

to Him. He promised to protect and prosper them as long as they continued loving Him and living in His Larger Story.

As with Abraham and Moses, God formed a partnership with the entire nation of Israel for them to live in His Larger Story of redeeming and restoring the peoples of the earth. And, He provided all that they needed in order to carry out this mission. Different from Abraham and Moses, the nation of Israel, by and large, failed to believe God and thus, chose not to live in His Larger Story.

Although Israel failed to live in God's Larger Story, God did not change the goal of His Larger Story, to fill the earth with image bearers who love Him and one another in a way that reflects the love in the Trinity. The Law of God exposed Israel's internal sin problem, but could not do anything to actually transform them from the inside out to love God and the love one another. To understand more about Israel and their place in the Larger Story of God's mission, see the course Israelology (ISR 403) in the Institute.

JESUS

Luke 1-2; John 1-21

God did not give up on his plan to fill the earth with His image bearers. Through many of the prophets of Israel, God continued to foretell of one who would come to deal with the sin of the world and to set Israel free from captivity (to sin and to her political oppressors).

When Jesus came onto the scene, humanity was in a very dark place. God had chosen to not send prophets to speak to his people on his behalf for over 400 years. Israel had been dispersed into many of the surrounding nations around the country of Israel. Only two of the twelve tribes of Israel actually lived in the land of

Israel. Rome occupied the country of Israel. The religious leaders of the Jews had taken the Word of God and His Law and turned it into a bunch of man-made rules by which the religious leaders controlled people, acquired benefits for themselves, and turned Israel against every other people group. This isolation from the Gentiles was in direct opposition to God's heart for Israel to represent Him and His love to other nations. The religious leaders were a very pious, stubborn, self-aggrandizing, and others-condemning group of men. Enter Jesus.

Prior to the birth of Jesus, we get a glimpse of his nature from Luke 1:35. One of the persons of the God-kind, the Son of God, was coming to the earth in the form of a baby. Although Jesus was born of a woman, He was also born of the God-kind. He was both God and Man or "The God Man." From very early on, Jesus understood his identity as the Son of God whose Father was in Heaven (Luke 2:49).

In his ministry, Jesus revealed the true nature of God's loving character. He sacrificed time, energy, and potential "career opportunities" presented by Satan to put the Father's love on display in tangible ways to people. He regularly went to His Father in prayer to receive wisdom, strength, and direction on how to live out the Father's will. Jesus entrusted himself completely to the Father's will. Jesus' definition of life was "deep relational intimacy with the Father of life." Jesus' definition of death was "loss of relationship with the Father." Because He defined life and death and these terms, he was able to live in such a way that went contrary to his culture.

Jesus' ultimate sacrifice as the God-man was to willingly give of his own life, take on the sins of the world, and experience relational separation from His Father in order to pay in full the penalty of death for the sins of all humanity. This one act of selfless love would open the opportunity for humanity to come back into a loving relationship with the Father. It would also provide the

opportunity to grow in relationship with the Father such that the souls of people could be transformed more and more into the soul of Jesus. What Jesus believed about Himself, what Jesus believed about His Father, what Jesus defined as life and death and then how Jesus chose to live out of these could be possible for others as they grow in their relational dependence on the Father through embracing His Truth as the Spirit teaches and directs through the Word of God.

In the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, we see one constant: Jesus partnered with the Father to accomplish the work of the Father through the leading of the Spirit that resided within Jesus. This work made it possible for others to follow in Jesus' foot steps, to live in the same way that Jesus lived.

God's goal of filling the earth with His relational glory through image bearers who love Him and love others, who mirror the love within the Trinity had not changed. But, through Jesus and the Church that followed after Jesus, God was changing how He was now going to accomplish this goal.

CHURCH

Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:4-8; John 17:20-23

After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus gave a command recorded in Matthew 28:18-20, "18 And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' "

Jesus came to put the Father's love on display and to make it possible through his work on the cross for others to put the Father's love on display in the same way that Jesus did: through

relational dependence on the Father and the provisions the Father gives through His Word and His Spirit.

Jesus was one person. But, he disciplined the twelve apostles in such a way as to multiply himself into them. After his resurrection, Jesus empowered his apostles to go out to the nations to multiply Jesus into others through the leading and power of His Spirit. In verse 20, we see a fascinating promise. Jesus said, "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

There is another interesting observation here. Whereas the nation of Israel was to set up camp and represent God to the world through the world coming to see "God" through the nation of Israel (a "come and see" posture), Jesus' command was to "Go" to the nations and put his love on display out there where the people are located (a "go and be" posture). Inherent in this "go" posture was also a "together" posture.

God's love is put on display best when His people are interacting with one another in such a way that it demonstrates something of the nature and character of God. In fact, this was part of Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-23. The love between God's people was to be a validating factor of the reality of Jesus and His Work.

Interestingly, in Acts, we see this lived out over and over again as the church exploded within the first century as she went out from Jerusalem to the far reaches of the Roman Empire to bring God's love to the nations.

When Jesus gave the command to go to the nations to make disciples, we also see him promising that He would be with them. Again, we see a partnership between God and man, Jesus and His Church, in accomplishing God's missional goal of filling the earth with image bearers who put His love on display through relational dependence on Him and utilizing the resources that He provides.

One of the resources Jesus gives the Church are gifted leaders/

influences in the form of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers in order to equip the church to participate in the discipleship ministry that Jesus gave to the Church. By definitions, apostles and evangelists help equip the church to take the gospel out. Prophets help to keep the Church in line with God's Word. Shepherds and teachers help to shape individuals into the thinking and beliefs of Jesus so they can better love God and others. When these are all working together in a balanced way within the Church, it helps keep the Church moving toward the goal of God's mission to fill the earth with His image bearers who are imaging His love to others as they partner with and depend on Him. This will be described in more detail in the course on Ecclesiology. See ECC 303 in the Institute.

144,000

Revelation 6-7

Just prior to the Tribulation, the Church is removed from planet Earth. Yet, despite the removal of the Church, God has not given up on his plan to reach people during this time and to fill the earth with image bearers that belong to Him.

It is likely that, because of the rapture of the Church, many Jews will begin to rethink their position on Jesus. They will have access to the Word of God and will likely come to the knowledge of Christ and His identity through His Word as they reflect on miraculous disappearance of millions of believers in Jesus from across the globe and the betrayal of the Antichrist in the middle of the Tribulation.

The Jews will begin turning to Jesus in larger numbers. To continue his mission forward, God sets aside 144,000 of those Jews who will be sealed as His witnesses to the earth during this time. The seal represents that they belong to God and that they are not to be harmed as God pours his remaining judgments out on the earth.