



We will review Adam and Eve and then take a look at Noah, Israel (through Abraham and Moses), Jesus, the Church, and the 144,000 in the End Times. Afterwards, we'll draw some general conclusions about the methods God uses to accomplish His mission. We'll also consider an approach to interpreting the Bible related to His mission.

## THE FIRST MISSION

Genesis 1:28 depicts the mission God gave to Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it..." We often overlook the beginning of verse 28, "And God blessed them." This small phrase is an important part of them being able to carry out the mission. Through what God gave to them, *blessing*, they could move forward into His mission.

Interestingly, as we read through Genesis 2, we see the reference to God change to "LORD." In the original Hebrew, the word "LORD" is actually the personal name for God, transliterated into English as "YHWH." The change in Genesis 2 to the personal name for God is an indication of the relational nature of God. It is in this chapter of Genesis that we get the details of God's relationality to man. Adam was formed from the dust of the ground and breathed into by YHWH to give the man the breath of life.

As we continue reading through Genesis 2, we notice the dependency that Adam had on God for all his needs. God is the one who planted the garden for Adam and then instructed Adam to work the garden and keep it. God brought all the animals to Adam so that Adam could name them as God instructed.

It was God who declared it was not good for man to be alone and, so, created Eve, a helper suitable for the man. And then, God is the one who brought her to Adam. Adam received her as a provision from God to carry out the Larger Missional Story that God gave to them both.

YHWH is the one who gave Adam the command not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, giving Adam (who then remembered the command and relayed it to Eve) an opportunity to trust God and to depend on Him to provide all that was needed to carry out the mission of populating the earth with His image bearers who love Him and love others. This was a genuine partnership. God would provide the needs, humanity would love and trust God and use His provisions to carry out His plan.

Even after the Fall, we see God pursuing Adam and Eve and making provisions for them to continue to carry out His plan of filling the earth. God also made a promise that He would one day rectify the sin problem that now placed a huge burden on humanity in their ability to move forward into God's mission.

## NOAH

*Genesis 6-9*

When arriving in Scripture at the account of Noah, we see the devastating effects that sin had on people. All of humanity had turned away from a relationship with God, except Noah and his immediate family. Noah was describe as a righteous man, blameless in his generation who walked with God. In other words, although Noah was not sinless, he had an intimate relationship with God and trusted Him to provide what Noah needed.

In His plan to destroy the earth, God made a provision for Noah and his family to escape God's wrath. God communicated to Noah, in advance, his plans to destroy the earth. God also communicated details of how Noah could escape. It was God who laid out the plans for the Ark (the size, the composition, and floor plans). It was God who communicated to bring the animals. It was God who said to bring food for his family and the animals.

Noah then spent 120 years building the Ark and gathering the food and the animals as God had instructed. On the day the flood waters were to come, God instructed Noah to enter the Ark. Noah, his family, and the animals entered the Ark and God shut them in using the door that Noah made in the side of the Ark.

The removing of all humans who rejected God and the saving of Noah and His family was necessary for God to stay on the mission of filling the earth with His image bearers. We know this was still at God's heart because He reiterates the mission that He gave to Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28) to Noah in Genesis 9:1.

We see a genuine partnership between God and Noah with God instructing and providing what Noah needed and Noah listening, believing, and moving in the direction God instructed. Noah was definitely walking in the Larger Story of God along with God in order to participate in the mission of God.

## ISRAEL

*Genesis 11-22 (Abraham); Exodus 1-Deuteronomy 34 (Moses)*

### CONTEXT

In all that happened from the time of Noah's Ark to Abraham, God was still about accomplishing his mission of filling the earth with his image bearers. We get a clear picture of this at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. The people of the earth, all with one language and culture, rejected God's mandate to spread out across the earth and, instead, built a tower unto themselves to demonstrate their capabilities. So, God confused their languages and dispersed them over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:9)

### ABRAHAM

Interestingly, once the earth was filled with broken image bearers, God now began a plan to bring about redemption and restoration to the people groups of the earth. God initiated this plan by choosing one man from which He would form a nation to

represent Him to all the other nations of the earth. This was the nation of Israel.

We see Abraham's calling in Genesis 12:1-7. God called Abraham to leave all that he knew and to travel to an unknown land that God promised to show him. God also made promises to Abraham that would have a future fulfillment:

- I **will** make of you a great nation.
- I **will** bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.
- I **will** bless those who bless you. I **will** curse him to dishonors you.
- In you all the families of the earth **will** be blessed
- I **will** give this land (Canaan) to your offspring.

**God** initiated the call. **Abraham** responded to the call. **God** provided all that **Abraham** needed to participate in the call. God motivated Abraham through future promises (some of which are still in process of being fulfilled today).

Again, we see God forming a partnership with Abraham and giving Abraham the opportunity to step into His mission of redeeming and restoring the image bears who were now spread across the face of all the earth. Although this mission would not be completed in Abraham's lifetime, Abraham believed God and moved in the direction God was leading.

This partnership and set of promises were passed down to Abraham's son Isaac and to Isaac's son Jacob (whose name was later changed to Israel). Through a series of circumstances, Jacob and his family fled to Egypt to escape a famine. While in Egypt, Jacob's family grew over the next 400 years into a nation of more than three million people consisting of 12 tribes who descended from Jacob's 12 sons. The Pharaoh of Egypt enslaved the Israelites

to keep them from rising up and siding with Egypt's enemies.

**MOSES**

When God's people (descended from Abraham) cried out to God for release, He raised up Moses to deliver them. God was now ready for the next phase of His Larger Story of redeeming and restoring the peoples of the earth. As we read through the account in Exodus 3, we notice some things of interest. God is the one who called Moses and gave to Moses all the provisions necessary to accomplish the mission of setting God's people free from slavery in Egypt. In verse 12, God promised to be with Moses as he engages in the mission. God also gave Moses two powerful signs to use to help convince the people of Israel to listen to Moses. God then provided Moses' brother Aaron to be a spokesperson for Moses. Yet, Moses had to make the choice to Go.

Once again, we're seeing God work through a partnership with human agency to accomplish His Larger Story goal. God called Moses. God provided all Moses needed. Moses then made a choice to live life in God's His Larger Story.

**ISRAEL**

God's plan at this point in history, to redeem and restore the people's of the earth, was to raise up a nation of people who would know God and represent Him to the rest of the world. This nation was called Israel. We understand that Israel was to represent God to the rest of the world from Exodus 19:5-6. God's Law was given to distinguish Israel from the rest of the world by the way they lived and by the way they put God's love on display to one another.

God gave to Israel all they needed in order to represent Him to others. He gave them leaders, prophets, His Word, and His Presence in the Tabernacle. He gave them a way to relate to Him through faith in His Word. He provided a covering for their sin through the sacrificial system that maintained the ability to relate

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.

Despite these times being the most difficult that humanity will have ever experienced, these 144,000 are successful in winning over people from every nations, tribes, and peoples and languages throughout the earth.

What we see here once again is a partnership that God makes with people, using human agency to reach broken and rebellious image bearers through the world. End-times if fascinating to study and ponder. It gives us great Hope to see the faithfulness of God in not giving up on his mission of rescuing people. He continues this mission right to the very end. More information about the End Times is presented in the course on Eschatology. See ESC 304 in the Institute.

## MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

*Revelation 20; Isaiah 65*

Although not much is mentioned about God's mission in the Millennial Kingdom, we do know that it is a time of peace like the world has never experienced since the fall of Adam. We also know that it will have a very Jewish flavor with both resurrected beings and natural beings living together under the rulership of Jesus in person.

The Church will return with Jesus to help him rule over the Earth for 1000 years. During this time, natural beings who matriculate into the Millennial Kingdom from the Tribulation as believers in Jesus will continue having children who are born with a corrupted flesh and will need to embrace Jesus as their Savior to experience His love and forgiveness and to enter into a relationship with the Father. The love between the resurrected beings will put Jesus' love on display and be a pretty convincing evidence of His reality. Also, the love that natural beings experience from Jesus and the Church will be a convincing evidence of Jesus and His Work.

During this time, God’s image bearers will be spread throughout the Earth. This will be an almost completed fulfillment of God’s mission. Yet, there will still be those who reject God. In fact, Revelation 20 depicts a time when Satan will be released and will go around deceiving the nations of the world to rise up against Jesus.

During this time, lost image bearers who are born will need to hear the gospel and believe in the person and work of Jesus to experience salvation. If God is consistent in his strategy for reaching lost image bearers, He will partner with His people in order to reach the lost.

## **ETERNAL KINGDOM**

*Revelation 21-22*

This is the last period depicted by the Bible. In this period of time, God will reside completely with people. All people in this time will be totally restored as image bears of God with uncorrupted flesh. We will be free to make choices, but will allow the influence of God, His Word, His love, His Spirit within us, His immeasurable grace and our past life experiences to direct us to trust God and His design for life.

The goal of God’s mission will be accomplished. The entire new earth will be filled with perfected image bearers who are loving one another in a way that reflects the love between the Father and the Son and the Spirit. We will worship God out of our deep personal loving relationship with Him in gratitude for the riches of His immeasurable grace and mercy that He had shown to us when we were exceedingly unworthy. We will continue to put his love on display as we receive from His eternal wellspring of resources to sustain us and teach us and direct us in His will and His love.

# GOD'S WAY

1 Corinthians 3:6-8; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

As we can see throughout the Bible, God was always intent on moving forward with his mission of filling the earth with His relational glory. The *goal* of the mission never changed although the *work* of the mission looked different in different time periods.<sup>1</sup>

There is one recurring principle that we see with the work of God's mission even though the particulars of the work changed throughout history: *God always partnered with people to move His mission forward.* This is extremely important to embrace. Paul highlights this principle in 1 Corinthians 3:6-8 when he writes, “<sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup> So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. <sup>8</sup> He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. <sup>9</sup> For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.”

Again, in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Paul concludes that we, believers in Jesus Christ, have been given the ministry of reconciliation. Some may ask, “Why would God entrust such a massive responsibility to messy people?” This is a good question indeed. Although there is no clear biblical answer, we can surmise one based upon what we know about who we are.

Primarily, for those who believe in Jesus, we are sons and daughters of God in His Family, adopted in through the process of redemption when we chose to believe the gospel. As sons and daughters who have received His Spirit, we have the privilege and responsibility to learn to live in the Family culture, which is predominantly outward and missional. Not only that, but God has given us access to every resource we need in order to live in His

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<sup>1</sup> Theologians use the word “dispensations” to describe the different time periods in which God interacted differently with humanity.

mission, including His Word, His Power, and Jesus' Church. As with Adam, we are image bears of God having access to all that we need from God in order to participate in the mission of God. The only question remaining is, "Do I see myself as this?"

## MISSIONAL HERMENEUTIC

*Judges 6-8*

If God was intent on moving humanity toward his completed mission of filling the earth with image bearers who, through a loving relationship with Him, put his love on display to others, and the entirety of the Bible depicts God moving toward his mission in different ways through the use of human agency, then this framework can be a lens through which we interpret the Bible.

In other words, along with applying good hermeneutical principles of context and discourse flow, we can also ask the question, "How does what I'm reading here relate to what I know is God's overall mission for humanity?"

As an example, consider Judges 6-8. These chapters are a narrative that depict Israel's rebellion against God and God's use of the nation of Midian to bring about judgment and discipline against his people. After seven years, the people cry out to the Lord for help. Then, the Lord raised up a rescuer for them, Gideon, to set them free from their captors.

There are some strange things in these chapters, Gideon's fleecing technique to affirm hearing from God being one of them. Nonetheless, it's not hard to understand what the author of Judges is saying. The narrative is very plain. Just reading it for what it says, we could walk away thinking, "Well, that was a neat way that God interacted with His people, but I'm not sure how that applies to me. Should I set out a fleece to verify a direction I think God is leading in my life? Is God going to take something away from me if I

disobey him? Gideon had many wives and seventy sons. Maybe polygamy really is part of God's design. After all, Gideon was used by God and it seems like God approved of his multiple wives. Should I have more than one wife?"

These are all questions that might come to mind and should be worked through if someone is genuinely asking those questions. But, the real question through the hermeneutical framework of God's Large Missional Story is, "How was God working here to advance His mission of filling the earth with image bearers who have a loving relationship with Him and who, in turn, are able to put his love on display in loving others?"

Here is a very plausible answer, "God's desire was to use Israel as a display of His nature and character to the rest of world. Israel rebelled against God and was not doing this. As a result, God brought about discipline to His children as a means of helping them realize their sin and to repent and turn back to Him. At the point they did this, God could now work them once again to put His love on display to the rest of the world so they would want to know this loving God. As a result of their repentance, God raised up a warrior/rescuer to set His people free from Midian, Gideon. Despite Gideon's weaknesses of testing God and multiple wives, he was the instrument God chose to use get his people back on track of His mission."

When we look at the entire Bible through the lens of God's Larger Missional Story, we can begin to understand it much better and in the way that God has intended. Not only that, but we understand Him better. We understanding the meaning of life better. We understand the need for Jesus and His Church better. These are all part of God's plan to attain his missional goal of filling the earth with His image through people who love Him and love others in the same way that the Father, Son, and Spirit love one another.



