

Missions
by Peter Pikkert

A mission field is any community without a resident evangelical church to which the Holy Spirit can direct those in whom he is working. The mystery of missions occurs when godly missionaries enter such communities to stay. When they do, the Holy Spirit, prepares people from that community to receive the gospel message (Acts 10:44–45). The missionary's goal is to be used by the Holy Spirit in such communities to lead people to repentance of sin, faith in Jesus Christ and thus the receiving of forgiveness of sin and eternal life, to disciple new believers (that is, teach them sound doctrine so they will grow in grace), to baptize them and to integrate them into local church fellowships.

An unbiblical view of missions exposes the missionary enterprise to one of two risks. It can make the missionary task too small, under the excuse that there is enough work to be done at home, or by asserting that God, in his sovereign grace, will save the lost in his own time without our involvement.

Conversely, it can lead to attempts to “Christianize” the world. The missionary task is not to bring all men to Christ, but to proclaim Christ to all men (Romans 15:20).

Clear goals and right motivation enables the church, the mission agency and the individual missionary to persevere in missions in difficult or seemingly fruitless situations as well as resist over-involvement in development and/or social work.

God's justice does not demand missions

God's justice decreed that when man sinned he would suffer everlastingly (Genesis 2:16–17; 3:19; Jeremiah 31:30; Ezekiel 18:4; 33:8; Romans 5:17; Hebrews 9:27; Matthew 25:30,41,46; Mark 9:43,48). On the day of judgment no one will complain that God has treated him unjustly. We will, in fact, condemn ourselves. We not only fail to live up to God's law, we even fail by the standard we expect of others (Romans 2:1)! God has no “moral obligation” to save. Salvation—and thus missions—flows from his grace.

Mankind does not want missions

Mankind rejects the missionary message because it is blind concerning the gospel of salvation (Romans 3:9–18; 2 Corinthians 4:3–4; Ephesians 4:18), under the power of darkness and energized by Satan (Colossians 1:13; Ephesians 2:1–2; 1 John 5:19). As long as missionaries make educational, medical or developmental contributions they may be tolerated; but when they concentrate on evangelism, discipling and church planting, they are often reviled. This is expected, for they are stepping into enemy territory. Scriptural authority for missions

Throughout the Scriptures, there is a clear missionary emphasis:

- In the character of God
The Bible uses the concept of light to describe God (John 1:5–9; 1 John 1:5; 2:8–10). Just as light is diffusive, enlivening, enlightening, penetrating darkness, so God, in his grace, seeks to penetrate spiritually dark places to destroy the works of the wicked one (1 John 3:8) and to introduce spiritual light, life and goodness (John 8:12). Furthermore, God's love motivates him to communicate with the objects of his favour. His love is outgoing, sacrificial and comprehensive, encompassing the world (John 3:16). He is a God of relationships.
- In election
 - 1) In the Old Testament, God chose a man, Abraham, and his descendants, the Jewish people, to make them channels of blessing to the whole world (Genesis 12:3b; 18:18; 22:17–18; 26:2–4; 28:12–14).
 - 2) God chose Israel so that it would serve him as a nation of priests and prophets to minister to the other nations (Exodus 19:5–6). The tragedy of the Old Testament is that the Jews failed to discern God's purpose for them, and so God set them aside as a failure.
 - 3) The doctrine of election as expounded in the New Testament is meant to be both an encouragement for evangelism (Acts 18:9) and an assurance that God will use his people for eternal purposes (2 Timothy 2:10; Ephesians 1:11–12).
- In the Old Testament
 - 1) In spite of Israel's failure, we still catch numerous glimpses of God's concern for the

nations through such people as Joseph, Jethro, Rahab, the widow of Zarephath, Naaman, Jonah and Daniel.

2) Solomon grasped something of God's purpose for Israel when he prayed (1 Kings 8:41–43).

3) The Psalms are full of the universal implications of God's rule. Up to one third of the Psalms address the Gentiles positively (Psalm 67:1–2; 72:8,17,19; 87:4; see also Psalm 2, 22, 47, 50, 96).

4) The prophets had a worldwide vision, even when their main message pertained to Israel (Isaiah 45:22; 52:10; Jeremiah 1:5; Malachi 1:11). Daniel's witness was so effective that two heathen kings proclaimed Jehovah to be the most high God, whose kingdom was everlasting and universal (Daniel 2:47; 3:28–29; 4:34–37; 6:26–27).

5) Esther, Ezekiel, Ruth, Obadiah, Nahum all contain interaction with Gentiles, and in Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and The Song of Solomon the interaction is generic. In short, we can trace God's concern for the whole earth in every part of the Old Testament.

• In the New Testament

1) The Gospels give us the life-story of Jesus, God's great missionary. His lineage contains a number of Gentile women, Tamar, Rahab and Ruth. The angels heralded his birth as "good tidings of great joy which will be to all people" (Luke 2:10). Simeon proclaimed him to be "a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32), and John the Baptist described him as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Although Jesus' personal ministry was to "the lost sheep of Israel," his thoughts, aims and teachings were global (Matthew 8:11; 13:38a; John 3:16; 8:12; 9:5b; 10:16).

2) Jesus reminded his hometown that God chose a Gentile widow to feed Elijah and healed Naaman. His miracles and parables encompassed Gentiles: a Roman centurion, a Syro-phoenician woman and a Samaritan. All four Gospels culminate in Jesus' great commission commands, which envision the evangelization of the whole world by God's people (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; John 20:21).

3) The Acts of the Apostles is the inspired record of missionary work during the first century. Acts 1:8 serves as the book's contents page: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts chapters 2 to 7 tells the story of the disciples' witness in Jerusalem, and chapters 8 to 12 give glimpses of outreach to Judea and Samaria respectively, along with Paul's conversion. From chapter 13 on, the narrative follows Paul and his fellow workers as they take the gospel "to the ends of the earth." Acts ends abruptly with Paul at Rome, where he was "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him" (Acts 28:31). This is appropriate, for the work of missions was to continue.

4) The epistles are missionary letters sent to new churches, new converts and the next generation of missionaries. They deal with practical, doctrinal and other matters facing new believers in hostile Judaic or pagan societies, and urge them to engage in missions (Romans 10:14–15).

5) Revelation was written by a banished missionary to comfort and encourage new Christians persecuted by a government seeking to destroy the remarkable results of the early church's missionary work. The book describes the final phases of the missionary era: the further growth of the church, the vindication of the people of God, the overthrow of all authorities in opposition to God and the establishment of God's universal kingdom of righteousness (Revelation 5:9; 11:15).

Conclusion

The Bible is a thoroughly missionary book. Those who accept it as their sole rule of faith must be committed to worldwide missions. Missions is, in fact, central in the church's duties and responsibilities in the world.