

When you think of the Old Testament, do you typically think about it as having an evangelistic focus? Why or why not?

What do you think was God's intent or strategy in the Old Testament with regard to mission?

### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Since the fall of man, society continued to grow, not only in size, but in unrestrained sinfulness. This sinful mindset was represented through characters such as Lamech.

#### **Genesis 4:23-24 (NIV)**

*<sup>23</sup> Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. <sup>24</sup> If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times."*

Civilization had become so wicked God chose to destroy it with the flood in order to provide any hope for mankind's survival. After the flood however, man's sinful nature continued to drive him away from God and to live contrary to the creation mandate given to Adam and Eve.

By Genesis 10 there are 70 nations or people groups in existence on the earth. All present day nations stem from these seventy nations.

#### **Genesis 10:32 (NIV)**

*These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.*

#### **Genesis 11:1-9 (NIV)**

*<sup>1</sup> Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. <sup>2</sup> As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup> They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. <sup>4</sup> Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." <sup>5</sup> But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building.*

*<sup>6</sup> The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup> Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." <sup>8</sup> So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. <sup>9</sup> That is why it was called Babel--because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.*

**What was so evil about what these people were doing that God had to come down, change their language and disperse the people?**

The goal of this early civilization was to build a city with a great tower SO THAT they might make a name for themselves and not spread through the whole world. There were numerous problems with their plan.

- 1) **The tower would reach to the heavens.** This does not literally mean they thought they could reach heaven, but mostly likely it would be a high place of worship to the starry host. As such it was a rejection of God's rule and the embracing of false religion.
- 2) **The tower would be made with clay and tar** causing some to theorize that this waterproof construction might be designed to protect them from future flooding and judgement. This is despite the fact that God promised that he would not destroy the earth by flooding a second time.
- 3) **They desired to make a name for themselves.** They were more focused on being great in the eyes of man, apart from God, than they were on the greatness of God. Success would be "their" achievement with no glory attributed back to God. It was all about control of their destiny, their future and their glory. It was the ultimate expression of humanism.
- 4) **They planned not to fill the whole earth** but to stay as one great community. On the surface this might not sound too negative until we remember the creation mandate was to fill the earth and subdue it. God desired mankind to spread out over the whole earth so that his image would represent his rule over all creation. This civilization was not interested in God's mandate nor desired in any way to represent God's rule. They were creating their own kingdom, with their own rule.

### **Genesis 12:1-3 (NIV)**

*<sup>1</sup> The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup> "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

### **Summarize the ways in which God promised to bless Abram?**

I will make you into a great nation

I will make your name great

All peoples/nations on earth would be blessed through you.

### **In what ways was the call of Abram in direct opposition to man's goals expressed at the tower of Babel?**

- God declared that there would be a great nation, not one created by a rebellious people but by God himself. To emphasize this point, he chose an old couple incapable of having children as the starting point for this new, great nation. (God first appeared to Abram when he and Sarah were 75/74yrs, and they had Isaac at ages 100/99)
- This new family would become a faith-based, worshipping nation instead of a rebellious, independent, humanist nation. This would be a nation that existed in covenant relationship with God, with the goal of representing his rule and bringing glory to him.

- Instead of focusing on himself to make his name great, Abram was to focus on God's great name and in return he would make Abram's name great.
- Where the tower of Babel community was self-focused, God's community was to have the best interests of the whole world in mind.

**Summarize the ultimate goal of Abram's blessing.**

The ultimate goal of Abram's blessing was that the whole world would be blessed.

**In what ways does God desire all nations on earth to be blessed?**

God's original intent for all people was that they be in **relationship** with him and **represent** his rule over all creation. Through creating Abram into a great nation God established a model community to demonstrate what it meant to enter relationship with God and be his people. By always having a community of faith on the earth, there would always be the hope and means of people turning back to him.

**How might Abram being blessed cause others to turn to God?****In what ways are "we" blessed by God that might encourage others to turn back to him?**

Fruits of the Spirit, freedom, relationship, spiritual family, purpose, confidence, faith, hope, etc.

**Have you seen others turn to God based on how God has been at work in your life? Share your story.****Exodus 19:3-6 (NIV)**

<sup>3</sup> Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: <sup>4</sup> 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup> Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup> you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

**What did it mean when God said that Israel, as a nation, would be a kingdom of priests? In what ways was this consistent with the idea of “image”?**

Priests were people who were to act as a go between God and the people. They were to represent his character and will and help people know how to relate to a holy God. God also introduced the idea of kingdom, once again suggesting the idea of rule on the earth. The concept of Priest and King appear consistently through scripture and rightfully so. The “Image of God” was to be a ruler (appointed king) on the earth representing the Great King’s rule AND representing relationship with him. We were all supposed to be kings and priests in God’s design. Israel is now appointed that role to reveal to the rest of the world what it means to live under the reign of the king, but also in intimate relationship with him.

REPRESENTATIONAL RULE + RELATIONSHIP

**Read the following verses regarding the temple.**

***Isaiah 56:6-7 (NIV)***

*<sup>6</sup> And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant-- <sup>7</sup> these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.*

***Haggai 2:7 (NIV)***

*I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty.*

**What role was the temple to play in the world? Is this different from what you previously understood?**

The temple was not just a location for Israel to seek restored relationship with God. It was a symbolic place for all people/all nations to come to worship God. The temple was never simply for Israel’s benefit, but for everyone’s benefit.

**Do we sometimes view church as a place just for us? What is the purpose of the church in this world?**

***Psalms 67:1-7 (NIV)***

*<sup>1</sup> May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, <sup>2</sup> that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.*

*<sup>3</sup> May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.*

*<sup>4</sup> May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth.*

*<sup>5</sup> May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.*

*<sup>6</sup> Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. <sup>7</sup> God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.*

**Why did the psalmist ask God to bless Israel as a nation?**

The goal of the blessing was that, as a result, God would be known among all nations. This would be evidenced through the nations singing with joy in worship to God.

**What do you think about the Psalmist asking God to bless him? How do you feel about asking God to bless you? Is that a selfish request?**

**When you ask God to bless you, do you find it is usually more for your personal comfort than it is for mission? Why is that?**

**What does God's desire to bless you say about his desire for "your" impact in this world?**

**In what ways did Israel perhaps misunderstand their role in God's kingdom mission?**

**In what ways do we tend to forget our role in this world?**

**1 Peter 2:9 (NIV)**

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

**Why did Peter use the descriptions applied to Israel in the Old Testament to describe believers in the New Testament?**

God's mission has not changed; he has simply expanded the team of those who represent him to include all nations. Now, anyone who places faith in Jesus becomes his royal priest to proclaim God to the rest of the world.

**Acts 1:8 (NIV)**

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

**Dissect the above passage. How many truths can you discover?**

- The Holy Spirit desires to come into our lives.
- When the Holy Spirit comes into your life, he empowers you to witness for Christ.
- God wants us to take witnessing to the world very seriously.
- We are not to be content with just our local community hearing about Christ. We are to passionately care that God's name be spread through the whole world.
- We start where we are and then move out from there.
- Etc.

**The above passage is not so much a command as it is a promise. What is the difference?**

**Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)**

*<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

**After his resurrection, Jesus' primary thrust of authority was to send out his followers to make disciples. Why was this such a critical commission?**

**If this is the one mission Jesus has entrusted to us on his departure, why do we tend to neglect it so much? Why do we not take it more seriously and centre our lives on it?**

**Matthew 8:21-22 (NIV)**

*Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." <sup>22</sup> But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."*

**What was wrong with the disciple's perspective?**

The man believed in and wanted to follow Jesus, but had his family as a higher priority. He valued the process of caring for his family and burying the dead over that of going through the towns proclaiming life. He did not understand the urgency of the message. It would be similar to prioritizing time burying a loved one instead of delivering the antidote to thousands who were about to die.

What excuses do we tend to come up with as to why we do not embrace the life-saving mission of Jesus?

**Matthew 24:14 (NIV)**

*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

Why do you think Jesus will wait until all nations have heard the gospel before he returns?

How does this relate to Abraham's blessing?

What does this communicate about what our life focus should be?

How can we personally speed up the return of Christ?

**Romans 10:12-15 (NIV)**

<sup>12</sup> For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, <sup>13</sup> for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

<sup>14</sup> How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? <sup>15</sup> And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

What are the implications of this passage for us?

**Revelation 7:9-10 (NIV)**

<sup>9</sup> After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Jesus will accomplish his mission and he will accomplish his mission through his people. What are some reasons we personally need to take up this call?

God has placed each of us in various communities where he desires that we represent him and his love to the people around us. These circles of influence include family, work, school, neighbourhood, sports teams, choirs etc. Draw these circles on the following page. Have the group share the various types of communities they are a part of.

**What can you do this week to act on God's passion for all people to know him, as you engage in your various circles of influence?**

Encourage your students to start praying for God's leading as to how to have a spiritual impact in their various realms of influence. They may want to identify specific people and start praying for them daily.

***Psalm 67:4 (NIV)***

*May the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth.*





## **CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE**

Draw a large circle for every circle of influence God has placed you within.  
Within those circles write the names of people that you believe do not yet have a personal relationship with Christ. Ask God to show you how you can represent him in each of these areas of influence and point people to Jesus Christ.

