

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XLIX : DIGRESSION #2 - PAUL AS MINISTER OF THE MYSTERY TO THE GENTILES (3:1-13)

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 KJV)

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles — Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 NIV)

For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you the nations, if, indeed, ye did hear of the dispensation of the grace of God that was given to me in regard to you, that by revelation He made known to me the secret, according as I wrote before in few [words] — in regard to which ye are able, reading [it], to understand my knowledge in the secret of the Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit — that the nations be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in the Christ, through the good news, of which I became a ministrant, according to the gift of the grace of God that was given to me, according to the working of His power; to me — the less than the least of all the saints — was given this grace, among the nations to proclaim good news — the untraceable riches of the Christ, and to cause all to see what [is] the fellowship of the secret that hath been hid from the ages in God, who the all things did create by Jesus Christ, that there might be made known now to the principalities and the authorities in the heavenly [places], through the assembly, the manifold wisdom of God, according to a purpose of the ages, which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have the freedom and the access in confidence through the faith of him, wherefore, I ask [you] not to faint in my tribulations for you, which is your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 Young's Literal Translation)

Paul as Minister of the Mystery to the Gentiles (3:1-13)

The essence of what Paul is saying is as follows:

For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you, the Gentiles —

*if, indeed, ye did hear of **the responsibility of managing the GRACE of God which was given to me, namely, that He made known the mystery that the Gentiles should be***

joint – heirs

and joint – body

and joint – partakers

of His promise in Jesus the Messiah through the gospel;

this **GRACE** was given to me

- **to preach** the unsearchable riches of the Christ among the Gentiles
- and **to enlighten** all as to what is the plan of the mystery

in order that [hina] the untraceable wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and to the authorities in the heavenlies through the ecclesia.

Therefore I ask you not to lose heart in my tribulations on behalf of you which is your glory.

V 8, 9 — Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things by Jesus Christ — Ἐμοὶ τῷ ἐλαχιστοτέρῳ πάντων ἁγίων ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις αὕτη, τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εὐαγγελισασθαι τὸ ἀνεξιχνίαστον πλοῦτος τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ φωτίσαι πάντας τίς ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων ἐν τῷ θεῷ τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι, [emoi tōi elachistoterōi pantōn tōn hagiōn edothē hē charis hautē en tois ethnesin euangelisasthai ton anexichniaston plouton tou Christou, kai phōtisai pantas tis hē oikonomia tou mustēriou tou apokekrummenoi apo tōn aiōnōn en tōi theōi tōi ta panta ktisanti dia Iēsou Christou.] As shown in the summary above ...

this **GRACE** was given to me

- **to preach** the unsearchable riches of the Christ among the Gentiles
- and **to enlighten** all as to what is the plan of the mystery

We looked at the first part of this couplet last week, verse 8. This week we will look at verse 9, the second portion of Paul's statement above. "As Paul fulfilled his commission by preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, as through his preaching Gentiles were brought to faith in Christ and found themselves united in church fellowship with fellow-believers of Jewish birth, the long-hidden mystery was being revealed before the eyes of men and women. For the church fellowship in which Gentile and Jewish believers were united was no mere enrollment on a register of membership; it involved their union with Christ by faith and therefore their union with each other as fellow-members of his body. The 'third race' was coming visibly to life: something that had not been seen or imagined before was now a matter of experience. Before all ages God's undisclosed purpose had existed in his own mind; now its accomplishment was evident not only to human beings on earth but also 'to the principalities and powers in the heavenly realm.'" [Bruce, 319f] "Prior to the time that his Spirit revealed it to Paul (and other apostles and prophets), only God knew that in Christ he would fully overcome the division between Jews and Gentiles. God has graciously given Paul a strategic administrative role (οἰκονομία, *oikonomia*, v. 2) in the plan (οἰκονομία, *oikonomia*, v. 9) according to which this mystery is being worked out: he is to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (v. 8) and to enlighten everyone — whether Gentile or Jews — about the ethnically inclusive nature of this creation." [Thielman, 214f]

ONCE AGAIN PAUL REMINDS US CHURCHES ARE SUPPOSE TO BE A PICTURE OF ETERNAL TRUTHS — "Verses 9 and 10 are highly significant for the way in which they link the [letter's] ecclesiological and cosmic emphases... It is no accident that the terms used in these verses for the disclosure of the mystery — γνωρίζειν, οἰκονομία, μυστήριον [gnōrizein, 'make known', *oikonomia* 'dispensation, administration', *mystērion* 'mystery'] — are those employed in the earlier discussion of the mystery in 1:9,10, where its content was the summing up of all things in Christ, nor that the thought of these verses about the Church brings to mind the other discussion of the mystery in 3:3-6, where its content is the one Church out of Jews and Gentiles.... This integration of cosmic and ecclesiological perspectives is reminiscent of the way the two were brought together earlier in 1:21-23, where Christ's lordship over the cosmos is shown to be on behalf of the Church and the Church has a special role as the medium of Christ's presence and rule in the cosmos." [Lincoln, 188f]

Eph 1:9-11

1:9 **having made known** [γνωρίσας] to us **the mystery** [τὸ μυστήριον] of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,

1:10 that in **the dispensation** [οἰκονομίαν] of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in Him.

1:11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined **according to the purpose of Him** who works all things according to the counsel of His will

Eph 3:9-11

3:9 and to make all see what is **the [administration]** [οἰκονομία] of **the mystery** [τοῦ μυστηρίου], which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;

3:10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God **might be made known** [γνωρισθῆ] by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,

3:11 **according to the eternal purpose** which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord

and to bring to light — καὶ φωτίσαι [kai phōtisai] literally "to enlighten" and was used earlier in 1:18 in the introductory prayer. "To make see (*phōtisai*). First aorist active infinitive of *photizō*, late verb, to turn the light on. **With the eyes of the heart enlightened (Ephesians 1:18) one can then turn the light for others to see.**" [Robertson, *Word Pictures*] "[In the introductory prayer, 1:18, Paul] had prayed for his readers' enlightenment. Here it becomes evident that for [Paul] such enlightenment is inextricably linked with [his] ministry, which was intended to produce this effect. His commission was to

make plain to all what was involved in the administration of the mystery.” [Lincoln, 184]

‘...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power’ (Eph 1:17-19 NKJV)

“This verb, which can mean to ‘give light to, shed light upon’ in the sense of showing up something for what it is (cf. John 1:9), is here employed figuratively denoting to ‘bring to light’, and so to ‘reveal or illuminate.” [O’Brien, 243]

‘That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.’ (John 1:9 NKJV)

“It means to illuminate. Paul was not only to deliver his Apostolic message, but also to spiritually enlighten those who heard it, so that they should understand it.” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 307]

THE PURPOSE OF OUR CHURCHES ARE TO ILLUMINATE, TO DISPENSE LIGHT — *“The word φωτιζειν [phōtizein] properly means ‘to shine,’ as any luminous body does, and then ‘to illuminate,’ to impart light to, as a candle does to those on whom it shines, and as God does to the minds of men, and as the Gospel does, which is as a light shining in a dark place, and hence the apostle, 2 Corinthians iv. 4, speaks of the φωτισμόν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου [phōtismōn tou evangelīou, ‘light of the gospel’].... The Church is compared to a candlestick, and ministers to stars. Their office is to dispense light. The light imparted by the Gospel was knowledge, and hence to illuminate is, in fact, to teach; which is the idea the word is intended here to express.”* [Hodge, 117]

‘ALL’ HAS ITS WIDEST USAGE: ‘ALL MANKIND’ — **for everyone** — πάντας [pantas] The stress is upon those who are enlightened. But who are meant by the ‘all’? **“Had [Paul] been thinking only of the Gentiles he would have used the pronoun ‘them’.** **Since the content of the mystery is the co-membership of Jews and Gentiles and these together form all humanity, it is better to give ‘all’ its widest sense, ‘all people’.**” [Best, 319] Thielman notes the word for ‘everyone’ is masculine and thus does not refer back to the neuter word, ‘Gentiles.’ **“Here, then, Paul is called to explain not only to Gentiles but also to everyone, whether Jews or Gentile, ‘the plan of the mystery’ revealed to him about the full partnership of Gentile believers with Jewish believers. As Paul says in his Letter to the Romans, he is obligated to proclaim the gospel to Greek, barbarian, wise, foolish, Jew, or Gentile.”** [Thielman, 214]

ERROR? — **“GOD’S WORK WAS CONFINED TO THE JEWS IN THE O.T. BUT IS NOW GLOBAL”** — Albert Barnes makes a comment on this verse that is not uncommon but of which I disagree: *“And to make all men see – In order that the whole human family might see the glory of God in the plan of salvation. **Hitherto the revelation of his character and plans had been confined to the Jews. Now it was his design that all the race should be made acquainted with it.**”* [Barnes, *Ephesians on CD*] I have been taught from my earliest days of being a Christian that global missions was always the plan of God and that the Jews failed, as do we Gentiles. **“That mission to and for the peoples of the earth was the focus can be attested from the representative Gentiles that are named in the O.T. text. One need only recall the names of Melchizedek, Jethro, the mixed multitude of Egyptians that went up out of Egypt with the Israelites, Balaam, Rahab, Ruth, the widow at Zarephath, and many others like them who responded through the preaching of prophets like Jonah or the major writing prophets, who addressed twenty-five chapters of their prophecies to the Gentile nations of their day (Isa. 13-23; Jer. 46-51; Ezek. 25-32). There are more verses dedicated to the foreign nations in those twenty-five chapters of the three major prophets alone than are found in all of the Pauline prison epistles in the N.T. There can be little doubt that God was more than mildly interested in winning the nations outside of Israel.”** [Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.; *The Great Commission in the Old Testament*; **see Appendix B**]

The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you. (Deut 28:9,10)

for the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever. (Josh 4:23,24)

(David and Goliath) *This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.* (1 Sam 17:46)

(dedication of Solomon’s temple) *Moreover, concerning a foreigner, who is not of Your people Israel, but has come from a far country for Your name’s sake (for they will hear of Your great name and Your strong hand and Your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this temple, hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, that all peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this temple which I have built is called by Your name.* (1 Kings 8:41-43)

(David’s song of thanksgiving) *Sing to the Lord, all the earth; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples.... Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; and let them say among the nations, “The Lord reigns.”* (1 Chron 16:23,24,31)

Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion! Declare His deeds among the [nations]. (Ps 9:11) Note the NKJV word

used is ‘peoples’ but it is used to translate the Hebrew word ‘goyim’, i.e., ‘the nations, the Gentiles.’

All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord’s, and He rules over the nations. (Psalms 22:27,28)

Arise, O God, judge the earth; For You shall inherit all nations. (Psalms 82:8)

All nations whom You have made Shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And shall glorify Your name. (Psalms 86:9)

Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. (Psalms 96:3)

Oh, give thanks to the Lord! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the [nations]! (Psalms 105:1)

I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples, And I will sing praises to You among the nations. (Psalms 108:3)

Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples! For His merciful kindness is great toward us, And the truth of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord! (Psalms 117)

He will lift up a banner to the nations from afar, And will whistle to them from the end of the earth; Surely they shall come with speed, swiftly. (Isa 5:26)

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea. (Isa 11:9)

Praise the Lord, call upon His name; Declare His deeds among the [nations], Make mention that His name is exalted. (Isa 12:4)

I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles (Isa 42:6)

How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good things, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion, “Your God reigns!” (Isa 52:7)

The Gentiles shall come to your light (Isa 60:3)

It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory. I will set a sign among them; and those among them who escape I will send to the nations: to Tarshish and Pul and Lud, who draw the bow, and Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off who have not heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles. (Isa 66:18-19)

TEXTUAL DISCREPANCIES — what is the plan of the mystery — τίς ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου [tis hē oikonomia tou mustēriou] ~ OR ~ **what is the fellowship of the mystery —** τίς ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ μυστηρίου [tis hē koinōnia tou mustēriou] The older versions have the word ‘fellowship,’ the newer versions for the most part have the word ‘plan.’ See **Appendix A** for details on the differences. **In common with both senses is the word ‘mystery’ which we have seen in this context refers to the admission of the Gentiles alongside the Jews in the ecclesia on equal footing.**

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE MYSTERY: KNOWN AND SHARED BY ALL MANKIND — “The publication of the gospel is called a fellowship, because it is the will of God that his purpose, which had formerly been hidden, shall now be shared by men.” [Calvin, 254] “If the word “fellowship” is to be retained, it means that this doctrine, or secret counsel of God, was now ‘common’ to all believers. It was not to be confined to any class or rank of people. Locke renders it, ‘and to make all people perceive how this mystery comes now to be communicated to the world.’ Dr. Whately (Errors of Romanism, chapter ii. section 1) renders it, ‘the common participation of the mystery;’ that is, of truths formerly unknown, and which could not be known by man’s unaided powers, but which were now laid open by the gracious dispensation of Divine Providence; no longer concealed, or confined to a few, but to be partaken of by all. The allusion, according to him, is to the mysteries of the ancient pagan religions; and he supposes that the apostle designs to contrast those ‘mysteries’ with Christianity. In those ‘mysteries’ there was a distinction between the initiated and uninitiated. There was a revelation to some of the worshipers, of certain holy secrets from which others were excluded. There were in some of the mysteries, as the Elensinian, ‘great and lesser’ doctrines in which different persons were initiated. In strong contrast with these, *the ‘great mystery’ in Christianity was made known to all. It was concealed from none and there was no distinction made among those who were initiated. No truths which God had revealed were held back from any part, but there was a common participation by all. Christianity has no hidden truths for a part only of its friends; it has no ‘reserved’ doctrines; it has no truths to be entrusted only to a sacred priesthood. Its doctrines are to be published to the wide world, and every follower of Christ is to be a partaker of all the benefits of the truths which Christ has revealed.*” [Barnes, Ephesians on CD]

‘OIKONOMIA’ COULD REFER TO THE PLAN OF GOD IN RELATION TO THE MYSTERY — “The word ... has two nuances: first the position or office of an administrator; second, the activity of administrating. Although the nuances are intertwined and both may be in view, the emphasis in 1:10 is on the activity of the administrator, whereas the emphasis in 3:2 and 9 is on the arrangement or plan of the mystery. Here it could have the idea of strategy [or ‘arrangement, plan’]. Paul’s

responsibility is to enlighten all as to what is the strategy or administration of the mystery. Hence, this mystery was made known to him (v. 3), its content was described (v. 6), and now its administration (plan) is to be disclosed.” [Hoehner, 455f] **“Before the world’s foundation he chose his people in Christ and destined them in love to be his sons and daughters; before the world’s foundation, too, he cherished this plan, to go into effect at the proper time, of bringing into being a community which would bear practical witness on earth to his reconciling work.”** [Bruce, 320]

‘OIKONOMIA’ COULD REFER TO THE OUTWORKING OF GOD’S PLAN TO PUT IN EFFECT THE MYSTERY

— “The content of what is enlightened is ‘the administration of this mystery,’ that is, how God chose to accomplish his purpose.... οἰκονομία [oikonomia] refers not to the divine ‘plan’ but the working out, or putting into effect, of the mystery.” [O’Brien, 243] “‘Administration’ is from the same Greek word (oikonomia) as ‘stewardship’ in verse 2. Paul is saying, in effect, ‘I am not only called in the vertical area to preach the unfathomable riches of Christ, but in the horizontal area to teach about the administration, the stewardship or dispensation, of the mystery of the church age.’” [MacArthur, 95]

ALL WERE TO BE ENLIGHTENED TO GOD’S PLAN OR GOD’S WORKING OF HIS PLAN, NOT TO THE MYSTERY ITSELF — **“It is the plan, of course, and not the mystery itself, in which all are instructed or on which light is thrown.** That of course does not mean that the mystery is not revealed (cf v. 3). The mystery is the same mystery as that of vv. 3f; v. 6 gives its content, viz., the co-membership of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ; it is not the mystery of 1.10.” [Best, 319f] “The meaning then would be, ‘to enlighten all in respect to rite dispensation of this mystery;’ that is, **to cause all to understand the manner in which this great truth of the plan of salvation is communicated to people.**” [Barnes, *Ephesians on CD*]

hidden for ages — τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων [tou apokekrummenoi apo tōn aiōnōn] ‘hidden’ = hide, conceal, kept secret; hidden up to the ‘now’ of v. 10. **“The concept of the mystery’s concealment corresponds well with the fact that it was uncovered or unveiled to the apostles and prophets (v. 5). The perfect tense expresses a completed action with continuing results. The mystery was hidden and continued to be so for the time expressed in the following [‘for the ages’].”** [Hoehner, 456]

FORMED IN ETERNITY PAST AND HIDDEN UNTIL THE NT ERA — “It means literally ‘from the ages,’ ‘from the world-periods,’ that is, *from the beginning, or since the world began.... The Divine decree was formed before the ages of the world began; the keeping of that decree hidden was since the ages of the world began, i.e., ‘from the commencement of the ages when intelligent beings from whom it could be concealed were called into existence.’*” [Salmond, *Expositor’s GK Testament*, 307] **“This mystery (v. 6), now available to all, was for long ages consciously concealed in the mind of God so as not to be known even to angelic intelligences (Col 1:26).... This was no arbitrary or accidental reticence on God’s part: it was in accordance with his deliberate policy.** His counsel was formed before time began (1 Cor 2:7), but the concealment dated from the inception of the ages (Rom 16:25). It was in his capacity as the universal Creator that God thus determined what his strategy would be, and the inference is that the world was brought into being with the realization of this purpose in view (Eph 1:9, 10).” [Wood, *Ephesians on CD*] **“Therefore, the mystery of the church has been hidden in God for all the ages until the present time. Once again, then, Paul makes it clear that the concept of the church was not evident in the OT.”** [Hoehner, 457] “‘The dispensation (arrangement, regulation) of the mystery (the union of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, ver. 6) was now to be humbly traced and acknowledged in the fact of its having secretly existed in the primal counsels of God, and now having been revealed to the heavenly powers by means of the Church.’ ... The decree itself originated [before the foundation of the world], i. 4, [before the ages] 1 Cor ii. 7: the [ages] being the spaces or reaches of time necessary for the successive acts of created beings, either physical or spiritual.” [Alford, 106]

in God who created all things — ἐν τῷ θεῷ τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι [en tōi theōi tōi ta panta ktisanti] **It is unusual to find a liturgical phrase such as ‘the God who created all things’ in Ephesians since Paul places such emphasis upon the second creation, not the first. Quite possibly “the phrase is intended to place the time when the plan was hidden as prior to creation; it was no afterthought but part of God’s intention from the beginning.”** [Best, 321] **“The mystery is described not only as hidden for ages, but also as hidden in God.... God has kept the mystery hidden in himself. This emphasis on its divine source suggests its security, both in terms of inaccessibility and of the certainty that accompanies its realization. That the mystery had its place from the beginning in God’s creative plan is underlined by the following liturgical formula about God as creator of all.”** [Lincoln, 185]

GOD, THE CREATOR OF ALL THAT EXISTS — “God is designated specially in respect of His creative power — ‘God who created all things’. *The τὰ πάντα [ta panta, ‘all things’], which also occupies a somewhat emphatic position here, is not to be restricted either to the physical creation, or to the spiritual, but has the absolute sense of all that exists.*” [Salmond, *Expositor’s GK Testament*, 307]

THIS PLAN IS SURE — “Thus, the mystery was hidden in God, inaccessible to human beings who lacked the ability to discover it. The relative clause ... ‘who created all things,’ speaks of God’s omnipotent power.... **Possibly this was to remind the recipients of the letter that God was in control of everything and that the revelation of the mystery (the creation of the new humanity) was in keeping with his plan and timing. In other words, his plan was to create this new entity called the church and his timing was to reveal it in the NT era. Moreover, this creation is sustained by the one who is the creator of all things.**” [Hoehner, 457f]

GOD AS CREATOR HAS A SOVEREIGN RIGHT OVER HIS CREATION — *“But why is this reference to God as the Creator of all things introduced at this point? By way of confirmation, say some, of what has just been said of the ‘mystery’ as having been hidden from the beginning in God; the point being that He who created all things must have had the contents of this ‘mystery’ in His eternal plan. To ‘enhance the idea of His omnipotence,’ say others; He who created all things having ‘ordained the mystery itself in the exercise of His undoubted prerogative of sovereign and creative power.’ Or, as other put it more precisely, its object is to take the wonder from the idea of the ‘mystery’ having been so long unrevealed; the creation of all things by God being a fact which involves His perfect right to adjust all things as He will’ — the Creator of all being ‘free to make what arrangements He pleased as to the concealment and revelation of His purpose.’ None of these interpretations can be said to be either very clear or very adequate. **This designation of God as the Creator of all that exists is intended rather to express the greatness of the ‘mystery’ that is now disclosed and of which Paul is to be a preacher. The main thought in the verse in question is the thought with which it starts, viz., the marvel of that Apostolic commission of which Paul had been put in trust by the grace of God; and the majesty and the wonder of that commission are made the greater by the grandeur of the ‘mystery’ the Divine disposition of which he was appointed to declare to all men. This ‘mystery,’ though long hidden, had been in the Divine mind from the first, and it had been there in such a sense that the whole scheme of created things had it in view, and in such wise that the knowledge of it was to be imparted even to the angelic world. Or, as it may be better put, the ‘mystery’ now at last revealed by God and proclaimed by Paul to all men in all the sovereign and surpassing wisdom of the Divine dispensation by which it was hidden long and in the fulness of time at last disclosed, was one of God’s own eternal secrets, one of His unsearchable thoughts, a thing that had its place from the beginning in His creative plan, a reserve in the Eternal mind that purposed and formed all that exists. And to Paul’s hands did the surpassing grace of God commit the proclamation of a truth of such magnitude, the illumination of so unsearchable a disposition of the Divine wisdom!”** [Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 307f] “It is clear that κτίζειν [ktizein, ‘create’] cannot be applied to the μυστήριον [mystērion, ‘mystery’], which is not a thing created. **The simplest explanation seems to be that the Creator of all was free to make what arrangement He pleased as to the concealment and revelation of His purpose.**” [Abbott, 88] “If I may be permitted to add just one more guess to all those that have been made by others [as to why Paul mentions the creation], I would say that **the expression may, perhaps rivet the attention on God’s sovereignty. He is the God who, by virtue of the very fact that he created all things, also proves himself to be the sovereign Disposer of their destinies. In other words, he does not owe it to any one to explain why for a long time the mystery was concealed from the Gentiles, and why it is now revealed to all, regardless of race or nationality.**” [Hendriksen, 157f]*

WHO ARE WE TO QUESTION OUR CREATOR? — *“This is intended, as before, to obviate the prejudice of novelty, — to oppose the rashness of men, who think it improper that they should remain in ignorance of anything whatever. Who will question the right which God has to keep his own purposes concealed, until he shall be pleased to communicate them to men? **What presumption, — yea, what madness is it, not to admit that God is wiser than we!**”* [Calvin, 254] *“O man, who are you to reply against God?”* (Rom 9:20) My wife and I sat under Pastor William I. Brown for about a dozen years. As I prepared this lesson I tried to remember a quote Bro. Brown used to give from Bertrand Russell. I cannot verify the exact details since the beloved Pastor Brown is now with his Saviour but he used to quote Bertrand Russell as saying something to the extent of *‘When I see God, I’m going to give him a piece of my mind.’* Of course the blasphemy of that statement boggles any believer’s mind. **How many people are bold and cress until they stand before the judge or are caught by the police? How many people are arrogant, proud and rebellious until they stand before the hangman’s noose or (in today’s society) the electric chair? In like manner, how many proud, rebellious sinners today make bold threats against our God but will cower in fear when their eyes are finally opened and they stand before the Lord in all His majesty and awe!** Bertrand Russell died in 1970; can any of us imagine the horror he must have felt when at last he stood before the Lord he had blasphemed? It is incredibly sad and thankfully beyond our imaginations to know what happened at that time.

Since I could not remember Bertrand Russell’s quote exactly, I did a web search and while I did not find my exact quote, I did find the following as well as many other like statements. **How blind was this man, but how thankful we each should be for ‘there but by the grace of God go I.’** Some of Bertrand Russell’s quotes:

Religion is something left over from the infancy of our intelligence, it will fade away as we adopt reason and science as our guidelines.

I say quite deliberately that the Christian religion, as organized in its Churches, has been and still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world.

It is possible that mankind is on the threshold of a golden age; but, if so, it will be necessary first to slay the dragon that guards the door, and this dragon is religion.

When asked if he was ever afraid of God’s judgment in denying him, Bertrand Russell replied, *“Most certainly not. I also deny Zeus and Jupiter and Odin and Brahma, but this causes me no qualms. I observe that a very large portion of the human race does not believe in God and suffers no visible punishment in consequence. And if there were a God, I think it very unlikely that He would have such an uneasy vanity as to be offended by those who doubt His existence.”*

by Jesus Christ — **διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [dia Iēsou Christou,]** although manuscript support for this addition at the end of the verse is weak, the truth of the statement is not doubted. *“If it is to be retained, **the sentiment is that the Son of God — the second person of the Trinity — was the great and immediate agent in the creation of the universe.**”* [Barnes, Ephesians on CD]

Appendix A: Textual Discrepancies

The issues are these: First, some manuscripts (mss.) do not include the word ‘all’ (πάντας, pantas). According to Bruce Metzger, the word is missing from several important witnesses but it is hard to imagine the word (or another such word) not being there since the verb ‘to give light, enlighten’ seems to require a direct object (which is usually has in the NT). Add to that the fact that there are no variant readings when it is supplied suggests the word is original. The committee for the United Bible Societies’ Greek NT therefore included the word in brackets to show it is missing in several important witnesses.

Secondly, the text underlying the KJV / NKJV reads ‘fellowship’ (κοινωνία, koinōnia) rather than ‘administration, plan’ (οἰκονομία, oikonomia). The textual support for ‘fellowship’ is only a scattering of late manuscripts while the reading for ‘administration, plan’ is supported by all the known uncials, almost all minuscules, all known versions and patristic quotations. Therefore in all likelihood the versions such as the ESV (‘and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery’) and the NIV (‘and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery’) has the correct reading. For further reading, see ‘*A Textual Commentary on the Greek NT*’, by Bruce Metzger [United Bible Society, 2nd edition, 1994], pages 534f; Ernest Best, 319; Salmond, *Expositor’s GK Testament*, 307; Abbott, 87; Hodge, 117.

Thirdly, while the manuscript support for the addition at the end of the verse of ‘by Jesus Christ’ is weak, the truth of the statement is not doubted by any who accept the Scriptures. “As this stands in our common Greek text, as well as in our English version, there is a striking resemblance between the passage and that in Colossians 1:15,16. But the phrase is missing in the Vulgate, the Syriac, the Coptic, and in several of the ancient MSS. Mill remarks that it was probably inserted here by some transcriber from the parallel passage in Colossians 1:16; and it is rejected as an interpolation by Griesbach. It is not very material whether it be retained in this place or not, as the same sentiment is elsewhere abundantly taught; see John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2. If it is to be retained, the sentiment is that the Son of God — the second person of the Trinity — was the great and immediate agent in the creation of the universe.” [Barnes, *Ephesians on CD*]

Below are the versions retaining the reading of the Textus Receptus:

King James Version: And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

New King James Version: and to make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;

Young’s Literal Translation: and to cause all to see what *is* the fellowship of the secret that hath been hid from the ages in God, who the all things did create by Jesus Christ,

The following are some of the newer versions which accepts the rendering as explained above:

English Standard Version: and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things,

New American Standard: and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;

New International Version: and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

Appendix B: The Great Commission in the Old Testament

by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.

World-wide missions in the Old Testament? Yes, and no faint glimmers nor only promises of better things to come in the New. Here is an article that will change your view of Scripture and will give you new zeal for God's purpose and plan of the ages.

[from http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/13_1_PDFs/01_Kaiser.pdf; April 16, 2015]

Most readers of Scripture will readily acknowledge that there is an unmistakable and clear evidence for asserting that the New Testament (N.T.) has a strong mission emphasis. This is especially the case in the classic Great Commission passage of our Lord in Matt. 28:19-20 followed through in the book of Acts. But few will accord the Old Testament (O.T.) anything even approaching such a mission emphasis or mission mandate.

However, the call for a mission mandate and emphasis in the O. T. cannot be overlooked, if readers are to do justice to the basic claims and message of the Old Testament (O.T.). Right from the beginning of the canon there is more than just a passing concern that all the nations of the earth should come to believe in the coming Man of Promise, the One who would appear through the Seed of the woman Eve, through the family of Shem, and then through the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David.

The message of the O.T. was/is both universal in its scope and international in its range. This is clear right from the start in Genesis 1-11 with its universal audience. It also is very clear from the fact that when God first called Abraham to be his chosen instrument, the Living God gave the first great commission to him. For while others tried to make a “name” for themselves, as in the case of the sons of God marrying the daughters of men (Gen. 6:4), and the building of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:4)—both cases involving the quest for a “name” or a reputation, God offered to give to Abraham a “name” as a gift from his grace.

But the gift of a name was not to be squandered on himself, but it was distinctly designed for the purpose of blessing others. Genesis 12:2-3 pointedly declared that Abraham's name, his blessing, and his being made into a great nation was for the purpose of being a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. Herein lies the heart of the mission mandate from its very inception!

That mission to and for the peoples of the earth was the focus can be attested from the representative Gentiles that are named in the O.T. text. One need only recall the names of Melchizedek, Jethro, the mixed multitude of Egyptians that went up out of Egypt with the Israelites, Balaam, Rahab, Ruth, the widow at Zarephath, and many others like them who responded through the preaching of prophets like Jonah or the major writing prophets, who addressed twenty-five chapters of their prophecies to the Gentile nations of their day (Isa. 13-23; Jer. 46-51; Ezek. 25-32). There are more verses dedicated to the foreign nations in those twenty-five chapters of the three major prophets alone than are found in all of the Pauline prison epistles in the N.T. There can be little doubt that God was more than mildly interested in winning the nations outside of Israel.

Rejection of Missions in the O.T.

Up until the present century, O.T. scholarship could be broadly characterized as accepting the proposition that Israel was called to respond to an active mission mandate to the peoples of the world. Sadly since that time, the idea of mission in that testament has been widely challenged with only a small number of writers defending the existence and focus of world mission in the older canon.

The modern discussion on the rejection of missions in the O.T. is probably to be traced to Max Löhr.¹ Robert Martin-Achard summarized Löhr's position, and sets forth three theses: 1) the concept of mission was peripheral, not central, to the message and the work of Israel; 2) the concept of mission, to the degree that it is present at all in the O.T., can be attributed to the prophets; however, even then it did not come to maturity until the prophets were declining in importance; and 3) the mission to the Gentiles bore no tangible results since it collided with the particularism of the Law and the Jewish contempt for the heathen. In Löhr's view, the real father of Jewish missionary activity was someone dubbed “Deutero-Isaiah,” allegedly someone who wrote Isaiah's chapters 40-66 in the post-exilic period, (sometime after 536 B.C.). Such a view undoubtedly qualifies as a minimalistic view, even if we do not comment on the unnecessary dividing up of the book of Isaiah and late dating of the same.

There were other voices that disagreed with Löhr. In the middle of the century, no voice was more active in defending the concept of Israel's mission to the nations than that of H. H Rowley.² Rowley named Moses as the first missionary in that he evangelized the Israelites in Egypt to faith in Yahweh, (whom Rowley wrongly and unnecessarily went on to identify as a Kenite deity). Evangelized Israel was, in turn, called to mission by virtue of the fact that they had been the objects of God's election. They had been elected to be the people of God. This was not merely an election for privilege, but it was an election for purpose: it was a particularistic call of one nation in order to reach the rest of the nations!

Rowley was not alone in his estimation of Israel's call to world-wide mission. Edmund Jacob likewise agreed that the concept of mission was a basic concept that could be found throughout the O.T. Jacob was especially enthusiastic about the importance of the book of Jonah for the missionary message.³ No less supportive were the voices of A. Gelin (Jonah is “the missionary manual par excellence”) and Robert Dobbie (Jonah is “the best missionary tract ever written”).⁴

Other scholars allowed Isaiah 40-66 to be included in what Johannes Lindblom called “the missionary revelations, dealing with the missionary charges (that were) incumbent upon Israel in relation to the Gentiles.”⁵ In a similar fashion, Christopher R. North

used that same section of the canon to show Israel's mission to humanity.⁶

But even this small amount of agreement was to experience significant opposition. Norman H. Snaith argues that Isaiah 40-66 did not support any concept of Israel's mission to the nations.⁷ He was followed by P. A. H. de Boer who also could find no exegetical grounds for such a position.⁸

The result of this drawing back of any missionary message in the O.T. text was to claim that Israel never had been given the role of being evangelists nor missionaries. Instead, their role was a passive one: they were just to be the people of God in the world. Martin-Achard concluded: "The Chosen People do not have to make propaganda in order to win mankind for its God. It is enough that, by its very existence, it should testify to the greatness of Yahweh."⁹

A Case for Missions in the O.T.

There are two outstanding missions texts in the Pentateuch, viz. Gen. 12:3 and Ex. 19:6. Both revolve around the famous declaration that God's plan was to provide for the blessing of all the peoples in all the nations of the earth through the father of the chosen people and the nations that would be born from him.

The Abrahamic Covenant

The Greek translation of Gen. 12:3 (the Septuagint) rendered the verb in Gen. 12:3 in its passive form—"be blessed." No less decisive are the words of the apostle Paul in Rom 4:13 and Gal 3:8; in fact, even the intertestamental and apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (44:21) interpreted this promise as a passive and not as a reflexive — "bless themselves." However in spite of this, the reflexive interpretation is the one favored in some recent versions and commentaries of the Bible.

But looking at the text in context, clearly God intended to use Abraham in such a way that he would be a means of blessing to all the nations of the world. Clearly, he was to be the instrument in the redemption of the world. This would be God's solution to the curse that had been imparted as a result of the fall, (Gen. 3) and the curse imposed at the dispersion of the human race at the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:7ff).

In what way, we might ask, is this text a missionary text? If Abraham is to be no more than an intermediary of the divine blessing, was he not thereby absolved from taking any initiative in actively converting the nations to the Man of Promise who was to come?

However, there is no mistake that Abraham was to be more than just a foil for the gospel. Everything he was and did, as the current office-holder of the promise, would have both an "already" and a "not-yet" aspect to the message he spoke and the actions he set forth. The work of providing the Messianic Seed and the regenerating action of redemption were distinctively God's own unique actions. But the descendants of Abraham, knowing how wide the scope of their influence would be in decimating the blessing of God, could not rest passively on their laurels and leave the work of missions to God or to a later generation. The patriarchs, and subsequently, the chosen people or nation who came from them, must actively call a waiting and watching world to repentance and to a belief in this Man of Promise who would come from their offspring.

Israel a Priestly Kingdom

The world mission purpose and focus is made even clearer in Ex. 19:6 — Israel as a whole nation was to be "a priestly kingdom," "a royal priesthood." It was from this passage that I Pet 2:5 and Rev 1:6, along with the Reformers, announced the N. T. doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

Prior to Israel's refusal and failure to act accordingly, it had been God's plan that every Israelite serve as a priest. Only after the nation's refusal to so act did God appoint the tribe of Levi to assist them. But there can be no doubt about the fact that in God's plan, every Israelite was to be a ministering priest. And if it be asked, "For whom were all the Israelites to act as priests?" the answer is inescapable — they were to be priests for all the nations of the earth!

Did the call of the Levites change the missionary imperative for the whole nation? No! The only thing it changed was the directness of their access to God. Now the priests of Aaron's family would represent the people before God, but the nation was not rid of its obligation to be a witness to the nations. After all, that was the reason for their election. Election was never merely an election to privilege: foremost of all it was an election to service — and that service was a world mission service — to share the blessing (what Paul equated with the "good news" or "gospel" in Gal 3:8) with all the families of the earth (an expression in Gen. 12:3 that had just been used in the Gen. 10 listing of the (then-known) seventy nations of the world.

The Dynasty Of David

Without any question, the great missionary text located in the historical books is the one found in II Samuel 7:19. The context for this startling revelation was King David's declaration that he intended to build a house for God to replace the 400 year old curtains and accoutrements of the Tabernacle that Moses had built in the wilderness. God had a different plan! The prophet Nathan announced that God would make a house (i.e., a dynasty) out of David, rather than have David build a house for the Lord. Furthermore, God repeated to David most of the promises he had given beforehand to Abraham and the other patriarchs — they would now be fulfilled in David and his family!

David was so surprised by all of these "new" declarations that he went into the house of God in II Sam. 7:18ff and prayed: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant."

It is at this point where one of the most sensational texts of Scripture appears, but unfortunately it also happens to be one of the places where most translations go just plain haywire. Literally translated, David exclaims: “And this (which God had just declared about David’s house and future) is (or will be) the charter for humanity, O LORD God!” David instinctively knew what many modern readers of the text have a great deal of difficulty seeing: the son born to David would be one that God personally would be a Father to (II Sam. 7:14) and that this son would be the means of blessing all the nations and families of the earth.

In many ways, this amazing expression of II Sam. 7:19, “law (or charter) for humanity” is very similar to the one that the prophet Isaiah will use two centuries later in Isa. 42:6, viz., “a covenant for the people.” Isaiah saw Israel’s role as a missionary role and he used this expression “a covenant for the people” in direct parallelism with “a light for the Gentiles.”

This son of David would have a dynasty, a throne and a kingdom that would last forever (II Sam. 7:16). It is this kingdom that would embrace all peoples, including all the Gentiles, if they would only call upon the name of that Man of Promise who was to come.

Even in his final words in II Sam. 23:5, king David showed an uncanny sense of clarity about what God was revealing to him. There he concluded, “Has not (God) made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part? Will he not cause to sprout (or “branch out”) my salvation.?” The verb David chose became one of the key terms for the Messiah, “the Branch” (see Isa. 4:2; Jer. 23:5-6; Zech. 3:8; and 6:12). Accordingly, almost as if he wanted to make a pun on this word, he declared that the salvation that would come to him and to all Israel through this Seed, now located in his family, would “branch out” (or spread). Since there was/is no other God in all the universe, He too had to be the God of the Gentiles. This would be God’s “charter for all of humanity”!

The Message of the Psalms

Repeatedly, the various psalmists will summon the nations to enter into the praise of the Lord God of Israel.

These invitations both presume and build on the fact that the invitation to believe the gospel had been issued and responded to by the heathen peoples of the world.

The key Psalm is Ps. 67. God had blessed Israel and caused his face to shine upon them in a favorable way (an allusion to the Aaronic benediction of Num. 6:24-26) so that God’s way might be known in all the earth and his salvation among all the nations (Psalms 67:2). This is very clear. Although one might quibble over Psalms 117 and debate whether in that Psalm we have a real example of missionary preaching, this point cannot be debated in Psalms 67. In fact, this Psalm ends with the note that God had blessed Israel specifically so that “all the ends of the earth might fear Him” (Psalms 67:7).

No less impressive are the millennial or enthronement Psalms (Ps. 93-100). After alternating in successive Psalms with first an invitation to “Sing to the LORD a new song” with a declaration that “The LORD reigns” (e.g. Psalms 96, 98 compared with Psalms 97, 99), the whole series of Psalms climaxes in Psalms 100 with an invitation for all the nations of the earth to come to the Lord with singing and joyful service. Not only should the nations recognize their Creator, but they should acknowledge Him as their God and Lord and King over all.

The Servant Songs

As Johannes Blauw summarized the situation, almost all those who have been concerned with the question of the missionary message of the O.T. are agreed that the universal significance and calling of Israel is nowhere expressed more clearly than in Isaiah 40-55.10 Within this corpus, there are two Servant Songs that have been pointed to by most observers as being the most mission oriented that give to Israel a calling and a world-wide mission mandate and ministry: Isa. 42:1-7 and 49:1-7.

In these two marvelous texts, Israel is called to reveal God’s “justice” to the nations (Isa. 42:1) and to serve as “a light to the Gentiles” (42:6 and 49:6) so that this salvation offered to Israel might reach to the ends of the earth (Isa. 49:6).

The only way to escape the obvious mission import of these clear declarations is to argue that “the Servant of the LORD” is an eschatological figure only, and not a figure that is to be equated with the nation of Israel. This interpretation, however, will not receive the endorsement of Isaiah’s text. The identity of the Servant of the Lord is consistently a composite concept of both the nation (e.g., Isa. 41:8; 44:1) and the One who is to come who would minister to Israel (e.g., Isa. 53).

Blauw himself, while admitting to the strong universal intent and flavor of these passages with their call to world mission, distinguished between the “centripetal” and the “centrifugal” mission consciousness in the O.T.¹¹ In other words, according to Blauw the message had more of an inward and example-setting quality (centripetal force) rather than an outward and witnessbearing mandate to reach all the peoples of the earth (seen as a centrifugal N.T. dynamic).

But this issue could not be highlighted more dramatically than in the debate over the phrase in Isa. 42:6, “a covenant for the people.” Normally the word “people” (Hebrew *berit`am*) stands in the singular for Israel. Yet Isa. 42:5 and 40:7 uses the singular “people” to refer to the nations. Indeed, the parallel clause in Isa. 42:6 is a synonymous parallelism in which “a covenant for the people” is paralleled with “and a light for the Gentiles.” Surely “Gentiles” (Hebrew *goyim*) makes it clear that the “people” intended here are not the Israelites, but the Gentile nations! It is true, of course, that this same “covenant for the people” (Hebrew *berit`am*) is used in Isa. 49:8 for the restoration of Israel to her land. But that is altogether in accord with the wide ranging nature of the promise plan of God that it would embrace within one and the same “covenant” an appeal for Israel to proclaim God’s salvation to all the nations while still embracing his promise to bring the nation of Israel back to their land.

However protests do sound: “Yes, but that word was directed to the ‘Servant of the Lord,’ not to the nation, or even to the believers of that nation.” However, it is precisely at this point where the reasoning has gone askew. Israel had been called to be “my son,” “God’s firstborn,” (Ex. 4:22); indeed, they were to be a “kingdom of priests,” “a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). Israel was also to be God’s “servant.”

Of course it is true that the “seed,” “my son,” “my firstborn,” the “Lord’s servant” had primary reference to the Messiah who was to come. But under the terms of corporate solidarity, which was/is so important to O.T. thinking, the One Christ represented the many, including the believers in Israel. It is not as if the writer indulged in double-talk or double meanings, or even that he meant one literal surface meaning and another hidden meaning that was left for N. T. writers to discover when the truth of world missions was enlarged. Rather, it was the fact that the writer saw as one collective whole both the one representing the group and the many as a single whole. It is much like in Western society where we exercise corporate solidarity thinking.

An example will suffice: If after repeated failure to win any proper redress of a newly purchased car, say from the General Motors Company, I finally take them to court to sue for relief, the court docket reads in its own legal fiction, “Walter Kaiser, Jr. vs. GMC.” For the purposes of law, GMC is regarded as a single person or entity, (thereby, I suppose, making this a fair contest). Actually, however, embraced in the single idea of GMC is the whole management team, all of the stockholders, the governing boards, and the employees. Yet they are treated as if they are one single person.

So it is with the concept of “Seed,” “My Son,” My Firstborn,” “My Servant.” and others. It certainly does point to Christ in each case, but at the same time that same single idea points to all who believe in Christ as well, whether they look forward to His coming as in the O.T. era, or look backward to His first coming, as in the N.T. age. Little wonder, then, that Paul can claim in Galatians 3:16 that it did not say in the O.T. “seeds,” (i.e., plural “descendants”), but “seed,” which is one, i.e., Christ. The apostle Paul was not using trickery or Jewish midrashic principles to make his point. No, he declared in the most vehement of terms possible that he understood this to be what the text itself taught. And having just made that point, he announces, without feeling any vacillation of any kind, that if we have believed in Christ, then we too are Abraham’s “seed” (Gal 3:29). Sadly to say, it is just this precise point that has been so badly missed in twentieth century exegesis, especially regarding a sound theology of missions in the O.T.

Therefore, the “servant” is to be identified with the righteous remnant in Israel. The servant has a task to perform which takes it far beyond its own nationalistic and provincial boundaries. That servant must be a “light to the Gentiles” (Isa. 49:6). That is precisely how missions came to be and must be seen as a central part of the vision of Isaiah.¹²

The Book of Jonah

The other landmark case of missions in the O.T., specifically in the prophets, is found in the book of Jonah. Without any doubt, Jonah is called to take a message from Yahweh to Israel’s most bitter and cruelest of enemies — the Assyrians in the capital of Nineveh. The sin of this Gentile nation had brought it to the brink of destruction. They must know this is the case, even if the impending doom is less than a five weeks away. But how ever we look at it, if ever there was a case of an intransigent and unwilling missionary this is just such a case.

Surprisingly enough to everyone, except to the prophet Jonah, the response to the message was overwhelming. The Gentiles in this capital city repented in a most dramatic way, giving enormous glory to God, but deep grief to a prophet who wished that so bitter an enemy would have had its just recompense for all the suffering they had imposed on Israel (along with a host of other peoples in the Near East).

It is clear that the sympathies of the author of the book of Jonah are with those who favor extending the missionary message to others: and it is centrifugal, not centripetal. The only antimissionary around is the prophet himself who had served reluctantly as God’s missionary after he has had a “whale” of an experience and had been “down-in-the-mouth” for a period of time!

Conclusion

God had never elected Israel only to be engrossed in “navel-gazing” — only to receive the blessing for herself. She had been called and elected for service unto the nations of the earth. Certainly with Abraham, and then most decisively with Moses, the stage had been set for a whole nation to be involved in a ministry of being priests and witnesses to all the peoples of the earth.

The covenant that David received was not to be selfishly squandered on themselves, but it was to be “a charter for all humanity.” That same point was affirmed by Isaiah as he again repeated this truth: it was to be “a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.” How much more clearly could the matter be put than that? In fact, if any doubt still existed, then what in heaven’s name is Jonah doing off in the territory of their most wretched of all enemies calling for repentance? Certainly, he is not doing this in the name of one of the pagan deities of Assyria, but in the name of Yahweh, the only true God of the universe who wants to save!

World-wide missions are not a missing element, or a belated afterthought, nor even an added gloss appended to the O.T. Instead, world-wide missions forms the heartbeat of the message and purpose of the O.T. That is why Genesis begins in the first eleven chapters with a focus on all the families and nations of the earth much before one family is called to serve all the other families of the earth. Teaching or reading the O.T. without missions is like eating bread without butter: the two go together like love and marriage, like horse and carriage! Rightly understood, the O.T. is a missions book par excellence because world missions to all the peoples of the earth is its central purpose. It also is the key that unlocks true understanding of its message as well as for the whole Bible.

End Notes

1. I am indebted for this reference (and much of the history of this discussion) to my former student, Donald E. Weaver, Jr., who did a Master of Arts thesis under my direction entitled, *Israel's Mission to the World* (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1977). Max Löhr, *Der Missionsgedanke im Alten Testament. Ein Beitrag zur alttestamentlichen religionsgeschichte*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Möhr, 1896). His views were most conveniently summarized by Robert Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations: A Study of the Old Testament Conception of Israel's Mission to the World*, transl. John P. Smith. London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962, pp. 5-6.
2. Among the numerous writings of H. H. Rowley on this subject are these: *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1944; *ibid.*, *Israel's Mission to the World*. London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1939; *ibid.*, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1950; and *Ibid.*, *The Faith of Israel. Aspects of Old Testament Thought*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956.
3. Edmund Jacob. *Theology of the Old Testament* transl. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock. New York: Harper and Row, 1958, p. 270, n.8.
3. Jacob, *Theology...*, p. 221.
4. A. Gelin. "L'Idée Missionnaire Dans la Bible," Supplement to *Union missionnaire du clergé de France*, No. 14, April 1956 as cited by Martin-Achard . *A Light to the Nations*. p. 50. Also Robert Dobbie. "The Biblical Foundation of the Mission of the Church," *International Review of Missions* 51 (1962): 197.
5. Johannes Lindblom, *The Servant Songs in Deutero-Isaiah. A New Attempt to Solve an Old Problem*. Lund: E.W.K. Gleerup, 1957, p. 57.
6. Christopher R. North. *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah. An Historical and Critical Study*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 143.
7. Norman Snaith. "The Servant of the Lord in Deutero-Isaiah," in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*. Presented to Professor Theodore H . Robinson. ed H . H. Rowley. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1950, pp. 187-200.
8. P.A.H. de Boer. "Second Isaiah's Message," *Oudtestamentische Studien* 11 (1956):80-101 . Another advocate of these same views was Antoon Schoors. *I Am God Your Saviour . A Form-Critical Study of the Main Genres in Isaiah XL-LX*. *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*. 24 (1973): 302-303.
9. Martin-Achard. *A Light to the Nations*, p. 31.
10. Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* London: Lutterworth, 1962, p. 31.
11. *Ibid.* p. 34.
12. For an in-depth study on the two Servant Poems in Isa. 42:1-6 and Isa. 49:1-6 see my article "The Missionary Mandate of the O.T." that answers the question of how Israel was to serve the Lord as a light to the nations. God's heart for missions never dwindled or relaxed throughout the whole O.T. But nowhere did it receive as strong a theological explication as it did in these two Servant Poems. It would forever be known that Israel was to be a "light to the nation," a "covenant to the people (all the peoples)," and God's "salvation to the ends of the earth." For a copy of this article contact the IJFM editor. Dr. Walter Kaiser is the Colman M. Mocker distinguished Professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass., where he and his wife Marge currently reside.