



WHAT IS MISSIONS?

God's Global Purpose and Our Response

What comes to mind when you think about missions? Maybe you think of foreign languages, eating weird food, or having no wifi. While a mission experience might include these, missions encompasses so much more. God's heartbeat for the nations to worship him can be heard all throughout the Scriptures. The Bible tells the wonderful story of God's global mission for the world and what role we are to play.

Missions in the Old Testament

Read:

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you... I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." - Genesis 12:1, 3 (ESV)

Reflect/Discuss:

- What are some examples of missions in the Old Testament?
- Do you see missions as a main theme in the Old Testament? Why or why not?

Consider:

Things get off to a really bad start. In only eleven chapters, Adam and Eve bring sin and death into the world, their son Cain kills his brother Abel, God floods the earth because of pervasive wickedness in the hearts of mankind, and people from every nation rally against their Creator God to build a tower into heaven before being scattered in judgment. That all happens in the first eleven chapters of the Bible!

Thankfully, Genesis 12 marks the start of something new. God offers hope to all people on the earth through one man named Abram (later renamed Abraham). From the very beginning, God reveals himself as a global God. Any and every person who comes to know Abraham's God will come to know the favor of the Lord. He will use Abraham as a means to bless "all the families of the earth." God is set on saving worshipers all over the world.

You can see God's heart for the nations clearly throughout the Old Testament. Rahab helps God's people even though she is from Jericho. Ruth is a Moabite woman who exemplifies godliness and finds herself in the bloodline of Jesus. God speaks to Israel through Isaiah the Prophet when he says, "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Psalm 67 cries out, "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" Jonah is sent to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, to preach a message of repentance. God's announcement to the world is that the nations will find hope and grace in the same place Israel will. Jesus Christ is coming into the world, and he will be their Savior.

Act:

- Spend some time reading the Old Testament through this new lens.
- Make a list of all the references you find of other nations worshiping the One True God.

Go Deeper:

[What is a Blessing?](#)

Missions in the New Testament

Read:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." - Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

Reflect/Discuss:

- What significance do you think there is, that these are some of the last words Jesus speaks to his disciples?
- What similarities do you see in Matthew 28:18-20 and Genesis 12:1-3?

Consider:

God's global purpose spills over from the Old Testament into the New. The coming of Jesus secures a way for both Jews and Gentiles to find salvation at the foot of the cross. This is why John the Baptist, upon seeing Jesus, exclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the *world!*"

Before Jesus ascends into heaven, he invites his followers to join this global cause. He urges them to go and make disciples of all the nations. This monumental event is recorded in each of the four Gospels and even in the book of Acts. The mission of God will now be carried on by Christians empowered by the Holy Spirit. The result is staggering.

The gospel sweeps across the Roman empire leaving dozens of churches in its wake and turning the world upside down. Men, women, young, old, Jews, and Gentiles all find new life in Christ. Paul the Apostle reminds us that this was God's promise all along. He writes in Galatians, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.'" God's mission in the New Testament is not new. What started in the Old Testament is continued by Jesus on the cross and spread across the world by his disciples.

Act:

- Spend some time reading the New Testament through this lens.
- Make a list of all the references you find of the Gentiles worshipping Jesus.

Go Deeper:

[The One Thing That Transforms Prejudice](#)

Missions in the Modern Day

Read:

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" - Romans 10:14–15 ESV

Reflect/Discuss:

- When did you first become a Christian? Who told you about Jesus?
- Who have you told about Jesus? What was their response?

Consider:

In the thousands of years since Jesus commissioned his disciples, Christians have been hard at work. The Church boasts a long history of faithful men and women who have brought the good news of Jesus to new lands. In fact, it can be difficult nowadays to find a country that doesn't have at least a few churches. Does that mean the task is finished? Is there even a need for missionaries anymore?

Hidden underneath the borders of the 200 political-nation states are hundreds and thousands of different languages, cultures, and distinct ethno-linguistic groups of peoples. There are currently over 5,500 of these groups who are virtually untouched by the gospel. Roughly 40% of the world population does not know a Christian, has never seen a Bible, and has no church in its area. They live and die without hope and there is no one coming to bring it to them. The task is still unfinished and it's as urgent as ever.

Paul makes his point in Romans 10 by working backwards. Calling on Christ, he says, means believing in Christ. Believing in Christ means hearing about Christ. Hearing about Christ means someone is preaching Christ. Someone preaching Christ means someone being sent for the glory of Christ. When Christians go as missionaries today they are joining those who have gone before them to intentionally bring the gospel to every language and culture. God's desire is for his salvation to reach the very ends of the earth and he is using his church to accomplish it.

Act:

- Find out how many different languages are spoken in your city.
- Pray that God would provide someone to preach the gospel to them.

Go Deeper:

[Was the Great Commission Meant for Us?](#)

Your Role in Missions

Read:

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. - Acts 13:2-3 ESV

Reflect/Discuss:

- Have you ever been on a mission trip? How was your experience?
- Has your church ever sent any missionaries? Where did they go?

Consider:

When William Carey was getting ready to embark on a missionary journey to India, he told those around him: "I will go down into the pit, but you must hold the rope." In other words, he believed that it was his job to physically go to India to preach the gospel but he needed the support and prayers from those back in England if he was ever going to be successful.

The church of Antioch is commanded by the Holy Spirit to send Barnabas and Paul out as missionaries. That does not mean that the rest of the church was disobedient to Jesus' Great Commission. They rightly understood that sending was just as important as going. Often times, those who cross borders for the sake of the gospel are in desperate need of monetary funds and prayer. When someone goes, someone else must stay behind. The church of Antioch held tightly to the rope while Paul and Barnabas descended down into the darkness.

So, what exactly is your role in the Great Commission? There are a myriad of ways you can remain faithful and obedient to Jesus' last words without ever leaving your country. First, you can join in *prayer*. You can pray for missionaries and for the salvation of the people whom they minister to. Second, you can join in *sending*. That is, you can contribute financially to those who are dependent on others financially for the ongoing work of their ministry. Third, you can help *welcome* internationals. God, in his sovereignty, has brought the nations to us! Some of the most unreached people groups in the world live in our very own neighborhoods. Finally, you can *go*. You can go short term or long term. There is *still* a great need for more missionaries all over the world. Whatever our individual task though, we must be willing to lay our conveniences and comforts at the foot of the cross.

Act:

- Decide which way you want to respond to the Great Commission
- Pray and look for opportunities to respond faithfully.

Go Deeper:

[How to Be Involved in Missions](#)

Your Confidence in Missions

Read:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" --Revelation 7:9-10
ESV

Reflect/Discuss:

- What are some things that give you confidence in life?
- Why do you think we can have confidence in missions?

Consider:

It's hard to grasp the magnitude of this moment. God's mission that began in Genesis is finished in Revelation. What started with one man in Abraham, spread to a nation in Israel and then to the Gentile world. Now, in the very last book of the Bible, a representation from all tribes, nations, and languages are worshipping Jesus! This future day recorded by the Apostle John has been a precious truth for hundreds and thousands of missionaries.

Average men and women have crossed physical, cultural, and language barriers to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. Many never returned to their homeland. Some never saw the fruit of their ministry. Others died as martyrs for Christ at the hands of the ones they came to save. Every one of them shared the same confidence from Revelation 7. They all knew that one day the mission would be accomplished and Jesus would get the glory.

That same confidence fuels us today. We know that God will use our prayers to bring salvation to the nations. We are sure that our money given to support missionaries or missions ministries will result in Jesus being worshipped in more languages.. We are convinced that the Lord has placed internationals in our country to hear the gospel and return to their home countries with the message of hope. Finally, we have an unwavering hope that when we go across the world with the gospel, God's Word will not return void. You can be sure that God's mission will be accomplished. Revelation 7 is our confidence that Jesus will one day be exalted among all the nations of the earth, and he is using his church to accomplish this task.

Act:

- Memorize Revelation 7:9-10
- Share with someone what you learned from this Bible Study

Go Deeper:

[Praying with Confidence](#)

Christians should care about missions because God cares about missions. It was the Lord himself who initiated the salvation of all people. Jesus is indeed worthy of their worship, and he has commissioned his church to finish the task. Will you join him?

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