

Introduction to Missions

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God is a God of missions. This simple yet a profound statement identifies right from the beginning that missions at a divine operation and is fundamentally theological category. As we unpack ideas of missions, there are a few points we need to keep in mind by way of introduction.

First, the purpose of missions is grounded in the nature of God. From before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5; 1 Peter 1:2) God's purpose has been to save a people to himself and he will accomplish this. When we consider the details of this story however, we are forced to wind our way through many twists and turns and to wrestle with messy and complex issues. Many have given up under the weight of discouraging circumstances, but we will see that in His sovereign wisdom God has used the assaults of Satan, the depravity of men and the complacency of the church to bring a people to Himself from all nations. The success of missions in the world is sure, and we know that in the end God will have the eternal praise of people from every nation.

Second, the mandate of missions is rooted in both the Old and New Testaments. Missionary interest and activity did not begin with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-19), nor with the book of Acts. From the first mention of salvation to our first parents (Genesis 3:15), through the story of Noah (Genesis 6-9), Babel (Genesis 11), and into the details of Israel's national hymns and prayers (Psalms), we will find the roots of Christ's Great Commission to go into all the world. In the Great Commission Jesus told us clearly what God intended for the world, and what He expected from us. The remainder of the New Testament outlines clear principles which the Church must follow by which we are to fulfill this commission correctly. God has given us both the mandate for world missions and the methods by which His commission is to be carried out.

A **third** point by way of introduction to missions is the obligation that God places on those whom he brings into relationship with himself. God saves men and women and uses those same men and women to accomplish his mission. The greater part of this study on missions will involve the personnel—the men and women—who have caught missionary vision and have taken the message of reconciliation to the four corners of the world.

Finally, the work of missions is very much an “unfinished task.” In other words, the obligation of the Great Commission is still upon us. Having seen the foundation of missions (the nature of God), the mandate for missions (the biblical record), and having had 2000 years of reflection, we can develop a biblical theology of missions. It is at this point that many of the questions are answered; what are the principles that must guide us, or the theories that determine our structure or organisation? What can we learn from history? Who should be involved in missions, who should send them, how should they go, and what should they do?