



The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative

Christopher J. H. Wright, Downers Grove, IL: UVP, 2006, 581pp.

Is it possible, is it legitimate, and is it helpful for Christians to read the whole Bible from the angle of mission? Chris Wright argues that it is, if we understand mission not in the "narrowly defined sense of human missionary activity" but in terms of "the plan, purpose and mission of God for the whole of creation." (532)

Wright contends that the whole Bible is about mission, God's mission to the world. He concedes that there are many different ways in which we can understand and interpret the Bible but traces one central theme running from Genesis to Revelation: God's desire to bless all the nations.

In Part One Wright describes his search for a missional hermeneutic of the Bible. He recognises many have sought to provide a biblical foundation for mission, but regrets that some have paid scant attention to the Old Testament and relied on an inadequate use of proof texts. He acknowledges the need for Western Christians to learn from the hermeneutical perspective of their brothers and sisters in the Southern hemisphere, where the majority of Christians now live. He rejects the claims of post-modernism that there is no such thing as a divine grand narrative or universal truth, and proceeds to sketch in outline his understanding of a missional hermeneutic. The other sections of the book fill out that sketch and aim to demonstrate that if we approach the Bible from the perspective of God's mission we can begin to "grasp the driving dynamic of the Bible's grand narrative." (26)

In the second part he examines the missiological implications of biblical monotheism as revealed in both the Old and the New Testaments. He reasons that because God is the only God, he alone is to be worshipped and he alone can save. This inevitably demands a rejection of all forms of

idolatry and all alternate ways of salvation.

Part Three considers the roles of the people of Israel and the church in God's missional purpose. Six chapters are devoted to the themes of election, redemption, covenant and ethics. As Wright traces the story of the Old Testament, he points out that God chose one nation, the people of Israel, with the ultimate intention of bringing salvation to all the nations. The people of Israel were elected so they could serve. They were blessed so they could be a blessing. They were redeemed from slavery and adopted as God's children so they might exhibit the comprehensive scope of God's salvation. Further, Wright argues, the whole of their history demonstrates God's holistic concern for his people and, by implication, for all people. The Exodus event cannot be understood simply in political terms, an act of liberation, nor purely in spiritual terms, an encounter with the living God. It must be seen as both because God was and is concerned for the total wellbeing of his people.

Wright cites the institution of the Year of Jubilee as a further demonstration of God's continuing concern for those oppressed by economic and social injustice. God's people are to be concerned for those who suffer within the community and take practical steps to help them. Christians today, he argues, should be no less concerned for the disadvantaged and needy in society. While he wholeheartedly agrees that the mission given to the church is the evangelistic task of preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins in Christ's name, he contends that it would be "a distorted and surely false hermeneutic to argue that whatever the New Testament tells us about the mission of the followers of Christ cancels out (his italics) what we already know about the mission

of God's people from the Old Testament." (304) In the fourth section of the book, Wright turns his attention to the earth: "We are to care for the earth because it belongs to God and he has told us to. That is enough in itself." (419) He then examines the paradox of human dignity and human depravity and discusses its missiological implications. Finally he considers the role of the nations and rejoices that the mission of God for the whole world will find its fulfilment in the eschatological vision, described in the Book of Revelation, when "the earth will be filled with the glory of God and all the nations of humanity will walk in his light." (530)

C David Harley

This book reflects the author's biblical scholarship and his years of missiological reflection as a teacher both in India and at All Nations Christian College in the UK. It demonstrates how the Old Testament, as well as the New, reveals God's great purpose for the world. It compensates for the inadequacies of books that provide a less substantial biblical foundation for missions. It challenges the view that considers the preaching of the gospel to be the sole purpose of mission and demonstrates the breadth of the purpose of God for his church and for his world.

This magnum opus (581 pp.) is written in Wright's delightful style and is eminently readable. It deserves to be adopted as a basic textbook for courses on missiology and to be translated into many languages, particularly in the Global South which is providing an increasing proportion of the world's mission force. For Christians in the West, may this book be a corrective to those with a narrow view of God's mission and a challenge to church leaders who believe there is no place for mission in today's world. <<