

Witnesses To All The World



Mission themes from Genesis to Revelation

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Introduction

God's heart for the nations is a theme that runs from Genesis to Revelation. From the very beginning, God has always commissioned his people to be a blessing to the nations. Something so important to the One we call Lord must also be very important to us. This book is your invitation to see the world and your place in it from God's point of view.

God is working powerfully in our world today to draw people to himself. He is using the events of history for his own purposes and he is bringing his people together for a tremendous work of grace in the nations.

How can you be more fully involved in the awesome, joyful task of reaching the world? We pray that God will use this studyguide to touch your life for the sake of his kingdom. The changes that can result from this study will enrich the rest of your life and through you will impact others for eternity. As you make God's agenda your agenda, he will bring purpose and fulfillment to your life along with overflowing joy.

The world is singing a sad song. Let's teach the world to sing a New Song! Let's invite people to be part of the eternal choir that will sing praises to our Lord forever.

“Let every kindred, every tribe on this terrestrial ball
To him all majesty ascribe, and crown him Lord of all!”

Study 1

Let's Start at the Very Beginning

Genesis 11:1-9; 12:1-9; Galatians 3:28-29

Airports, restaurants, malls--wherever you go, you hear people speaking many languages. In our world of cultural diversity, it's hard to imagine that at one time "the whole world had one language and a common speech" (Genesis 11:1).

When we lived in Nigeria, we studied Hausa, one of over 300 languages in that country alone. As we struggled to learn a language so different from our own, we often wished that the Tower of Babel incident had never taken place. It took so much work to learn how to communicate in another language! But as we began to understand Hausa, it became a delight to us. To this day, sometimes only a Hausa word captures what we want to say. It's hard to imagine a mono-cultural, mono-lingual world. "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise!"

1. What experiences have you had with learning a foreign language? What was most frustrating to you about the process?

Leader's Note: The first question of each study will help your group approach the theme of the passage before actually reading the Scripture. Often it will also help you to know each other in new ways.

Read Genesis 11:1-9.

2. Why were the people building the tower (Verse 4)?
3. Why might limitless human potential be a problem (verse 5)?

Leader's Note: Group members may note that we usually think of human potential in a positive sense--especially when people are working together. But the human heart is desperately evil and power often leads to further corruption. Apart from God's interventions, our tendency as a human race is to forget God and to go our own way.

4. What would confusing the languages do to the peoples' feelings of pride and self-confidence?

LEADER'S NOTES: You may want to refer to experiences group members described in question 1. People who are learning a foreign language often describe the experience as humbling, like

being babies who are just learning to talk. There is no room for pride when you can't speak and can't understand!

5. In what ways was this confusion more an act of mercy than of judgment?

LEADER'S NOTES: Left on their own, the people's pride would have led to self-destruction. God could have punished them with a plague or some other catastrophe. Instead, he scattered them.

Scripture has two basic themes. One is that God wants to bless us with his salvation. The second is that God wants us to be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. Both themes are strong in God's covenant to Abram (later renamed Abraham by God, Genesis 17:5).

Read Genesis 12:1-9.

6. When did you first leave home? What was that like for you?

7. What do you plan to be doing at age 75? How would you feel about uprooting your home and leaving your country for good at that age?

8. The moral deterioration of the human race was the setting of God's call to Abram. What command did God give to Abram? What promises?

LEADER'S NOTES: Note that Abram did not begin life as a Hebrew. He was called out from an idol-worshipping people group (Joshua 24:2) to begin a whole new nation. By faith, Abram was asked to exchange the known for the unknown and to find his reward in what he could not live to see. He obeyed, walking away from his home for God's promise of even greater things in the future.

9. Note that God promised Abram a great name, though he condemned the name-building plans of the people at Babel (Genesis 11:4). What was the difference?

10. What was the purpose of God's blessing to Abram? What was the scope of God's promised blessing?

Read Galatians 3:28-29.

11. How does this passage explain the way God's promise to Abraham will be fulfilled?

LEADER'S NOTES: Abraham's blessing to the nations would come through Christ, the offspring of Abraham. Paul says, "If you are Christ's then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." So the promise to Abraham comes true as the message of the gospel is taken to all the nations and through faith in Christ people become "heirs of the promise."

12. If God were calling you to a place of greater service and usefulness, could you give up your present comforts and security to follow his leading? If not, pray that God will give you new openness and willingness to be available to him. Pray for the kind of courage Abram had to be able to obey God wholeheartedly so that the nations can be blessed through you.

Seeing the World through God's Eyes

Do you think that cultural diversity was part of God's original, perfect plan or that it came about as a result of the Fall? Genesis 11 certainly describes the separation of languages as God's response to the evil pride of the people. But that does not mean this was a curse that would need to be reversed in the age to come. Perhaps God originally intended for diversity in cultures and languages to come about naturally over time as people spread out and populated the planet. Because of the people's pride, God brought about diversity instantly. After the Tower of Babel, there were approximately 70 people groups.

Today there are more than 10,000 people groups and about 6,500 languages are spoken. The Scriptures are available in 2,000 languages. Pray for Bible translators in their key role. Perhaps you or your group could help to fund a Scripture translation or a Jesus film translation for an unreached people group.

For Further Study: Acts 17:26-28; Revelation 7:9-10

Study 2

The Nations Are Watching

Exodus 19:1-6; Deuteronomy 4:1-9; 1 Peter 2:9

Do you ever wonder why God needed to form a special, chosen nation like Israel? Why should one race be singled out for God's special affection?

The first eleven chapters of Genesis show that the human race as a whole had demonstrated its determination not to serve the Almighty God. They had proved a grief and disappointment to the Creator. When God called Abraham, it was as if he were saying, "If the human race as a whole will not serve me, I will call out a special nation to be my people. Then I will reveal myself to the rest of the world through them."

The choice of one race among many was not an exclusive, anti-missionary act on God's part. It was an integral part of his plan for all the nations. God chose Israel to be distinct from the other nations so that his ways would not perish on the earth but instead be preserved for all of humankind.

Though Israel failed in many ways, God's purposes continued to unfold. Through Israel we received the Scriptures and the Messiah. The church was founded by the Jews and the first Gentile converts were brought to Christ through the ministry of Jews.

Today's study describes the role that God intended for Israel in the world. But it isn't just ancient history. Today the same role is our responsibility.

1. If you could design "an ideal nation," what would it look like?

Read Exodus 19:3-6.

Over 600 years have passed since God called Abraham. The nation God formed has grown to over two million people and has just been rescued from Egypt

2. God says that he carried the Israelites "on eagle's wings" out of Egypt. What does this metaphor show about God? About Israel?

LEADER'S NOTES: Encourage group members to think about the various characteristics they know about eagles. The image is a beautiful picture of God's tender, protective care and of the utter dependency of his people.

3. What was God asking Israel to do (verse 5)? What promise was he giving to Israel?
4. For whom would Israel be “a kingdom of priests”?

LEADER’S NOTES: Israel’s mission was to be God’s representative to the other nations. She was to be a servant nation rather than a ruling nation. God wanted Israel to be a display-people, a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with God changes a people.

Read Deuteronomy 4:1-9.

5. What was at stake for the people of Israel in following God’s decrees and laws (verse 1)?
6. In what ways might the people have been tempted to add to or subtract from God’s laws?

LEADER’S NOTES: Adding to God’s laws is one of the errors of legalism--making God’s laws more detailed and more burdensome than he intended. On the other hand, Israel was often tempted to dilute God’s laws to make them more convenient or less demanding. Encourage group members to give examples of how these same temptations plague us today.

7. How do verses 3 and 4 illustrate the seriousness of God’s command in verse 1?

LEADER’S NOTES: The sin of the people at Baal of Peor is described in Numbers 25:1-9. The men of Israel began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women and this led to worship of the Moabite gods. The Moabites led the Israelites into abominable practices such as sacrificing infants to Baal. God’s anger burned and 24,000 died in a plague.

8. What was at stake for the other nations if Israel followed the Lord or not (verse 6)?
9. What would the nations learn about God and about the implications for a nation governed by God (verses 6-8)?

LEADER’S NOTES: “Other nations would recognize a ‘specialness’ about Israel--a specialness stemming not from natural endowment or racial genius, but from the grace of God who has gifted them with comprehensive guidelines for their whole lives” (Ian Cairnes, Deuteronomy: Word and Presence. International Theological Commentary. Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992, p. 56.)

10. If a non-believer were describing your personal life (or your local church), how would it resemble what the nations observed about Israel?
11. Give examples of the human tendency to forget God (verse 9). How can we guard against this?

Read 1 Peter 2:9.

12. Through Christ, we too are God's chosen people. Why has he made us "a royal priesthood and a holy nation"?

13. The nations are still watching! In what ways could your life be used as a redemptive blessing to the peoples of the earth?

Seeing the World through God's Eyes

As you pray for the nations, you are carrying out one of your priestly roles. How can you intercede more effectively for lost people? One valuable tool for intercessory prayer is the book *Operation World* by Patrick Johnstone (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993)

This book gives information about every country of the world and includes prayer needs that are pertinent to each nation. You will find more valuable prayer helps in the book *Catch the Vision 2000* by Bill and Amy Stearns (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1991).

Faithful intercessory prayer for the nations is hard work. But we know that God's eternal purpose is to bring people from every people group into his kingdom. Prayer is our joyful privilege as God's royal priesthood.

David Bryant points out that prayer is a strategic way for all Christians to be involved in world evangelization. "What if you could travel anywhere in the world, to anyone in deep need, and stretch forth a loving hand to help them? Did you ever stop to think that prayer allows you to have such a limitless mission? As far as God can go--geographically, culturally, spiritually--prayer can go. Distance, social status or language create no barriers for our God and for what He ultimately does with our faithfulness in praying" ("Obey the Vision through Prayer" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. Ralph Winter, ed. Pasadena, Cal.: William Carey Library, 1992, p. 820).

For further study: Deuteronomy 7:7-26; 8:1-19

Study 3

Everyone's Invited to this Party!

1 Chronicles 16: 1-36

National holidays are times when people show pride for their nation. October 1 is Independence Day in Nigeria. Anzac Day makes April 25 special in Australia and New Zealand. July 1 is Canada Day. When we were in Australia during the USA's Fourth of July Independence Day, our Australian friends surprised us by displaying an American flag, singing one of our patriotic songs, and decorating a dessert trifle with red, white and blue icing. We were quite honored to have Australians help us celebrate our national holiday. That is most unusual in today's world!

The people of Israel clearly understood their role among the nations. Moses and Joshua continually challenged them to serve God wholeheartedly so that other nations would be drawn to their Creator. But we all know the story of Israel's dismal failure to be a unique God-serving nation. For nearly 400 years after Joshua's death, God's people went through cycles of rebellion and repentance.

King David was far from perfect, yet he was "a man after God's own heart." His psalms are full of references to "the peoples," "the nations," and "the ends of the earth." He understood God's heart for the world. God blessed the people of Israel when they were a witness to the nations, and punished them when they failed to be a light to the Gentiles.

King David's first big national celebration took place when the ark of the covenant was returned to Jerusalem. The ark was a special gold-covered box that reminded Israel of the powerful presence and eternal promises of the Lord God Almighty. David was anointed as king of all Israel, he had defeated the Philistines in battle, and now it was time to bring the ark to Jerusalem. You will see that as the people celebrated, David longed for all the nations to join the party.

1. What are the most important national holidays in your country? What are some of your childhood memories of celebrating these special times?

Read 1 Chronicles 16: 1-36.

2. From verses 1-7, list all that the people do to make the celebration so special. (Look back at 1 Chronicles 15: 23-28 to find more things the people did to celebrate.)

3. Note all the actions David urges the people to do in order to celebrate God's greatness (verses 8-13).

4. Why should David be interested in other nations during this Israeli holiday (verse 8)?

5. National holidays are often occasions when important people give speeches about the history of the day. Verses 14-22 summarize key points in the history of Israel. What is the over-riding theme in these verses?

LEADER'S NOTES: Group members will notice the theme of the covenant or the promises of God. The ark was to remind the people of God's eternal covenant.

6. In today's world nations break treaties, corporations break contracts and individuals break promises. What is so comforting about verses 14-22?

7. What does David command in verses 23-25?

8. Missionaries are sometimes criticized for being intolerant of the religion of other people.. How would David answer such critics (verses 26-27)? What are the benefits of worshiping the true God, according to these verses?

9. Today some churches are known primarily for their worship, and other churches are known primarily for their commitment to missions. What would David say to a church deeply committed to worship but not enthusiastic about cross-cultural missions? What would he say to a church with a strong interest in missions, but a shallow perfunctory interest in worship?

10. In verses 28-30 David challenges the people to give praise or "ascribe praise to the Lord". Who is encouraged to worship the Lord, and how are they to praise him?

11. Verses 30-33 describe an exuberant worldwide party. What causes the celebration?

12. Most people would not think of having a party to celebrate the coming of a judge. But God's people look forward to the coming of the judge with joy because all evil and wrong will be ended. Reflect on what the world will be like after the judge comes to do away with all sin, pain, and sorrow.

13. How does this passage challenge you to have a deeper passion for missions and for worship? How does it encourage you to be more joyful in celebrating the presence and power of the Lord in your life?

Seeing the World through God's Eyes

Reflect on these thoughts from John Piper's book *Let the Nations Be Glad*:

"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't . . . When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of . God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.

Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal in missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of

God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God.”
(Baker Books, 1993, p. 11).

What is your reaction to this definition of missions? What stereotypes does it challenge? What implications would it have for the behavior and activities of missionaries?

For Further Study: Psalm 96; Psalm 97

Study 4

Blessings Aren't for Hoarding!

Psalm 67

Walk into any Christian bookstore and you'll find that most of the titles on display are self-help books. All of us have great concerns about our careers, our marriages, our children, and our health. We long for self-fulfillment and for success. We pour our energy into self-improvement and look for ways to be more comfortable.

Many of these concerns are legitimate, but focusing exclusively on our own problems often kills missionary vision. How can we have a passion for people of other cultures when we are consumed with worries about our own well-being? We are so infatuated with ourselves and our own needs that we are blind to God's heart for the world.

Psalm 67 is a song for people who long for God's blessing. And beyond that longing you'll find there is a purpose for blessing that will give your life eternal significance.

1. What are some of the longings, worries, or distractions that tend to deaden a vision for cross-cultural missions in your life or in the life of your church?

Read Psalm 67.

2. This song begins with a plea for God's blessing. It is based on the famous blessing in Numbers 6:24-26 that God gave to Aaron for the people of Israel. In what ways are you hungry for God's blessing?

LEADER'S NOTES: Encourage group members to be honest in expressing the blessings they long for (perhaps by thinking back on what their recent prayer requests have been.) It isn't wrong to long for God's blessing. This question can help us to identify the blessings we long for and then perhaps God can enlarge our vision and show us a purpose for his blessings to us.

3. What might your life look like if God's face were shining on you?

4. According to verse 2, why does God want to bless his people? How is this purpose different from the expectations many people have?

LEADER'S NOTES: God's blessings in our lives are double-pronged. He gives good gifts to his children and wants them to enjoy these blessings fully. But there is a purpose beyond personal comfort--sharing those blessings with the nations.

5. Some people see evangelism or church planting as the ultimate goal of missions. Others focus on alleviating human suffering. According to verse 3, what is the ultimate goal of missions?
6. In light of verse 4, think through the international news of this last week. Which nations of the world do you know of that are glad and joyful?
7. What difference would it make in your own country if the judges and political rulers made wise and just decisions one hundred percent of the time?
8. Why is the Gospel such good news for the nations?
9. Sometimes missionaries are accused of pushing their own religion down other peoples' throats. What is the emphasis and motivation of verse 5?
10. What is needed before the land will yield its harvest (verse 6) and before God can bless us?

LEADER'S NOTES: Harvest might refer to a physical harvest of material blessing or a harvest of people coming to Christ. But the harvest might also refer to the return of Christ when the effects of the Fall are overcome. People will no longer struggle by the sweat of their brow and the harvest will not be choked by thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:17-19).

11. Some might say that the task of world missions is impossible to accomplish. But this psalm tells us how the story of world missions will end. What two promises are given in verse 7?

LEADER'S NOTES: What does it mean that all the ends of the earth will fear him? The New Testament tells us that every knee will bow before the Lord Jesus (Philippians 2:10). Those who have not been born again have much to fear because of coming judgment. Those who have been adopted into God's family through Jesus Christ do not fear rejection, but have a reverent awe of God's greatness and a fear of breaking fellowship with him.

12. Make a list of all the ways that God has blessed you through relationships, life events, spiritual gifts, heritage, skills, education, and resources. How can these blessings be channeled to be a blessing to the nations?

Seeing the World through God's Eyes

Many missionaries have been willing to leave their homelands and not come back. Some 19th century missionaries packed their belongings in coffin-shaped boxes that could be used for their burial. Of 35 who went to Ghana between 1835 and 1870, only two lived more than two years. No wonder West Africa was called the "White Man's Grave." Adoniram Judson buried two wives and five children in Burma. People continue to give their lives for the sake of the Gospel today. We only hear a few of the many martyrdom stories among itinerant evangelists in China or church planters in northern India. Chet Bitterman was executed by a Colombian gorilla group in 1981; Steve Welsh and Tim Van Dyke were also killed in Colombia in 1995. Believers in the Middle

East and other Islamic nations live under continual death threats, and many have paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Others Christians, though, are worried about “burning out.” They want to pace themselves so that they won’t be “used.” While God is probably not calling us all to be martyrs for his sake, we need to be willing to suffer for his sake.

At the very least, we need to ask ourselves how we can be a bigger part of God’s purposes for the world. What drives your agenda? What captures your most creative thinking? How are you spending your energy? Are you willing to share your blessings with the nations?

For Further Study: Psalm 22, 47, 96, 98, 117, 145, and 150

Study 5

This Little Light of Mine

Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-7 Selected passages

When Scottish missionaries Tom and Grace Archibald first went to Kagoro, Nigeria in 1927, the people of the area were headhunters ruled by fear. The gospel revolutionized this tribe in one short generation. In the 1960s, the chief of Kagoro described it this way: “Forty years ago we lived in complete darkness. Eight out of 10 babies died. No one could read. Our one thought was warfare. Now look at us. Our people are clothed and gentle. They are leaders in other communities. Fewer than two out of 10 babies die. You will even find pagans copying the way of living of the Christians, because the light of Jesus is strong.” In May of each year the people now observe “Kagoro Enlightenment Day.” An official proclamation says, “This Day reflects the day when light was brought into Kagoro by the first missionary, Mr. Archibald, in May 1927.” (Run While the Sun is Hot, by Harold Fuller, p. 65.)

Charles Spurgeon said, “We live in such a dark world that we must not waste the tiniest piece of candle.” What do others see when they look at the way we live? The agnostic Nietzsche said about Christians, “I would believe in their God if they looked more like a redeemed people.”

1. Tell about a Christian you know whose life is like a light in the darkness.

Read Isaiah 42:1-7.

2. This passage is the first of four “Servant Songs” in the book of Isaiah. What do you learn about the Servant’s relationship to God (verse 1)?

LEADER’S NOTES: Who was the servant? “These verses are about the Servant-Messiah, not the servant Cyrus (as in chapter 41). Israel and the Messiah are both often called servant. Israel, as God’s servant, was to help bring the world to a knowledge of God. The Messiah, Jesus would fulfill this task and show God himself to the world.” Life Application Bible, p. 1028.

3. This Servant Song is quoted in the New Testament several times in reference to Jesus (See Matthew 12:18-21). What do you learn about the Servant’s character in this passage?

4. What is the scope of the Servant’s mission (verses 1 and 6)?

Read Isaiah 49:1-7.

5. This Servant Song speaks both of the nation Israel (verse 3) and of the Servant Messiah who would bring Israel (Jacob) back to God (verse 5). What was God's purpose for the nation Israel (verse 3)?
6. The people of Israel failed to fulfill God's purpose and the nation also rejected the Servant Messiah (verses 4 and 7). What expanded mission did God give to the Servant (verse 6)?
7. What assurance is given about the nations' ultimate response to the Servant (verse 7)?

Read these additional passages that also affirm what God will do among the nations.

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Habakkuk 2:14)

“ ‘My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations,’ says the Lord Almighty.” (Malachi 1:11)

8. How might these verses encourage you as you read the daily news headlines?

Read Acts 13:44-48.

9. Though Israel failed to display God's splendor to the world, how did God's purposes continue to unfold?

Read the following verses.

“Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life. . .” (Philippians 2:14-16)

10. What characteristics make God's people shine like stars in a dark world?
11. What further responsibility do we have beyond living blameless lives?

LEADER'S NOTES: It isn't enough for Christians just to be a presence in society. Along with holy living, we need to articulate the Gospel message or “hold out the word of life.” People can be attracted to the light of the Gospel through our lives, but then they need to know just what the Good News is.

12. What are some effective ways you have found to “hold out the word of life”?

Seeing the World through God's Eyes

“If you want to see what God is doing, read the newspaper. His hand is there. Although He may wear gloves and not leave fingerprints, He is still in control of the major events in this world” (Bob Sjogren, *Unveiled at Last*, p. 121).

When you look for God’s hand in the glove of current affairs, you read the news with a different perspective. You praise God that Albania, once considered the hardest nation of the world to get into, is now wide open to the Gospel. After seventeen years of Marxist rule in Ethiopia, you see new freedom for witness and you pray that God’s people will meet the challenge during this window of opportunity. As you read about developments in China, you “stand on tiptoes” to see how the cause of Christ will be affected in that huge land.

God’s people should pray with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other hand. Ask these questions about international news stories: What does this mean in the cosmic battle for the glory of God? For new opportunities God is bringing about? For the health and welfare of Christians? For the oppression or growth of the national church? For the spread of the Gospel? For hazards or opportunities for missionaries?

Make a special effort this week to see the world through God’s eyes. Choose one “hot spot” for which to offer a “kingdom prayer” each day this week.

For further study: Isaiah 12; Isaiah 52:7-10; Isaiah 60; Isaiah 62:1-3

Study 6

If You Have Great News, Tell the World!

Matthew 28:5-10; 16-20

You might be asking, “hasn’t the task of world missions been pretty much accomplished?” It’s true that this has been a century of tremendous advances and there are more Christians in the world today than ever before. One hundred years ago, Korea was unreached and considered impenetrable. Today the country is 30 per cent Christian and there are thousands of churches in Seoul alone. Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim country, is around 20 per cent Christian. There will be more Christians in Africa in the year 2000 than there are in the West. At the beginning of this century, South America was called “The Neglected Continent.” Now it is experiencing “The Second Reformation” as Protestant churches grow at an astounding rate.

The sacrificial efforts of thousands of dedicated missionaries and those who have sent them have paid rich dividends. But because of rapid population growth, there are also more non-Christians in the world than ever before. The task of missions is actually greater today than it was 100 years ago! This is not a time to sit back and relax. It’s a time for action and commitment.

1. What kinds of “good news” do people typically spread quickly? Why is it that we are often hesitant to spread the Good News of salvation?

LEADER’S NOTES: We have a friend who is zealous about a particular brand of vitamins. She even approaches strangers on the street to tell them they look a bit pale and need vitamins! Encourage group members to think of examples of people who are eager to “convert” others to a particular product or idea. The point is that we are quick to tell people about all kinds of “good news.” But we are often hesitant to tell them of the most wonderful cure in the world--salvation.

Read Matthew 28:5-10.

2. The angel said, “Do not be afraid.” What fears might the women have had?

3. In what ways did the angel reassure the women (verses 6-7)?

LEADER’S NOTES: Encourage group members to look at all the angel did and said. The angel comforted the women with news of Jesus’ resurrection and invited them to look at the empty tomb for themselves. Then he gave them a task--”Go and tell.” Finally, he assured them that they would see Jesus in Galilee.

4. What was the women’s response to the angels’ words (verse 8)? To Jesus himself (verse 9)?

5. Find all the references to “going” and “telling” in verses 5-10. Do you think this is the natural response to hearing good news? Why or why not?

Read Matthew 28:16-20.

6. How did the disciples respond to the women’s news and to Jesus himself (verses 16-17)?

7. How would you characterize your own response to spiritual truth? Are you quick to obey and worship the Lord or do you struggle to believe?

8. How does Jesus’ authority (verse 18) validate his command (verses 19-20)?

LEADER’S NOTES: Because Jesus conquered death, he has all authority in heaven and on earth. He could have used his authority to become Israel’s national messiah. He refused that role because he had a much larger mission--a world mission.

9. Note the words all, everything, and always (verses 18-20). Discuss the implications of each use of these strong words.

10. Look carefully at all the instructions Jesus gave in these verses. In what ways does Jesus’ commission go beyond the initial task of evangelism?

LEADER’S NOTES: David Howard explains that this text could be translated “as you go . . . make disciples. It isn’t a question of whether or not we are to go. This is assumed. But, as we go, we are to make disciples” (*The Great Commission for Today*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1976, p. 66).

11. If the emphasis of this command is making disciples, what are the implications of this for missionary activity?

12. Though these were Jesus’ last words to the disciples, this was not a brand new command. How do our studies up to this point show that the Great Commission is a theme throughout the Bible?

13. How can Jesus’ commission become more of a central theme in your life?

Seeing the World through God’s Eyes

Study this “Big Arrow of Life.” Every person is somewhere along this arrow in his or her life journey. The missionary task is to help people in every place to move closer to the goal of being like Christ.

Think about the missionaries you know who are working cross-culturally. What is the primary focus of their outreach? Whether it is pre-evangelism, evangelism, or leadership development, pray earnestly that God will empower their efforts. Pray that as people come to Christ they will become mature disciples equipped to bring others to Christ. Thank God for more than 145,000 missionaries from non-western countries who have become strong disciples and are now crossing cultures themselves with the Good News.

For Further Study: Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:36-53; John 20:19-23

Study 7

Don't Just Stand There – Go!

Acts 1: 1- 11

If you knew you had only five minutes to live and all the world was listening to hear your last words, what would you say?

Jesus knew he was leaving his disciples, at least in his physical body. With his last earthly words, he wanted to remind his disciples that their work was just beginning. Wherever they went, they were to tell people the good news about Jesus.

Some people seem to think this was an afterthought Jesus thought of on his way up through the clouds. “Oh yes, I almost forgot. . . . there’s one more thing folks -- You need to be my witnesses in Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth.”

As we’ve seen, missions is the central message of the whole Bible. The Great Commission is really the Great Re-commission.

Leslie Pelt, a friend of ours ministering in Nigeria asks, “Why is it that Christians try so hard to obey everything else Jesus taught, but when it comes to the Great Commission, they often ignore it?”

It seems that many Christians see world-wide witness as an afterthought, something to do when everything else is in place

1. Is it really all that bad for churches or individuals to be inward-looking? What is the problem with that?

Read Acts 1: 1-11

2. Some people may think that the record of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection is merely a fairy tale. Look at Luke 1:1-4 together with Acts 1:1-5. What do you learn about Luke’s research methodology that would convince Theophilus of the accuracy of the report?

Leader’s Notes: Acts 1: 1-11 is an important transition passage between the Gospels and the history of the early church. Acts is the continued story of the apostles and disciples into the next generation. Both The Gospel of Luke and Acts were written by Luke.

3. What convincing proofs did Jesus give to help his disciples know that he was really alive?

4. Look at verses 4 and 5. Why did Jesus tell his disciples to wait in Jerusalem? Why do you think he had to command them to wait?

5. The disciples asked Jesus about a time-table for political liberation from Roman oppression. What did Jesus say about the timing for the Kingdom (verses 6-8)?

Leader's Note: The disciples still had the temptation to be inward-looking rather than looking beyond the needs of Israel. They still had much to learn about Jesus' world mission.

6. While it is good for Christians to be involved in politics, what did Jesus tell his disciples was even more important?

7. What two events are described in verse 8?

8. Why is it so important to link the power of the Spirit with the task of witness? What might happen if a church only emphasized the power of the Holy Spirit without a concern for the task? What might be the problem if a church tried to emphasize the task without the Spirit? Can you give examples?

9. Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth describe an ever-widening circle of outreach. Each ripple takes one further from his or her comfort zone. Christians around the world have very different circles of outreach.

What is your Jerusalem (family, neighbors, school, friends, or work colleagues)?

What is your Judea (people in your town or city who have a life-style similar to yours)?

What is your Samaria (people in near cultures with some similarities and significant differences)?

What are your ends of the earth (people far from you culturally, whether near or far geographically)?

10. Describe the events in verses 9-11. How would you have felt if you were watching with the disciples? Why do you think Jesus went to heaven in such a dramatic way?

11. From these verses, what can you learn about the second coming of Jesus?

12. From what you have learned in this passage, describe the vision and activities of a healthy church.

Seeing the World Through God's Eyes

The early Christians were not merely spectators--they were in on the action. It's sometimes tempting for us to be admirers of Jesus, perhaps even enthusiastic spectators. But Christ calls us to committed action. Obviously, not everyone can cross geographic boundaries to be part of the action, but all believers can have a part in making God's name known and honored in all parts of the earth.. To what aspect of world missions is God calling you? Keep your heart open to whatever God is asking you to do in your Jerusalem, in your Judea, in your Samaria, and in your ends of the earth.

One way you can strengthen outreach to all of these spheres is to help your local church develop a passion for missions. Churches have a tendency to be inward looking and to focus on their own needs. A church can't be balanced and healthy without a vision for reaching the world for Christ.

You will find excellent suggestions for enriching your church's missions involvement in the book *Catch the Vision 2000* on pages 187-190. The Association of Church Missions Committees has special handbooks and ongoing help for mobilizing missions in your church (Box APMC, Wheaton, IL 60189). Various mission agencies also have resources to help your church.

Reaching every people has always been God's plan and deepest desire. Most often, he does this through the church. Ask God to rekindle a vision for missions in your church and make a commitment to be part of the action.

For Further Study: Acts 3:25; 10:9-48; 13:1-3 and 44-48.

Study 8

You've Been Appointed Ambassador to the World!

2 Corinthians 5:11--6:10

An appointment as ambassador to another country is a distinguished honor. It also carries enormous responsibility.

Today's passage declares that we are ambassadors for Christ. What are the implications of this assignment? Paul's picture is not one of glamour, but of hardship, trouble, and sleepless nights. But the rewards are there too--"having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (6:10).

What could motivate someone for this task? You'll discover the answer in today's study.

1. Who was Christ's ambassador to you? How did you hear that God wanted to be your friend through Christ?

LEADER'S NOTES: Take some time to hear from each group member about his or her introduction to the gospel. This can be a powerful lead-in to today's passage as well as a time to know one another in new ways.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-15.

2. What were Paul's motives for ministry? How do these motives fit together?

LEADER'S NOTES: Notice that Paul is motivated both by fear of the Lord (verse 11) and by Christ's love (verse 14). Both are legitimate and necessary reasons for being involved in the ministry of reconciliation.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16--6:2.

3. What might it mean to regard someone from a worldly point of view?

4. What does "reconciliation" mean? (Look up the word in a dictionary.)

5. Describe a time when you were alienated from someone and then reconciled.

6. How does this passage describe the reconciliation God has provided for us?

LEADER'S NOTES: Verse 21 is one of the most powerful statements of God's gift of reconciliation--our sin was exchanged for Christ's righteousness. This allows us to become new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17).

7. What is our responsibility as Christ's ambassadors?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-10.

8. How does Paul model the responsibility of an ambassador in his ministry to the Corinthians?

9. What resources for ministry do you see in this passage?

LEADER'S NOTES: Help group members to see resources such as endurance, hard work, purity, understanding, patience, kindness, love, the Holy Spirit, truthfulness, the power of God, and "weapons of righteousness." Paul summarizes his resources with his familiar theme of strength through weakness--"having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

10. What kind of "results" does Paul have to report in this passage?

11. How do Paul's results compare or contrast to the "marks of success" we look for in ministry today?

12. How does Paul's example challenge or encourage you in terms of your own ministry?

13. To whom is God calling you to be an ambassador on his behalf?

Seeing the World through God's Eyes

By now you have a strong picture of God's heart for the world. Reaching the nations with the message of reconciliation is God's top priority. How will you align your life so that your agenda matches God's agenda?

You are called to be an ambassador. You may be able to cross geographical boundaries for the sake of Christ. Nothing could be a higher privilege. Or you can build relationships with students, refugees, or immigrants from unreached people groups working or living in your community. What an exciting opportunity! Imagine being an ambassador to Ghana, to India, to France, or to Uruguay by sharing the message of reconciliation with people from those countries who are living and working near you. They, in turn, may be future key leaders in their countries where they can take the light of the Gospel.

Explore ways to be a mission mobilizer in your area. Make a commitment to tithe both your finances and your time for the cause of world missions. Pray that God will raise up a host of people to be his ambassadors.

For Further Study: Romans 1:1-17; Romans 5:9-11

STUDY 9

Revelation 5:1-14; 7:9-17

The Hallelujah Chorus in 6,500 Languages

Do you think that cultural diversity is a temporary phenomenon? Or will it endure throughout eternity? We don't know for sure, but in the book of Revelation, the apostle John repeatedly tells of people from every nation, tribe, people and language giving praise to the Lamb.

We've been blessed to worship in many nations with people from numerous tribes and languages. We always find that the various expressions of praise reflecting different cultural backgrounds enrich our worship immeasurably. So it seems that cultural diversity could be a way of magnifying the glory and praise given to our Lord throughout eternal ages.

We like to think that the Spanish Carol grew up with in Ecuador and the Hausa language we learned in Nigeria will be a part of the great eternal choir (complete with drums and shakers!). It's exciting to think that language will no longer be a barrier in heaven, but neither do we think it will be obliterated. Imagine singing alongside redeemed ones praising God in Amharic, Gourma, Maninka, Urdu, Bengali, Quechua, Aymara, Russian, Swedish, Arabic, Mandarin.--and thousands of other languages!

We're not sure how all the languages will blend together in the eternal song, but we know it will be a magnificent choir. Maybe we'll all understand each other much as the culturally diverse crowd understood the disciples on the day of Pentecost. Though they were speaking different languages, "each one heard them speaking in his own language" (Acts 2:6). Hallelujah!

As we come to this last study, we'll get a glimpse into the last chapter of God's redemption plan, still coming in the future. It's a vision that brings meaning and purpose to all of life. As you read today's headlines, you can put them in the context of "the last chapter" and rejoice in the victory that is already assured! Do you think the orchestra is beginning to tune up?

1. What is the best musical group you've ever heard or participated in?
2. Read Revelation 5:1-14.

The scroll described in this passage is a book that reveals the future destiny of the world. Why is Christ the only one worthy to open this scroll with the seven seals (verse 9)?

3. One of the elders calls John to look at the Lion, but when John looks, he sees a Lamb! What is the significance of Jesus being both a Lion and a Lamb (verses 5-6)?
4. Describe the response when the Lamb takes the scroll.

5. Look closely at the three songs. Who makes up each group of singers? How is the Lamb described?

Note: Notice that the praising choir becomes increasingly larger and more inclusive. It begins with the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders falling before the Lamb. Then they are joined by an infinitely large number of angels. Finally, all of creation joins in the song, including every creature in heaven, on earth, and in the sea.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 of Revelation describe the opening of the seven seals on the scroll, each unfolding future events of judgment. Just before the seventh seal is broken, a vast multitude breaks out into praise again before the Lamb.

Read Revelation 7:9-17.

6. Describe the scene in these verses. Who makes up the vast crowd? What are they doing and what are they wearing?

7. What qualifies this multitude to stand in white robes before the Lamb? (verse 14)?

Note: The Great Tribulation is the period of intense hostility before Christ returns for his church. Some believe it can also refer to the suffering of believers throughout the ages. In either case, it is the believers who remain faithful to God who will be with him eternally, safe forever under his protection.

8. What is the new role of these redeemed ones? What will their God do for them?

9. Think about the world's many musical styles and the cultures they represent, from the rich choral sounds of Europe to the up-beat reggae of the Caribbean. Do you think the mighty choir that sings a new song to the Lamb will incorporate diverse musical styles and languages? Why or why not?

10. How do these scenes from Revelation encourage you in what seems like a chaotic world? How do they motivate you in the task of world missions?

11. What action will you take to get the good news to every nation and people group?

For Further Reflection

Read the whole book of Revelation, noting the way that the two themes of worship and mission are continually intertwined. Make a note of this in the margin of your Bible each time these themes appear.

Let the vision of multitudes from every language and people worshipping the Lamb motivate you to actively share the good news wherever you are!

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