

Israel as a Contrast Community

Session One
Recharge 2013



Two emphases of missional Wilbert Shenk

- Missionary consciousness: oriented toward world, exist for sake of the world (inward)
- Missionary encounter with culture: called to live in different story as contrast people and challenge idols of culture (outward)

- Wilbert Shenk





A Contrast Community in the Midst of the Nations


‘ . . . mission is not primarily about *going*.
Nor is mission primarily about *doing*
anything. Mission is about *being*. It is about
being a distinctive kind of people, a
countercultural . . . community among the
nations.’


- Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra





Not all there is to mission!

- Be the witness
 - Do the witness
 - Say the witness
- 




When we speak about the Church as “the people of God in the world” and enquire into the real nature of this Church, we cannot avoid speaking about the *roots* of the Church which are to be found in the Old Testament idea of Israel as the people of the covenant. So the question of the *missionary* nature of the Church, that is, the real relationship between the people of God and the world cannot be solved until we have investigated the relation between Israel and the nations of the earth.


- Johannes Blauw






Israel and the Nations

- Gen 1-11: Good creation corrupted by human rebellion
 - Gen 12.2-3: God's plan to restore his good creation
 - From curse to blessing
 - From nations judged to all people blessed
- 



Relating Gen 3-11 and 12-50: Abraham and Israel for the sake of the world

The whole primeval history . . . seems to break off in shrill dissonance, and the question . . . arises even more urgently: Is God's relationship to the nations now finally broken; is God's gracious forbearance now exhausted; has God rejected the nations in wrath forever? That is the burdensome question that no thoughtful reader of ch. 11 can avoid; indeed, one can say that our narrator intended by means of the whole plan of his primeval history to raise precisely this question and to pose it in all its severity. Only then is the reader properly prepared to take up the strangely new thing that now follows the comfortless story about the building of the tower: the election and blessing of Abraham. We stand here, therefore, at the point where primeval history and sacred history dovetail, and thus at one of the most important places in the entire Old Testament. (G. Von Rad)






Blessed to be a Blessing

- Genesis 12.2-3: Blessed to be a blessing





Genesis 12.1-3

- “Stupendous utterance” (H. Wolff)
 - “Twofold agenda” (P. Williamson)
 - Abraham to be *recipient* of God’s blessing
 - Abraham is to be *mediator* of God’s blessing (all nations will be blessed through you)
 - Blessed to be a blessing
 - Blessing (5 times in Gen 12.2-3); Curse (5 times in Gen 3-11)
- 



Blueprint for rest of the story


‘ . . . these few verses offer a theological blueprint for the redemptive history of the world’

- William Dumbrell





Display People

- Genesis 12.2-3: Blessed to be a blessing
 - Exodus 19.3-6: Display people
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Exodus: Formation of People

● *A redeemed people* (Ex. 1-18)





GOD



Moses



Israel

gods of Egypt



Pharaoh




Egypt

I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. (Ex. 12.12)

Freed from idols to serve the living and true God. (1 Thess. 1.9)





In the Exodus, the power of the suzerain is broken; the pharaoh, the god-king of Egypt, was defeated and therefore lost his right to be Israel's suzerain lord; the Lord conquered the pharaoh and therefore ruled as King over Israel (Exod. 15:18). As their deliverer, God had claimed the right to call for his people's obedient commitment to him in the covenant.

- Peter Craigie






Exodus: Formation of People

- A *redeemed* people (Ex. 1-18)
- A *covenant* people (Ex. 19-24)
 - Vocation: An attractive, distinctive life (19.3-6)





Three labels

- Treasured possession: Special people belonging to God with a special task
 - Holy nation: Distinctive people, different from the nations
 - Priestly kingdom: A kingdom that mediates God's blessing to other nations as a priest does to people
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Treasured possession, holy nation, priestly kingdom


. . . a people set apart, different from all other people by what they are and are becoming—a display people, a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people.


- John Durham





Exodus: Formation of People

- *A redeemed people* (Ex. 1-18)
 - *A covenant people* (Ex. 19-24)
 - Vocation: An attractive, distinctive life (19.3-6)
 - Calling foundational for rest of the story
- 




‘The history of Israel from this point on is in reality merely a commentary upon the degree of fidelity with which Israel adhered to this Sinai-given vocation’

- William Dumbrell





Exodus: Formation of People

- *A redeemed people* (Ex. 1-18)
 - *A covenant people* (Ex. 19-24)
 - Vocation: An attractive, distinctive life (19.3-6)
 - Calling foundational for rest of the story
 - Torah: Shape Israel's life (20-23)
- 




Torah provides God's way of living

‘God’s mission involves God’s people
living in God’s way in the sight of the
nations.’

- Chris Wright






The Exodus brought the people out
of Egypt in order to bring them into
a new society and the Torah
furnishes the model for that new
society.

- Gerhard Lohfink





Torah in Exodus

- Ten words: Ten broad creational principles to direct Israel's life (Ex 20)
 - Social legislation: Working out ten words for Israel's particular social life in that culture for that time (Ex 21-23)
 - Whole of Israel's life brought under God's authority as a display to nations
 - Further worked out in Leviticus and Deuteronomy
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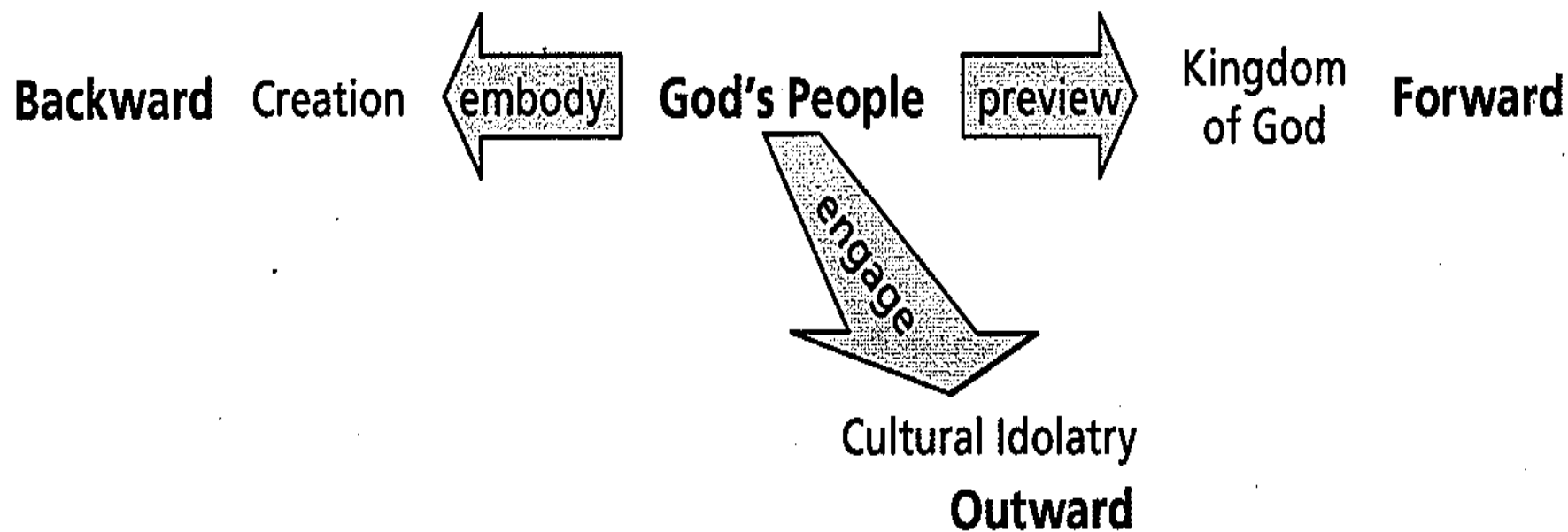



Figure 2.1 *Facing In Three Directions*




Leviticus 19

- ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy’ (v. 2)
 - Followed by comprehensive demands to mark off Israel as contrast people: respect in family relationships (v.2), freedom from idolatry (v.3), concern for the poor (v.9-10) and vulnerable (v.14) and elderly (v.32) and foreigner (v.33), fairness in economic dealings (v.13), interpersonal integrity (v.11), justice in courts (v.15) and in speech (v.16), concern for the safety and well-being of neighbors (v.16), even love of neighbor (v.18), sexual faithfulness (v.20-22), care of the non-human creation (v.23-25), distance from pagan religion (v.26-28, 31), commercial honesty (v.35-36)
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Contrast community


Israel's holiness also depends on whether it really lives in accordance with the social order which God has given it, a social order which stands in sharp *contrast* with those of all the other nations. (G. Lohfink)






Exodus: Formation of People

- A *redeemed* people (Ex. 1-18)
 - A *covenant* people (Ex. 19-24)
 - Vocation: An attractive, distinctive life (19.3-6)
 - Calling foundational for rest of the story
 - Torah: Shape Israel's life (20-23)
 - A people of God's *presence* (Ex. 25-40)
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God converts the nations by working in the midst of His own People. His interventions, and these alone, make Israel the light of the world. The Church does its work of evangelisation in the measure in which its Lord gives it life; when it lives by Him its very existence is effectual. . . . it is entirely dependent on the hidden activity of God within His Church, and is the fruit of a life really rooted in God. The evangelisation of the world is not primarily a matter of words or deeds: it is a matter of presence—*the presence of the People of God in the midst of mankind and the presence of God in the midst of His People*. And surely it is not in vain that the Old Testament reminds the Church of this truth.

- Robert Martin-Achard






On display in the land

- Genesis 12.2-3: Blessed to be a blessing
 - Exodus 19.3-6: Display people
 - Deut. 4.5-8: Distinctive way of life shaped by Torah and presence of God
- 



Deuteronomy 4: Distinctive People


- Placed on land in midst of nations
 - Nations observe Israel and say: ‘Surely this is a wise and understanding people.’
 - God’s presence: ‘What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?’
 - God’s law: ‘And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?’
 - Two threats:
 - Idolatry of nations
 - Failure to pass along faith to next generation
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On display in the land


- Genesis 12.2-3: Blessed to be a blessing
- Exodus 19.3-6: Display people
- Deut. 4.5-8: Distinctive way of life shaped by Torah and presence of God
- Placed on display in the land to be visible to the nations

The ‘visibility of Israel was *part of its theological identity* and role as the priesthood of yhwh among the nations.’ (Chris Wright)





Israel's failure


- Genesis 12.2-3: Blessed to be a blessing
 - Exodus 19.3-6: Display people
 - Deut. 4.5-8: Distinctive way of life shaped by Torah and presence of God
 - Placed on display in the land to be visible to the nations
 - Failure of Israel to live up to identity to be light to the nations
 - Engulfed in idolatry of nations
 - Did not pass along the faith to the next generations
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Prophets' Message


- Genesis 12.2-3: Blessed to be a blessing
- Exodus 19.3-6: Display people
- Deut. 4.5-8: Distinctive way of life shaped by Torah and presence of God
- Placed on display in the land to be visible to the nations
- Message of prophets
 - Israel would be judged and scattered
 - Promise of end-time kingdom when, *first* Israel would be gathered and renewed, and *then* the nations incorporated

Old Testament theology has paid scant attention to the motif of “gathering,” whereas ‘the “gathering of the scattered people of God” has been . . . one of the fundamental statements of Israel’s theology.’ (Gerhard Lohfink)






Prophetic Message

- Coming of God's kingdom
 - Ushered in by Messiah
 - Accomplished by power of Spirit
 - Cosmic restoration and judgement
 - Israel gathered and renewed to fulfil calling: Become a light and city on a hill
 - Nations incorporated into people of God
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Ezekiel 36

- 36.16-21: Israel failed and profaned God's name in nations
 - 36.22-23: Yet God will act so his name is proved holy in eyes of nations through Israel
 - 36.24-27: God will gather and renew Israel for this purpose
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Church takes up Israel's task

- Incorporated into Abrahamic covenant—blessed to be blessing (Gen 12.1-3→Gal 3.7-9)
 - Take over calling of Sinaitic covenant—display people (Ex 19.3-6→1 Pet 2.9-12)
 - Takes vocation of being light to the nations (Is 42.6→Matt 5.14-16)
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What does it mean to be God's people?

- Elect people: Chosen to embody and mediate God's blessing to nations
 - Covenant people: Bound to God to know him and his salvation for the sake of the nations
 - Redeemed people: Liberated from gods of Egypt to serve God in all of their lives so that they might be a . . .
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What does it mean to be God's people?

- Holy people: Walking God ways—creational intention, preview of kingdom, against idolatry to be a display of what God intends for human life in contrast to idolatry of nations
 - People enjoys God's presence: God is at work *in* and *through* them for the sake of the nations
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