass them on to me, I’d do what I could in that way also.

**Review**

Let me repeat what I said the last time. There are one or two things to it. Let’s, first of all, say that one of the virtues of this book is that it moves through the whole issue of mission in the sense of (1)God’s mission in His world. It moves through His mission and (2) purpose of creating and re-creating, the mission that is (3) given to humanity as humanity, and the mission (4) that was Israel's. We thought quite a bit about that in the last session. It also moves through the mission (5) of Jesus, which is, of course, is crucial and central to what happens in the mission of God from beginning to end. It moves through, of course, the mission (6) of the church. Again, it is a vehicle that Jesus has chosen to carry His message out and to make disciples of all nations through. So let me encourage you, as you think about this. Perhaps, as a working model, keep those six divisions that we initially had. Also, picture in your mind, the garden as the beauty with which we began. Picture the fall, and the tragedy of what happened. Picture the cross, as the great action of God in which the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus, solved the problem of sin in the lives of His created people. Also, as we looked at the other day, it had it’s impact across the whole created order.

Picture the cross and the suffering of the cost to God, and all that we expected to learn from that. God loves the world so much. He loves us so much. Think of the resurrection, of the revivifying, and the remaking power that resides in God as Jesus was raised from the dead. We think of His resurrected life, so one day, we too, will be raised up by God to be members of His new heaven and new earth. We will enjoy heaven with Him if our death happens before that. The ultimate thing is our participation in that new heaven and new earth. Then think about the new heaven and new earth. That hope, as we've learned over and over again, is meant to inspire us. It is something to which we look. It is something which we anticipate as the great goal of God’s creating purpose, and the wonders that undoubtedly lie beyond that - things too beautiful and too different for us to contemplate. Still, the prospect lies before us. So bear that in mind.

suggestions

I suggested, in terms of studying and working on this, that you might, in using this book, work through the questions that been provided. You may like to use it again as the basis of a yearlong daily devotion. You could use it in your Bible reading. That would be a good thing to do. Or you could use it just in your personal reading as what you choose to read. You could use it in a group study. Get some people around you. Get a copy of the book and take different chapters and work on it, and contribute to one another. I suggested that you may like, if you had the opportunity of conducting Bible studies, to use this as the basis for a series of Bible studies. If you have the opportunity of preaching, using some of the material in your sermons. I mentioned a trick that I was taught by a very wise theologian. Keep a book close by, and read a few pages every day, even if life is very busy. Over the period of a year, or many years, you’ll read quite a bit. You might like to keep this book on your desk for a while until you work your way through it. Also, for every new book - and I guess this is a new book - read one or two older ones to balance it out. All wisdom is not found in the present moment.

Again can I add that these themes, in actual fact, do represent the life and story of the Bible. Their emphases ought to be found in the life of the local church to which you belong. That is, you ought to perhaps be encouraging churches, in which you have a ministry, to think about all these responsibilities. Encourage them to think about what God is doing in His total mission, what humanity is being committed to do, and what role that Israel played, and how we've been grafted into that expanded Israel. Think about how the mission of Jesus was central to all this, in His death, and resurrection, and His coming again, and with the completion at the end. All these ought to be reflected in the life of the Church. If a church is not involved, really, in doing evangelism in a realistic way something is missing. If it's not encouraging it’s people to live within this general framework, and to practice justice, compassion, as well as Evangelism, it’s defective.

**GOD AND THE NATIONS IN NEW TESTAMENT MISSION**

Let’s turn now, to our topic today, which is God and the nations. We’re looking at the nations as part of the mission in the New Testament. Dr. Wright opens it by saying,

“At the end of the previous chapter I outlined the abroad contours of Israel's understanding of the nations within their core worldview, convictions about God, and the world. This is a study foundation of conviction on which Jesus and His earliest followers built an edifice that has come to be called the mission of the church.”

**I. FOUNDATION**

So this is what we’ve been looking at as the foundation. He says that it must've been something that reasoned like this... Well, before we come to that, let me deal with the question that is often raised which is whether there is a mission mandate in the Old Testament. Chris Wright tends towards saying “No, not in the sense that we think of it”, but there are others that have a different point of view. Let me just read the section in which he says,

“We need to step back just a moment and ask whether the logic (that we are looking at at the moment) ought to have generated mission to the nations much earlier, that is, within the history of the Old Testament itself. It should've been sending missionaries out. There are those who think that it was indeed God’s intention that the Israelites should have engaged in evangelistic centrifugal mission, that is, going out to the people.”

He talks about Walter Cater and his building of that particular thing. Wright goes on,

“However, it seems to me that there is no clear mandate in God's revelation to Israel over the centuries for them to undertake missions, in our sense of the word, to the nations. If it had been the case that God intended the Israelites should travel to other nations to challenge their worship of other gods, to call them to ethical and religious repentance, to tell the story of all that Yahweh had done in and for Israel, and then to lead them to trust in the promised seed of Abraham for their salvation, if all this had been God’s intention for Israel, one might have expected to find other lines of evidence. For example, in the Torah, while we have observed implications of the designation of Israel as God’s priesthood among the nations, there’s no clear and expressive command that Israel should go to the nations and exercise their priesthood there. There’s not shortage of laws about how Israel was to live in the land as God’s covenant partner in the midst of the nations. So if Yahweh’s intention had been that they were to organize missions to the nations, instructions to that affect, surely would have been framed. But we find none. If actual missions to the nations had been a known covenantal obligation, we might have expected explicit condemnation in the prophets for Israel’s manifest failure to undertake such missionary activity. Especially if there were such a key and conscious element in Israel’s understanding.

The prophets found no shortage of things to condemn Israel for; failure to live by the standards of their covenant with Yahweh among the nations. Failure to take the message of salvation to the nations by physically going to them, is not one of them. This suggests that nobody, at that point, was under the impression that they were supposed to go, including those who stood closest to the mind and revelation of God. Jonah, of course, was an exception. To use him in support of an alleged missionary mandate in the Old Testament begs the hermeneutical questions of the book’s intention. The book clearly teaches important lessons about the nature of God and His attitude towards outside nations. It’s the obvious thrust of the final chapter. It clearly challenges the kind of attitude that Jonah adopts in reaction to God’s suspension of judgment on Nineveh. Whether it was written with the additional intention of persuading other Israelites to be foreign missionaries like Jonah, is questionable.

What we find, rather, is the clear promise that it is God’s intention to bring such blessing to the nations. God will summon the nations to Himself in a great pilgrimage design. Missions to the nations from an Old Testament perspective is an eschatological act of God, (That is, it’s something to be done in the future by God) not yet a missionary sending agenda for God’s people. Only in Isaiah 66, is there explicit word of God sending messengers to the nations, and that is a future expectation contingent on the ingathering of Israel first.”

Let’s go back to when he talks about the fact that there is no clear demand. However, he says that there was a logic to the notion of when the time would come for the call from the Psalms, and the news of Yahweh’s salvation, to be proclaimed to *all* the nations. It would move from the imagination of faith into the area of historical fulfillment. Here’s the logical patent. It’s listed here, but it's worth reading. It goes like this:

If the God of Israel is the God of the whole earth – (the answer is, yes, he is),

if all nations including Israel stood under His wrath and judgment – (and yes they did),

if it is, nevertheless, God’s will that all nations on earth should come to know and worship him – (and it is),

if He had chosen Israel to be the means of bringing such a blessing to all nations – (and it was),

if the Messiah is to be the one who would embody and fulfill the mission of Israel – (and He was),

if Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen, is that Messiah, (He was and is),

then it is time for the nations to hear the good news.

It is time for the repeated summons of the Psalms, and the news of Yahweh’s salvation would be proclaimed and sung among the nations, and for the vision of the prophets that Yahweh’s salvation should reach the ends of the earth to move from the imagination of faith into the arena of historical fulfillment.

**II. MISSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

So we're about to launch now on how God and the nations appear in the New Testament mission. We’re saying that, perhaps, there was no direct missionary mandate in the Old Testament. But now we're moving on to see what we learn in the New Testament. Under the heading of “Jesus and the Evangelists”, the Scriptures begin to show us a new picture. Wright says,

1. **Jesus and the Evangelists**

“What were the aims of Jesus? What did He set out to do? How did He understand His own personal mission? What what did He envision happening up to His death? These are massive questions on which oceans of scholarly ink have been spilled. Fortunately, there's some very helpful surveys of the relevant scholarship.”

We need not rehearse them here. If you want to read them, you have the book. You can follow his references. He says,

“One of the simplest ways in framing a reasonably coherent answer to the question above, is to observe what immediately preceded, and what immediately followed Jesus earthly ministry. All records agree, that the ministry of Jesus began out of the ministry of John the Baptist. John's ministry was aimed at calling Israel to repentance in preparation for the coming of the Lord Himself. That is, it was fundamentally a prophetic ministry seeking the restoration of Israel. Jesus identified Himself with John's message and used it as the foundation of His own. Then, very soon after Jesus death and resurrection, we find His first followers crossing the boundaries of Jewish separateness from the Gentiles in order to share the good news about Jesus. Supported and authenticated in doing so by the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Within a few short years, those who named Jesus as Lord and Savior had grown beyond the original group of convinced Jewish believers, to include Hellenized Jews, then Samaritans, then Greeks, and people of many ethnic groups in Asia Minor, and those that eventually had taken root in the cosmopolitan city of Rome itself. In other words, Jesus’s earthly ministry was launched by a movement that aimed at the restoration of Israel. But He, Himself, launched a movement that is aimed at the ingathering of the nations to the new Messianic people of God. The initial impetus for His ministry was to call Israel back to their God. The subsequent impact of His ministry was a new community that called the nations to faith in the God of Israel.”

It's important when you're reading the Gospels, to remember that there is a primary focus in what they say. They were directed towards the people of Israel. When Jesus spoke of this, He said He was first sent to the house of Israel. That was His initial mission to call God’s ancient people back to Himself as being restored to their land. They were still under the authority of others. He had come to call them to their real liberation which He was to provide. In other words, Jesus’s ministry was launched by movement aimed at the restoration of Israel.

“The double dimension of the ministry of Jesus, that is, to Israel and then in the impetus for the nations, needs to be kept in mind as we read the New Testament. It is consistent, not only with the Old Testament passages we have surveyed in which the eschatological scenario (the view of the end) often included this sequence, Israel would be restored. The nations will be gathered. Or, in Zachariah 2 and Zechariah 9, the king, Yahweh, would return to Zion, thus restoring His kingdom in their midst and then the nations would be joined to His people. It also reflects what is known of the Jewish hopes in the period between the close of the Old Testament, the opening of the New. Among the huge variety of eschatological scenarios found in the post-Old Testament literature, the dominant note is that of the redemption and restoration of Israel. But the subordinate note is that after the purging fires of judgment on the enemies of God, the way would be opened for the ingathering of the nations as foreseen in the great canonical prophets.”

So as we think about this, and as we think about Jesus and the evangelists, we bear in mind that the mission of Jesus was initially to Israel, and the promise of God to restore His people. It began an impetus which was to move out into the world to gather in the Gentiles. What about Jesus and the Gentiles? Well, there is a series of incidences that Wright draws to our attention as we look at Jesus’s attitude to Gentiles. I think we should look at these.

1. **Jesus and the Gentiles**

**1.**

So, find Matthew chapter 8 verse 5. It has it’s parallel in Luke, but in verse 5 is says,

(Read Matthew 8: 5)

**“When He had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to Him, appealing to Him, ‘Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.”**

**He obviously had heard of Jesus. Possibly was hard not to have heard of him.**

**“And he said to Him, ‘I will come and heal him.’”**

Now here, first of all, is a non-Jew, a Roman Centurion, a leader of the group of soldiers who were the occupying army. So this is a Gentile. He is a Gentile overlord in the sense that he’s representing Rome. But he comes with a sense of who Jesus was, and in great need concerning one of his servants. Jesus responded by saying,

“**I’ll come and heal him. But the centurion replied, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.’”**

There is a marked difference in the attitude of this Gentile to Jesus and his own people. He says,

**“For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”**

The implication being that Jesus has power authority to do, in the dimension in which he is looking for help, something similar to what he does in his responsibilities as Centurion.

**“When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed Him, ‘Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.’”**

In other words He was saying, ‘This man's confidence in me is characteristically different to a lot of what I’m experiencing amongst my own people.’

**“Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment.”**

So there is this very significant encounter with this Gentile. He sees a deep expression of his confidence - confidence which was not being represented in His own people. He comments on it in that fashion. So this incident with a Roman Centurion is a powerful indicator of Jesus’ interest and commitment to the wider circle of humanity. Remember those triangles: God, Israel, and the land, inside God, the nations, and the world. So here you see it. Because Jesus is God and shares the heart of the Father, this was the intention from the beginning. So that was a first one.

**2.**

He then suggests we have a look at Matthew chapter 8 verses 28-34. There are parallels to that. The Decapolis involved Gentile territory out on the right-hand side of the river Jordan to the north. Indeed, the Cavaliers area was very mixed. It had a lot of Gentiles in it. Other areas in Jerusalem were quite critical of Jews from that area. They looked down on them because of that. In Matthew 8:28, the account says,

(Read Matthew 8: 28 – 34)

**“And when Jesus came to the other side of the lake,”** (This followed his calming of the storm. **“His disciples said, “What sort of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey him?”** We’ve thought about how this action mirrored the actions of God in the Old Testament. Jesus **“came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. And behold, they cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, O Son of God?”** There was some recognition in these people of who Jesus was. Even in a way that His own people didn’t. He was the anointed one. They probably had heard something of this. **“Have you come to torment us before the time?”** Perhaps they knew about the judgment that was meant to fall on all the disobedient including the Gentiles. Perhaps it was the voice of the devils talking about their judgment. But anyway, these demoniacs cry out out, **“What have you to do with us? We know who you are. Have you come to torment us before the time? Now a herd of many swine feeding it some distance from them.”**  This probably indicates that these were Gentile herdsmen, since swine were not part of the Jewish way of life.

**“And the demons begged Him, saying, “If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.” And he said to them, “Go.” So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged Him to leave their region.”**

Now if you happen to turn across to Mark chapter 5 to see the account of this - let’s just do that for a moment. There’s a little bit of an addition. It’s larger and it refers to only one, but come down to verse 14.

(Read Mark 5: 14 – 20)

**“The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged Him that he might be with Him. And he did not permit him but said to him, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.**

So there was, out of this incident, something of a missionary venture, out amongst those who are not predominately Jews. Jesus launched this man in this direction. So it’s a fascinating thing.

**3.**

Have a look at Mark chapter 7 for a minute in verses 31-35. This is another incident of healing. It says,

(Read Mark 7: 31 – 35)

**“Then He returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. And they brought to Him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged Him to lay His hand on him. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, He put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, He sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”**

So out amongst these predominantly Gentile people, the Lord Jesus goes with His healing work - indicative of the fact that He’d come to heal all nations.

**4.**

Let’s have a look at the Matthew 15 starting in verse 21. Jesus has been interrogated in previous things by the Pharisees who came up from Jerusalem. It goes on to say,

(Read Matthew 15: 21 – 28)

**“And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.”** Jesus took this strange approach and, **“He did not answer her a word.”** That might have been thought to be typical of a Jewish person - to ignore Canaanite woman. **“And His disciples came and begged Him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”**

That was his initial mission. Let’s not lose sight of that. At this point in His ministry, Jesus's primary mission is to Israel. So he reiterates that. “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

She wouldn't give up. She came and she knelt before Him, saying

**“Lord, help me.”** He answered - perhaps He was trying her out - her seriousness**, “And he answered, ‘It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.’”** This was an expression often used by Jews of Gentiles; dogs. So he hurls this typically Jewish insult at her. How does she react? In bitterness? No. The remarkable thing is she said, **“She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.’”** I guess she’s acknowledging that God had a role for His ancient people which was different from the role of the nations, round about. She articulated this, and **“Jesus answered her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.”**

Here is a Canaanite woman, well outside of arena of what is thought of as Jesus’s mission. But she is indicative of a whole range of non-Jews who, ultimately, exercise a saving faith in the Lord Jesus. Jesus, while He knows that His mission is primary to Israel, would not rebuke or turn away this woman. He tested her faith, perhaps, she maintained it. He answered her. So, Jesus dealing with the Gentiles.

**5.**

Let’s have a look at the good news to be preached to the nations in Matthew 24 verse 14. Starting in verse 9, he’s talking to his disciples about what lies in front of them.

(Read Matthew 24: 9 – 14)

**“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”**

So the nations are in Jesus’s focus as he thinks about the Gentiles. His specific mission at the time was to the ancient people of Israel - to call them back to their God, and to restore them. But the Gentiles were not out of His focus.

**6.**

Then, of course, Matthew 28:18-20 you’ll know well.

**7.**

But at this time, let’s turn to Luke chapter 24 verses 46-49. We’ll start at 44. This is a resurrection appearance of Jesus. It says,

(Read Luke 24: 44 – 49)

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

They are to go out. But notice what we’re seeing here? We’re seeing, in the ministry of Jesus, the fact that what was envisioned in the Old Testament of the gathering of the nations and the nations becoming part of Israel, is now being contemplated in reality. Going back to the section of the book in which Wright picks these up, he goes on to say,

“The language of the great commission, especially in Matthew, is steeped in Old Testament covenant vocabulary and concepts. Jesus adopts the cosmic posture of the Lord Yahweh, Himself. He sets down the stipulations of His new covenant partners discipling, baptizing, and teaching the nations. Then, He concludes with a great covenant promise, His personal presence to the very end. The limitations of Jesus’s earthly ministry in the early mission trips of the disciples to the borders of Israel, are not completely removed. The Messiah is risen. The nations must hear and be drawn into the covenant faith through repentance and forgiveness.”

So as we look at Jesus in His ministry, which was primarily, as we’ve said, to His own people, and He was sent to draw them back to Himself. Throughout His ministry, as those incidences particularly reflect, there was the wider vision of the nations always in view. As Dr. Wright says, in that way, the borders to which Jesus permeated during His earthly ministry, He is now throwing open in His risen life. He is banishing those borders and commissioning those who are His, to make disciples of all nations. Dr. Wright goes on to look at the evangelists themselves, and the Gentiles.

**the evangelists themselves**

So, thinking about Matthew's gospel, and we've looked at this, but let's look at it again.

**1.**

If you go to Matthew chapter 1, turn to that interesting part that opens with his genealogy. Prominent in it, and being incorporated into the life of Israel, are Gentiles. There, he talks about Ruth being incorporated into it. He comes down to list Rehab in verse 5. So there are those like that who are mentioned even in this list of forefathers. Gentiles are included in the long line of Messiah. That is indicative of the fact, that they are included, ultimately, in God's purposes. So that is an indication in Matthew 1. Let me read to you what Wright says;

“Both Matthew and Luke record genealogy for Jesus. Luke indicates universality of Jesus by tracing back to Adam, the Son of God. Matthew does the same by tracing Jesus back to Abraham, the one through whom God promised blessing to all the nations. Matthew goes further by including within his list of fathers, only four mothers. But each of those foremothers is a Gentile. Tamar, the Canaanite, Rahab, the Canaanite. Ruth the Moabite, and Bathsheba, the Hittite. (They were all mentioned there.) Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, had Gentile blood in His veins also. (That's fascinating isn’t it?)

Then he asks us to think about the international aspects of Jesus’s infancy. He notes,

“Matthew portrays the international significance of Jesus, by recording first, how Magi (wise men) came from the east to worship Him, and then how Joseph took Mary and Joseph west, to Egypt. Luke sets the birth of Jesus within the context of the decree of Augustus – “that all the world should be censused.” In Luke 2, that is the decree, that the world should be taken into a census. He emphasizes the promise to Abraham with its implicit universal thrust in Luke 1:55.”

**2.**

Let’s look at that. It’s the song of Mary, and we’ll go back to verse 54.

(Read Luke 1: 54 – 55)

**“He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”**

Remember the promise to Abraham? He was to be a father of many nations and be a blessing to many nations. So here it is. Luke has embedded it in.

“He emphasizes the promise to Abraham with this implicit universal thrust and puts

the words of universality into the mouth of Simeon, who recognizes in Jesus, not only the glory of Israel, but also a light to the Gentiles.”

**3.**

That’s in Chapter 2, verse 30. Let’s have a look at that. When the child is being brought to the temple, Simeon says,

(Read Luke 2: 29 – 30)

**“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvationthat you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”**

So there was always this international aspect to Jesus's ministry as the Gospel writers prefer it. Wright goes on,

“Simeon also observes the work of salvation, now beginning through the infant in his arms, will take place in the sight of all people for the witness of the nations. So when Luke moves on to his second volume - to the story of the Gentile mission - the mission to the nation in Acts is thus the continuation and fulfillment of Jesus’s divinely appointed destiny.”

So this is how the evangelists look at the Gentiles.

**4.**

The next point, he says, is the confession of the Centurion at the cross. He asks us to look at that. In the meantime, he talks about an interesting thing. He said that,

“The editorial summaries of the international extent of Jesus influence, are fascinating. Though we might be tempted to dismiss these short notes by the Gospel writers as merely local color, it is more likely that they are intentional signals of the wider impact of Jesus.” (That is, the comments by Mary in her Magnificat, and the other references there.) “His ministry was not actually confined to the borders of Israel. Even with that which He probably primarily wanted, His fame spread far and wide. Representatives of nations came to know and to benefit from His ministry.”

sidebar – editorial summaries of international influence

These little sorts of notes made in some passages are interesting. So let’s just look at Matthew chapter 4 verses 24-25. It’s interesting isn’t it? It’s not the sort of thing that you'd naturally pickup when you read it, but it’s there when it’s drawn to your attention. Starting at verse 23,

(Read Matthew 4: 23 - 25)

**“And He went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So His fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought Him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and He healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. “**

Now we tend to focus on the healing. But there are these sidebar references of how the Gentiles outside the history of Israel were being influenced. There’s another one in Mark chapter 3 verse 7. Let’s just quickly look at that because they’re easily passed over.

(Read Mark 3: 7 - 8)

**“Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judeaand Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that He was doing, they came to Him.”**

So there are editorial comments which just fill in the background. This is telling you what's happening. They carry great significance in themselves.

Let’s look at the last one. Luke 6 verses 17-18. This reminds you, doesn’t it, that if you study the Bible there’s always something new to find. There’s always something that perhaps you hadn't recognized, or that you’ve passed over, not seeing the significance. Verse 17 says,

(Read Luke 6: 17 – 18)

**“And He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch Him, for power came out from Him and healed them all.**

**“Then He lifted up His eyes”**, and announced those famous words. There are those little editorial comments which show you the place of Jesus in relationship to the Gentiles in the eyes of the evangelists.

**4.**

He turns then, as I said, to the confession can of the Centurion before the cross. Let’s turn to Matthew chapter 27, verse 54. Here are these dramatic moments of the death of Jesus. He cries, and He yields His spirit in verse 50. Then it says in 51

(Read Matthew 27; 46 – 54)

**“And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.”**

Really, this was an action of profanation. The temple was being profaned to no longer be the center where the people would find God. Jesus was a new center. The curtain was torn in the holy place for all eyes to see.

**“And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection, they went into the Holy City and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with Him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”**

Now, it probably wasn't that he was saying what we say in our Trinitarian faith. What he was showing here was someone who was anointed by God. He was someone who perhaps will fill the role I’ve heard talked about in the history of this people. He was someone of significance. Here was a Gentile confessing who Jesus was at the cross.

It’s in Mark 15. Would you like to have a look at that while we’re considering it because it is a significant thing. This is a reminder that this Centurion was a Gentile. In verse 38, it says,

(Read Mark 15: 38 – 39)

**“And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’”**

He was duly struck with who it was.

So the confession of a Centurion at the cross, and, as well see, there will be other Gentiles who come to acknowledge this in the same way. Wright asks us then to look at the quotations used in the New Testament in what he calls “Gentile focused scriptures”. That is, the passages from the Old Testament which really speak of the Gentile mission. He asks us to look at those. So let’s do that.

Gentile focus scriptures in the New Testament quotations.

Let’s start with Matthew 4 verses 15 and 16. This is following His temptation. Verse 12 says,

**1.**

(Read Matthew 4: 15 -16)

**“Now when He heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth He went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

Of this, Dr. Wright says, “Matthew's use of scriptural quotations in relation to Jesus is pervasive. Two in particular, not surprisingly drawn from Isaiah, link Jesus to prophecies of the inclusion of the Gentile nations in the redemptive purpose of God now being fulfilled through the Messiah. Matthew 4:15-16 quotes Isaiah 9:1-2 in relation to Jesus going to live in Galilee of the Gentiles.”

**2.**

Matthew 12:18, let’s turn to that. Starting at verse 15 it says,

(Read Matthew 12: 15 -18)

**“Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed Him, and He healed them all and ordered them not to make Him known. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon Him and He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets; a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not quench, until He brings justice to victory; and in His name the Gentiles will hope.”**

It’s a quotation from Isaiah 42 in relation to the ministry of God's servant. So both these references in Matthew, quoting as He does from the Old Testament, are an indication that, as they pondered on the Scriptures and saw from the very outset in the history of His people, that the Gentiles were ultimately to be part of the purposes of God. So much for Jesus, and for the evangelists in relationship to Gentiles. They are all very significant.

**C. In the Early Church**

Let’s move now to think about the early church in the Acts of the Apostles. Let me again read to you from Wright. He says,

“At the very beginning of his book, we observed how Luke, at the end of his gospel, portrays the risen Jesus, insisting that His disciples must now read their Scriptures both messianically and missiologically.”

Remember how He taught them - both those on the road to Emmaus and in the closing verses which we read just recently, about speaking to the large body - that messianically, is to understand the Scriptures as focusing on the Messiah - the anointed one - Jesus as that anointed one. Then missiologically - that this was a message that was to be carried out to the world. Repentance and forgiveness of sins was to be preached in all the world.

So the church is born out of that understanding and is growing out of the Old Testament. If it is interpreted accurately and in the light of God's actual dealings through His Messiah, there would be both a foundation for, and an impetus to, move out into the Gentile world. So that is how the Acts of the Apostles, the second work of Luke, has its very beginning and foundation. He says,

“The same scriptures that point inexorably to the Messiah, also point to the good news going to the nations. Luke continues this angle in his second volume again, and again, showing how the Gentile mission is nothing more, or less, than a fulfillment of the Scriptures, and especially of the prophecies of Isaiah.”

I hope you take encouragement from that as you engage in your ministry. You are part of a ministry which has a long, long history that you draw out of. Millennia of missionary impetus grows out of this foundation. We're being encouraged to remember the foundation, and to see how the church took that up. Wright said,

“Even the overall structure of Luke's two-volume work, expresses this underlying theology. It begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome, from the heart of the faith of Israel, the Temple, to the heart of the world, of all the nations. That is the great arc that constitutes both the geographical progress, and the theological dynamic of Luke's account of the things that have been fulfilled among us. It reflects the whole scriptural understanding that I've been elucidating in the preceding sections. The things that happened in Luke’s story, from John the Baptist to Paul, are not just an exciting narrative. They are things that have been fulfilled. They bring the whole of the Old Testament story of Israel to its climax and destination as the purpose for which God created Israel in the first place. The blessing of all the nations now becomes a reality through the mission of the church. It requires much more space than we can take to elucidate all the text in which Luke’s perspective on the nations is expressed. Some highlights are all that we can present.”

And this is what he presents. You can take his lead and look for more. Let’s look at them.

**1.** Peter

First of all, Peter and Philip. He says,

“The early preaching of Peter, even before his encounter with Cornelius indicates an awareness of the wider significance of the events of Easter and Pentecost. Even the list of peoples whom he addressed on the day of Pentecost probably had universalizing intentions. James Scott links it at all along with the allusion to Babel in Acts 2 to 4, to the table of nations in Genesis 10. He argues that the Diaspora Jews spread out around the world who gathered in Jerusalem, represent every nation under heaven, and points to the universalistic thrust of the book of Acts. Accordingly, Peter’s appeal to the crowd for repentance and baptism affirms that the promise of forgiveness is for all who are far off and for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Which has echoes from Isaiah 44 verse 3 and of Joel 2 verse 32. Just recall Genesis 10 and the scattering of the nations. Let’s go back to Acts chapter 2 verses 1-4 to be reminded of that.

(Read Acts 2: 1– 4)

**“The day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”**

Now some people feel that these were heavenly tongues, but others believe that it was the tongues of the nations to whom they were going to speak. If you go across to chapter 4, verse 24, we go on to read about how the disciples are praying after they have been released from the charge.

(Read Acts 4: 24 – 31)

**“And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed - for truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to Your servants to continue to speak Your word with all boldness, while You stretch out Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”**

It was in the company of people of both Jew and Gentile origin, that this scene was being fulfilled. I was reading from chapter 4. Let’s go back to chapter 3, verse 24.

(Read Acts 3: 24 – 26)

**“And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ God, having raised up His servant, sent Him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.**

What is he saying here? In this phenomenon of the nation, representative of all the nations, being gathered together in those who returned for the festivals in Jerusalem, he sees as a fulfillment, or a repairing, of what was recorded in Genesis 10. That’s what Wright says,

“Similarly to his preaching for the healing of the cripple at the gate, Peter proclaims fulfillment of the word of the prophets, not just in bringing messianic blessing to Israel itself, the healing in the name of Jesus, but the fulfilling of the promise to Abraham. Specifically, that all people of the earth would be blessed.”

So there we are. Peter and Philip involved in that ministry, having this sort of focus of God's intention for the Gentiles.

Now significantly, of course, is the story of Cornelius. That is worth turning to in Acts chapter 10 and 11.

(Read Acts 10 and 11)

(Read Acts 10: 1 – 7)

**“At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, “Cornelius.” And he stared at him in terror and said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.” When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants,”** and did as he said.

In the meantime Peter was having a vision when he had, perhaps, gone to pray on the flat rooftop of the house of Simon the tanner. He had his vision of the sheep coming down from heaven with all the things that were unclean in it that Peter wouldn’t normally eat, as a Jew. “Rise, kill, and eat,” he hears the voice say. “But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.’ And the voice came to him again a second time, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.”

So what was Peter to draw from this? Well, people come and knock at the door and say,

(Read Acts 10: 22 – 23a)

**“And they said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say. So he invited them in to be his guests.”**

So Peter probably would have had certain scruples about going. Even though he had heard and been a participant in all that had gone before. This wasn't an easy lesson to learn. He goes off to meet Cornelius. So when he gets there, it says he greets him,

(Read Acts 10: 24 – 29)

**“Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.” And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”**

To this Cornelius relays what he experienced. God told him,

(Read Acts 10: 32 – 48)

**“Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’ So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord. So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality.”** (The lesson Peter is learning was not an easy one for Jewish people. God is showing no partiality. The bigger triangle is operating now.) **but in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him. As for the word that He sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all that He did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree, but God raised Him on the third day and made Him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. (**This was the message that God had given. The remarkable thing that really was convincing for Peter, was that) **While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.**

This did not pass unnoticed. Peter was called up before the church in Jerusalem. He went to those who said yes, you can enter a living relationship with God through faith in Jesus, but to really be the real thing, you had to be admitted into the life of the people of Israel and fulfill all their responsibilities. But Peter began to explain to them what happened. What else could he do? God made Himself manifestly clear. In chapter 11 verse 15 he says,

(Read Acts 11: 15 – 18)

**“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If then God gave the same gift to them as He gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?” When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”**

So here in this experience, the early church is beginning to find, not only in testimony of the things that have been declared, but also in the actual happenings, that God was moving beyond the borders of Israel to the world as He had always intended to do.

**2.** Philip

One other interesting experience is in Acts chapter 8. It is the Ethiopian eunuch, who is a significant officer in the house of the Queen of Sheba. Let’s look at this chapter. Philip has been ministering in Samaria, and he is called by the Lord to the Queen of the Ethiopians by an angel.

(Read Acts 8: 26 – 34)

**“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opens not His mouth. In His humiliation justice was denied Him. Who can describe His generation? For His life is taken away from the earth.” And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”**

Philip begins to explain and to expand on Jesus. In response, they go down and the eunuch is baptized into Christ. So here in this incident, Wright says,

“Even before Peter, however, Philip had engaged in evangelism beyond the boundaries of strictly Jewish community. First, in the remarkable mass movement in Samaria, and then in individual witness to the Ethiopian in Acts 8. We cannot be certain whether the Ethiopian court official was simply a God-fearing Gentile through contact with Jews in Ethiopia who had gone to Jerusalem to worship, or whether he was actually a full proselyte. It depends upon whether description of ‘eunuch’ is intended literally as castrated male, (as certain royal servants were - those displaced and Royal harem) or as simply a synonym for a court official. If he was physically eunuch, then according to the exclusion rule of the Deuteronomy 23, he probably could not have been a circumcised proselyte. If on the other hand he was a royal servant without official title, and he may well have been a proselyte and, therefore, no longer truly a Gentile from the official Jewish point of view. It may be then that Luke indicates the steady progression of the Gospel from Jerusalem Jews, to Samaritans, to proselyte Gentiles, and then to a God-fearing Gentile, Cornelius, and finally to the real Gentile world of Greeks and other nations when they came to Antioch. Whatever the true status of the Ethiopian, Philip wastes no time in pointing him to the words of Isaiah and their fulfillment in the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth. Luke undoubtedly saw in this event, a fulfillment of the promise of God to eunuchs and foreigners in Isaiah 56, and he probably also records the events in significance of the fact that this man's conversion of gospel reaches south into Africa the land of Hem. It is also reaching the lands of Shem. Soon after, under Paul, it will go north and west to the lands of Japheth.”

Alright, there is a further indication as we come to consider the Jerusalem Council which is so very significant in the story that we're pursuing. That is, of the gospel now in the providence of God bursting and breaking out of its Jewish limitations to embrace the nations. What was in vision, as we look at the last study, is now in actuality here, in the New Testament. What lies behind this, as you probably recall, is that Paul's ministry had been greatly blessed. He was not, out of necessity, submitting his Gentile converts to becoming members of the people of Israel by submitting themselves to all the ordinances of Israel's and being recognized as a proselyte. He was encouraging them to see that their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ fully initiated them into the life of Israel. So they called this council to discuss this matter. It says in Acts chapter 15,

(Read Acts 15: 1 - 21)

**“But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.””**

Now, it wasn’t just circumcision, I take it. It was taking upon themselves the responsibilities of being a Jew.

**“And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, reporting the conversion of the Gentiles, and they gave great joy to all the brethren. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles, and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses.”** (Notice how hard it to make significant transitions. It is, and it was then.)**The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” And all the assembly kept silence; and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brethren, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written,‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins** (we read this in Amos before)**, and I will set it up,that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name,** (They are beginning to see the impact of these words from the Old Testament being fulfilled in reality) **says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old.’ Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood. For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every sabbath in the synagogues.”**

That, he says, is open to everybody. So here are these indications of how the early church dealt with the issues of the incorporation of the Gentiles. They were taking up the direction of the Lord Jesus. They were stepping into the missiological role that He committed to them, and drawing on the passages and visions in the Old Testament of what was to come.

Further insights: Paul’s adoption of the servant ministry

There are some further things to which Wright draws our attention, and they are worth considering as we work through this section. He talks about Paul’s adoption of the servant ministry. Now, remember how the Old Testament passages of Isaiah speak about the servant, the mission that He will accomplish in the redemption of His people, and His suffering for sins and the like that we’ve already looked at. Paul, in a sense, picks up this ministry. If you turn to Acts chapter 13 you see this expressed significantly. It says in verse 13,

(Read Acts 13: 13 – 16)

**“Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem; but they passed on from Perga and came to Antioch of Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.”** (Now that was an open door for Paul wasn’t it? Someone saying, “tell me about this”.) **So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said:** (So he goes on.)

Now remember we looked at this before, noting the difference between his operation amongst a Jewish congregation and amongst a Gentile group. As he goes on, he tells the story of Israel, “The God of this people Israel chose our fathers.” So he goes on about their life in the wilderness and about the coming of a king with Saul. He goes on about David and Jesse, “Of this man’s posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as He promised. Before His coming John had preached a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.” So he goes through it all.

(Read Acts 13: 26 – 40)

**“Brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you that fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize Him nor understand the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. Though they could charge Him with nothing deserving death, yet they asked Pilate to have Him killed.** (Paul is seeing, in this, the words about the servant in Isaiah.) **And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead; and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now His witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this He has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, ‘Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee.’ And as for the fact that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He spoke in this way, ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’ Therefore he says also in another psalm, ‘Thou wilt not let thy Holy One see corruption.’ For David, after he had served the counsel of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption; but he whom God raised up saw no corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by Him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware, therefore, lest there come upon you what is said in the prophets.”**

So here he is drawing on the insights about the servant of the Lord in the prophecy in Isaiah and making it known here in this Gentile congregation. Let me read to you what Wright says.

“On the first Sabbath, Paul gives a long scriptural sermon that leads us up to Jesus. The message, Paul says, is both for the children of Israel and God-fearing Gentiles.”

The message is that, in the resurrection of Jesus, God has fulfilled what He promised to the forefathers. Through Him, He offers forgiveness of sins. A mixture of Jewish proselytes accept the word and become believers. At the next Sabbath, some of the Jews caused trouble and turn again. This draws from Paul and Barnabas the following decisive answer;

(Read Acts 13: 46 – 47)

**“We had to speak the word of God to you first; but since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light to the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”**

“Paul is quoting from Isaiah 49:6. The words are originally spoken by God to the servant in the second of the, so-called, “Servant Songs”. He's taking these words as a personal mandate for himself in his missionary task. It’s a bold hermeneutic. (A bold hermeneutic step, picking up the words about the anointed servant and bringing them forward.) The servant passages in Isaiah 40 to 55 are exceedingly rich and beyond full exposition here. As a mere sketch of the flow of thought, I might summarize it like this: Israel was called to be the servant of Yahweh as dimensions of their election in Abraham. However, the historical reality was that in exile, Israel was a failed servant. In a mysterious unveiling, He introduces His own servant in Isaiah. His identity seems to oscillate between a corporate embodiment of Israel and its mission on the one hand, and an individual figure who has a mission to Israel and beyond Israel on the other. The figure will have his primary mission in the establishment of God's justice among the nations by means of ministry of compassion, enlightenment, and liberation [That’s Isaiah 42]. We picked it up, of course, in Isaiah 53 specifically. Jesus as the servant there, and in that, He bears the sin of the world. (So there lies in this, Paul's picking up of this ministry of the servant.) In a leap of hermeneutical logic, Paul can take the words from Isaiah, spoken by God to His servant, which he knew ultimately applied to Christ, and address it to himself as the embodiment of that moment of the mission of the church to the nations. (He picks that up as the mission that the servant had, and is being now embodied, presented, and carried by those who are appointed by Christ to go to the nations.) In the book of the Acts, Luke presents some of its key apostles of the early Christian movement; Peter, James, and Paul, and he shows them united in these great biblical and theological convictions.”

**3.** Paul

Let’s move on quickly to the apostle Paul. He has particular things that he draws our attention to. Wright says,

“The nations are seeing what God has done. The witness of the nations to all that God did in Israel, was a significant Old Testament theme. Paul, like Peter before the Sanhedrin, makes much of the fact that the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were not done in a corner, but were a matter of public record witness, and even amongst the Roman community. This is a feature of the various testimonies of defenses in the second half of Acts.”

So he asked us to look at Act 26, verse 26. So let’s do that. He’s defending himself before Festus and King Agrippa. Verse 24 says,

(Read Acts 26: 24 – 26)

**“And as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are mad; your great learning is turning you mad.” But Paul said, “I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner.”**

He goes on to challenge the beliefs of King Agrippa. These were publicly declared things and as Paul goes out he wants to make it known that the events of the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and the consequent movement is something, but was a public demonstration. The nations are seeing what God has done as this is carried out into the world.

Wright speaks about the nations benefiting from what God has done. He asks us to look at Galatians chapter 3, verse 14. So let’s do that. He’s talking about Jesus and faith without works. Starting in verse 10 it says,

(Read Galatians 3: 10 – 14)

**“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them.” Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for “He who through faith is righteous shall live”;but the law does not rest on faith, for “He who does them shall live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree”— that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”**

So in writing to the churches in Galatia which were significantly Gentile, though with Jews, he is reminding them of that fact. It's, the nations are now seeing what God has done in Christ. The nations are, then and now, benefiting from what God has done in Christ. The nations are bringing their worship to God. Remember we talked about centripetal - that they were coming to Israel to learn about God. It is now centrifugal. It is going out.

Let’s quickly look at I Corinthians chapter 2 verse 8 and 9, which is a long passage. But perhaps you’ll appreciate it. Paul was anxious to take up a collection from these Gentile churches and take it up to Jerusalem for the care of poor Jews in Jerusalem who were suffering. Also, I think it was an expression of unity. It was to show that they were one, as Paul talks about it in his letter to the Ephesians, and as we read in Romans. This whole section of 8 and 9 is about how he might take these gifts up to Jerusalem. So read that through. This is the nations bringing their worship to God as the Gentiles send this gift up. It is not only a help it's an expression of, not only unity, but also an expression of that Old Testament promise that the Gentiles and nations would bring their worship into the city.

Let’s look quickly at Romans Chapter 15, verse 16. He says,

(Read Romans 15: 14 – 16)

**“I myself am satisfied about you, my brethren, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by Godto be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”**

He sees his ministry of evangelism as part of his priestly work. Indeed, there is a sense in which you, yourselves, will participate in that priestly ministry. I'll allow you to go to look up yourself about the nations bringing their worship to God and the obedience of the nations. Paul talks about his work as being the obedience of faith among the nations, and its indicative of the fact that faith is now being born out of the lives of the nations. As a consequence, they bring their worship to God, and they bring their worship into the presence of God.

**THE NATIONS SHARE IN THE IDENTITY OF ISRAEL**

Let’s turn to the final consideration. The nations are sharing in the identity of Israel. We’ve talked about this before as we looked at Romans 10 and 11. We saw that the Gentiles are being grafted into the old stem. Some are being broken off but some are being gathered into the ancient promise from Zephaniah. Let’s quickly look at Zephaniah chapter 3 where the Gentiles are becoming part of the people of God in fulfillment of the promise originally made to Abraham - that he would be addressing to the whole world. Verse 9 says,

(Read Zephaniah 3: 9 – 10)

**“Yea, at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve Him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering.”**

The nations are being gathered up with His people to form part of the expanded identity of Israel.

Look at Ephesians 2 and 3 which is a very significant thing. It’s addressed to this question of the incorporation of Gentiles, and the role of the of Jew and Gentile. It's a marvelous passage. Chapter 2 has that marvelous beginning of starting with the dead in trespasses and sins, and finishing us that we children God, through faith in Christ, and we are His workmanship, created in God's hands. He goes on in this passage saying,

(Read Ephesians 2: 11 – 15)

**“Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law of commandments.”**

He is the one people of God, made up of Jew and Gentile. It is the expectation and vision in the eye in the Old Testament and is now fulfilled. You can look at the rest yourself. Romans 9 to 11 we’ve considered. Israel is redefined and extended. There is only one new people of God. The gospel is to be preached to Jews and Gentiles. It's a magnificent prospect.

CONCLUSION

As I draw this session to a close, I do want to go back to you and say, if you possibly can get the book and read it. Indeed, if you know someone who can't get it and you can, get it and give it to them. Work through the material that is offered as questions whether you’ve got the book or not. Follow the suggestions I’ve made for group studies and so on. Let me end by saying this; You and I are called to the most wonderful relationship with God through Christ. We have the opportunity of working in the mission of God that moves from creation to new creation. We’re part of the redemption. We’ve been redeemed by that. We do have the possibility of carrying it to others. As you work in evangelism, whether it is with EE now, or wherever, God bless you in that work. Thank you.