

# WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOD DOING?

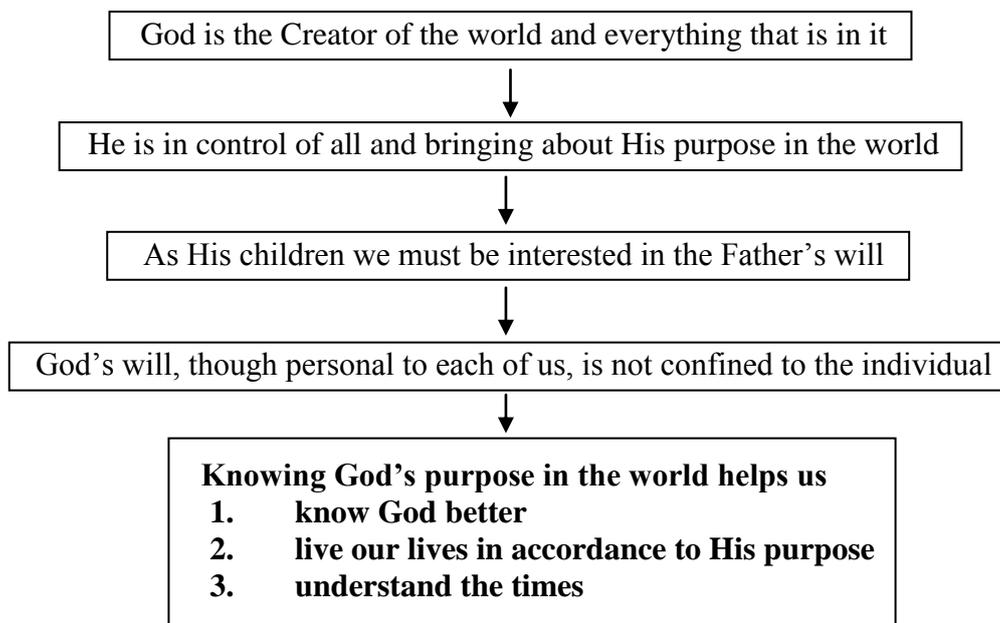
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## LESSON 1: God's Purpose in the World

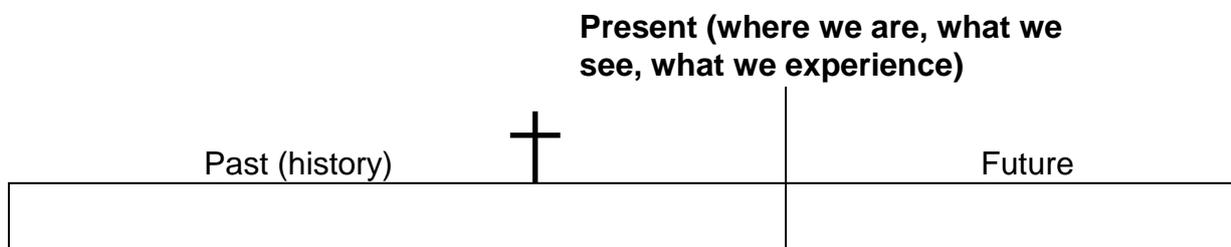
### 1. Introduction

- Why do you want to know what in the world is God doing?

The question of “What in the world is God doing?” is often asked in times of calamity, times when we are unsure about the happenings around us, times which make us question John 3:16 “For God so loved the world...” However, knowing God's purpose in the world has a very important bearing upon our lives:



### 2. How Do We Discover God's Purpose?



To discover God's purpose we must go beyond our present experiences lest we misunderstand Him. The best way to understand God's purpose in the world is through what He tells us Himself. Hence, the importance of the Bible. And it is through the Bible we interpret the past (history) and the present.

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### **3. Two Problems of Creation**

#### *Primeval rebellion*

“The Lord is King forever” (Ps.10:16). In the operation of His kingdom God rules by principle of delegated authority. He organized the angels as a hierarchy. To act as His supreme lieutenant in directing this kingdom, God endowed one specific archangel with striking beauty, wisdom and power (Eze.28:12-17; Jd 9). He named him Lucifer and gave him a throne from which to rule (Isa.14:12-14). Endowed with freedom of choice, the crucial test of any creature was allegiance to the will of God. Lucifer in choosing to be “like the Most High” (Isa.14:14), threw himself out of God’s will. One third of heaven’s angels followed him in rebellion (Rev.12:4-7). God allowed him to form a counterfeit kingdom of darkness and his name was changed to Satan (adversary) in keeping with his behaviour.

#### *Earthly rebellion*

After Satan’s fall, God began another creation: man. He likewise endowed this being with freedom of choice, as dangerous as it would be, but required of love. Freedom of choice is essential to human personality, to be created in the image of God. In choosing to eat of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gen.2:17) rather than the “tree of life”, they threw themselves out of God’s will and out of the Garden of Eden. By this deliberate action, they declared their independence from the will of God and their affiliation with Satan’s kingdom of darkness.

#### *Two problems summarized*

1. Lucifer defected and started a counterfeit kingdom
2. Man defected and fell into a state of sin and personal disintegration

### **4. God’s twofold purpose and program**

When Adam and Eve first sinned, God began His judgement with the serpent (Gen.3:14, 15) “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.” The two figures on this conflict are Christ (Gal.4:4) and Satan (Rev.20:2).

#### *Kingdom program*

“He shall bruise you on the head,” was a prophecy that Christ would destroy Satan. At the final judgement, Satan’s counterfeit kingdom will be destroyed. This process will reclaim God’s authority in all realms and re-establish His kingdom to fullness.

#### *Redemptive program*

“...and you shall bruise him on the heel,” suggests the devils assault on Christ at the cross. Christ’s death on the cross became ground for God’s redemptive program, the program by which He provides salvation for men.

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**God's purpose on earth can be summarized:**

- 1. To redeem a people from every people**
- 2. To rule a kingdom over all kingdoms**

**These two purposes are inextricably linked.**

The rest of the Old Testament pictures the progressive development of this two fold purpose of God in the earth.

### Two men

Abraham. God made a covenant that through him, all nations will be blessed. That out of his seed, Jesus Christ (Gal.3:6-16), God would bring redemption to men, fulfilling His redemptive program.

David. To fulfil his kingdom purpose, God made a covenant with David about a kingdom and a royal seed (2 Sam.7:12-16). David's seed will rule over Israel and the whole world (Amo.9:12; Zec.14:9).

### Two sons

Isaac. Typified Christ in his miraculous birth and redemptive function (being offered on Mount Moriah as a living sacrifice).

Solomon. Typified Christ in His royalty, a king of glory and splendour of no comparison.

### Two animals

Sacrificial lamb. Typified Christ in His redemptive work as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn.1:29), and "like a lamb... to slaughter" (Isa.53:7)

Lion of Judah. Typified Christ in his kingly authority (Gen.49:9, 10; Rev.5:5).

## **5. So What in the World is God Doing?**

Based on the above understanding and perspective we can now better understand God, ourselves and the times in light of calamities, uncertainties, disasters, hardships, doubts, etc.

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## LESSON 2: Israel, the Covenant People – The Abrahamic Covenant

### 1. Introduction

To understand what God is doing in the world, we need to see the big picture – past, present & future. His Word reveals all three to us. We began last week with creation and the two problems that arose:

1. Lucifer defected and started a counterfeit kingdom
2. Man defected and fell into a state of sin and personal disintegration

With that, God set into motion His purpose in the world:

1. To \_\_\_\_\_ a people from every people
2. To \_\_\_\_\_ a kingdom over all kingdoms

With these framework in mind, we now look into how God has been achieving His purpose, beginning with Israel, the covenant people.

### 2. Before Israel

God has always show mercy and offered reconciliation to men right from Adam and Eve even though we have to bear the consequences of our sins. However, man has always rejected God's pro-active love.

- i. When Adam and Eve sinned, their eyes were opened to their nakedness. God's first act to provide garments of skin was one of \_\_\_\_\_ (Gen.3:21).
  - ii. Expelled from the Garden of Eden, God continued to \_\_\_\_\_ with men (Gen.4).
  - iii. But man's wickedness grew and "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." (Gen6:5).
  - iv. God was deeply \_\_\_\_\_ and man reaped the consequences of sin in the great flood. Yet, God was merciful to save one righteous man, Noah, with his family (Gen8:1).
  - v. Although guaranteed by a \_\_\_\_\_ that God would never destroy the earth again by flood (Gen.9:11), Noah's descendants turned away from God.
  - vi. They set out to build a tower to make a name for themselves (Gen.11:4).
  - vii. God confused their language (Gen.11:7-9) and there began the nations that were scattered "to be fruitful and multiply" and cover the earth.
  - viii. Yet, God would not give up on man despite repeated rebellion. He began a strategy to fulfil His purpose: To build a \_\_\_\_\_, Israel, to reach \_\_\_\_\_. They were to communicate His redemptive message to the world.
  - ix. And this nation would be birthed through a man named \_\_\_\_\_ (Gen.12).
- Consider that God did not give up on men despite thousands of years of rebellion (Adam to Abraham). He is committed to what He is doing in the world – to redeem a people form every people and to rule a kingdom over all kingdoms.
  - Do you think God will stop doing what he has been doing since Adam's time?
  - In our own walk with God, we stumble many times. Do you think God will give up on us? On others? Should we give up on ourselves or others?

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### 3. The Abrahamic Covenant

Throughout the ages, God's relationship with man has been expressed in various covenants found in the Bible. Of particular significance is the Abrahamic Covenant in Gen.12:1-3.

#### 3.1 The Promise

##### Promise of posterity (descendants / succeeding generations)

"I will make you into a great nation." Abram was to leave his country, people and father's household to start a great nation. God changed his name from "Abram" (exalted father) to "Abraham" (father of a multitude) (Gen.17:5).

##### Promise of a land

"... go to the land I will show you." Abraham was to leave Haran, where his father had settled en route to Canaan, and to go to the land God would show him, which was Canaan (Gen.13:14-15).

##### Promise of a blessing

"I will bless you." 5 times the word "bless" and "blessing" occur in Gen.12:2-3. The blessing God promise Abraham would spill upon all mankind, "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

#### 3.2 The Fulfilment

Old Testament prophecy often had not a single but triple fulfilment – past, present and future.

- i. The \_\_\_\_\_ fulfilment was an immediate or historical fulfilment in the life of the nation of Israel.
- ii. The \_\_\_\_\_ is an intermediate or gospel fulfilment in Christ and His church.
- iii. The \_\_\_\_\_ will be an ultimate fulfilment in the new heaven and new earth.

##### Immediate fulfilment

###### *a. Posterity*

God's promise to Abraham received an immediate historical fulfilment in his physical descendants, the people of Israel. From one man, came posterity that were as numerous as the "stars of heaven" (Gen.26:4) and "the sand of the sea" (Gen.32:12). When Joseph (3<sup>rd</sup> generation from Abraham) and his family moved into Egypt, they numbered 70. 400 years later, during Moses' time "the descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong; so that the land was filled with them." (Exo.1:7). In the exodus, there were 600,000 men (besides women and children). Another 400 years later, King Solomon called Israel "a great people that cannot be numbered or counted" (1Kg.3:8). 350 years later during Jeremiah's time, God's again said, "As the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of David my servant." (Jer.33:22). God was committed to His purpose and promise.

###### *b. Land*

God rescued the Israelites from Egyptian slavery and gave them the Promised Land despite their failures and rebellion.

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### *c. Blessing*

The greatest blessing for Israel was for God to be their God (Gen.17:7-8). And God kept to His commitment despite their failures and rebellion again and again. He also blessed materially (King David and Solomon).

- What promises has God given you? How would you view His promises in light of His faithfulness to His own Word and promises to Abraham and the Israelites?

### Intermediate fulfilment

God's promise to Abraham receives an intermediate or gospel fulfilment in Christ and His church.

### *a. Posterity*

Apart from the physical descendants of Abraham, came a spiritual descent. "The promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring... those who are of the faith of Abraham" Rom.4:16. Abraham's real descendants are believers in Jesus Christ.

### *b. Land*

Paul says in Rom.4:13 "the promise to Abraham and his descendants that they should inherit the world." In 1 Cor.3:21-23 he says "all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours." Christians by God's wonderful grace are joint heirs with Christ of the universe.

### *c. Blessing*

Undoubtedly, the greatest blessing we as the Church experience is the blessing of salvation in Christ. His blessings are numerous. Yet, this blessing is not to be for ourselves, but meant to be spilled over to other peoples (Gen.12:2-3). The Jews had forgotten this and it became a stumbling block for the early church to spread the gospel to the Gentiles.

- "If a church does not have missions at heart, it has no reason to exist." How is this statement in agreement with Gen.12:2-3?

### Ultimate fulfilment

God's promise to Abraham will receive an ultimate or eschatological fulfilment in the final destiny of all the redeemed. The posterity is the "great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne in front of the Lamb." (Rev.7:9). The land is the new heaven and the new earth (Rev.21:1). The blessing is to be with God eternally, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city." (Rev.22:14). ***His twofold purpose to redeem a people from every people and to rule a kingdom over all kingdoms will come to pass.***

## **4. Conclusion**

What in the world is God Doing? What He is doing is to achieve His twofold purpose. And in the Abrahamic Covenant, He outlines how He is doing it – posterity, land and blessing.

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## LESSON 3: Israel, the Covenant People – The Covenant Established

### 1. Introduction

The Abrahamic Covenant outlines how God is going to achieve His twofold purpose of redeeming a people from every people and ruling a kingdom over all kingdoms – the promise and fulfilment of posterity, land and blessing.

Be it a personal, national or global matter, God is working to achieve His purpose.

### 2. Obligation, Opportunity and Response

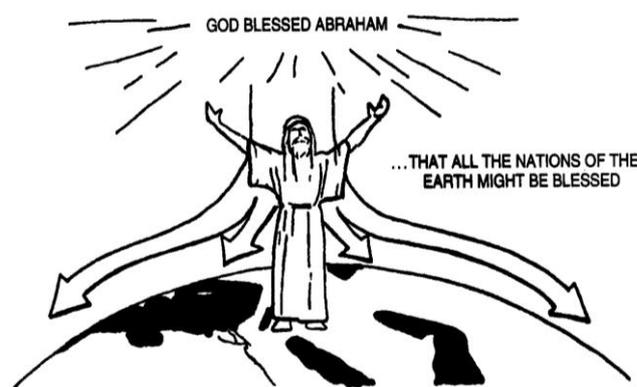
Much of the Old Testament is the account of how the Hebrew people (descendants of Abraham) came into being, their response to the opportunities God gave them to fulfil their covenant obligations, and the consequences of their actions.



- i. **Obligation** - Israel was created with the expectation that she would be a blessing to all other nations (Gen.12:1-3)
- ii. **Opportunity** – Israel was given the means and opportunities to fulfil her charge to be a blessing
- iii. **Response** – Israel failed to respond voluntarily to her part of the covenant. God continually reminded Israel of her obligation and used her to touch the nations regardless of her disobedience (involuntarily).

The Old Testament is not just simply a series of historical and cultural events; it is God putting His purpose and plans to action. People at that time would have asked, “What in the world is God doing?” We may look at the OT or even our present situation and ask “What in the world is God doing?” He is doing what He has always been doing and will continue to do so until it is fulfilled – His twofold purpose

### 3. Israel’s Obligation



Understanding the Abrahamic Covenant is key to understanding the basic dynamic which governs the participation of God’s people in the fulfilment of His eternal purpose. God does bless his people, but He also expects obedience in

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return. The Covenant also makes clear God's intention to carry out His mission purpose through His children. *He blesses them in order that they may be His agents of blessing to the world.*

Isaac, Abraham's 'covenant' son, had the terms of the covenant set forth for him by God (Gen.26:2-5). Likewise, Jacob, Isaac's son and the inheritor of the birthright and the blessing, also had the terms of the covenant given to him (Gen.28:13-15). Within 400 years, God had richly blessed Abraham's descendants even while in Egypt.

The book of Exodus recounts the marvellous ways God worked in delivering Israel from bondage in Egypt. A key to understanding the deliverance is that God was setting apart a people for Himself, "I will make a distinction between my people and your people." (Exo.8:23; 9:4; 11:7). He was establishing Israel as his "treasured possession... a kingdom of priest and a holy nation" (Exo.19:6).

- What is the function of a priest? How does this relate to Israel's role to the nations?
- What does holy mean?

**The obligation for Israel to reach all nations as part of God's instrument to redeem a people from every people and to rule a kingdom over all kingdoms** is restated in over 50 passages of the Old Testament. Read Psalm 67.

- Do we have the same obligation as Israel did? On what basis?

### 4. Israel's Opportunity

God provided many opportunities for Israel to fulfil her obligation.

Two forces were at work:

- Attractive force
- Expansive force



#### **Attractive force**

This is a passive means in which other peoples were attracted to Israel:

- The tabernacle and the temple – places where God's Name dwelt. They were holy places, the heart of Israel's religious ceremony and practice. They were not intended just to serve Israel but to reach nations through attraction (1 Kg.8:41-43, 54-61). The visit of the Queen of Sheba following the prayer bears testament to the temples attractive force (1 Kg.10:1-9).
- Naaman the Syrian was also attracted to Yahweh through the unnamed Israelite slave girl.
- On the day of Pentecost, there were "God-fearing Jews (non-Israelites who adopted the Israel belief in Yahweh) from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5) gathered in Jerusalem. They had been attracted.
- Israel's strategic location at the juncture of 3 continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. As "the centre of the land" (Eze.38:12) it was a major crossroads of the ancient world, attracting travellers and traders from many nations.

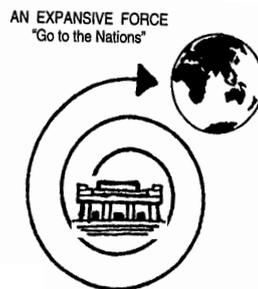
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### Expansive force

This is an active means in which other peoples were reached by sending God's message beyond Israel:

- a. Joseph going to Egypt
- b. Daniel exiled to Babylon
- c. Esther in Susa
- d. Jonah to Nineveh and many others



Israel was not always willing for these two forces to work, especially in the expansive force (hence the exile and captivity) – next lesson on Israel's response. *But whether willing or not, God will use His people to spread His redeeming message.*

These two dynamic forces are also present in the church today.

- Give some examples of attractive force whereby potential believers are attracted to Christ.
- Give some examples of expansive force whereby the Gospel is taken to potential believers.
- Which of these two forces is God primary means of achieving His purpose in the world? Why?

God's command is for the church to go, not for the world to come (Matt. 28:18-20). There are too many social, cultural and geographical barriers to be crossed for the attractive force to work on a wider scale.

The point is **God provides opportunities for us to fulfil our covenant obligations to bless other nations. God's people must be willing to take hold of these opportunities, especially the expansive force.**

## 5. Conclusion

We share the same obligation of Israel as we are inheritors of the Abrahamic Covenant – posterity, land and blessing – the obligation to bless all nations as we are blessed of God. Like Israel, God also provides opportunities for us to fulfil our obligations. “What in the World is God Doing?” He is arranging circumstances in our personal lives, nation and the world that we might grab hold of the opportunities to usher in the fulfilment of His twofold purpose.

- What is your response?

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## LESSON 4: Israel, the Covenant People – Israel's Response

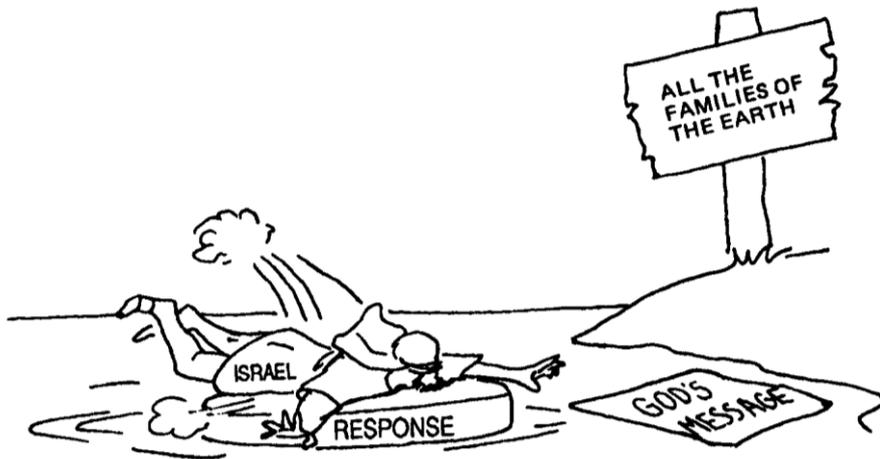
### 1. Introduction

God's command is for the church to go, not for the world to come. God provides opportunities (attractive and expansive force) for us to fulfil our covenant obligations to bless other nations. God's people must be willing to take hold of these opportunities, especially the expansive force.

- What do you think was Israel's response to the obligation and opportunity to bless other nations?

### 2. Israel's Response

On the whole, Israel failed in her responsibility to be God's agent of blessing to the nations. She failed to be a part of what God was doing in the world. Had she lived a holy life, she would have demonstrated to the world God's identity, character and saving power. Sadly, at almost every step Israel demonstrated her unfaithfulness to the Lord.



There were times when, chastened by God's discipline or exuberant with the success He had granted, the Jews would submit to God's will and follow their calling. After a time of enjoying the benefits of their obedience, they would invariably fall prey to a lethal complacency, opening the door to sin and idolatry.

Ezekiel 20:5-44 provides a brief summary of Israel's history from God's point of view. It spans over 800 years from the time of Moses (1400BC) to the time of Ezekiel (~587BC).

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GOD'S BLESSINGS ON ISRAEL	ISRAEL'S RESPONSE
Deliverance form slavery in Egypt.	Wanted to go back to Egypt after 43days in journey to Promised Land (complained about water, food and meat).
Performed many daily miracles during journey to Promise Land to assure them of His presence and provide for their needs (pillar of cloud and fire, water, manna, quail, shoes & clothes didn't wear out, etc.).	Not willing to enter Promised Land for fear of the inhabitants (whom they were supposed to bless).
Gave Mosaic Law to guide them in practical ways.	Disobeyed the laws and adopted the ways of surrounding nations.
After conquering the Promised Land, they were to make known Yahweh to the people by remaining faithful in worship to Him.	Committed spiritual adultery (worshipping Yahweh and other gods) and spiritual prostitution (giving of themselves to other religions to get something in return).
During the period of Judges (over 350 years), God mercifully delivered them from their enemies again and again.	For a short while they would rejoice and commit themselves wholly to the Lord. Sadly, within a few years, they would turn away from God (forgetting what He has done) and worshipped idols.
Lead them faithfully through His appointed judges and prophets.	Rejected God's leaders and wanted to appoint a king just like what the surrounding nations did. Instead of influencing (blessing) the nations, Israel was influenced by them.
Blessed the reign of Israel's first king, Saul, and strengthened Israel as a nation (politically and military), even though it was against God's plan to have a king, and even though Saul became wicked due to pride.	Saul continually disobeyed God and fell deeper and deeper into sin, refusing to repent despite God's mercy and love towards Him.
Blessed King David and Solomon, bringing Israel to its 'golden age'.	Instead of remaining faithful to God, Solomon adopted the idolatrous ways of his wives and led Israel to the beginning of its downfall.
Even after the Israel split into two (North – Israel, South – Judah), God continued to guide and love them through His many prophets (major and minor prophets, and other prophets).	Used religion for political reasons (to win the favour of the people and for military protection). All the kings of Israel from Jeroboam onwards were evil (didn't follow the Lord). Only a few kings of Judah were good; the rest were evil.
From the first attack from neighbouring enemies (Egypt), God was calling for Israel to repent and return to Him through His	They rejected the prophets (which is equivalent to rejecting God) and looked to political help and treatise. Even when Israel was captured by

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prophets.	Assyria (722BC), Judah didn't learn; rather she continued to sin and was captured and exiled to Babylon (587BC), marking the demise of the nation of Israel until 1948.
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- The above brief history is from God's point of view. How would it have been from an Israelites point of view?

Through exile and captivity, Israel began fulfilling her duty. Many of the brightest chapters of the Old Testament are the accounts of the faithful witness of Israelites who were forcibly taken to other nations. Through their testimony, God's name was exalted and glorified before the Gentiles. In the fire of tribulation, the best element came forth and was purified. Under these circumstances, the Israelites began to acknowledge the sovereignty of their God.

- Name some of these witnesses.

Throughout the 400-year intertestamental period, Jews migrated throughout the known world (Jewish Diaspora). Wherever they went, they established synagogues and won the allegiance of many Gentiles to God. The Hebraic Old Testament was translated into Greek (Septuagint), the *lingua franca* at that time, in order that many non-Jews may know and receive the blessings of God.

### 3. Voluntarily or Involuntarily

God makes Himself known through the attractive and expansive force. We saw that God's primary means is the expansive force, an active and purposeful action of going to bless others. This going can either be voluntary or involuntarily.

As seen above, Israel often went involuntarily. The results were never too good and they suffered the consequences of their rebellion. However, when they finally began to go voluntarily during the Jewish Diaspora, taking initiative to win people to the Jewish faith, not only were the results good, they themselves were blessed.

### 4. Conclusion

Going voluntarily is God's will. There is no need for us to repeat the mistakes of Israel in the way we respond to our God given obligation and opportunities.

- What are the right attitudes to be God's agent of blessing?

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### LESSON 5: Jesus, the Messiah for All Peoples

#### 1. Introduction

From the earliest Genesis records, God has been at work in this world to redeem a people from every people and to rule a kingdom over all kingdoms. Through our study of the Abrahamic Covenant and other key passages, we have come to understand that the Old Testament clearly show God working His purpose by making His people a blessing to all nations.

In the next 3 lessons, as we study the New Testament, we find God's concern for all nations / peoples continues as the central purpose of his dealings with the human race. We will look at the Messiah, His messengers and the message.

#### 2. Jesus, the Messiah for All Peoples

You know someone is committed to what he says when he himself gets fully involved in it. So, "when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman" (Gal.4:4). With the coming of Jesus the Messiah, God initiated a special phase of the reestablishment of His kingdom on earth.

Jesus, His message and His disciples were so radically different from the Jews' expectations that those who did not have "eyes to see or ears to hear" (Matt.13:13-15) could only respond with unbelief and rejection.

- Consider how people see the world, God and the church today. Do they respond with unbelief and rejection? Do they fail to see the connection between God and the world?
- For those who did accept Jesus as Messiah for the Jews, as did the disciples, could they accept Him as Messiah for all peoples?

Jesus, as who He is, shows that He is indeed a Messiah for all peoples.

#### 3. Jesus and the Gentiles

##### 3.1. Son of Man

- What is in a title "Mr., Ms., Dr. etc."? How important are they?

We read in the Gospels that people often referred to Jesus as "Son of David," a popular Jewish designation of the Messiah. Some even called Him the "Son of God," referred to in Ps.2:7. But the title which he used throughout His ministry was "Son of Man." More than 40x in the Gospels, the term is used, always by Jesus referring to Himself. The words were almost a substitute for the personal pronoun "I." Jesus derived this term from two principal sources: the books of Ezekiel and Daniel. "Son of man" is the distinctive title applied to the prophet Ezekiel by God and occurs 87x. The Hebrew is *ben Adam*, literally 'son of Adam' or "son of mankind." (The Hebrew word for *man* and the name *Adam* are the same.)

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- In what way did the title Jesus chose for Himself demonstrate His identification with all mankind? (What if he chose Son of David or Son of God?)
- Why is it important for us to understand that Jesus' messianic role was global in its perspective?

### 3.2. From the beginning

The vision of a universal kingdom was integral to the plan of Jesus from the very beginning of His ministry. The fact that one of the wilderness temptations involved “all kingdoms of the world and their glory” (Matt.4:8) is conclusive. Jesus did aspire to world dominion. That is the purpose of God.

His first sermon in His hometown, Nazareth, demonstrated His Gentile agenda (Gentile refers to non-Jews). Rejected by the Israelites, He said, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. There were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time (of severe famine)...yet (he) was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a widow” Lk.4:24-26. Received into a Gentile home, Elijah performed the miracle of multiplying the flour and oil (for food) and later restoring the widow's son to life – not a Jewish widow, but a Gentile. To rub salt in the wound, Jesus went on, “And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha... yet not one of them was cleansed – only Naaman the Syrian (a Gentile).” God's redeeming grace was for all peoples.

### 3.3. To the Jews first

In Mt.10, Jesus sent out His 12 disciples “to the lost sheep of Israel.” Later in Lk.10, He sent out 70 others to the “harvest field.” The 12 apostles symbolically represent the 12 tribes of Israel, and the 70 symbolize the Gentile nations (Gen.10). They were sent first to Israel as it was God's chosen nation, and through them the nations of the earth will be blessed. Thus, they needed to be blessed first in order that the rest of the world can be blessed of God.

### 3.4. Jesus' ministry

A Roman centurion Lk. 7:1-10

- i. The centurion was a Gentile. Why did he send elders of the Jews to Jesus (v.3) rather than he himself going to see Jesus?
- ii. According to the Jews (v.4), why should Jesus help the centurion?
- iii. On what basis did Jesus help the centurion (v.9-10)?

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#### A Canaanite woman Mt.15:21-28

- i. Why did the disciples asked Jesus to send the woman away (v.23) instead of asking Him to help her?
- ii. How would you explain Jesus' apparent coldness towards her (v.23-24)? (Gentiles were degradingly referred to as dogs by Jews)
- iii. On what basis did Jesus help the woman (v.28)?

#### A Samaritan village Lk.9:51-56

(Samaritans were of a mixed lineage of Jewish and Gentiles.)

- i. Why did the people not welcome Jesus into their village (v.53)?
- ii. Why did James and John react so strongly to the villagers (v.54)?
- iii. What was Jesus own response (v.55-56 including footnote)?

Jesus, through his intentional encounters with Gentiles, was conveying that God was interested in the world, not just the Israelites. He is at work in our lives, our society and our world to redeem a people from every people and to rule a kingdom over all kingdoms. He challenges us across social boundaries, mental prejudice, cultural norms, politics etc. He challenges us in every aspect of life. Our God cannot be confined within the church, personal devotions and religious matters. He is too big for that.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The Jews in Jesus' time were often shocked by Jesus – His life, His teachings and His disciples. Though they were well versed in the Old Testament, had a sincere desire to worship and serve God, belief strongly in their convictions, they were wrong at times.

- Are we sometimes like the Jews in being wrong about God and the things He is doing?
- What can we do about it if we do not want to end up like the people who crucified Christ?

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### LESSON 6: Messengers for All Peoples

#### 1. Introduction

If you had a very close friend for at least 3 years, spending many moments together, sharing from the heart with each other, do you expect your friend to understand (and support) you? How would you feel if he/she still didn't have a clue about you?

The disciples spent 3 years with Jesus but were very much clueless about Jesus' mission for the world. Even with so clear and powerful a command as the Great Commission (Mt.28:18-20), which is actually what the Old Testament and life of Jesus is all about, the 11 disciples **response** to their **obligation** and **opportunities** provided were dismal to say the least.

- How about us? Have we known the Lord so long and yet have not really caught His heartbeat? The real test is not what we know but how we live our lives.

#### 2. The Reluctant Messengers

We often see the Apostles as dynamic leaders who were ready to jump into anything the Lord told them to do. The picture painted in Acts is quite the contrary as we shall see.

##### 2.1 Pentecost

Word was abuzz in Jerusalem and Palestine that an innocent named Jesus, whom some thought to be the Messiah, had been crucified but had risen from the dead and appeared to more than 500 people. "What in the world is God doing?" could be heard at street markets with excitement and amazement. In an upper room of Jerusalem, 120 people were also wondering "God, what in the world are you doing?" with a sense of sadness and disappointment.

Read Acts 2:1-12. "*What does this mean?*" The great breakthrough of Pentecost demonstrated God's desire that His message be intelligible to people from all nations. Rather than being proclaimed in faultless Hebrew (the mother tongue of Jews) or common Aramaic (*lingua franca* of the day), the declaration of the wonders of God resounded in languages represented by the crowd, including Arabic. Could there have been a clearer witness of God's intention that the whole world should know of His love?

##### 2.2 Jerusalem and Samaria

From the day of Pentecost, Acts 1:8 began to take fulfilment. The apostles indeed did proclaim God's love in Jerusalem and Judea. Yet, they did not go further than their own race and culture. The Samaritans lived so nearby, and was clearly part of Acts 1:8, but no effort was made to reach them until persecution arose in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1, 4).

- Could the persecution have been God's way of sending out the believers through an involuntary expansive force (as did the exile of Israel)?

It was a Greek believer, Philip, who took the message to Samaria (Acts 8:6). Perhaps socio-cultural barriers hindered the Jews from reaching their 'contaminated' cousins. When "*Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them*" (Acts 8:14). But

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this was no pastoral visit. It was more of an investigation. Having given their approval, the 2 apostles returned to Jerusalem, preaching along the way.

- Is this the kind of response expected of those who knew what God was doing?
- What about your response as you go through this course?

As if to encourage Philip and the readers of Acts, it is recorded the Spirit of the Lord entrusted an even more culturally and geographically distant task to Philip. His obedience reaped success.

### 2.3 Joppa

Meanwhile, Peter travelled around the country ministering to converted Jews in Joppa (Acts 10). God had to give Peter a vision, thrice-repeated, to prepare his heart to minister to Gentiles who were actually asking for a witness. The issue was not simply to give witness to Cornelius' household in Caesarea. If it was, God could have used Philip who was already there (Acts 8:40). Rather, this incident was necessary to convince the early church of God's world-embracing purpose.

- Does God need to convince you that he is bigger than what you think? What areas?

Peter returned to Jerusalem to convince the church that he was not wrong in reaching out to Gentiles. In the only part of Acts which is repeated almost word for word, he recounted the incident (perhaps because the Holy Spirit wanted to emphasize this vital lesson by repetition.)

- What was the church's response to God's work among the Gentiles (Acts 11:18)? (In some translations, instead of "praise God" it is "held their peace") Should it have been such?

### 2.4 Antioch

The story continues in Acts 11:19-21 (perhaps 30 years after Pentecost). It wasn't intentional for the Gentiles in Antioch to be reached. Yet, "*a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.*" **God was definitely making sure His twofold purpose of redeeming a people from every people and to rule a Kingdom over all kingdoms would be achieved.** The apostles did another investigation by sending Barnabbas. None of the 11 apostles came to Antioch, rather Barnabbas had to recruit Saul to teach the new church for a year. It is here that the disciples were first called Christians

- What does being called a Christian mean to you?
- Why do you think the Antioch believers were first called Christians and not the believers in Jerusalem – 30 years ago?

### 2.5 Ends of the World

As you proceed on in Acts, the evidence is clear that the disciples weren't moved out of the 'home church' to any significant degree until the destruction of Jerusalem. Nevertheless,

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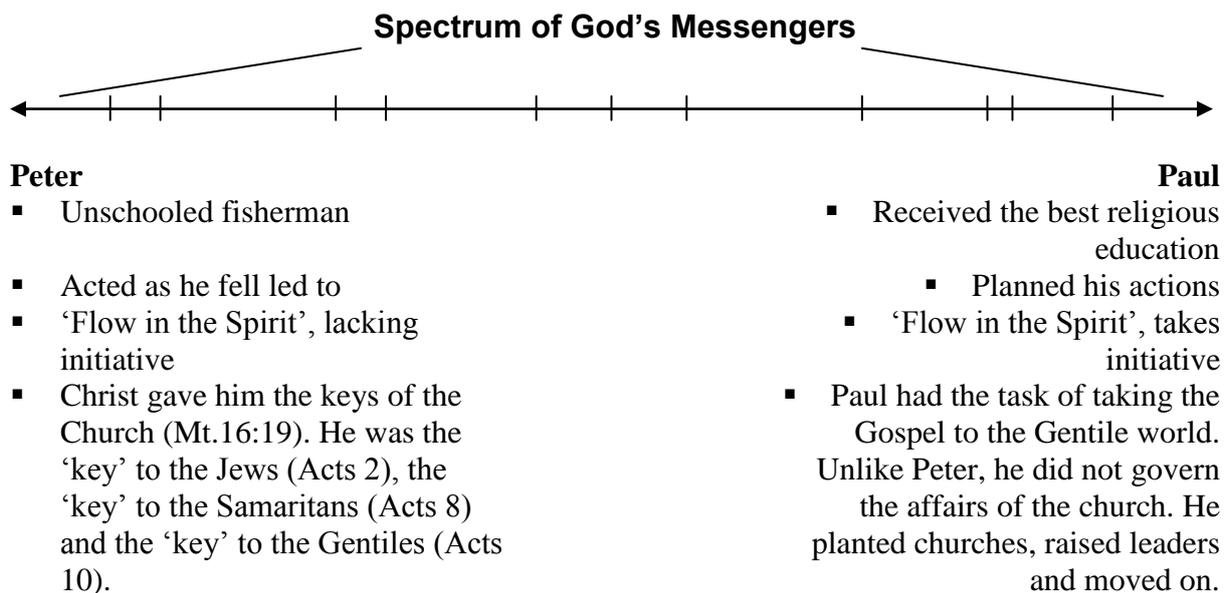
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Christ's clear 'all nations' mandate was carried out in spite of the reluctant disciples. Acts 1:8 is a prophetic declaration of the progression of the gospel as recorded in Acts.

**God reaffirms once again (as stated in Gen.12:1-3) that what He is doing in this world is and will be done through His people.**

### 3. God's Messengers Today

Two key figures stand out in Acts: Peter and Paul. They represent two ends of a spectrum of God's messengers



Though vastly different, God used them as His messengers. Neither was better than the other. They simply show us that God takes us as we are and uses us. All of us fit somewhere in the spectrum of God's Messengers.

**What He wants to do in this world is through you.**

- Do you know your part?
- What are you doing for Him?

God can use your skills, vocation, education, characteristics, temperament, family, finance, and willingness to glorify Him. Notice that the disciples in Acts never worked alone but in and under the church. It is God's will that Christians serve Him not as 'lone rangers' but as members of the Body.



**3. Conclusion**

It is important for us to be clear as to what God's message is. Knowing His message enables us to share it clearly with whom He wants it to be shared with – all peoples. A wrong understanding of His message can result in terrible mistake as seen in history, but a right understanding can result in tremendous blessings as we will see the next two weeks.

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**LESSON 8: Expansion of God’s Purpose**

**1. Introduction**

Last week, we concluded that it is important for us to be clear as to what God’s message is. Knowing His message enables us to share it clearly with whom He wants it to be shared with – all peoples. A wrong understanding of His message can result in terrible mistake as seen in history, but a right understanding can result in tremendous blessings.

**2. Epochs of God’s Mission**

God’s mission is twofold: to redeem a people from all peoples and to rule a kingdom over all kingdoms. From Genesis 12 to the end of the Bible, and indeed until the end of time, this is what God is doing in the world. To make it easier to see the big picture, the 4,000 years from Abraham till now can be divided into 10 epochs (period), with each epoch having its own defining history lasting about 400 years.

	<b>Epochs</b>	<b>God’s Agents</b>	<b>Means</b>	
2000 B.C.	 1. Patriarchs	Abraham, Isaac, Jacob	Voluntary going	
1600 B.C.		Joseph, Moses, Joshua	Involuntary going	
1200 B.C.		3. Judges	Israel	Invasion
900 B.C.		4. Kings	David, Solomon, Exiles	Attraction, Invasion
450 B.C.		5. Post-exile	Dispersed Jews	Involuntary going
0 A.D.	<b>+</b>			
	6. Rome	Early church	Involuntary and Voluntary going	
400 A.D.	7. Barbarians	Celts / monks	Invasion, Voluntary going	
800 A.D.	8. Vikings	Slaves	Invasion, Involuntary going	
1200 A.D.	9. Saracens	(Crusaders), Friars	Voluntary going	
1600 A.D.	10. Ends of the earth	Modern missions	Voluntary going	
2000 A.D.				

We have over the last 6 lessons looked at the first 5 epochs from Abraham to the early church (2,000 years). In the last few lessons, we will look at the remaining 5 epochs (2,000 years) in which God, on the basis of the intervention of His Son, is making sure that all nations are blessed with the church being a blessing to all peoples.

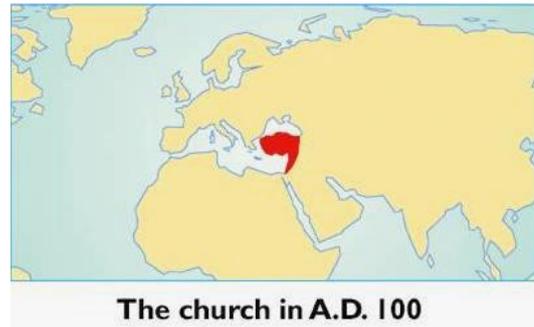
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#### 3. Epoch 6: Rome (0 – 400 A.D.)

From the early church, God's purpose expended relentlessly throughout the Greco-Roman world. From a tiny sect of 120 in a world full of sects and religions, it blossomed within 300 years to become the official religion under the Roman Emperor Constantine. **The blessings inherent in (naturally within) the message spread throughout the Roman world.**



However, much of God's purpose was not achieved through deliberate planning and organization (apart from Paul and his missionary team). The Christian faith expanded by means of involuntary going when persecution broke out in Jerusalem. In addition, it also spread along the trade routes. Nevertheless, **the inherent power of the Gospel brought many to Christ.**

- What factors did God use in the spread of the Gospel during this epoch?  
The widespread Roman Empire provided the right ground through:
  - i) Common language (Greek)
  - ii) Easy mobility (trade routes & safety)
  - iii) Jews spread over it (during Diaspora)

Under the Romans, the local autonomy of city state ended and created a widespread need for a sense of belonging. Christianity provided a wide appeal as it was the one religion that was not ethnocentric. So, in 312, the Roman Emperor Constantine declared himself a Christian. And by 375, Christianity became the official religion of Rome.

\* Despite full-scale systematic persecution of Christians during the reign of Roman Emperor Diocletian (284-305 A.D.) (one of the fiercest early opponents of Christianity), God ensure His purpose was carried out.

However, little evangelization was done outside of the Roman world to its neighbours such as the Barbarians. (Barbarians are also known as Indo-Aryans. They were tall, fierce, fair-haired, fair-skinned and a rough forest people. Those who they came in contact with considered them uncivilized, and yet were fascinated by their strength, stamina, force of will, charisma, and versatility.) Strangely, God used the Arians (they were banned from the Empire for their questioning of the deity of Christ) to reach the Barbarians. They put the Gothic language to writing and translated Scriptures for them which would bring great blessings later. (Goths were Germanic people and one of the several Barbarian tribes.)

#### 4. Epoch 7: Barbarians (400 – 800 A.D.)

Because of the hesitation of believers to go beyond their Greco-Roman world, God must use involuntary means such as invasion to achieve His purpose. The Barbarians began invading Rome in 410. (The Roman Christians would certainly be asking "What in the world is God doing?") It is here that the blessings of the Gospel becomes so clear. Because they had a superficial Christian faith (brought earlier to them by the Arians), they had great respect for life and churches and spared Rome from much destruction. Christianity had instilled certain moral standards into the 'uncivilized' Barbarians.

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- The modern day example is African nations. Southern part of Africa is largely Christian. Though having its own problems, it is relatively free of bloodshed violence in comparison to Northern Africa which is largely unevangelized. This is the blessing of the Gospel.

The invading Barbarians ‘fell’ under **the inherent power of the Gospel and became true Christians.** At that time, there were believers who went voluntarily to fulfil God’s purpose – the Celts. (Celts were Indo-Europeans who inhabited much of Europe.) Thanks to them many Anglo-Saxons and Goths were won for the Lord. (Anglo-Saxons were settlers from the German regions of Angeln and Saxony. Though having their own religion, majority were converted to Christianity through the Celts and St. Augustine.) **Not only did the Celts bring the blessings of the Gospel, but along with it came progress, technology, and education (Middle Ages).**



The church in A.D. 400

The Barbarians, who had become Christians, purposefully set out to evangelize the Vikings. (Vikings were Scandinavian seafaring warriors known for brutality.) Unfortunately they failed to cross cultural barriers and thus had little success.

#### 5. Epoch 8: Vikings (800 – 1200 A.D.)

After the Barbarians, came the Vikings. Totally opposite of the Barbarians, the Vikings seemed to take special delight in burning churches, killing people and selling monks into slavery. Perhaps if they had been influenced by the Gospel, as did the Barbarians, they would have been spared much destruction.

Once again, when Christians did not reach out to the nations, the peoples came. Yet, it was not a victory for the Vikings. **The inherent power of the Gospel manifested itself and conquered many of the conquerors.** Monks sold as slaves and Christian girls forced to be wives and mistresses eventually won these savages of the north. Sounds like Joseph, Daniel and Namaan’s wife’s slave girl?



The church in A.D. 900

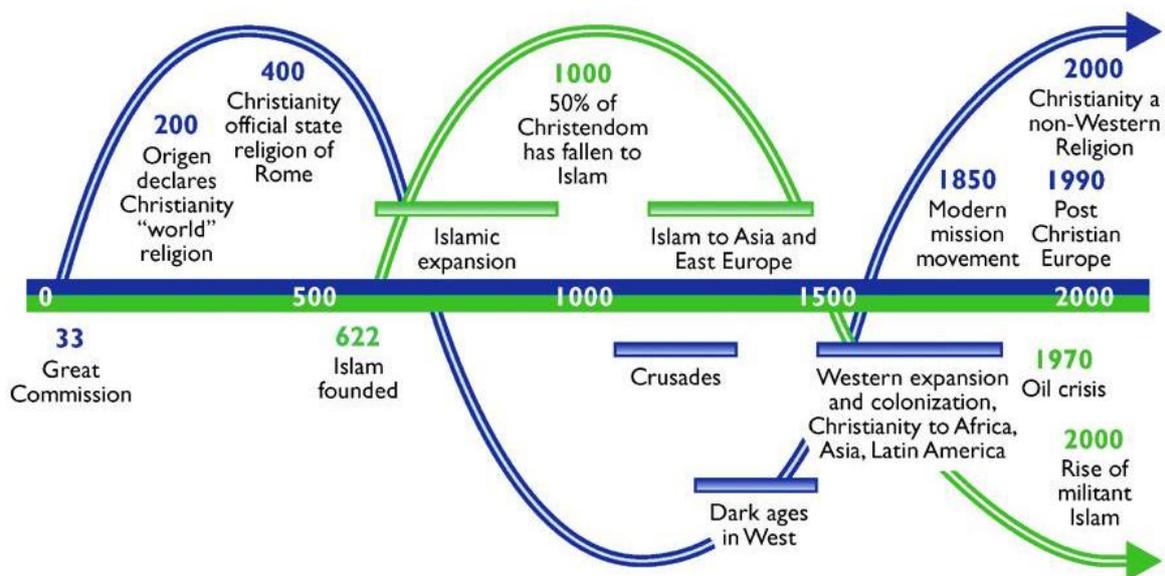
Perhaps in God’s eyes, the Vikings salvation was more important than the tragedy of this new invasion which plunged Europe into the Dark Ages. **After all, God had not spared even His own Son in order to redeem us.**

#### 6. Epoch 9: Saracens (1200 – 1600 A.D.)

(Saracens were any persons – Arabs, Turks, or others – who professed the religion of Islam.) This is the most tragic of all epochs, marked by the Crusades. Islam was on the rise while Christianity was falling. The Crusades were a series of battle expeditions from Western Europe to the Eastern Mediterranean, designed to recover the Holy Land from Jews and Muslims and then retain it in Christian hands. They not only failed in their objectives but left a very negative witness for Christ, especially among Muslims even till today. **The great lesson of the Crusades is that good will, even sacrificial obedience to God, is no substitute for a clear understanding of His will.**

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At the same time, the church fell into corruption and bureaucracy. It existed more as a political power. It wasn't until the reformation in 1600 A.D. that a revival of deeper life, Bible study and prayer began to sweep over Europe. The Roman Latin stronghold was broken and the Gospel took the forms of the peoples - "to a Jew, like a Jew... to a Gentile, like a Gentile... I have become all things to all men that by all possible means I might win some for Christ." (1 Cor.9:22). No longer was it to be a Christian was to be a Roman (adopting its culture and language).

Despite the Reformation's great gain in its power to formulate anew their own Christianity, it did not carry out God's mission. The world was still waiting for the Gospel.



## 7. Conclusion

The 4 epochs we looked at are not very different from that of the first 5 (Abraham till the early church). Those that are blessed were not eager to share their blessings. They forsook their obligations despite numerous opportunities given to them by God. Only the Celts responded well to God's purpose. Just as in the Old Testament, **the coming of blessings brings sober responsibility, dangerous if unfulfilled.**

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### LESSON 9: The Final Thrust – To the Ends of the Earth (1600 – 2000 A.D.)

#### 1. Introduction

We stopped at the 1600s with the Reformation taking place resulting in the Church coming back to God. The emergence of nationalized forms of Christianity (rather than the traditional political Roman form) and the discovery and exploration of vast new portions of the globe set the stage for a tremendous surge in God's purpose through voluntary going.

#### 2. Roman Catholic Movement (1600 – 1800)

In this final epoch, the 1<sup>st</sup> half (1600-1800) was almost exclusively a Roman Catholic show. From countries such as Spain, Portugal, and France they colonized North and South America, Asia, South East Asia, and Africa. The Protestants, though 'reformed', were inactive in God's purpose to redeem a people from all peoples and to rule a kingdom over all kingdoms. By 1800, the Roman missionaries were writing off the Protestant movement as apostate simply because it was not going out to bless the nations.

- So, while the Roman Catholics were concerned with what God was doing in the world, the Protestants were apparently too caught up with their new 'spiritual reformation' with the Lord to bless others. Can we fall into the same mistakes as the early reformers?

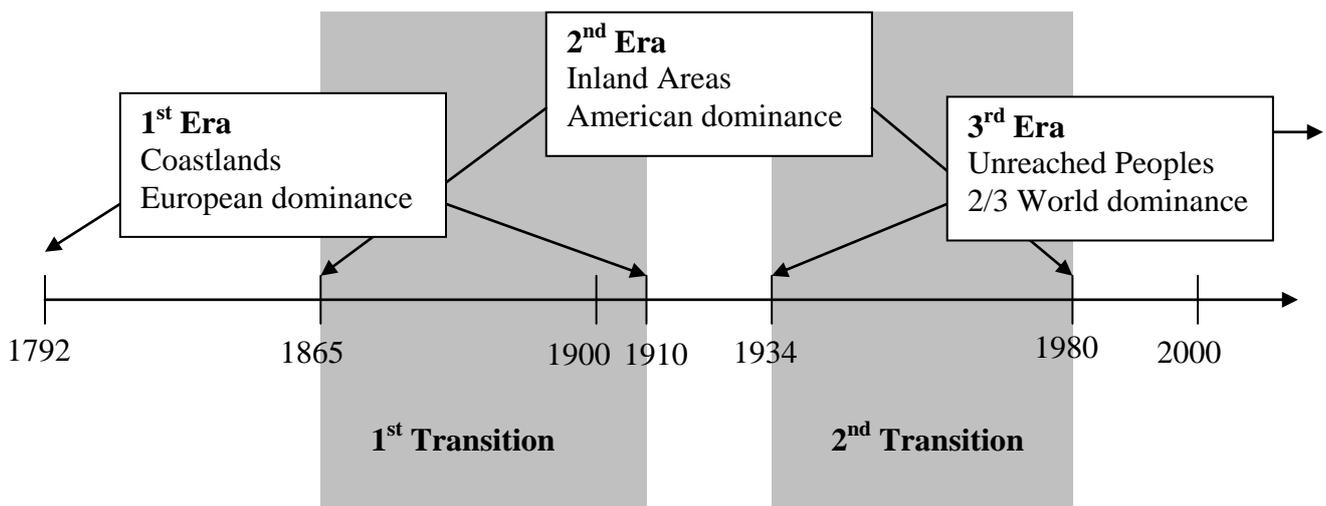
The Roman missionary effort was forced into sudden decline in 1800 due to:

- i Reduction of Jesuits
- ii French Revolution
- iii Problems within the Roman catholic church

#### 3. Eras and Transitions (1800 – 2000)

The year 1800 marks the awakening of the Protestants from slumber. More than Catholic missions, they led the way in establishing all around the world the democratic apparatus of government, schools, hospitals, universities and the political foundations of new nations. The blessings they brought were more than just spiritual.

These tremendous 200 years which saw God's purpose expand globally can be understood in terms of 3 distinct eras with 2 transitions in between.



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#### 3.1 1<sup>st</sup> Era: Coastlands

- After 200 years of slumber, how did God awaken the Protestants to what He is doing in the world?

A young man of under 30 years old, William Carey, challenged a group of ministers to take the Great Commission seriously, to go and bless the nations. Despite negative reactions, he wrote a booklet entitled “An Enquiry Into The Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens” and managed to persuade some friends to create a tiny missions agency. Hence, the humble beginnings of the Protestant missions movement began. It was not new. As we have seen throughout the Old and New Testament, God not only gave obligations but the opportunities to fulfil it by use of means – voluntary going was not something new. It started with Abraham!

- Why did they go to the coastlands?

There are 2 highlights of this era:

- i It was an astonishing demonstration of love and sacrifice on the part of those who went out to bless the nations. Majority died on in these foreign coastlands due to sickness. Yet, it did not stop believers from going out.
- ii It began the development of high-quality insight into God’s purpose and strategy. For the 1<sup>st</sup> time, it was not a hit and miss mission. It was a purposeful structured approach to being God’s agents of blessings.

- Was this sudden flood of believers into foreign lands well accepted by the locals themselves? Why?

#### 3.2 2<sup>nd</sup> Era: Inland Areas

It was another ‘under 30’ young man, Hudson Taylor, that moved God’s purpose from coastlands to inland areas. He wanted to ensure that indeed all peoples are covered. Understandably, the church was reluctant for even at the coastlands the casualties were high. How would they venture into unchartered territory without the modern technologies and information that we possess?

Though recognizing this, Taylor was driven by knowledge that while many coastlands had been reached for Jesus, many more in the inland had not. God raised an army of student volunteers, more than 20,000 volunteers, to go forth into the inland areas. These 20,000 knew what God was doing and wanted to be a part of it.

#### 3.3 3<sup>rd</sup> Era: Unreached Peoples

By 1945, 99.5% of the non-Western world was under Western control. Colonialism was leaving a very negative witness for Christianity. In the rush of fulfilling God’s purpose, the converts in the 2/3 worlds were made to conform to the foreign culture of God’s agents of blessings. Though geographically the church had covered great grounds, both coastal and inland, many pockets of people in them were untouched by the Gospel, resulting in ‘unreached’ peoples. 2 young men, Cameron Townsend and Donald McGavran, began what is known in modern missions as ‘contextualization’ Again, it was not something new. Apostle

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Paul had already modelled it. And today, we live in that incredible final era and epoch just before Christ's return.

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**LESSON 10: Beyond the Gates of Splendor**

Watch video “Beyond the gates of Splendor” abridged version (40mins.).

An incredible documentary film based on the amazing true story of five missionary martyrs to Ecuador in 1950s. When five missionary families travel to Ecuador, they find creative ways to connect with an isolated tribe, the Waodani. Although at first they find acceptance, eventually, some meet with hostility, and ultimately, death. In a testament to unsurpassed forgiveness, however, members of the slain missionaries’ families return to the Amazonian basin and live among the tribe. Featuring first-hand accounts of this fascinating story, including tribe interviews, this powerful documentary is one you will never forget.

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### LESSON 11: What in the World is God Doing? – Case Studies

#### 1. Introduction: 5 Martyred Missionaries

Last week, we watched a powerful true story of the work of 5 martyred missionaries and their families. Their commitment to their work was because they fully understood God's two fold purpose:

- To redeem a people from every people
- To rule a kingdom over all kingdoms

They understood it not to be a wishful hope, but one that would definitely come to pass; one that was of eternal value; one that was from God Himself.

*“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” – Jim Elliot (martyred missionary)*

The result is not only majority of the Waodani tribe are Christians today, but crime has decreased and standard of living improved. Such is the inherent blessings of the Lord – both spiritual and physical.

A greater impact, one that would never have been imagined by the missionaries themselves, is that God has used their life testimony to race up many champions for God's kingdom. At a conference of 10,000 pastors and evangelist from around the world, half testified that they were in some way influenced into Christian leadership by the events of the 5 martyred missionaries.

Many more Christians continue to be impacted through the documentary movie and the new movie “End of the Spear” released early this year.

What in the world is God doing? The answer on the day the 5 bodies were discovered is very different from the answer today. Thank God the 5 families never gave up.

#### 2. Case Study 2: Malaysian New Economic Policy

The **Malaysian New Economic Policy (NEP)** or *DEB* for **Dasar Ekonomi Baru** in Malay) was an ambitious, though controversial, socio-economic restructuring affirmative action program launched by the Malaysian government in 1971 under then Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak. The term of the NEP ended in 1990, and it was succeeded by the National Development Policy in 1991. Although the NEP was hailed in some quarters as having reduced the socioeconomic disparity between the Chinese minority and Malay majority, others accused it of having reduced non-Malays to the status of second-class citizens.

- What is your view on the policy?

The NEP's success — or lack of it — is a subject of heated debate; although the NEP targeted a 30% share of the economy for the Bumiputra (indigenous people, mostly the Malays), such a figure has never been reached according to official government statistics. Although the policy ended in 1990, Malaysians often refer to it in the present tense, as much of the tangible

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economic benefits it offers the Bumiputra have never been completely ended. In 2005, some politicians from the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) — the leading political party of the governing Barisan Nasional coalition — called for the restoration of the NEP as the New National Agenda (NNA).

NEP Benchmarks	1970	1990	2004
Bumiputra equity	2.4% (RM477m)	19.3% (RM20.9b)	18.7% (RM73.2b)
Overall poverty	52%	17.1%	5%
Rural poverty	59%	21.8%	11%
Household income	RM660	RM1,254	RM2,996

- What do you think is God's view on the policy?
- Was the NEP a necessary evil to prevent Bumiputra aggression? (Consider the occasional anti-Chinese rioting in Indonesia that draws a stark contrast to our situation in Malaysia.)
- How does this policy relate to God's twofold purpose?

### 3. Case Study 3: Eritrea, Africa's newest country

Eritrea achieved independence on May 24, 1993 from Ethiopia. It is one of the youngest independent states. Since independence from Ethiopia, Eritrea has faced the economic problems of a small, desperately poor country. Like the economies of many African nations, the economy is largely based on subsistence agriculture, with 80% of the population involved in farming and herding. The Ethiopia-Eritrea war has severely hurt Eritrea's economy.

- Is independence always good? Why?

Since May 2002, the government of Eritrea has only officially recognized the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Sunni Islam, Catholicism and the Evangelical Lutheran church. All other faiths and denominations were required to undergo a registration process that was so stringent as to effectively be prohibitive. Amongst other things, the government's registration system requires religious groups to submit personal information on their membership in order to be allowed to worship. The few organizations that have met all of the registration requirements have still not received official recognition. More than 1700 Christians have been detained, many simply for owning a Bible or attending church.

- What do you think is God's view on Eritrea's independence?
- How does its current government stand with respect to God's twofold purpose?

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### **LESSON 12: Conclusion - What in The World is God Doing?**

#### **1. Importance of Knowing God's Purpose in the World**

- i. Know God better
- ii. Live our lives in accordance to His purpose
- iii. Understand the times

To discover God's purpose we must go beyond our present experiences lest we misunderstand Him. The best way to understand God's purpose in the world is through what He tells us Himself. Hence, the importance of the Bible. And it is through the Bible we interpret the past (history) and the present.

#### **1.1 Two Problems of Creation**

1. Lucifer defected and started a counterfeit kingdom
2. Man defected and fell into a state of sin and personal disintegration

#### **1.2 God's Twofold Purpose**

1. To redeem a people from every people (redemptive program)
2. To rule a kingdom over all kingdoms (kingdom program)

History pictures the progressive development of this two fold purpose of God in this world.

### **2. The Old Testament**

#### **2.1 Abrahamic Covenant**

God's twofold purpose is clearly expressed in the Abrahamic Covenant Genesis 12:1-3.

- i. Promise of posterity (descendants / succeeding generations)
- ii. Promise of a land
- iii. Promise of blessings

The fulfillment of these promises:

- i. The past fulfillment was an immediate or historical fulfillment in the life of the nation of Israel.
- ii. The present is an intermediate or gospel fulfillment in Christ and His church.
- iii. The future will be an ultimate fulfillment in the new heaven and new earth.

#### **2.2 Israel**

Much of the Old Testament is the account of how the Hebrew people (descendants of Abraham) came into being, their response to the opportunities God gave them to fulfill their covenant obligations, and the consequences of their actions.

- i. Obligation - Israel was created with the expectation that she would be a blessing to all other nations (Gen.12:1-3)

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- ii. Opportunity – Israel was given the means and opportunities to fulfill her charge to be a blessing
- iii. Response – Israel failed to respond voluntarily to her part of the covenant. God continually reminded Israel of her obligation and used her to touch the nations regardless of her disobedience (involuntarily).

God provided many opportunities for Israel to fulfill her obligation. Two forces were at work:

- i. Attractive force: A passive means in which other peoples were attracted to Israel (God's secondary means).
- ii. Expansive force: This is an active means in which other peoples were reached by sending God's message beyond Israel (God's primary means).

**God provides opportunities for us to fulfill our covenant obligations to bless other nations. God's people must be willing to take hold of these opportunities, especially the expansive force. God's command is for the church to go, not for the world to come.**

On the whole, Israel failed in her responsibility to be God's agent of blessing to the nations. There were times when, chastened by God's discipline or exuberant with the success He had granted, the Jews would submit to God's will and follow their calling. After a time of enjoying the benefits of their obedience, they would invariably fall prey to a lethal complacency, opening the door to sin and idolatry. Ezekiel 20:5-44 provides a brief summary of Israel's history from God's point of view. We can either go voluntarily or involuntarily.

### **3. Inter Testament Period**

It was only during the captivity and exile that the Israelites began to acknowledge the sovereignty of their God. Throughout the 400-year intertestamental period, Jews migrated throughout the known world (Jewish Diaspora). Wherever they went, they established synagogues and won the allegiance of many Gentiles to God. The Hebraic Old Testament was translated into Greek (Septuagint), the *lingua franca* at that time, in order that many non-Jews may know and receive the blessings of God.

### **4. The New Testament**

“When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman” (Gal.4:4). With the coming of Jesus the Messiah, God initiated a special phase of the reestablishment of His kingdom on earth.

Jesus, His message and His disciples were so radically different from the Jews' expectations that those who did not have “eyes to see or ears to hear” (Matt.13:13-15) could only respond with unbelief and rejection. Though they were well versed in the Old Testament, had a sincere desire to worship and serve God, belief strongly in their convictions, they were wrong at times. We are reminded to have a teachable spirit and to live by faith.

#### **4.1 Jesus the Messiah**

Jesus, through His intentional choice of title, teaching and ministry demonstrated God's purpose was to redeem a people from every people and to rule a kingdom over all kingdoms, not just the Jews. Thank God lest we still be unsaved!

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#### **4.2 Messengers for All Peoples**

The disciples spent 3 years with Jesus but were very much clueless about Jesus' mission for the world. Even with so clear and powerful a command as the Great Commission (Mt.28:18-20), which is actually what the Old Testament and life of Jesus is all about, the 11 disciples response to their obligation and opportunities provided were dismal to say the least.

Throughout Acts we see their reluctance to go beyond Jerusalem. Yet through the Holy Spirit, they were finally cast to the ends of the earth. Two key people in Acts are Peter and Paul who were vastly different yet greatly used of God. They show us that God takes us as we are and uses us.

#### **4.3 A Message for All Peoples**

If God is committed to redeeming a people from all peoples and to rule a kingdom over all kingdoms, then His message must certainly be a message for all peoples. And if His message is for all peoples, then we can certainly go and tell everyone and anyone about His message.

Apart from salvation, one of the central themes of Jesus' teaching was the kingdom (rule) of God. Unlike earthly kingdoms, God's kingdom is not restricted to a particular people, culture or language. Because it is a kingdom of faith, and everyone can have faith, it is a kingdom for all peoples. And Christ's prophecy that "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Mat.24:14) is coming to pass. Today, almost in every nation of the world, the church exists.

### **5. Expansion of God's Purpose**

The 4,000 years from Abraham till now can be divided into 10 epochs (period), with each epoch having its own defining history lasting about 400 years.

#### **5.1 Rome, Barbarians, Vikings, Saracens (0 – 1600 A.D.)**

These 4 epochs are not very different from that of the first 5 (Abraham till the early church). Those that are blessed were not eager to share their blessings. They forsook their obligations despite numerous opportunities given to them by God. Only a small group (Celts) responded well to God's purpose. Just as in the Old Testament, the coming of blessings brings sober responsibility, dangerous if unfulfilled.

#### **5.2 The Final Thrust (1600 – 2000 A.D.)**

The 1600s saw the Reformation taking place resulting in the Church coming back to God (after the Dark Ages). The emergence of nationalized forms of Christianity (rather than the traditional political Roman form) and the discovery and exploration of vast new portions of the globe set the stage for a tremendous surge in God's purpose through voluntary going.

The Roman Catholics led the way in 1600 – 1800 A.D., much of it with the help of colonialism. The year 1800 marks the awakening of the Protestants from slumber. More than Catholic missions, they led the way in establishing all around the world the democratic

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apparatus of government, schools, hospitals, universities and the political foundations of new nations. The blessings they brought were more than just spiritual. 3 eras:

- i. Coastlands – Europeans
- ii. Inland areas – Americans
- iii. Unreached peoples – 2/3 world (us!!!)