

Chapter 1

Biblical Basis for World Evangelization

LESSON OBJECTIVE

It is important to understand that:

- World Evangelization (W.E.) is God's initiative
- The Bible is a missionary book, more than anything else
- You need to learn to read the Bible with missionary eyes

LESSON OUTLINE

Topics we will discuss in this lesson are:

- Defining some Terms
- What does W.E. have to do with YOU?
- W.E. is the Main Theme of the Bible
- The Old Testament (OT) Perspective
- Israel's Disobedience and Failure
- The New Testament (NT) Perspective

LESSON CONTENTS

Different people have different definitions for the terms 'Evangelization' and 'missions'. It is best to become acquainted with how most missiologists, missionaries and theologians use them:

Defining some Terms

We distinguish between 'missions' (plural) and 'mission' (singular). We define missions as: works of believers, fulfilling the great commission of Christ, who Himself fulfilled the mission of God. The mission of God, also called *missio Dei*, is to save a lost humanity. Missions are the churches' salvation ministries: an execution of the mission of God.

Christ commissioned His disciples to make disciples of all people on earth:¹ to bring His good news to all people groups in the whole world. We can also use the term *world(-wide) Evangelization*.

The difference between *evangelism* and *missions* is: the *former* preaches the gospel in a *mono-cultural, local* setting; the *latter* does so in a *cross-cultural, foreign* context. *Evangelism* takes place in Jerusalem and Judea: no language learning and cultural adaptation are needed. *Missions* take place in Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth: both language learning and cultural adaptation are needed. The difference is not necessarily geographic.

Now is the time for all churches in all countries to do their part in world missions as *sending* church, rather than as *receiving* church. Or -as they say- missions is "from everywhere to everywhere"

What does W.E. have to do with YOU?

W.E. is God's initiative, not man's. God is the primary sender. After having sent many prophets, He sent Jesus and He sends us by the Holy Spirit. We look at *both* Testaments to discover the theme of W.E., not only the NT!

W.E. is church business. Van Rheenen says that 'as the body cannot survive without blood, so the church cannot survive without mission. Without blood the body dies; without mission the church dies...'.²

This course helps you to understand more of God's plan for your life. Do we all have to be missionaries, then? Yes and no. Yes, because God sends us to our daily contacts with the gospel message. No, because not all of us are called to travel the world for the sake of the gospel. If you are not called to go yourself you can still support W.E. with prayers and finance. The Lord wants *all of us to participate* in W.E. For instance: Start to pray for a missionary every day, send him or her a gift once a month and visit a mission field once a year!

1 Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8

2 Van Rheenen, 1996:31

W.E. is the Main Theme of the Bible

The church is committed to W.E. to the degree that she is convinced of the authority of the bible as God's word. The bible gives us a mandate, a message, a model and the power for W.E.³ which was God's idea from the beginning.

In Genesis God promised to 'bless Abraham and in him all the families of the earth'.⁴ In Revelation we see the outcome: representatives of all nations, tribes, peoples and languages stand before God's throne.⁵ W.E. between these two verses forms the main theme of God's word. The Lord reveals himself as the God of history, who sticks to his covenant, and 'wants none to perish'.⁶

Missionary themes can be found in every bible book. You will discover them when you pray that God will reveal His heart for missions to you. Then, read the bible from the beginning 'with missionary eyes' – and you will be speechless about what you discover. Write down your findings in a personal notebook!

Humans were created for God's glory⁷ and only fulfill their purpose by worshipping Him. Paul says: 'every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'.⁸ Therefore, we want to lead people to repentance, bowing their knees voluntarily instead of forcefully. God decreed that there will be representatives from all the families of the earth.⁹ That does not mean 'all people on earth'; some will always despise His presence. Many have already heard and responded, but now the task must be finished.

Missionaries work hard towards that goal. But unless *all of us*, churches and Christians of all races, seek God's kingdom first, we will not finish this task soon. Again: not only through missionaries,

³ Perspectives, 1981:3-9

⁴ Gen. 12:1-3

⁵ Rev. 7:9

⁶ 2 Pet. 3:9

⁷ Rev. 4:11

⁸ Phil. 2:10,11

⁹ For an explanation of the term 'families of the earth' and people-group-theology, see Piper, 1993/2007:158-170

but through *all of us*. Are you joining? Do whatever He tells you to do, making use of the resources He gave you. Now, enjoy our exploratory tour into the realm of W.E!

The Old Testament Perspective

Some think that W.E. is only NT ministry, but the OT is also full of how God reaches out to the nations. Jesus, Paul and Peter taught W.E. from the OT, since that was all they could quote from. Now, let us look to some OT books:

Genesis

When Adam and Eve sinned, God's rescue mission became operational¹⁰ and continues until Christ returns.¹¹ In spite of Noah's preaching for a century,¹² judgment eventually came¹³ after people's persistent refusal to repent. Noah's story shows how the world's situation will be at the end of time, because Jesus compared the two eras.¹⁴

In Gen. 9 God's new beginning becomes visible and in chapter 10 we see a list of 70 nations. Then people went astray, causing God to interfere.¹⁵ After this He called Abraham: one man now sets the stage for good news to the whole world in Gen. 12.

Eventually Abraham developed into the people of Israel. All through Genesis we see W.E. themes develop that we also find in the rest of the Bible. Continually God calls people and gives them missions to fulfill. In embryonic form Genesis develops the great themes of sin, salvation, the nations and many others.¹⁶ In Joseph's life¹⁷ we notice many *redemptive similarities* with Jesus' ministry.

10 Gen. 3:14,15

11 Matt. 24:14

12 Compare Gen. 5:32 with 7:6,11

13 Gen. 6-9

14 Matt. 24:37-39

15 Gen. 11:7-9

16 See also my book *The Bible's Missionary Message – Part I – The Old Testament*, especially Chapter 1, Genesis

17 Gen. 37-50

Exodus

We see Jesus also in the life of Moses, who freed his people from slavery in Egypt. In Exodus God widened His operation from a *redemptive* man, Abraham, to a *redemptive* nation, whose purpose was: 'You will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'.¹⁸ Then follows the tabernacle building, foreshadowing the later temple in Jerusalem, meant as a house of prayer *for all nations*.¹⁹ Israel's purpose was to be God's light to the nations and His channel of blessing to the world.²⁰ The nations were to know from watching Israel, that there is no god like the God of Israel. This is a theme we meet in the scriptures often and it still is our worldwide missionary assignment today.

Psalms

There is hardly a Bible book that speaks as extensively about God's purpose for the nations as the Psalms do.²¹

In OT times God decreed Jerusalem to be the central place of worship where He would live. The nations could come to Jerusalem and worship there. Yahweh's worship was centralized in Israel. We call this *centripetal* missions. In the NT we see *centrifugal* missions: the gospel went out from Jerusalem; the key word became "go".²²

Jonah

Sometimes, a missionary was sent abroad, like Jonah, but he was badly motivated, having his own, mainly political, reasons to refuse his mission.

Prof. Verkuyl said 'Jesus Christ is one, greater than Jonah. If a person draws his lifeblood from the one greater than Jonah and yet declines to spread the good news among others, he sabotages the aims of God

18 Ex. 19:6 We are reminded of this reality in I Peter 2:9-10

19 Is. 56:7 (italics mine)

20 42:6; 49:6; see also 1 Kings 8:41-43,60

21 E.g. Ps. 2:8,9; 9:11; 22:27,28; 45:17; 67:2-7; 72:11,17; 86:9; 96:3,10; 98:2-4; 105:1; 117:1 etc.

22 See for instance the famous verses from Matthew 28:19,20 or Acts 1:8

Himself. Jonah is father to all those Christians who desire the benefits and blessings of election, but refuse its responsibility'.²³

In the brief format of this course, we cannot explore the theme of W.E. in the Prophets, but many messianic passages are connected to 'the Gentiles'.

Israel's Disobedience and Failure

After Israel occupied Canaan under Joshua, it failed to shine God's light to the surrounding nations. Instead Israel embraced the worship of these nations. There was idolatry and temple prostitution attached to the worship of foreign gods. Israel was warned by invading armies,²⁴ by prophets, famine,²⁵ the split of the kingdom after Solomon and lastly by the exile to Babylon. Israel's *redemptive function* had ended temporarily. They had not become the example God intended them to be. The Gentiles could no longer meet God in Jerusalem because the place was in shambles. Israel's disobedience caused God's rescue mission to come to a pause.

Van Rheenen warns: 'Israel forgot the God who chose them. They imitated the nations around them by going after their gods. As a result, God sent them into captivity.'²⁶ The church, like Israel, is called to be a distinctive, separate people, personally relating to ... God ... Unfortunately, the church today frequently loses its identity as God's distinctive people...Instead of permeating the world ... , the church is being permeated by the world'.²⁷

After the exile Israel never regained its former glory; it could at best be called a *redemptive remnant*. But now: what might be the reason that the church reaches out to the world so little? Could it be that the same reasons apply as in Israel of old? Are our lives examples of godliness to the people around us?

23 Perspectives, 1981:44

24 See the books of the Judges, Samuel, Kings and Chronicles

25 As we see e.g. in the book of Ruth

26 Deut. 32:15-18; 2 Kings 17:7-23

27 Van Rheenen, 1996:30

The New Testament Perspective

Jesus Christ, Missionary Par Excellence

As with Abraham, God narrowed his plan down again to one Man. His mission would not fail, sometimes in spite of His troops. We now look at the very center of W.E., Jesus Christ, the Redeemer Himself. Shortly after his birth Simeon called him 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles'.²⁸

Jesus Christ is the spectrum of God's plan for the world's salvation. All prophecies speak about him. Many OT saints typify *him*, e.g. Noah, Joseph and Moses, but we see him also in Isaac (the son), Joshua (the commander), Samuel (the judge), Elijah (the prophet of judgment), Elisha (the prophet of mercy), David (the king), and many others.

W.E. in the Gospels

The gospels are mission-handbooks. Their theme is the kingdom of God. The word kingdom speaks about God, resuming reign on earth, by the hand of Jesus Christ, to whom has been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

It becomes manifest by Jesus' authority in the lives of his own and over Satan, sin, sickness and death. The kingdom is near; it progresses, yet awaits its all-encompassing revelation. The parables teach us much about the kingdom's nature²⁹ and how it will reach all nations and peoples.

The gospels show us also stories about encounters Jesus had with Gentiles. *Matthew* tells of the Canaanite woman, the Roman centurion, and the Gadarene demoniac.³⁰ *John* adds the story of the Samaritan woman and mentions Greeks who wanted to see Jesus.³¹ *Luke* writes about a time that Jesus and his disciples passed a

28 Luke 2:32

29 Matt. 13; Mark 4; Luke 8

30 Matt. 15:21-28; 8:5-13 and 8:28-34 respectively

31 John 4 and 12:20-23,32 respectively; Jesus will 'draw all men to Himself'

Samaritan village where they were not welcome. When James and John asked for fire from heaven, Jesus answered that he had not come to destroy but to save, and so identified himself as Savior for the Samaritans.³² This was also expressed in the healing of ten lepers.³³ The great commission can be found in all gospels and in Acts.³⁴

A Deeper Message in Acts of the Apostles?

Acts is another handbook for W.E. Jesus had returned to Heaven, the Holy Spirit had come and yet, He still needed to persuade His disciples to leave Jerusalem and Judea, to go to Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth.

At first, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was mainly a Jewish happening. When the Spirit came, 'God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven' witnessed the event.³⁵ Worship happened in the temple or in private homes and had a form to which the converts were used in the synagogues. The local rulers understood this 'new faith' to be a sect of Judaism and the believers considered it to be a fulfilment of their original religion. Water baptism was a common act of proselytism, and all Jewish believers were circumcised, so the character and practice could go on unchallenged for some time. Problems started only when uncircumcised Gentiles came to Christ.

Should their faith have Jewish characteristics? This question, dealt with later in Acts,³⁶ proved to be of major importance with regard to W.E. The real question was: "If we convert to Christ, do we have to convert our cultural habits as well?" It was for the first time that issues of Christianity and culture surfaced, and still today it needs to be dealt with adequately every time cultural barriers are crossed for the sake of the gospel.

32 We may be surprised about the disciples' attitude toward Samaritans, but how is the general attitude of Christians towards Muslims? We can learn a lot by replacing 'Samaritan' in the NT by 'Muslim'. Suddenly the NT becomes even more relevant for the 21st century!

33 Luke 9:51-55 and 17:12-19 respectively

34 Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8

35 Acts 2:5

36 Acts 15

For the time being however, the Christian faith was conveyed in a way, compatible with Jewish culture and as such formed a perfect bridge to the Jewish community that had not yet come to Christ.

But what about Jesus' command to reach out to Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth? How many years would have to pass before the apostles started to reach out to Gentiles? Were they starting at all?

Don Richardson writes: 'Hundreds of millions of Christians think that Luke's Acts of the Apostles records the twelve apostles' obedience to the great commission. Actually, it records their reluctance to obey it'.³⁷

They did not catch the message when the Spirit gave them to speak in so many languages. Why should the Spirit have done that if only their own blessing had been intended? Yet, by the end of Acts 7 we see that all apostles and thousands of their converts are still in Jerusalem. A quarter of the book was already history when we don't even hear yet about plans to obey the rest of Jesus' command! God's solution was simple but painful: He scattered the new believers through persecution; only the apostles stayed in the city. The rest now finally went to Judea and Samaria. God needed Acts 8:1 to put Acts 1:8 into practice.

Then we see an interesting new phenomenon: as the 'clergy' could not even be dislodged by this persecution, layman Philip, a deacon, successfully started outreach among Samaritans.³⁸ Only then do we read that the apostles joined in. Until then they had been avoiding Samaritans.

Philip was then led to the Ethiopian eunuch and explained him the gospel. This apparently was the end of Philip's cross-cultural outreach, but he nevertheless set a new trend, that the Holy Spirit would continue thereafter.

³⁷ Perspectives, 1981:89

³⁸ Acts 8

A Gentile Pentecost

Then, the Holy Spirit was poured out again, on Gentiles! The Lord engineered a vision and a word for Peter, then sent an angel with a clear message to Roman officer Cornelius. This resulted in Peter's preaching in his home after which the Holy Spirit came upon them: a second day of Pentecost, a Gentile one!³⁹ That was such a series of miracles that the other apostles could not deny it, although they criticized Peter before they heard him.⁴⁰ 'One wonders how Jesus' great commission could be executed, without Jews eating with Gentiles!'⁴¹

At Last: A Gentile Church!

Then a real Gentile church starts at Antioch. What did the apostles do? They didn't go and look for themselves, but sent a deputy instead, Barnabas.⁴²

Obviously, a new apostolic band was needed to evangelize the Gentile world. This band started with Paul and Barnabas. The Jew Paul had been raised in a predominantly Gentile city; he spoke Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and probably Latin. He was born a Roman citizen and received his training under Gamaliel.⁴³ God chose him as his instrument to shape the last part of the great commission better than any of the original apostles had done.

The division of labor between the apostles to the Jews and those to the Gentiles looks like the present situation at the mission fields. Even today most workers minister in the already evangelized parts of the world, and a small minority occupies itself with real pioneer work at the far frontiers of missions.

After Judas committed suicide, four men joined the apostolic band: Matthias, James (the Lord's brother), Paul and Barnabas, making fifteen altogether. Only two of them reached Gentiles; the other

39 Acts 10

40 11:2,3

41 Perspectives, 1981:93

42 Acts 11:22

43 22:3; Perspectives, 1981:94,95

thirteen were 'convinced they were all needed to evangelize three million Jews, among whom there were already tens of thousands of witnessing believers'.⁴⁴ If only that attitude had changed by now....

Some think that Luke wrote Acts as a subtly disguised handbook designed to encourage the other apostles and their Jewish converts to follow Paul's example in evangelizing the Gentiles.

After all, Luke, a Gentile himself, travelled with Paul long enough to be permeated by his philosophy of ministry.⁴⁵

Titus' destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 must have scattered the apostles still alive, since there was hardly a Jerusalem left to stay in. Tradition tells about John, who died at Turkey's west coast, Peter who was crucified in Rome, Thomas who went to India, and Andrew who travelled north to Russia. Eventually they did move out. Either because of Luke's hints, or because of Jerusalem's destruction.⁴⁶

Is it as hard for us, as it was for them to obey the last part of the great commission? Will we allow it to become the great omission of our lives? Do we need to be forced out, or will we obey voluntarily? Are we joining the two out there, or comfortably staying at home with the other thirteen? What does it take for the Lord to make us obey his call?

Paul's Epistles

Paul's epistles breathe the salvation of the Gentiles.⁴⁷ Stearns writes: 'The Jews had known for 2,000 years that God's plan was to bless every people group on earth. That they often ignored their bottom line responsibility does not prove they were ignorant of it. In the same way, today's believers can ignore the mandate of the great commission while being fully aware of it'.⁴⁸

44 Ibid. p. 96

45 Acts 26:16-18

46 Perspectives, 1981:96,97

47 Rom. 1:1,5,7; 15:15,16,20,21; 16:25,26; Eph. 2; 3:6-10; Gal. 3:7-9,29; 1 Cor. 9:20-23

48 Stearns, 1991:109 (slightly abbreviated quote)

All church members are *witnesses*, but *not all* are *missionaries*. In the Body of Christ one is either a sender or a sent one. There are no neutral places!

Stearns explains that it is the task of the Body to:

- Identify those who are designed by God to be cross-cultural missionaries. Not everyone is a missionary any more than everyone is a pastor
- Equip those sent ones with training
- Send them out and support them⁴⁹.

Pirola states that 'the ratio of support personnel to an American combat soldier is twenty to one. We need a lot more senders than we do missionaries, if we stick to this parallel, to join the cause of missions in sacrificial prayer and action behind the lines'.⁵⁰

Revelation

In the last Bible book we see the final outcome of W.E. Here we see the Son of God in glory,⁵¹ and the purpose of all creation realized: worship of the Father,⁵² by people from every tribe, language, people and nation.⁵³ The climax is that God's dwelling is with men and that there will be no more tear, death, mourning, crying or pain.⁵⁴

Amen, come Lord Jesus! Is this not what W.E. is all about, to bring the return of the Lord nearer?⁵⁵

49 Ibid.

50 Pirola, as quoted in Stearns, 1991:110

51 Rev. 1:13-18

52 4:8-11

53 5:9 & 7:9

54 21:3,4

55 Matt. 24:14

RESEARCH

Check out these websites for interesting additional information:
<https://www.biblicaltraining.org/world-mission-church/timothy-tennant> ;
http://www.discipletree.com/05Courses/BiblicalFoundationMission/04Week/VerkuyI_TheBiblical.pdf

MISCELLANEOUS

Recommended books: See the Bibliography at the end of the book

Assignments:

- Write in your journal, in about 50-80 words what the Lord said to you through this lesson, for later reference and meditation
- Write down two examples of your own findings in the Bible, where it speaks about one or other form of mission that God gives a person to fulfill
- Browse through the two websites mentioned under RESEARCH for about 10 minutes each and write down your most interesting findings

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Define the difference between mission and missions
2. Define the difference between evangelism and missions
3. According to Van Rheenen, 'missions is the church's blood, without which'
4. Give four examples from four Bible books in the OT that show God's heart for W.E.
5. Give three examples that show Jesus' reaching out to the Gentiles
6. What was the 'hidden message' in the book of Acts?
7. Which NT Scripture passage, not mentioned in this chapter, in your opinion, describes best Jesus' becoming a missionary?
8. If you are not a sent one in the Body of Christ, you are a