

II. Biblical Concept for Sharing your faith in Christ with the nations



The term Nations in the Bible refer to the non-Jewish nations and the Gentile or all the non-Jewish people of the earth. It is the people of a territory united under a single government into a country or a people of a tribe. The Bible as salvation history declares again and again that God chose Israel to be a people for His own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. In Deuteronomy 7:6, Israel was to be a holy nation set apart and consecrated as priests to all other people and nations.

*(You will notice the words **Nations** and **Strangers** substituted for the word translated **Nations**, or **People** or **Strangers** in *The Harvest on your Doorstep*.)*

The last book of the Bible foretells the end time in which a great multitude from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues will stand before the throne of God (Rev. 7:9) purchased by the blood of the Lamb (Rev.5:9). This interest in the surrounding nations is one indication of the importance of history in the Bible as a vehicle of revelation. God has chosen to reveal Himself, His purpose and His ways, involving His people with Him as He invites all the world's people to know and worship Him.

1- In the Old Testament:

Through Abraham, God revealed Himself as the LORD, the Almighty and the Provider, who wants to bless all the peoples of the world through His people. God chose Abraham (Isa. 51:2) and made a covenant with him for the benefit of the nations. The Israelites found themselves unable to keep a balance between these two theological poles. The tension pulled them into a

religious nationalism and Jewish exclusivism. God had spoken to Abraham *In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed* (Gen. 12:3). This promise, almost with the added force of a command, was repeated over and over again to the patriarchs (Gen. 18:18). *All nations will be blessed through Abraham...* (22:18, 26:4; 28:14).

Genesis 12:1-3 states that through the spiritual seed of Abraham, the nations will be blessed as we follow God's promise and plan. Why did God tell Abraham to leave his country and go to Canaan? When God told Abraham to leave his country, Abraham became an international just like anyone else who leaves his country and comes to study in the United States

Through Moses, God revealed Himself as the *I AM THAT I AM*, whose plan is to show His glory to the world through His people, who are to be a kingdom of priests to all peoples. Israel was a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:5,6) *Among all peoples*. God consecrated Israel for service to bear witness among the nations and to bring their neighbors to worship Him.

This is stated in Deuteronomy 10:17-19, *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.*

Through David, God also revealed that His Seed would rule all nations and His Kingdom would be for all peoples. Psalm 96 declares that God will not be fully glorified unless all nations are included in worshipping Him.

Through the Prophets God reminded the nation of Israel of His purpose. In Exodus 19:5-6, the Israelites are also the object of God's redeeming purpose. However, like the prophet Jonah (Jonah 4:6-11) the people of Israel, as a whole, were deaf to their covenant responsibility of witnessing to the nations (Is. 42:19). Jonah became angry at the Lord.

The Lord made a vine grow up to shade Jonah's head and protect him from the sun. Jonah was very happy to have the vine, but early the next morning the Lord sent a worm to chew on the vine, and the vine dried up. During the day the Lord sent a scorching wind and the sun beat down on Jonah's head, making him feel faint. Jonah was ready to die and shouted, >I wish I were dead! = But the Lord asked, >Jonah do you have the right to be angry about the vine? = >Yes I do, = he answered, >and I am angry enough to die=. But the Lord said: >You are concerned about a vine that you did not plant or take care of, a vine that grew up in one night and died the next. In that city of Nineveh there are more than a hundred twenty thousand people who cannot tell right from wrong, and many cattle are also there. Don't you think I should be concerned about that big city? =Jonah 4:6-11.@ (NIV)

Just as Jonah was deaf to his responsibility to witness to the people of Ninevah, the Israelites were reluctant to witness to the nations.

Through Isaiah, God kept on calling. *You are my witnesses,@ declares the LORD, A and my servant whom I have chosen@ (Is. 43:10).* God announced His coming to gather all nations and tongues that they might see His glory, and that He would send His remnant to the nations that had not heard of His fame in order to declare His glory among them (Is. 66:19).

Isaiah 56:7 and Luke 19:45 state that the purpose of the temple is a place where all the nations can come and hear the truth and worship the Lord. Isaiah prophesies that peace will be achieved on the earth with the coming of a unique leader.

For a child has been born for us , a son given to us, authority rests upon his shoulders, and his name is wonderful, counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forever more@ (Isaiah 9: 6-7; NIV)

God announced that he would give that individual covenant to the people, a light to the nations (Is.42:6).

Through the minor prophets God also revealed His desire to reach all the nations.

Zechariah 2:11 states *And many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day and shall be my people.* Zechariah 9:10 attests that *He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea.* Malachi 1:11 also affirms the Lord's plan to witness to all the nations. *For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.* Haggai 2:7 states that all the people of the world hunger for what is right, or that Jesus is the desire for all nations. In Ezekiel 34:25 the Lord says, *I will make a covenant of peace with them.* Micah 5:4 states, *He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.*

2- In the New Testament

Jesus' commission to his disciples: The commission to reach out to the nations is abundantly clear in the New Testament: *The Greek word Ethnos is translated between seventy and ninety times to mean nation and Gentiles. The latter is used when the reference is interpreted to be to the non-Jewish nations (e.g., Matt 20:19, 25 Acts 4:27; 9:15).*

Despite all the differences and conflicts between the Jews and the Gentiles, Jesus asks His disciples who are the Jews to reach out to the Gentiles. Not only was Jesus teaching this to His disciples, but He was living it too.

The New Testament flows right out of the Old, with unbroken continuity. In the distinctive title He chose for Himself, in the strategy of His ministry, and in His clear teachings, it is obvious that Jesus undertook a mission for all mankind started from His own house and nations

God revealed His love and His purpose to reconcile the world to Himself through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. We recognize the fulfillment of this prophecy in the birth of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

In the sixth month, God sent an angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:26-28). Luke 2:11,14 say, "Today in the town of David a savior has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests".

Jesus also affirmed His intent to reach all people by teaching stories like the parable of the dragnet fish. Fish of every kind were gathered from the sea, a symbol of all nations (Mt.13:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). Also He clearly made statements to the Pharisees, that He is the good shepherd, ministering to non-Jews personally on the basis of the principle stated in John 10:14-16 *"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."* Jesus makes it clear that He expects His followers to have compassion for all people in the Parable of Sheep and Goats: Matt 25:31-46 *"I was a stranger and you invited me in."* John 3:16 says *"For God so loved the world."* By predicting the eventual spread of the gospel to all nations (Mt 24:14, 25:3 Jn12:32), Jesus declares His concern for all nations. After His resurrection Jesus commissioned His disciples to take the gospel to all the nations (Mt 28:19, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, Acts1:8), not just to the Jewish people.

Jesus offered salvation to people from all nations. A Samaritan woman was the sole audience for one of Jesus' greatest sermons. She received the assurance that the time was near when God would be worshiped, not just in Jerusalem or on Mt. Gerizim, but all over the world, in spirit and in truth (John 4:5-42). A Canaanite woman's faith was rewarded when her daughter was healed. Much has been made of Jesus' puzzling remark at the beginning of this encounter: *I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Matt 15:24). This may have been a deliberate rebuke of the disciples, who wanted to send her away with her request unanswered, and who shared the racial prejudice which was common at the time. The Centurion whose servant was healed was almost certainly a Roman commander of a band of one hundred foreign soldiers quartered at Capernaum to keep the peace. He was despised by the Jews, who resented this *Army of occupation*. Conscious of his own authority as a military man, he humbly assured Jesus that it would not be necessary for him to go to his house to heal the servant. *Just say the word and my servant will be healed,* he declared with genuine faith (Matt 8:8). Jesus turned and announced the following to him: *I tell you the truth: I have not found a single Hebrew who showed as much faith as this Gentile military leader* (Matt 8:10).

The coming of a group of Greeks precipitated the final crisis in the inner life of Jesus: his decision to move on to the cross. It is clear that these were not merely Hellenist Jews, but aliens, either inquirers or proselytes, who had accepted Judaism and thus were qualified to worship in the temple area, at least in the court of the Gentiles.

During His final days on earth, Jesus repeated His desire to reach all the nations. *For this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all nations, and after that the end shall come* (Matt. 24:4-14). Concerning his return in glory, he was purposely vague, declaring, *Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the*

Son, but the Father alone (Matt. 24:36). When speaking of His return, Jesus promised, *All nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats* (25:32). Just before the Passover, at a house in Bethany, a woman anointed his body with an expensive ointment. When she was criticized for her act, Jesus stoutly defended her with these words: *>She did it to prepare me for burial. Truly I say unto you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be spoken of in memory of her* (26:13). The next evening in the upper room with His disciples, He sealed the New Covenant with them, in anticipation of His death. He declared as He passed the cup, *"This is My blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins"* (v. 28). Only the eleven were present, and all were Jews. But Jesus knew that the small nucleus of a new Chosen People, the remnant of Israel, was soon to be enlarged, as the many for whom he died heard the good news and accepted him as Lord and Savior.

Whereas the activity of the church initially concentrated on the Jewish mission, Peter's visit to Cornelius in Acts 10 and the conversion of Paul in Acts 9 signaled a revolution in Christian thought. The apostles and the early Christians were led to follow the order of this strategic plan by circumstances and the direction of the Holy Spirit, as the history of the spread of the Gospel is unfolded in the Book of Acts. In Acts 2: 5-11 at Pentecost, Jews from many nations were gathered together and "each one heard them speaking in his own language." (Acts 2:6) Sixteen language groups were present, and they all understood each other. In Acts 8, Philip reaches out to the Ethiopian diplomat. In Acts 9, "the foreign student," Saul of Tarsus is in Jerusalem at Gamaliel's seminary. Acts 10 describes the conversion of "the Roman captain and military man,

Cornelius". Acts 11 states the first principle in mission strategy in saying, "They took Christ back with them". Acts 13 describes the second principle in mission strategy declaring that "Paul and Barnabas took Christ to other countries."

In Acts 21:27-32, Paul is accused of bringing a Greek into the temple. These Jews hated Paul because he loved the Nations. Paul was nearly mobbed to death by the Jewish crowds in the temple area because they suspected he had defiled the holy grounds by bringing a Gentile to the temple. The fundamental truth of Paul=s message was the good news of access for all to God=s grace, irrespective of nationality, social status, or sex (Gal. 3:28; Rom. 10:12). Paul preached the message of salvation to the Jew first and also to the Greek for he was under obligation both to Greeks and Barbarians as well as the Jews (Rom1:13-16; cf. 15:1521; 16:25,26). Paul=s final words to the leaders of the Jewish community in Rome clearly declare that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and that they will listen (Acts 28:25-28). In 2Corinthians 5:18-21, reconciliation has been accomplished between God and humans in saying *All this is from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation that is in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself.*@ In Romans 1:5 Paul states that *"we received grace and apostleship to call people from all the nations to the obedience that comes from faith."* In Romans 9-11 Paul describes in detail how the Jewish rejection of Christ had turned out for the benefit of the Gentiles. However, he appears to hold out the prospect of an eventual national return of Israel to God (Rom11:25).

The Apocalypse of John displays considerable interest in the salvation of the nations. According to Revelation 5:9-10 and 7:9 the ransomed of God will include *Amen from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.*@

As evidenced in Acts 2:5 and Acts 9:15, Satan attacks you when you go and reach the nations. We don't go to the nations because we don't like them. The conclusion will come when we tell the nations about Jesus. Peace was given to the church as a blessing to the nations. Peace as part of a greeting is found in the early church from Jesus and from the writers of the epistle (Luke 24:36; John 20:19; Acts 15:22,23; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 1 Cor 1:2; 1 Peter 1:2)