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By the Waters of Babylon:
Global Missions from Genesis to Revelation¹

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Standing on this side of Jesus's resurrection, the apostle Paul described his and the church's mission as a calling "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of [Christ's] name among all the nations" (Rom 1:5). Missions for the sake of the Messiah's glory is one of the central ends of the gospel of God concerning the Son (1:1-3). It is this message that shapes the hopes of the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:45-47; Acts 26:22-23) and that is realized in the new covenant. From Eden onward, God has been moving history toward the day when he finally eradicates Satan, the curse, and the evil that is "Babylon" (Rev 7:15-17; 14:8; 18:2, 10, 21; 20:10; 21:4; 22:3). In that day he will reveal his glory over the whole earth (Num 14:21; Pss 57:5, 11 [6, 12]; 72:19; Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14; Rev 21:23) and generate praise from all the redeemed peoples for whom the Lamb was slain (Rev 5:9-10; 7:9-10). The church's mission to make disciples of all nations is still incomplete, but it continues to spur every Christian either to send or go, either to hold the ropes for others or to cross boundaries and cultures for the sake of Christ's name.

Though we live in this age as "sojourners and exiles" in the kingdom of "Babylon" (1 Pet 2:11; 5:13), our mission as members of Christ's church (Matt 28:18-20) is to confront spiritual darkness (Eph 6:10-20) and to spread the light of the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6) ... until those whom Christ ransomed "from every tribe and language and people and nation" serve as "a kingdom and priests to

¹ *Author's Note:* An earlier version of this essay appeared as "God Always Wanted the Whole World: Global Mission from Genesis to Revelation," *desiringGod.org*, Dec 5, 2019: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-always-wanted-the-whole-world>. I thank my friends Tom Kelby, Brian Verrett, Gilbert Zinke and Dr. Joey Allen for offering helpful feedback on the present study. For further resources, see <https://jasonderouchie.com/>.

our God” and “reign on the earth” (Rev 5:9–10; cf. 22:5). This study seeks to trace the theme of missions from Genesis to Revelation for the elect exiles dwelling “by the waters of Babylon” (Ps 137:1).

Humanity’s Original Commission and the Need for Curse-Overcoming Blessing

When God first made the world, he planted a garden-city in the region of Eden (Gen 2:8). The city was on a mountain (see 2:10–14; cf. Exod 14:17–18) and operated as his temple-palace. In it he placed his image—a man and a woman, whom he commissioned to expand his garden temple by displaying his image to the ends of the earth.² “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Gen 1:27–28). God commissioned humanity to reflect, resemble, and represent his greatness and glory on a global scale. Humans were to rule the world, subduing and having dominion (1:26, 28). As they worked and guarded the land (2:15), the uninhabitable regions beyond the garden-city would increasingly become habitable, the garden-city would grow, and the glories of God’s sovereignty would fill the earth.

Our first parents initially rejected this calling by choosing to imitate the serpent in their rebellion (Gen 3:1–6), and through their surrender to the serpent and disobedience to God, the rule of this world transferred from humans to the devil (John 12:31; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2). God cursed the world (Gen 3:14–19), but he remained committed to magnify himself in the universe. He promised to overcome the curse and the serpent through a royal deliverer—a male offspring of the woman who would one day overpower the serpent—and by extension, his offspring—and

² See especially G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004); G. K. Beale, “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission in the New Creation,” *JETS* 48 (2005): 5–31; T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008); Matthew Newkirk, *Fill the Earth: The Creation Mandate and the Church’s Call to Missions*, 2020.

reestablish global blessing (3:15).³ From the moment God exiled humanity from his garden paradise, the Bible's story looks ahead to the day when representatives from all humanity will once again inhabit the mountain city of God. Hence, we read: "To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (Rev 2:7). In that day, the voices of heaven will ring out, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (11:15). And "his servants will worship him ... and they will reign forever and ever" (22:3, 5), thus fulfilling their original calling. "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9; cf. Num 14:21; Ps 72:19; Hab 2:14).

After Adam's fall and humanity's exile, sin escalated and moved God to justly punish humanity through the flood. In the days that followed, as Noah and his sons repopulated the world, humans built and filled a new city known as Babel or Babylon.⁴ It was here through a man-made tower that human pride against God moved him to confuse language and to disperse some seventy families by their tribes, languages, lands, and nations across the face of the planet (Gen 11:1–9; cf. 10:5, 20, 31–32). On account of their sin, humanity's exile from the garden landed them in Babylon. From this point forward in Scripture, the title "Babylon" comes to represent rebellion, curse, and hostility against the Lord. God will need to rescue humanity from their "Babylonian exile" if he is to overcome evil and save his elect.

³ For this reading of Gen 3:15, see C. John Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?," *TynBul* 48.1 (1997): 139–48; Kevin Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 35–66; cf. T. Desmond Alexander, "Further Observations on the Term 'Seed' in Genesis," *TynBul* 48.2 (1997): 363–67; C. John Collins, "Galatians 3:16: What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?," *TynBul* 54.1 (2003): 75–86; James M. Hamilton Jr., "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *SBJT* 10.2 (2006): 30–55; James M. Hamilton Jr., "The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham," *TynBul* 58.2 (2007): 253–73; Jason S. DeRouchie and Jason C. Meyer, "Christ or Family as the 'Seed' of Promise? An Evaluation of N. T. Wright on Galatians 3:16," *SBJT* 14.3 (2010): 36–48.

⁴ The term is the same in Hebrew.

The Means for Curse-Overcoming Blessing: The Two-Stage Abrahamic Promise

For the Lord's blessing to overcome curse and sin, his saving work would now need to cross cultures and language barriers. He pledged to do this through a descendant of one of the seventy families—Abraham:

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 so that I may make of you a great nation, and may bless you, and may make your name great. And there, be a blessing, so that I may bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I may curse. And the result will be that in you all the families of the ground shall be blessed." (Gen 12:1–3, author's translation)

Growing out of the two commands to Abraham to *go* and *be a blessing*, a two-stage process emerges for overcoming the curse.⁵ First, Abraham would need to go to the land of Canaan, where God would make him into a great nation. God fulfilled that promise in the Mosaic covenant era. Second, Abraham, or one representing him, would need to be a blessing, so that God could ultimately overcome global curse and bring blessing to all the families who earlier spread around the earth (cf. 10:32). The Lord ultimately realized that promise in Christ and the new covenant.

Following the original declaration in Gen 3:15 that God would overcome the serpent and his "offspring" through the "offspring of the woman," Genesis distinguishes two family trees--the serpent's rebellious offspring (highlighted in Genesis by three segmented genealogies in Gen 10:1–32; 25:12–18; 36:1–43) and the remnant hoping in the offspring of the woman (e.g., 5:1–32; 11:10–26). Genesis 12:1–3 distinguished both the mission of Abraham's offspring and the mission

⁵ For support of this grammatical interpretation, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 267–70; cf. Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Plan*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 78–79; Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 209–11.

field since the majority of “the families of the earth” (12:3) are linked with the rebels (10:32 with 11:1–9) and not the remnant.⁶

God promised Abraham that he would become “the father of a multitude of nations” (17:4–6). He also stressed that this move from being the father of one nation (Israel) to a father of many nations would happen only when the single, male deliverer would rise. This deliverer would expand kingdom territory by possessing the gate of enemies, and all the nations would be blessed through him: “I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (22:17–18; cf. 24:60; 26:3–4).⁷ Missions as we know it—carrying a message of reconciliation outward to the nations—would become operative for all God’s people only in the day when this king would arise and crush the powers of the serpent.⁸ Let’s now consider each of these two stages as they play out in Scripture.

⁶ For more on this distinction, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the *Toledot* Structure of Genesis,” *JETS* 56.2 (2013): 219–47.

⁷ For more on Gen 22:17–18, see my case study on Gen 22:1–19 in “A Redemptive-Historical Christological Approach,” in *5 Views on Christ in the Old Testament*, ed. Andrew M. King and Brian J. Tabb (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming). See also Alexander, “Further Observations on the Term ‘Seed’ in Genesis”; Collins, “Galatians 3:16”; Andrew E. Steinmann, “Jesus and Possessing the Enemies’ Gate (Genesis 22:17–18; 24:60),” *BSac* 174.693 (2017): 13–21.

⁸ On this delay of a full-blown “go and tell” (centrifugal) mission, see especially Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, NSBT 11 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001); Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, 2nd ed., NSBT 53 (Downers Grove, IL: 2020); NSBT 53 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020); Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Israel, the People of God, and the Nations,” *JETS* 45 (2002): 35–57; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004); Kevin Paul Oberlin, “The Ministry of Israel to the Nations: A Biblical Theology of Missions in the Era of the Old Testament Canon” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2006); contrast Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); cf. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity

Stage 1a: Israel's "Come and See" Calling and the Failed Mosaic Covenant

During the Mosaic covenant age, many non-Israelites *became* Israelites—people such as the mixed multitude coming out of Egypt, Rahab the Canaanite, Ruth the Moabite, and Uriah the Hittite. While Israel as a people was, at some level, a multiethnic community, during the entire Old Testament period Abraham remained the father of a single nation in a single land (Gen 17:7–8).⁹ And like Adam in the garden-city, God called this people his firstborn son (Exod 4:22; cf. Gen 5:1–3; Luke 3:38) and charged them to be priest-kings by representing, resembling, and reflecting him to a needy world. Others would see their good deeds, and those good deeds would direct them to the greatness of God.

Thus, Yahweh told Israel, "If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant and be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, then you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy

Press, 2006). Twice the book of Jonah links to Joel's statement that "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (Joel 2:32; cf. Jon 1:14; 3:8) and by this anticipates the missional hope of the NT (Rom 10:13). I believe that Yahweh's call to Jonah to image his own character (Jon 4:2) and to carry the message of judgment and implied hope to Nineveh serves to anticipate the global mission realized through Christ and the church in the NT. Nevertheless, the old covenant included no clear prescription for all Israel to engage in a "go and tell" mission. For more on Jonah's unique role, see the Daniel C. Timmer, "Jonah and Mission: Missiological Dichotomy, Biblical Theology, and the Via Tertia," *WTJ* 70 (2008): 159–75; cf. Daniel C. Timmer, *A Gracious and Compassionate God: Mission, Salvation and Spirituality in the Book of Jonah*, NSBT 26 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

⁹ By asserting this I do not deny that beyond the people of Israel Abraham also "fathered" peoples like the Ishmaelites, Edom, Amalek, and Midian. However, the focus of the Gen 17:4–8 is to contrast the "multitude" he with "father" in contrast to the single nation that will inherit the land of Canaan. Furthermore, because Gen 17:6 is reiterated to *Sarah* in 17:16, the focus of the promise regarding his fathering many nations relates *not* to all those who came from Abraham biologically but the adopted spiritual offspring whom God would identify with him spiritually by adoption. For more, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective," *JETS* 58.3 (2015): 450–61.

nation” (Exod 19:5–6, author’s translation).¹⁰ Through radically surrendered lives, Israel would mediate God’s presence and display God’s holiness to a needy world. Similarly, Moses wrote, “Keep [the statutes and the rules] and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’” (Deut 4:6).¹¹

Israel had a high calling to reflect God’s worth by surrendering wholly to him. But this calling does not appear to have included the centrifugal, “go and tell” mission that we as Christians now have. Instead, Israel’s limited “mission” to the nations was centripetal, involving only calling others to “come and see.”¹² As the Israelites obeyed Yahweh, the nations would take notice and draw near to Yahweh’s greatness. Thus, at the temple’s dedication King Solomon prayed,

Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name’s sake (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name. (1 Kgs 8:41–43)

This is exactly what happened with the queen of Sheba who “heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD” (1 Kgs 10:1). After seeing Yahweh’s glories and the king’s splendor and wisdom, she asserted: “Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness” (10:9).

¹⁰ For more on the translation and significance of this verse see Jason S. DeRouchie, “Understanding and Applying Exodus 19:4–6: A Case Study in Exegesis and Theology,” *JBTS* 6.1 (2021): 85–134.

¹¹ On Deut 4:5–8 within the framework of Israel’s mission, see Daniel I. Block, “The Privilege of Calling: The Mosaic Paradigm for Missions (Deu 26:16–19),” *BSac* 162.648 (2005): 387–405.

¹² For more on this distinction, see the resources above in footnote 8.

Yet the queen of Sheba was not the norm, for Israel more commonly failed in their covenant loyalty. Like Adam, they rebelled, breaking the covenant. And like Adam, as Moses anticipated (Deut 4:25–28; 31:16–18) and the prophets affirmed (2 Kgs 17:13–15, 23), Yahweh removed them from their paradise. Comparable to humanity after God cast them from the garden of Eden, Israel's exile from Canaan landed them in Babylon (ch. 25). Jew and Gentile alike need deliverance from this secular city.

Renewed Hope by the Waters of Babylon

We read in Ps 137:1, “By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.” The original speakers were grieving their losses and recalling the seriousness of sin. Babylon was their place of judgment, for having turned from God, they experienced the covenant curses, culminating in exile and death (Lev 26:14–33; Deut 28:15–68), all of which testified to the Lord's removal of provision and protection.

For the prophets, “Babylon” represented the center of earthly power opposed to God (Isa 13–14; Jer 50–51). And Israel's exile there reminded them of their neediness and should have pushed them to return to the Lord and to find hope for the day of complete restoration when Yahweh would overcome “Babylon” in the days of “an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten” (Jer 50:5). Thus, Yahweh declares, “I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.... And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them” (Isa 13:11, 19). And again, God asserts, “Behold, she [Babylon] shall be the last of the nations, a wilderness, a dry land, and a desert. Because of the wrath of the LORD she shall not be inhabited but shall be an utter desolation.... They flee and escape from the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of the LORD our God, vengeance for his temple” (Jer 50:12–13, 28).

Significantly, within the Psalter, the despondency that rises “by the waters of Babylon” in Ps 137 is followed by the messianic King's declaration of hope in Ps 138.¹³

¹³ A Christian approach to the Psalms demands that we read the whole as messianic music, whether as songs “by Christ” or “about Christ.” Mark D. Futato,

I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart....
 On the day I called, you answered me....
 All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD,
 for they have heard the words of your mouth,
 and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD,
 for great is the glory of the LORD. (Ps 138:1, 3–5)

You should hear an echo in these words of God's promises to Abraham, which countered the world's Babylonian exile.¹⁴ Israel's curse in the city of Babylon was but a picture of the global curse that arose after exile from the garden-city of Eden. Yet the hope since Gen 3:15 has been that an anointed king would rise, overcome the curse, and secure the praise of leaders from around the globe, resulting in the end of humanity's Babylonian exile. Through the patriarch Abraham a single male seed would grow into a global multi-ethnic garden made of people from every tribe and tongue and with the kingdom turf expanding beyond the land of Canaan to all the lands of the earth.

Similar declarations of future, multi-ethnic praise are common through the Psalms. For example, in the midst of his suffering, the anointed king of the Psalter cries out:

All the nations you have made shall come
 and worship before you, O Lord,
 and shall glorify your name. (Ps 86:9)

And again:

Nations will fear the name of the LORD,
 and all the kings of the earth shall fear your glory.
 For the LORD builds up Zion;
 he appears in his glory. (Ps 102:15–16)

Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook, Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 174. See my discussion on interpreting "Psalms" in DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 62–83.

¹⁴ For more on how Abraham's calling reverses the curse in general, see Hamilton, "The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham," 253–73. For its reversal of the Tower of Babel episode in particular, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 279–81.

And following his brutal death and victorious resurrection, the same Messiah declares:

All the ends of the earth shall remember
 and turn to the LORD,
 and all the families of the nations
 shall worship before you.
 For kingship belongs to the LORD,
 and he rules over the nations. (Ps 22:27–28)

Stage 1b: Prophetic Visions of Hope and a Global Mission of Reconciliation

The Mosaic covenant resulted in Israel’s exile in Babylon. Yet even amid the covenant peoples’ failures, God raised up prophets like Isaiah and Zephaniah who recalled the promises that God would end the Babylonian exile and bring good news and blessing to the whole world through a single royal deliver. This servant-king would represent the people of Israel, even bearing her name. Through him some from Israel the people and from the rest of the nations would enjoy lasting salvation:

You are my servant, Israel,
 in whom I will be glorified....
 It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
 to raise up the tribes of Jacob
 and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
 I will make you as a light for the nations,
 that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isa 49:3, 6)¹⁵

Isaiah distinguishes the servant-people “Israel” from the servant-person “Israel.” The former are a “sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity,”

¹⁵ For this reading of Isa 49:3, 6, see J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 383–89; G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 656–57. See also my case-study on Isa 42:1–4 in “A Redemptive-Historical Christological Approach,” in *5 Views on Christ in the Old Testament*, ed. Andrew M. King and Brian J. Tabb (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming).

who have “forsaken the LORD” (1:4; cf. 59:2; 64:7); they are spiritually “deaf,” “blind,” and imprisoned (42:18–15; 43:8–13); they are “stubborn of heart” and “far from righteousness” (46:12). In contrast, the servant-person is righteous (50:8; 53:11) and guiltless (50:9), having not rebelled (50:5) and done no “violence” or “deceit” (53:9). None in the nation could save (59:16), so Yahweh would raise up the messianic servant, whom he named “Israel” (49:3), to save a remnant from both Israel the nation and the earth’s other nations (49:6).

This royal servant would enjoy God’s presence and would fulfill his merciful mission to help the hurting and bring justice to the nations (42:1–4; 51:4–5; 61:1–3). He would serve as a covenant mediator and would open the eyes of the blind and deliver the captive (42:6–7; 49:8–9). He would preach the good news of God’s victory over evil and saving grace (52:7–10; 61:1–3), which he would secure through his own substitutionary sacrifice. “He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (53:5).

Yahweh would make his royal servant an offering for humanity’s guilt, and by this atoning work he would “sprinkle many nations,” “make many to be accounted righteous,” and “bear their iniquities” (52:15; 53:11). In Paul’s words elsewhere, “For our sake [God] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). And again, “By the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (Rom 5:19).

Through the death and resurrection of this royal servant-person, a multitude of offspring-servants would rise who would carry on the missional task of the servant-person, Israel (Isa 49:3, 6). “In the LORD all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory” (45:25). “When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities” (53:10–11). These would be “an offspring the LORD has blessed” (61:9), and they would “possess the nations” (54:3), including “servants” who would operate as priests

(66:20–21) from among the foreigners (56:6–8) and ethnic Israelites alike (56:6–8; 63:17).¹⁶

Building on Isaiah’s vision, the prophet Zephaniah similarly foretold that, at the very time when God would consume his enemies like a sacrifice by fire at the day of the Lord (Zeph 3:8; cf. 1:7), Yahweh would also create and preserve a multi-ethnic remnant of worshipers and counter the effects of Babel’s tower (3:9–10): “For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering.” God would purify the peoples’ “speech” (LXX = “tongue”) so that with one voice they will call upon Yahweh’s name and serve him together (3:9; cf. Ps 116:4, 13, 17 with Isa 12:4; Joel 2:28–32; Zech 13:9). Indeed, the offspring of those once dispersed at Babel will operate as Yahweh’s worshiping priests, following the rivers of life back to God’s sanctuary and bringing him offerings (Zeph 3:10; cf. Isa 56:6; 66:20–21). “Cush” was the ancient center of black Africa and located in modern Sudan, and the rivers were likely the White and Blue Nile (see Isa 18:1–2). The region of Cush and the people associated with it were named after Cush, Noah’s grandson through Ham. Cush’s son Nimrod is the one who built ancient Babel, where the peoples elevated their own “name” over Yahweh’s and where God confused their “speech/tongue” and “dispersed” them throughout the world (Gen 11:4, 7, 9).¹⁷ We first learn of Cush in Gen 2:10–14, which identify it as a terminus of one of the four rivers flowing from the single river coming

¹⁶ For more on these passages, see DeRouchie, “Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets,” 465–74.

¹⁷ Gen 11:1–9 and Zeph 3:9–10 are the only two places in the Old Testament that include the terms “lip” (*šāpā*), “name” (*šēm*), and “disperse” (*pûš*), which suggests that Zephaniah intended us to view God’s work of restoration at the day of the Lord as a reversal of the Tower of Babel. For more, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “Zephaniah,” in *Daniel–Malachi*, vol. 7 of *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 596–97; Jason S. DeRouchie, “Zephaniah, Book Of,” *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale, D. A. Carson, Benjamin L. Gladd, Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, forthcoming); Jason S. DeRouchie, *Zephaniah*, vol. 32 of *ZECOT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming), s.v., Zeph 3:8–10.

from Eden. So, because Zephaniah envisions the worshipers gathering to Yahweh at his sanctuary to give him offerings, it's as if the descendants of those once exiled from the garden of Eden and scattered at the Tower of Babel are now following the rivers of life back to their source in order to enjoy fellowship with the great King (2:13; cf. Rev 22:1–2). Zephaniah foresaw a day when God would reverse Babylon's curse and restore his world to right order.

Stage 2a: The New Covenant and Jesus's Mission of Good News

Jesus is the very one Moses, Isaiah, and the other prophets anticipated—the one through whom all the world can be blessed. In Jesus, God was remembering “his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham” (Luke 1:72–73). Christ is the singular royal “offspring of Abraham,” and in him Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, can become Abraham's true “offspring,” full heirs of all the promises.¹⁸ Paul builds on the promises of Gen 12:3 and 22:18:

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.” ... In Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham [has] come to the Gentiles.... Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring ... who is Christ.... And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:8, 14, 16, 29)

Furthermore, Jesus is Yahweh's royal servant, who proclaims the good news of God's reign and brings light and salvation to the nations. Thus, he opened his ministry by citing Isaiah 61:1–2 in combination with 42:7 and 58:6: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4:18–19). Similarly, citing Isaiah 9:1–2, Matthew stressed

¹⁸ See DeRouchie and Meyer, “Christ or Family as the ‘Seed’ of Promise?” For more on how all of Scripture's promises are “Yes” for all Christians today, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “Is Every Promise ‘Yes’? Old Testament Promises and the Christian,” *Them* 42 (2017): 16–45; Jason S. DeRouchie, “How Should a Christian Relate to Old Testament Promises?,” in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, by Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 355–64.

that in Jesus's preaching, the light of God was dawning on Galilee of the Gentiles (Matt 4:13–17).

Jesus directly fulfilled Isaiah's promise that the messianic servant-person "Israel" would save a remnant both from "Israel" the servant-people and from other nations (Isa 49:3, 6): "To this day I [Paul] have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22–23). With citations from the Law, Prophets, and Writings, the apostle also noted that Jesus is the one in whom peoples from the nations are now hoping.

I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name." And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him." And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope." (Rom 15:8–12; cf. Ps 18:49[50]; Deut 32:43; Ps 117:1; Isa 11:10)

Through the servant Jesus, God was fulfilling OT hopes for the day when his saving blessing would overcome the curse and reach beyond the borders of Israel to all the nations of the earth.

On Mission by the Waters of Babylon

Yahweh had called old covenant Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation amid a dark world (Exod 19:5–6), but they failed in their calling. In contrast, the Lord now both calls and empowers the church to live in a way that points to his greatness and glory, representing him in this foreign land as we hope in the complete realization of his kingdom promises. Hence, Jesus demanded, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16). Similarly, Peter proclaimed, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession,

that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.... As sojourners and exiles ... keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2:9, 11–12).

Did you notice that Peter tagged Christians “sojourners and exiles”? Regardless of lineage, language, or national status, when we are “born again ... through the living and abiding word of God” (1:23), we gain new birth certificates that identify us with Zion, the great heavenly city Jerusalem. This is the point of Ps 87, which notes:

Glorious things are said of you,
 city of God:
 “I will record Rahab and Babylon
 among those who acknowledge me—
 Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—
 and will say, “This one was born in Zion.””
 Indeed, of Zion it will be said,
 “This one and that one were born in her,
 and the Most High himself will establish her.”
 The LORD will write in the register of the peoples:
 “This one was born in Zion.” (Ps 87:3–6)

Similarly, Isaiah foresaw the day “when Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance’” (Isa 19:24–25). These three peoples are representative of a remnant of saints from all the earth, now realized in the church of Jesus, who worship God as his single family.

So the church’s “citizenship is in heaven” from which “we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:20), where is our present address? From the beginning of Scripture’s story, to live as exiles means to live in association with Babylon, and our present state is no different. Thus, Peter concludes his first letter, declaring, “She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings” (1 Pet 5:13). Following in the OT pattern, Peter here identifies Rome as the spiritual “Babylon” in his day,

the capital of the earthly world empire wherein believers suffered as “sojourners and exiles” (2:11; cf. 1:1, 17).¹⁹

At the end of the Bible, Babylon shows up again as the great city that Revelation symbolically uses to talk about the controlling evil force of influence behind all cultures and worldly systems in our day.²⁰ John envisions one of God’s angels readying to proclaim “an eternal gospel ... to every nation and tribe and language and people” (Rev 14:6). The angel calls his listeners to fear, worship, and give glory to God “because the hour of his judgment has come” (14:7). Then a second angel adds motivation to this call by declaring, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality” (Rev 14:8). Those standing with the Lamb are spiritual “virgins,” having not defiled themselves by worshiping other gods (14:4), but the idolatry associated with Babylon was rampant. Thus, we read elsewhere, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.... So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more” (18:2, 21).

Today the “eternal gospel” stands against such stark wickedness. But the contrast will not stand forever. For Babylon the great will fall, and God will replace it with an eternal city with which the saints today are already associated. How does Scripture speak of this new city? Isaiah had told us that we were waiting for a restored garden of Eden, a new creation that is nothing less than a new Jerusalem.

¹⁹ For this reading of 1 Pet 5:13, see, e.g., Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 201; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, WBC 49 (Dallas: Word, 1988), 310–11; Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 201–203; Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 353; Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 322–23.

²⁰ Beale writes, “In the Apocalypse Rome and all wicked world systems take on the symbolic name ‘Babylon the Great.’” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 755.

The LORD comforts Zion;
he comforts all her waste places
and makes her wilderness like Eden,
her desert like the garden of the LORD;
joy and gladness will be found in her,
thanksgiving and the voice of song. (Isa 51:3)

And again,

For behold, I create new heavens
and a new earth,
and the former things shall not be remembered
or come into mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in that which I create;
for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy,
and her people to be a gladness." (Isa 65:17–18)

Revelation builds on these prophecies when it speaks of Mount Zion (Rev 14:1) or the holy city of Jerusalem (21:10). This is not the Jerusalem in the Middle East but the heavenly Jerusalem that will come to earth and fill all with God's glory (cf. Gal 4:25–26; Heb 12:22). Thus, John recalls how the angel said to him, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." Then the apostle tells us:

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.... And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.... But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Rev 21:9–10, 23, 27)

Saints today live "by the waters of Babylon," but we do so "as sojourners and exiles" (1 Pet 2:9). And in this foreign context, we must keep our "conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that ... they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation (1 Pet 2:9, 11–12). But our call today is even greater than this, for through those living

in the church age “an eternal gospel” is to go forth, bringing warning and hope “to every nation and tribe and language and people” (Rev 14:6).

Stage 2b: Jesus’s Mission Becomes the Church’s “Go and Tell” Mission

The mission of the Messiah has now become the mission of his church. In the original garden-city, God commissioned his image bearers to fill, subdue, and rule the earth, displaying his worth and splendor throughout the earth (Gen 1:28). Jesus is now fulfilling this reality through his church. The very one who has all authority in heaven and on earth has commissioned us, his servants, to make disciples, and he has given us his presence, which allows us to image or bear witness to his greatness and glory throughout the world. Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:18–20).

In Isaiah 49:6, God commissions the servant-person, whom we know as Jesus, to bring light to the nations that God’s salvation might reach to the end of the earth (cf. Acts 26:22–23). It is striking, therefore, that Paul claims the Messiah’s mission as *his* mission in Acts 13:47: “The Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Remember how the book of Acts opened. “In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen” (1:1–2). The Gospel of Luke records what “Jesus *began* to do and teach,” which means that the mission of the church in Acts is what Jesus *continues* to do and to teach through his redeemed saints. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (1:8). The “Holy Spirit” that now empowers us is nothing less than “the Spirit of Jesus” (16:7), so as we proclaim the good news, we do so as agents of Christ himself.

At Pentecost God began to fulfill Zephaniah’s vision of Babylon’s reversal and of a remnant of worshipers with purified speech (i.e.,

tongues) and unity (Zeph 3:9–10).²¹ Devout Jews “from every nation under heaven” heard Jesus’s followers speaking in other “tongues” and proclaiming the gospel in their languages (Acts 2:4–6). The result was that many called on the name of the Lord and were saved and united together (2:21, 41–42). Nevertheless, it was God’s saving the Ethiopian (i.e., Cushite) eunuch that most directly marked Babylon’s reversal and the initial fulfillment of Zephaniah’s multi-ethnic remnant (8:26–39). The good news that through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection the reigning God saves and satisfies sinners who believe was now moving from “Jerusalem ... to the end of the earth” (1:8).

In Isaiah, the messianic servant was the one with beautiful feet bringing the good news of salvation and God’s reign: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of *him* who brings good news” (Isa 52:7; cf. 61:1). But in Romans 10 Paul makes the subject plural to identify that the church now carries on the Messiah’s good-news proclamation to the nations. “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!’” (Rom 10:14–15).

In Isaiah, the Messiah has armor to aid him in advancing God’s kingdom: “Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist” (Isa 11:5). And again, “He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak” (59:17). That very armor is now ours in Christ (Eph 6:10–20), as we carry out our mission of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:17–21).²²

²¹ For more on this connection, see Jerry Dale Butcher, “The Significance of Zephaniah 3:8–13 for Narrative Composition in the Early Chapters of the Book of Acts” (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1972); Jud Davis, “Acts 2 and the Old Testament: The Pentecost Event in Light of Sinai, Babel and the Table of Nations,” *CTR* 7.1 (2009): 29–48; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary; Volume 1: Introduction and 1:1–2:47* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 1:840–44; DeRouchie, “Zephaniah, Book Of,” *DNTUOT*, forthcoming.

²² For more on this theme, see Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Put on the Armour of God: The Divine Warrior from Isaiah to Ephesians*, JSNTSup 140 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997); Mark D. Owens, “Spiritual Warfare and the Church’s

For the church of Jesus, a “go and tell” (i.e., centrifugal) mission now matches the responsibility to obey in order that others may “come and see” God’s worth displayed. Indeed, our Lord has commissioned us to proclaim to all nations the good news that through Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection the reigning God eternally saves and satisfies sinners who believe. Filled with the very Spirit of the resurrected Christ (Acts 16:7), the church as God’s temple-sanctuary has spread from Jerusalem to Judea-Samaria to the ends of the earth, thus fulfilling Christ’s promise (1:8; cf. Isa 32:14–17; 44:3; 59:21). In Christ, the new creation has dawned. God is now reestablishing right order, and his glory is increasingly filling the earth.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.... We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way. (2 Cor 5:17–21; 6:3–4)

We today are the end-times servants that God has called to carry out the mission of the servant Jesus. Hear how Paul opens the book of Romans, which is the greatest missionary-support letter ever written.²³ He writes:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be

Mission According to Ephesians 6:10–17,” *TynBul* 67 (2016): 87–103; Jason S. DeRouchie, “Greater Is He: A Primer on Spiritual Warfare for Kingdom Advance,” *SBJT* 25.2 (2021): forthcoming.

²³ We see that Romans is a missionary support letter from Rom 15:23–29.

the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. (Rom 1:1–6)

Paul was the Messiah’s servant, whom Jesus sent as an apostle “to carry [his] name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15; cf. 22:15; Gal 2:7). God set Paul apart for the good news, which finds its source and content in God, comes to us through the agents of the Old Testament prophets through the vehicle of the Scriptures, and finds its focus in the divine Son.

Now, consider the aim of Paul’s gospel. “Through [Jesus Christ] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations” (Rom 1:5). Three elements are noteworthy with respect to this goal.

First, the phrase “the obedience of faith” probably means “the obedience that always flows from faith” progressively over time.²⁴ Faith is the root and obedience the fruit, yet in a way that the two are never separated; saving faith submits to Christ’s lordship (6:17–18; 10:13–17). “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life” (6:22).

Next, the target of the gospel mission is to see people saved and satisfied from “among *all* the nations.” All the nations experienced God’s curse, and some from all the nations will experience God’s blessing. The good news that through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection the reigning God eternally saves and satisfies sinners who believe is for the Libyan and the Bolivian, for the expats in Dubai and the mountain peoples in the Himalayas, for the varied tribes in Ethiopia, the Latinos in Miami, and the poor in rural Wisconsin.

Finally, this passage tells us that missions is not the end but is a means to exalting God. As John Piper explains, “Missions is not the

²⁴ So, e.g., Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 79–82; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 40; Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, NICNT, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 50–51.

ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't."²⁵ One day, the need for missions will pass away, but the redeemed will forever magnify the majesty and glory of God in Christ. Missions exists "for the sake of [Jesus's] name." The church that received Paul's message bears no higher goal than seeing Jesus's glory savored among the peoples of the world. Making disciples of Jesus (Matt 28:19) and bearing witness to him (Acts 1:8) is the church's distinctive mission.²⁶

The apostle Paul played a unique part in fulfilling the early church's great commission. Jesus sent him to reach both Jews and Gentiles with the good news of Jesus, and this included the Christians in Rome "who are called to belong to Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:6). Nevertheless, the responsibility "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations" (Rom 1:5) was not simply the apostle's mission but is the mission of the whole church in this age. Jesus commissioned his followers to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). So all Christians are "set apart for the gospel of God" (1:1), but not all in the same way.

When Paul was in Antioch, the Holy Spirit called him and Barnabas out from that local church to be frontier missionaries (Acts 13:2; cf. Rom 1:1; Gal 1:15). Paul later declared, "I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation" (Rom 15:20; cf. 2 Cor 10:16). After the apostle had

²⁵ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 15.

²⁶ Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); cf. Timothy Keller, "The Gospel and the Poor," *Them* 33.3 (2008): 8–22. For an alternative approach that I believe unhelpfully minimizes the centrality of disciple-making in the church's mission, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*, Biblical Theology for Life (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010). John Piper captures the balance correctly when he affirms that "Christians care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering," and "Christians care about all injustice, especially injustice against God" ("Christians Care about All Suffering and Injustice," presented at "Sing! Conference," Edinburgh, Scotland, and posted at [desiringGod.org](https://www.desiringgod.org), Aug 25, 2019: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/christians-care-about-all-suffering-and-injustice>).

planted the churches and moved on, others like Apollos followed him and supplied further training and grounding in Scripture with the help of the Lord (1 Cor 3:5–6; cf. Acts 18:24–28; 1 Cor 16:12; Tit 3:13). Still others like Timothy left his home in Lystra (Acts 16:1), journeyed with Paul for a time, but then settled away from his homeland to oversee the church in Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3) after it had its own elders (Acts 20:17) and its own outreach (19:10). Today there are Paul-type missionaries, Apollos-type missionaries, and Timothy-type missionaries, each serving as arms of local churches to make disciples through reaching and teaching.²⁷

But there are also the senders and supporters, whom God has equally set apart from the world to live as the temple of God for the sake of the gospel (2 Cor 6:17). These planted in local churches are to conduct themselves honorably every day (1 Pet 2:12) by embracing the gospel that alone can transform them (Rom 1:16; 16:25; 2 Cor 4:6; 9:13). They are to live as new creations, proclaiming “the message of reconciliation” to family members, neighbors, coworkers, and friends (2 Cor 5:18). They are also to pray fervently for those who have gone out to enjoy gospel advance amid persecution (Rom 15:30–31; 2 Cor 1:11; Col 4:3; 2 Thess 3:1–2); such prayers will multiply God’s praises when answers come (2 Cor 1:11). These same ones send out missionaries “in a manner worthy of God” and “support” them (3 John 6b–8). This support includes helping the missionaries through advocacy and financial provision (Rom 15:24; 1 Cor 9:11; Gal 6:6; Tit 3:13) and contributing financially to the needs of those they are serving (Rom 15:25–27; 2 Cor 8:1–5; 9:2, 6–15; cf. 1 Cor 16:1–4), all so that more may thank God for his kindness (2 Cor 9:12–13). By this, local churches will “reap bountifully” (2 Cor 9:6), bear fruit in accordance with their “confession of the gospel of Christ” (9:13), and become partners in the gospel (Phil 1:5) and “fellow workers for the truth” (3 John 8).

²⁷ For the distinction of Paul-type and Timothy-type missionaries, see John Piper, “World Missions and the End of the World,” *desiringGod.org*, Oct 26, 1997: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/world-missions-and-the-end-of-history>.

Stage 2c: The Present and Lasting Praise to the Reigning Savior and Satisfier of the Nations

The ultimate end of missions is white-hot worship—the magnifying of God’s greatness and glory in Christ through a multiethnic bride. Paul’s mission and the church’s mission is “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of [Jesus’s] name among all the nations” (Rom 1:5). Even now in the heavens, those gathered around God’s throne are singing praise to the Lion-Lamb King, whose death and resurrection delivered peoples from all nations: “Worthy are you ... for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (Rev 5:9–10). Today, God’s messengers are proclaiming his “eternal gospel ... to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people” (14:6). And in the future, those saved and satisfied “from all tribes and peoples and languages” will together cry out, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (7:9–10).

If we have tasted and seen the goodness of God in Christ, the Lord calls us to know Christ and make him known. As I write this study, there are still regions wherein Christ remains largely unknown and where the local churches, if they exist at all, are relatively insufficient at making Christ known without outside help. Over 5 billion people in this world remain in darkness—spiritually lost and helpless, not knowing, not acknowledging, not adoring Christ as Savior and Lord. Of the 17,416 ethnolinguistic people groups around the planet, 7,403 of them are unreached, totaling around 3.27 billions souls.²⁸ 116 of these unreached peoples are completely unengaged—those for whom not one person, church, or mission agency has taken responsibility to proclaim the good news through word and deed.²⁹ With these remarkable figures, 1.5 billion people still do not have a full Bible in their language, 167 million people don’t have any Scripture at all, and over 350 sign languages are still waiting for a video Bible translation to start.³⁰ Finally, over 85 percent of all church leaders in this world have no formal theological training or

²⁸ Figure taken from <https://joshuaproject.net/>.

²⁹ Figure taken from <https://finishingthetask.com/about-finishing-the-task/people-group-list/>.

³⁰ Figure taken from <https://www.wycliffe.org/>.

theological resources to shepherd God's people.³¹ What role are you and your church playing in making disciples for Jesus from among the neighborhoods and the nations?

You have an opportunity and responsibility to participate in a work of cosmic proportions—one that God has been developing since creation and that will climax in the global praise of Christ and the immeasurable joy of the redeemed on the new earth. We can join in God's passion to see the brokenhearted find healing, the enslaved set free, the grieving find hope, and the hurting find help. We must either go or send; we must either be a rope holder or one who crosses cultures for the sake of the name. Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2). We enjoy the greatest power for the highest task (Acts 1:8). I am praying that God would let the readers of this meditation become more faithful goers and more faithful senders until multi-ethnic worship makes missions obsolete. Will you today heed Christ's call to make disciples of all nations as you continue "by the waters of Babylon"?

³¹ Figure taken from <https://trainingleadersinternational.org/85>.