

The Great Commission and Abraham

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Missions in the Bible Part I

Mission Frontiers, April 1980

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/missions-in-the-bible3>

It is a drastic mistake to suppose that missionaries do their work simply by carrying light into dark places watching the darkness jump back as happens when you carry a candle into a dark room. No, the Bible speaks of darkness as an angry, active, antagonistic force. The Bible kind of darkness cloaks Satanic forces that reach out and try to tear the candle from your hand. This is why ancient readers were so surprised by John 1:5: “the light came into the world and the darkness has not overcome it.”

However, we earthlings needed Jesus to come precisely because all through the Old Testament an evil darkness had in fact many times overcome the light! Let’s see how that happened:

Abraham and his descendants were clearly given the Great Commission, that is, chosen as a special nation to “be a blessing to all the (other) families of the earth.” But in all the following chapters, whenever (most of the time) their faith wavered and (like people today) their hearts were flooded by self-concern and fear, they immediately recalled only the final part of their mandate that their own nation would be blessed.

Ah, how dangerous to seek to be blessed. The Bible makes clear that the only safe thing, paradoxically, is to seek, by faith, to be a blessing. As Jesus put it, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these material things will be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

Thus it is a dismaying scene as we page through the first 17 “story carrying” books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther. We discover very little sense of responsibility externally only a few glimmers of recollection.

Rather, we see this “missionary nation” seeking mostly to survive, denying God’s desire for outreach, and often grumbling and complaining (or at least worrying) about whether they were to be blessed or not. And perhaps precisely because they sought to be blessed they often failed to be blessed and almost always failed to be a blessing.

Yet in our own personal lives today, in our families and our churches, I’m afraid it is still very difficult for us to concentrate on what God wants and let God take care of our wants. Yet THAT is the life of faith.

The chain of references for review are as follows: Gen. 12:1 3; 18:18; 22:17,18; 28:14; Ex. 9:16; 19:5,6; Num. 14: 21 13; Deut. 7:6, 8, 13, 14; 28:9,10; 32:20, 21; Josh.4:24; 1 Sam. 2: 8, 10; 12:22; 17:46; 2 Sam.7:23, 24; I Kings 8:60; 11:4; 17:10, 16; 2 Kings 5:15; 19:19.

1 & 2 CHRONICLES. Many scholars believe that these two books were a new summary produced by Ezra at the time of the return from Babylon. The account begins clear back with Adam but skims very rapidly until it comes to David, and the primary intent is to provide the genealogical base for the newly reestablished nation. Also, we note that unlike the books of Samuel and Kings, this account is confined to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The Northern Kingdom, Samaria, did not return and must now be

called the “lost tribes.” Furthermore, it is very significant that the former territory of the Northern Kingdom was actually repopulated by foreign nations.

Thus, 2 Kings is one of the most important passages in the Old Testament because

- 1) it records the severance and termination of a major section of God’s chosen people because they had simply passed beyond retrieval (v.7, 23) and
- 2) it shows that their land would be turned over to foreign nations (v. 24, 28) if that was apparently necessary to allow the glory of God finally to be passed over to the other nations!

But the role of the chosen nation was carried on by the return from Babylon of a portion of the people and leadership of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. This is how a whole generation died in captivity just as happened earlier when God allowed a generation reluctant to obey Him to expire in the wilderness.

Just as the first Exodus from slavery in Egypt produced the “Books of Moses” (Genesis through Deuteronomy), so the second “Exodus” from captivity in Babylon produced 1 & 2 Chronicles, which (like Genesis) reach back to Adam and portray the bright new ideals and sense of national purpose of a nation starting out afresh. Ezra inserts a beautiful hymn (1 Chron.16:8-36) which has not appeared before. In verses 8, 14, 24, 28, 30, 31, and 33 we see evidence of the Genesis 12:1 3 mandate, which is the Great Commission: “Tell the peoples of the world,” “show His glory to the nations,” “O people of all nations of the earth, ascribe great strength and glory to His Name,” etc. David obviously had this larger vision. So did Solomon. He speaks of foreigners coming: “all the peoples of the earth will hear of your fame and will reverence you” (2 Ch.6:33).

EZRA NEHEMIAH ESTHER These are the documents authored by the leaders of the “Second Exodus.” God had forced His people into contact with other nations. Now, on return they have freedom again to give a good testimony, and they are now more than ever aware of their witness to the many onlookers. Some of course, as with Israel today, are much more concerned about survival than witness. Amazingly, God’s own evaluation via His prophet Isaiah (49:6) is that the restoration to their land was “a (relatively) light thing” compared to being “a light to the Gentiles” so that His salvation might go to “the ends of the earth.” Will God take away American freedom until we are willing to be a blessing to others not just assure ourselves of a blessing for ourselves?

Missions in the Bible II

Mission Frontiers, August 1980

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/missions-in-the-bible7>

As we turn now to the New Testament we approach it with new eyes. We have by now seen that the whole Old Testament (from Genesis 12 through Malachi) is the record of a nation called to be a missionary nation, yet wavering in disbelief and disobedience. We saw how we need to shake ourselves loose from the concept of a “hibernating mandate” for the Old Testament, that is, the belief that the mandate God gave to Israel He never intended them to fulfill before the coming of Christ. Giving up this view makes the New Testament suddenly much clearer. However, giving up this view is not easy. Let me give an example of one of our readers as he struggles with this.

Dear Sir,

I was just now reading (rather tardily) the “Missions in the Bible” page from the May issue of *Mission Frontiers* and was somewhat disturbed. First of all, I should say that there were many good insights in it and it did a good job of spotlighting the missionary concerns of God in the Wisdom books. However, Mrs. Winter seemed disappointed that such concerns did not occur more often in those books. She complained that Job, Solomon, and Ecclesiastes were caught up in their personal or national concerns.

I think we need to remember that the books of the Bible are not just reflections of their times and the concerns of their culture but also are reflections of what God wanted to say to his people at a given point in time. If God had desired a greater missionary emphasis in the words He inspired, He jolly well would have put it in.

I hope you will find my comments to be beneficial, If I misinterpreted the article, I would welcome correction. Please don't feel it is necessary to reply.

Sincerely,

T.C., Culver City

This was my response:

I could have written your letter myself a couple of years ago, because until that time I had tended to look at the Bible as basically a compilation of inspired writings put together for our immediate blessing.

Now, however, in this series of lessons I feel I am expressing a much better grasp of what God is trying to say to us in His Word. Let me illustrate it as though we are not talking about the life of a nation but about the life of an individual. Let's suppose that a person who has been called to “be a blessing to all the nations of the earth” really did not live out his life very effectively in that call and was not only not reaching out to people all over the world to be a blessing to them but was not even effectively reaching out to people close at hand. And, worse still, he was overcome with anxiety about his own safety, security, and salvation and was totally preoccupied with simply fighting battles of

selfishness rather than generosity, battles of greed versus love, battles of morality and hedonism versus obedience and sacrifice.

Now if God were going to compose an inspired account of this person's calling and response, it would be necessary for God to describe things accurately, which we believe the Bible does as it describes the obedience and disobedience of the nation Israel. Thus the account of this individual would have to be a rather discouraging account of wavering disbelief and disobedience, just as the Bible is as it talks about a nation. Obviously God does not intend for us as we read the Bible today to find out new methods of falling away from Him, but neither does He intend for us to fall back to the level at which Israel was as it was absorbed in fighting all those little battles.

It seems to me that Luke 24:47 clearly indicates that those who rightly handle the Old Testament Scriptures should be able to perceive a mandate for mission that was resident therein. They should be able also to perceive the basic record of disobedience across the centuries which the Old Testament describes just as we today, on looking back, can see the pervasive disobedience on the part of most Christians both in the New Testament and since in regard to Christ's last and greatest command. The mere fact that the Pauline epistles are in the main occupied with the kindergarten problems of his hearers surely does not nullify the fact that the Great Commission still stood as the overarching major campaign within which all of those people should have surely been operating. Paul himself, of course, was operating within that Commission. He constantly reiterated that his concern was to go where Christ was not named, and he distinguished his ministry as being to the uncircumcised while Peter's was to the circumcised. As I see it now, I am a bit shocked by the fact that Peter, who stood there when the Great Commission was given, would be later classifiable as a person whose ministry was mainly to his own people.

I think we should also be shocked by the level of vision of the disciples after the resurrection in Acts 1. Here they are still very childishly preoccupied with receiving power when Jesus should come into his kingdom, and they ask Him about the timing for that event. Jesus turns to them with infinite patience and says, "Look, you will receive power only when you allow the Holy Spirit to make you into His witnesses to the ends of the earth." After Pentecost Peter, in his sermon in the temple, clearly voiced this commission (Acts 3:25) and yet as a matter of actual fact, except for his ministry to Cornelius, we have no record that Peter was very actively involved in that Commission to go beyond Judea, and even less is there a record that the other disciples went to the Gentiles.

You can see this is a very different view from what I used to have, and it isn't a common view at all. Yet in a sense it is the view that Jesus had as He looked back at the Old Testament tradition (Luke 24:47) and pointed out that the story was pretty consistently one of stoning the prophets. In saying this, is He implying that God wasn't interested in the nations? But Jonah is proof that He was.

But, you say, if God had wanted the people to respond to the prophets he "jolly well could have put that in." But how could God put something in that wasn't there? The fact that the Bible records the incriminating fact that the people did not respond to the prophets is proof of Biblical inspiration. It is also true that the people did not respond to the Great Commission as we find it recorded in Genesis 12:1-3. And the Bible again tells it like it is. The Bible in your words, "tells reflections of what God wanted to say to his

people at a given point in time.” This is absolutely true. But the Bible doesn’t just tell about those who obeyed; with equally divine inspiration it faithfully portrays what the children of Israel said back to God in return, even when grossly disobedient. Thus the Bible reflects very accurately not only God’s words to His people, but the words of His people in response to their God. What I am saying is not a low view of inspiration. I am certainly interested in your own groping with this point since I shared it for some years myself.

Missions in the Bible III

Mission Frontiers, December 1980

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/missions-in-the-bible11>

It is an astonishing view as we look back across the Bible in the month of December.

The story begins with a single person and his family, a hopelessly tiny minority to grapple with the vast world of humanity already laced with sin.

Nevertheless the people Jesus met in everyday life, especially the religious leaders, amazingly, were not terribly aware of their debt to the other nations of the world. Their preeminent concern was for themselves and for the safety and salvation of their own nation.

By the end of the Bible we see a nation that has grown from that one family to hundreds of thousands of people. It has been taken captive in Egypt and later in Babylon. It has been dispersed across the face of the earth. It even boasts of a pharisaic missionary tradition that a hundred years before Jesus' birth began "traversing land and sea" to make Gentiles into Jewish proselytes.

The Acts of the Apostles is principally the story of a single person who was aware of that debt the Great Commission.

Paul's letters consistently reveal his pleased astonishment that from the very beginning God had planned for the salvation of the Gentiles all who were not Jews.

This insight is not so evident in the other letters of the New Testament: Hebrews, James, 1, 2, and 3rd John, 1 and 2 Peter, and Jude. There are hints: John condemns a proud Christian leader who not only refuses hospitality to missionaries (to the Gentiles?) but even puts people out of the church who extend that hospitality. (3 John 9, 10). And in 2 Peter 3:15-18, Peter understands that Christ's return is until the message of salvation is extended to others. Again we wonder if Peter means those who are not Jews because he refers to Paul, whose ministry was mainly to Gentiles. In the *Living Bible* these verses are much more clear than in other versions: "Try hard to live without sinning; and be at peace with everyone so that he will be pleased with you when he returns. And remember why he is waiting. He is giving us time to get his message of salvation out to others. Our wise and beloved brother Paul has talked about these same things in many of his letters. Some of his comments are not easy to understand, and there are people who are deliberately stupid, and always demand some unusual interpretation they have twisted his letters around to mean something quite different from what he meant, just as they do the other parts of the scripture and the result is disaster for them" 2 Peter 3:14b, 16)

The book of Revelation is unique not only in being the only completely prophetic book in the New Testament, but also in the way it ties up history from the beginning of time. Here we see Christ at war with Satan, a war begun long before the garden of Eden. And we see Christ victorious.

But what about the central theme of the Bible, God's concern that all mankind would be redeemed? Is it here also? Yes, repeatedly! Here John makes it crystal clear: "by thy blood (thou) didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9 RSV). Revelation 7:9 is almost identical: "They came from every nation and tribe and people and language" (Phillips). Both of these are highly reminiscent

of Jesus' words in Matt 24:14: "And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it, and then, finally, the end will come."

So the Bible ends where it began: God working to redeem his fallen creatures and judging those who refuse Him. It begins with Abraham being commissioned to be a blessing to all the families of mankind, and ends with all the families of mankind falling down and worshipping him. Throughout there runs this central theme.

Throughout there also runs the theme that we are blessed to be a blessing. Abraham was chosen for a purpose. So are we! How will God judge American Christians at the final day? There are still 2.5 billion people who have not yet had a reasonable chance to respond to the gospel. The only way that can happen is for a witnessing church to be planted among the 16,750 tribes, languages, and peoples to which they belong.

American evangelicals have been given so many opportunities and so seldom pass that blessing on to others. We have radio and TV evangelism, child evangelism, coffee cup evangelism, churches scattered throughout our cities, and scores of translations of the entire Bible into English. The book of Revelation assures us that the nations, the peoples of this world will be judged. and so will we! But of us much more will be required: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke 12:48).

How often we see American Christians with their two Cadillacs in the garage, luxurious, even palacial, homes, extensive overseas vacations, etc., justifying it all because "We give a lot of money to the church and to missions." Jesus said that it is not how much we give, but how much we could give, and how much we keep for ourselves (see Mark 12:42). That is the basis on which He will judge us. Can we pass that test?

Twelve Frontiers of Perspective (Perspective #2)

Foundations Reader, 267-81

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Perspective Two: The Great Commission and Abraham

The second major new insight, or frontier, that we picked up along the way had to do with the Bible. My wife and I began writing a series of columns in *Mission Frontiers* called “Missions in the Bible.” We began with the Torah—the first five books of the Bible—and we moved on down through the history of the formation of the canon of the Old Testament, and talked about the presence or the absence of mission vision in each of those periods.¹ You can see that change of perspective and the resulting radically new idea (to us) that the Great Commission was right there in Genesis 12. Now that was a revolutionary thought for me. I had toyed with the thought when I was still at Fuller, but it really came home to me as we began to write this series of articles, month after month.

This new frontier of understanding came to a head just as the first *Perspectives Reader* was going to press. This was in 1981. I was the only one who thought we ought to make sure this idea got into the book, and I was being outvoted by everybody else on the editorial committee. “No way,” they said, “no one else sees things this way, and so we can’t put it in.”

But, by Providence, I happened to be asked to be a speaker at the dedication of the Billy Graham Center (that was in 1980), and when I went back to that I ran into Walter Kaiser, Jr. (now President Emeritus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary). I had been looking at one of his books even before going and between sessions questioned him about the way he was titling his chapters. He put into every chapter-title of his book on the Old Testament the phrase “The Promise.” I said, “Dr. Kaiser, isn’t that simply a Jewish misunderstanding of what was actually a mandate, a command? It wasn’t just a promise; it was more than that. Maybe they reduced it down to a promise.” I was very upset about that. He calmly replied, “Well, the reason I used the word promise is because Paul did. Paul referred to Genesis 12:1-3 as the Promise.” I staggered back fumbling for words and said, “Well, yeah, but Paul was only using the term that was common among his hearers. Surely it isn’t that he agreed with his listeners that the Abrahamic Covenant was only a promise.”

Then he looked right at me and said, “Well, you can call Genesis 12:1-3 the Great Commission if you want.” Again I staggered back and I said, “Oh, now wait a minute. I can’t go around saying that Genesis 12 is the Great Commission. I don’t have the Biblical credentials. I’m not a Hebrew professor. I need to be able to quote somebody who is. Do you have that statement in print?” So then, for the third time I staggered back when he answered, “Look, you quote me and I’ll get it in print.”

So I came back to the editors who were working on the final stages of the 1981 version of the *Perspectives Reader*, and I said to them, “Guess what, Kaiser agrees with me here. We can quote him.” But, that didn’t make much difference—I had nothing to prove this. However, in a few days the mail brought a cassette which was the recording of a chapel talk Kaiser had just given at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, where he was

the Dean. Sure enough, he did in fact get his stirring statement into print—at least printed magnetically on tape! What he sent on cassette then became Chapter 4 in that first *Reader* (Chapter 2 in the 3rd Edition).

That was a major insight for us, giving us a whole new Bible. And this element in the Perspectives course is one of the biggest jolts which especially seminary students get when they take the Perspectives course. The idea that the Great Commission is the backbone of the whole Bible—not just one of the teachings of the New Testament—is a major shift in perspective, a frontier yet to be crossed for most Christians. I have a feeling this was the same thing Paul was puzzling over for three years in Arabia. We used to joke that we would from then on refuse to talk on the *Biblical basis of missions*. We will not accept that topic. But we will be willing to talk on *Missions as the Basis of the Bible*. We think that the difference between missions being just one topic in the Bible, or the *one* theme of the Bible, is a pretty important question. The stories *in the Bible* are great, but the story *of the Bible* is even more important.

Luther's commentary on Genesis observes that Abraham in his day was to convey a blessing to other peoples, and Luther names off nine peoples so blessed. Luther in turn may have gotten this idea from a French commentator, and so on. Gradually we learned that many people had already taught what we are saying about the Great Commission in Genesis 12—notably Kaiser—or we couldn't have mentioned it!

We have since learned that the “blessing” being spoken of is not so much a blessing as a new relationship, such as the blessing conferred by Isaac on Jacob. Also, the Great Commission was further given to Isaac and to Jacob (Israel), and that in the latter case in Genesis 28:14, 15, we may be looking at the very passage Jesus was paraphrasing as He spoke to the children of Israel in His day, the Greek wording of Matt 28:20 being very similar to the Greek wording in the Greek Old Testament (the LXX) which was currently in use in Palestine at that time.

The Biblical Plan, Announcement of the Great Commission

Lecture 3 for the course, Foundations of the World Christian Movement

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In the previous two lessons we mentioned six different mysteries:

- 1—Matter
 - 2—Life
 - 3—Humans
 - 4—An intelligent counterforce
 - 5—the consequent declining of ancient high civilizations
 - 6—The Abrahamic New Beginning.
- But we hardly touched on the last mystery.

Mystery 6

In terms of God’s strategy, we see selectivity as He selects Noah for survival in his part of the world, whose offspring re-inhabit the whole Middle East. Later, God selects Abraham to be the carrier of faith and blessing to the rest of the world.

We read of Isaac being selected instead of Ishmael, and Jacob instead of Esau. We see Moses being selected and then Joshua. We see the Southern Kingdom emerging instead of “all Israel.” We see the small remnant returning from Babylon, two thirds remaining in Babylon—by Jesus’ day only one third had returned to the land of their fathers. We see selectivity, of course, in the case of Galilee-of-the-Gentiles rather than Jerusalem, Nazareth, of all places, and the selection of Mary.

Such selectivity has often been interpreted as exclusivity. Thus, we are surprised when Abraham is judged immoral by Abimelech, a man who was completely outside of the Abrahamic Covenant. It would seem that the Bible reports accurately and critically on a nation and its story, a story which is not altogether admirable. For example, much of the Bible describes almost exaggeratedly-objectionable behavior. Thus, the British historian, Herbert Butterfield, remarked that the uniqueness of the story of the Jewish people is not their history but their historiography. Apparently, selection has had as much or more to do with the goal of reporting to posterity and other nations as it has been a matter of gaining exclusive favors.

Furthermore, the Bible obviously does not contain all the things God has said and done among all of the nations of the world. We don’t always remember that fact. It is common for Christians to assume that God’s selectivity has really been intended to be exclusivity: that God spoke to and through the Jewish tradition and to and through none other. Thus, again, echoing Butterfield, we can, in the case of the Jewish people, and their Bible, understand that it is the perspective of the record, not the content of the record, that is the most unique.

In other words, the amazing and unique literary record we have in the Bible, despite its admirable honesty and self-criticism, does not on merely talk about human events that were unique or universal. With surprising accuracy it does describe people and their experiences and their understanding of things in the situation in which they found themselves, and in this we find many unique perspectives.

The Bible—What Kind of a Book?

It is important to remind ourselves that there is a big difference between believing in an inerrant Bible and in believing in inerrant interpretations of the Bible. In regard to our interpretation of Genesis (or any part of the Bible for that matter), there are at least three possibilities:

First, that what is said was meaningful to both the human author and his hearers or readers. This is the usual situation throughout the Bible.

Second, that what was said had a double meaning: it was meaningful at the time and also described something that was going to happen in the future. This is much rarer, but we do see it, for example, in some of the references in the Old Testament to Christ in the New Testament.

Thirdly, it is even more rarely possible that what was said was confusing and meaningless to the human author and audience at the time, and only described something in the future that was unknown at the time.

In the particular case of Genesis chapter 1, we can begin, as usual, by assuming that what was said was meaningful to the ancients producing it, that it did not miraculously represent insight into the entire universe, unknown at the time, and that it most likely meant something else. Is it not much more likely that we moderns have anachronistically read our current cosmological knowledge back into the text? Have we been guilty of wanting to put scientific discoveries into the text? If so, that would be quite understandable and forgivable, but it would obscure what the Bible meant at the time it was written.

Whenever we misinterpret a verse we not only risk error in our interpretation; we cover up what the Bible is really saying about something else.

This sort of thinking, however, does not require us to insist that the Abrahamic Covenant has only a local meaning, since—unlike Genesis 1—we do not in Genesis 12 have to choose between an ancient meaning of one set of events and a modern understanding to refer to a completely different set of events.

As for the detailed meaning of the Abrahamic Covenant, the idea that this is the first case of the Great Commission has been explained in the Perspectives course. Here it may be well to look at two aspects of it more closely.

The Link to the New Testament

The commission is mentioned in regard to Abraham three times and once to each Isaac and Jacob—in Genesis 12:1-3; 18:18; 22:18, to Abraham, to Isaac in Genesis 26:4-5, and to Jacob in Genesis 28:14-15. It is interesting that Genesis 28:15 is closely similar to Matthew 28:20. This similarity does not appear clearly in English translations since our Old Testament is a translation of the Hebrew. But in the Bible of the early church the Greek Old Testament—the New Testament phrase, “I will be with you until the end” is almost verbatim in Genesis 28:20.

This close similarity gives rise to the thought that Jesus in Matthew 28 was consciously paraphrasing the Old Testament Great Commission in the form that it was given to Jacob. Jacob was also called Israel, and Jesus was talking specifically to the children of Israel, not all the children of Abraham, so that would make sense. But, in any

case, the key point here is that the Great Commission was not something invented in New Testament times.

Furthermore, it is not just Jesus who alludes to these Old Testament Great Commission passages. Peter in Acts 3 quotes the phrase “in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed.” Paul in Galatians 3 says, seeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, “all the nations shall be blessed in you” (Gal. 3:8).

While we are on this verse let’s be sure to note that the faith Paul is talking about that Abraham had was not what we often glibly call “saving knowledge of Christ,” if that phrase means head knowledge. In the Bible faith is indissolubly related to obedience. Indeed in Romans 1:5 Paul talks about bringing about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles. Abraham’s “saving faith” did not involve any very detailed knowledge about Christ at all. And the Gospel preached to him Paul summarizes as the simple fact that it is good news that all nations will be included. That is, the basis of the Gospel is the blood of Christ, the one name under heaven whereby we must be saved. But the message of the Gospel is indeed the good news that Gentiles, not just Israel, are and always have been welcome by God.

The “Blessing”

We must also note that the common English translation “I will bless you ... and you will be a blessing to all of the families of the earth,” seems to fit in perfectly with our modern prosperity gospel. Again, we usually read into the text what we like it to mean. In this case the misleading word is the word, “blessing.” This is, in the Hebrew, the same word used again and again in the book of Genesis with a different meaning. Jacob was “blessed” not Esau, for example. This did not mean simply that he was to inherit land. It meant he was to shoulder many of the heavy responsibilities of a father now too old to carry them further. It made him the principal carrier of the family name. He was now more officially rooted in the bloodstream of his father than ever before.

For us today the difference between these two meanings of the word “blessing” is the difference between getting a ticket to heaven, which you can walk off with, and inheriting a permanent relationship to a heavenly family with all of the rights and privileges that are involved. This long-term family relationship illuminates the rationale for Jesus saying, “As my Father sent me, so send I you.” As we have seen earlier, this “blessing,” this new birth inducts us into a kingdom at war, not just to a safe holding tank awaiting heaven. Believers in poverty, oppression, and even semi-starvation tend to sing about the next world. Even Evangelicals in years gone by, in their less up-scale days, used to sing,

*This world is not my home,
I’m just a-passing through
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue
The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door
And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.*

No hint of a war to fight while waiting for Him to welcome me from heaven’s open door.

This type of otherworldly fixation is less defensible the more secure we become and the more knowledge we gain of what it takes to be loyal to a family, a kingdom,

which is at war here and now, striving to set the record straight as to who God is and what He is like and to re-glorify His Name.

In other words, Adam and his lineage became survivors but, unless reborn spiritually, not soldiers in a war against Satan. Once “saved” or “reborn” we become “listed” in heaven in “the lamb’s book of life,” but we may not be aware of the fact that we are also soldiers “enlisted” on earth to fight, as Paul says, not against flesh and blood but against principalities, powers, against the rulers of darkness, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Thus, it is not merely a matter of getting humans into heaven but getting heaven into humans. Those who are enlisted but don’t report for duty are classified as “Absent With Out Leave” or “AWOL.” When Jesus appears on the scene and tells us we should pray “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” when He assures us “the gates of Hell will not prevail against the onslaught of the church,” that is, the fortifications of Hell will not be able to resist the destruction of the works of the devil, our response may merely be “Huh? I thought the purpose of church was to meet my needs and the needs of my family.” In a war, of course, soldiers need to eat and sleep and have their basic needs met. But they are also committed to an enterprise in which they may be injured or killed. Now that sounds like Jesus saying “He who seeks to save himself will lose his life but he who will lose his life for my sake and the Gospel will save it.” From this we realize that going AWOL is not necessarily as safe as staying with the troops and fighting the good fight.

The Christian and Old Testament Theology

Foundations Reader, 41-45

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Before we launch into Kaiser's input, we should consider the significance of Kaiser's writings on the Old Testament. To illustrate, let me just give you an anecdote about Kaiser and my own reflections along this line. For fifteen or eighteen years I had been teaching the story of the Gospel beyond the Bible, that is, the story of the impact of the Bible down through history. There really are only two subjects in the last four thousand years: the biblical revelation, and then the *impact* of that revelation. All of human history in the last four thousand years relates directly or indirectly to that simple, single picture.

During the years in which I was teaching this whole four thousand year period, I was trying, naturally, to track the continuity throughout. That is, my professional assignment while teaching for ten years at the School of World Mission at Fuller Seminary was to teach what happened *after* the Bible. Of course, I was focusing on the Great Commission. But, as a former missionary on the field coming home and taking up this kind of a scholarly activity, I soon discovered to my dismay that the Great Commission, which was so important to me and which I had acted on in a decision that changed my life, was a subject virtually absent from all Christian literature following the Bible itself!

Following the Bible, the great Christian Fathers of the ancient church—like Tertullian, Ambrose and Augustine—never talked about the Great Commission. The Nicene Creed makes no reference to our obligation to the nations. Neither is it evident in the Chalcedonian Creed, the Second Helvetic Confession or the Augsburg Confession. None of the theological traditions demonstrate awareness of the Great Commission.

My problem as a professor was to figure out how to explain that oversight. As I was teaching over the years about the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth centuries to the present, I noted to myself that these people had surely received the Great Commission. It was in force. Jesus did not say, "Now, here is a Great Commission, which is not to be taken seriously until William Carey comes along, and then I want you to take it seriously." That is not what Jesus said. Yet, after the Protestant Reformation, it was hundreds of years before the Protestants clicked in even though during the same period of time the Catholics took it seriously. But in the early centuries and in most of the Christian tradition, the Great Commission is absent in the theological literature. And I had to figure out how that could be.

How could the Great Commission have been given formally and officially by Jesus Christ Himself and be found in all four Gospels, yet be so completely absent in Christian history? You can buy books which present at a sweeping succession the great sermons preached throughout Christian history. But you will not find the Great Commission there. Whatever set of sermons you look at, the editor seems to be as unaware of the Great Commission as are the preachers from which he quotes!

Now here is the key point. If a whole massive global Christian tradition can get along for century after century with virtually no reference whatsoever to the Great

Commission, could it also be true that the Jewish people received the Great Commission at the time of Abraham but also did very little about it?”

Now, I knew about the Abrahamic Covenant. I knew that it talked about all the peoples of the world. But for many, many years I did not think, “Well, the Jewish people didn’t take it seriously. Or they didn’t know it was in force even if it was in force.” It never even occurred to me that it was in force, and that God actually expected His chosen people to be missionaries.

Sometimes I think that people talk as though the Jewish people did understand God’s concern for all people as expressed in the Abrahamic Covenant! And I playfully say that Joseph’s brothers took up an offering and sent him off as a missionary to Egypt. Right?

Wrong! That was not the brothers’ purpose. But God did have that in mind! Years later Joseph’s brothers were completely under his power and could easily have supposed that he was going to harm them in retribution. Joseph looked at them and said, “You sold me...”

You can imagine that like a bad dream what they had done to him years before swished through their minds. They knew that the man they were looking at had complete power of life and death over them. Then Joseph goes on with his sentence, “You sold me, but God sent me!” He saw clearly that it was God who had sent him.

But his brothers did not understand that point. They did not have the Great Commission clearly in mind. They were not rehearsing those key verses in Genesis 12:1-3. Obviously not. But does that mean those verses were not intended to be taken seriously?

This is a key point. There is, for example, what I call a “Mickey Mouse” theory that in the Old Testament the mission of the church was in effect only for those who *came* to Israel but that in the New Testament, Israel was to *go* to the nations. In other words, the idea of *going* was a new idea given by Jesus. The fancy words used for this theory are “Old Testament mission is *centripetal*, New Testament Mission is *centrifugal*.” It is simplistic.

As I look further on in the Bible, I feel almost sick that most of my life I understood that God was *punishing* the Northern tribes when He sent them out in the *Diaspora* (a term for the *dispersion* or for *being sent away*). Well, it was a punishment. But it was more than that. God was in the Mission Business, whether Israel was or not.

All through the Old Testament, looking at it once the scales fall off your eyes, you can see that God is in the Mission Business, whether His people recognized their Commission or not.

You can say the same thing about the period following the Bible. Twenty centuries have gone by after the Great Commission clearly was given. During most of that period Christians do not understand about the Commission. But *God was in the Mission Business*, whether they were or not.

Going back to my personal story—what I’m saying is that this new perspective on the Bible was boiling through my mind when I ran into Kaiser’s 1978 book, *Towards an Old Testament Theology*. This was in 1980 or 1981—the year the Billy Graham Center was inaugurated. I was at that meeting and was asked to give a little talk one afternoon.

Kaiser was asked to give a talk every morning. After his first morning’s talk, I went up to him and asked, “Why did you put the word *Promise* in the heading of every

chapter of this book you have written? Every chapter employs the word promise. Promise isn't the right word. You know that the Abrahamic Covenant wasn't just a promise." I was troubled with that word due to this new perspective I now had.

He looked at me, smiled, and said, "Well, I called it the *Promise* because Paul did."

Oh yes! That's right. Paul did.

"Well, why did Paul call it the Promise?" I answered back. "It is because He was talking to Jews who had misunderstood the Commission as merely a Promise, and so Paul employed the term they knew, saying, 'Now what you call the *Promise*...' and he went on to refer to it as a *mysterious* phenomenon."

This is why we call this phenomenon a great *Mystery*—the Mystery of God's Plan which became clear in Christ, or maybe when William Carey finally dug it up, but which should have been clear from the time Abraham first received it. There is a great mystery here.

Kaiser said, "As a matter of fact you can call the Abrahamic Covenant the *Great Commission* if you want."

At that I was staggered. I had never heard anyone important say that before! I could hardly believe an eminent scholar like Kaiser would say that!

So I said to Kaiser, "I don't have the standing as a Bible scholar to go around saying Genesis 12:1-3 is the *Great Commission*. People would laugh at me, and run me out of town. I simply could not get away with it. We are trying to put this kind of perspective into a course"(what we now call our Perspectives course). So I said, "I need to be able to quote someone like you, somebody who is a Hebrew and Old Testament professor and the head of a major seminary. I need to quote you. Do you have that statement in print?"

This is the phrase I will never forget. Kaiser said to me, "You go ahead and quote me, and I will put it in print."

I asked, "Quote you saying what?"

He said, "Well, you know, those verses in Genesis 12:1-3, which don't speak simply of a Promise. You can call that the Great Commission if you want." To understand, therefore, Kaiser essentially elicits all the different Bible passages that he refers to: Luke 24; Matthew 5; John 5:39, 45-46; Romans 15; Hosea; 1 Corinthians 10; Hebrews 6:18. All these passages assure us in one way or another that the Old Testament is really an up-to-date book. He also hints that the term "Old Testament" is not a Biblical designation. Isn't that interesting? See, he says, "Now that's the ancient church tradition." But we get the impression that there is something defective about the phrase *Old Testament*. "Old" is a word which steers you incorrectly. I refer to the Old Testament as Part I of the Bible.

To illustrate, in the Second Century there was the Marcionism heresy condemned by the church because it perceived the Old Testament and its Creator-God as inferior and embraced a truncated new Testament and Father of Jesus Christ as a superior, distinct God. Marcion is the wealthy businessman who had time to dabble in spiritual things, and probably was an earnest person. We have had many earnest Marcions down through history who have somehow gotten the idea that the Old Testament is out of date and no longer applies. The possibility of reading it that way may exist because in the New Testament, Paul, Jesus, and all of the church leaders are trying to throw off the legalistic

burden that the Jewish religious tradition had accumulated. But in throwing off that legalistic burden, they were not throwing off the Old Testament but a *misunderstanding* of what we call the Old Testament. Our Old Testament was their Bible, their scripture. They were not throwing out the Scriptures.

Probably the clearest example of that is something that I myself remember vividly understanding for the first time in my life when I was probably just out of my teen years. I had always read and heard people refer to Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43 as, “You have heard it said, but I say unto you.” Ah! There you’ve got it. The Old Testament said these six things, but Jesus trumped them. He came out with something better. Note well that he started out this whole series of six illustrations by saying, “Look, I am not here to overthrow the law” (Matthew 5:17). So, does He go ahead to overthrow the law in six ways? Does that sound reasonable? No, but people do interpret it that way, insisting that the Old Testament—the Law—says one thing, but that the Gospel says something else. Such people face this problem: *the Gospel is in the Old Testament*. You cannot contrast the Gospel with the Old Testament.

The telltale clue in finding out what is really going on, is the sixth of the six illustrations when Jesus says, “You have heard it that way; I tell you this way.” We take it to say, “Moses said, the Torah said, the Pentateuch says, the Old Testament says clearly, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”

How did this happen? This is really embarrassing, and I don’t mean to be anti-Jewish at all because most people have probably come to the same conclusion in their weak moments. People latched on to the love part and simply assumed the hate part. They said, “Yeah, love your neighbor. Oh yeah, That means you can hate your enemy! Right, right, right! Hate your enemy but love your neighbor.”

Well, Jesus said, “You have heard it said (by your teachers), ‘Moses said you should love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ And I tell you that that was not what Moses said. That is a misquotation. Look back in the Old Testament. It doesn’t say to hate your enemy. That isn’t in the text. The text merely says love your neighbor. It doesn’t say hate anyone!”

Oh! So now you realize that Jesus is not comparing His teaching with the teaching of Moses but with the contemporary interpreters of Moses. Jesus is not quoting Moses, He is quoting Moses’ misled expositors.

Let me make sure you understand this. Every one of those six examples of popular teaching to which the hearers of Jesus had been exposed—where He has to make a correction—He is not making corrections of Moses. These are not updatings of Moses. These are updatings of their *misunderstanding* of what Moses had said.

Jesus starts right out in verse 17, saying, “Don’t think I came to abolish the law.” Okay! Then He goes on, “Now, here’s some examples. You heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder.’ I say to you that everyone who’s angry shall be guilty...” Jesus is not overthrowing Moses; He’s pointing out the true significance of Moses.

In other words, the key phrase is, “I did not come to abolish but to fulfill—to reinstate, to clarify, to reinforce.” And all six of these are like that one. For example, “You have heard it said to you, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I want to point out that you can commit adultery in your heart.”

The Old Testament talks about the heart. The heart is the heart of the matter, whether you are in Deuteronomy or Genesis or wherever. Right? And so it is not as if the Old Testament says, “All you need to do is to do things outwardly, and you’ll get along just fine” but that in the New Testament it says, “Well, we’re going to go to higher things! We’re going to talk about the heart!” That is a fallacy--a dreadful, ghastly, tragic fallacy. Such thinking throws the whole Old Testament into a shadow. Unfortunately for many people that has very commonly been the case.

In any case, I am elaborating to a degree what is said in this passage in Matthew, because Marcion obviously thought that Jesus was condemning the Old Testament in these statements. So he throws the whole Old Testament out except for certain narratives. But, alas, he finds that he has to throw out much of the New Testament, too. By the time he gets through, he’s got a kind of a theoretical gospel that sounds a lot like some of the modern heresies. “Easy believism,” for example, is a modern heresy; it is neo-Marcion talk, or a resurrection of the Marcionitic point of view. This neo-Marcion perspective is a danger that constantly surrounds us. We dare not minimize the Old Testament at all!

Another passage to consider in relation to the Old Testament are the events of Luke 24 which overviews the time from the resurrection of Christ through the story of the Road to Emmaus and Christ’s appearance to the disciples to His ascension. How did these events bring mission vision to the disciples? Is Luke 24 merely a clarification as to the reason Jesus had to die, or is it also a clarification as to why the whole world should have been in their perspective?

While Luke 24 records an amazing story, both clarification elements are very much a part of Luke 24:47. Jesus says very clearly that the whole world is in the picture *as it should have been*, and essentially asks, “How come you didn’t understand this?”

Now I don’t think Jesus was trying to belittle these people in Luke 24:25 when He says, “Oh, foolish men,” so much as to point out the incredible foolishness of what they were saying. I would prefer to translate Jesus as saying, “Look, you guys! You are incredibly foolish in this thing!” It is not that they were dummies; they were perfectly intelligent people. But the problem was that they were slow of heart to believe.

The Luke 24:23-34 passage is fantastic. I know of no more powerful, dramatic event in the New Testament that talks about the nature of faith and belief and obedience and of why our understanding hinges upon our obedience. For years this passage has been one of great excitement to me. I contend that these two men were downcast; their vision was shattered. They were in a hopeless mood, just trudging out of the city with all of their hopes dashed. And they were probably a little bitter. Why did things turn out the way they did? Why did everything go wrong?

And then this Man joins them. They do not pay any attention to who He is. Of course, they do not recognize Him. So when He asks, “Hey, what’s the problem?” I believe that they just burst out in anger. How else can you interpret the phrase, “Are you the only one in Jerusalem who doesn’t know what has gone on there the last few days?” I mean, that answer is very much a put-down. They snarled at him. And it came out of anger.

Stop and think how far removed these two were from the realities. Jesus was by no means “the only one in Jerusalem who didn’t understand.” He was in fact the only one in Jerusalem who did understand what was going on.

What a cataclysmic difference between those of us who many times in our lives may be stumbling along in despair and dismay and hopelessness simply because we were not aware of what God was doing. And the difference between what God is doing and our understanding of that is sometimes just black and white. In our weak moments we may think He is the one who does not understand. He is the only One who does understand!

And so, this is a momentous passage. We are talking about that which hopefully will burn in your hearts also: this recognition of the genuineness and the usefulness and the up-to-dateness of the Old Testament. These truths must permeate our thinking, both in respect to the Redeemer that was to come, and also with respect to the whole globe that was in the picture from the beginning, from Genesis 12 on.

Note that from the first announcement of the Plan, there was nothing more to be added. The Great Commission was there in all its splendor—right there in Genesis! And when you realize that, then all of a sudden the story of the Jews is a story which could be the story of any nation. It could be the story of a group who had the glory, had the Gospel, had the blessing—everything that God wanted them to have—but somehow did not push on in that belief to the rest. Too many forgot or ignored the crucial fact that blessing was to be *shared*, that glory was to be *shared*, that inheritance from the Father was not just for them but *for all peoples of the earth!*

When that understanding suddenly comes upon you, it's like a second conversion. It's an incredible experience. These disciples were staggered when they finally understood. They should have known. They were exposed. There was no reason for not understanding. It was a *mystery*, as Paul said, that they did not understand.

Some of them did, however, all the way down through history. The Psalmist speaks of declaring His glory among all nations. Isaiah talks about, "You are to be My salvation to the ends of the earth, a light to the nations" (Isa 49:6).

Looking back I cannot believe that I used to think that the Jewish people were essentially waiting for the commission for 2000 years. I can't believe I was such a dummy (*I'm* using that word now!). I had the idea that the Jewish people were just supposed to behave in the meantime; just supposed to be good boys and girls—as if God merely said, "Just don't get into trouble..." The point was, I thought that they didn't have any mission, any message, any mandate, any purpose. They were just supposed to keep out of trouble, and then, one day, 2000 years later, God was going to say, "Now, by the way, I've got a job for you to do."

But no! That commission in Genesis 12:1-3 was no "hibernating mandate." It was always in force.

This whole subject has got to be revolutionary. I hope it will be for you.

“The ‘First Chapter’ of the Bible: Genesis” 12–50

Foundations Reader, 47-49

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The Introduction of History

In our study of Genesis, it is important to recognize that Genesis is always broken into two parts, Genesis 1–11 and 12–50. In my estimation, Genesis 1–11 is the introduction to the whole Bible, not just to the book of Genesis. The reason this section of Scripture is an “Introduction,” not just to Genesis but to the whole Bible, is that it portrays a problem so serious that the whole Bible is centered around it. In some ways Genesis 1–11 introduces all of subsequent history. These passages start out by presenting the beauty of God’s creation. The entrance of evil is introduced. It talks about the hopeless result. And what better backdrop for the whole Bible could you present?

In fact, the opening chapters of Genesis confront the reader with an almost insoluble problem. All the efforts of humanity up to this point are hopeless. Humanity is set on committing evil continually. The stage is set, then, for a Plan (The Plan) that has yet to be announced. The Plan is announced in the “first chapter” of the Bible, Genesis 12-50.

If I was to print a Bible I would pull Genesis 1-11 out and use it as the divinely inspired *Introduction* to the whole Bible. That is because Genesis 1-11 presents the stage on which all the biblical events are played out. Then Chapter One would start with Genesis 12–50. Chapter Two would be Exodus and so on.

The First Chapter

For the actual drama, Act I, the curtain opens at Genesis 12. Genesis 12:1-3, is essentially the announcement of the subject of the entire Bible. From our point of view the Great Commission first appears, of course, in Genesis 12:1-3. The Commission also reappears four more times. It reappears more than that in fragments, but the key phrase “all the peoples of the world” occurs four more times. Two of these times are in the case of God’s relationship to Abraham (or Abram, and later Abraham), one time with Isaac, and one time with Jacob.

Now, Genesis 12:1-3 is a most amazing section of Scripture. First of all, a remarkable plan is launched that affects every human population on the face of the earth. It builds on the fact that those populations have been put out of communication with their Creator Father God. In addition, it proposes a solution for the reintegration of those peoples back into the Father Creator God’s global family.

Terms like *bless* are used. Now that word *bless* can be traced to mean more than the re-inheritance of a person, but also the *adoption* of a person. And this is consistent with New Testament terminology to that same effect.

Then when it comes to the second verse, Genesis 12:2, we come to an imperative verb: “You will be a blessing.” Now, this is the same word but with a different meaning. We as individuals do not go around the world pronouncing a blessing in the same sense that the Bible pronounces a blessing on the oldest son, who then officially inherits the authority of the family and corresponding responsibilities. God is the one who blesses not

only us but all other peoples; and through us other peoples will be blessed by God. That is very important. So the word blessing stretches to include several possibilities.

Then, when we come to this phrase *peoples* in Genesis 12:3, the reference is to a relatively small group: *mishpa'ah* in the plural in Hebrew. The same word does not occur in 18:18 where this same Commission comes up again, nor in 22:18 or 26:4-5, where you have the second two references to Abraham and then Isaac. The word does reappear, however, when Jacob comes into the picture in Genesis 28:14-15.

The Commission and the Plan

Several considerations need to be noted about the fivefold repetition of this Commission. First of all, recognize it is a *Commission*, not just a Promise. The Jewish people reduced it to a Promise. They considered it a promise God had made to them, not merely a promise that included and obligated them in their response. It was meant to be an opportunity and an obligation. A subtle and disastrous misunderstanding occurs when we understand in our own Christian lives that God is simply out to bless us, and He does not care about brothers and sisters in our own family, or our neighbors, or the peoples across the world. Such views turn salvation, which is global in its very essence, into an individual heresy.

American culture has upheld this heresy probably more than any other of the world's cultures. In America today, with terribly evil results in our own society and all around the world in so far as our perspectives pervade around the world, people have been taught that it is safe and sound, even reasonable and heroic to seek your own salvation. Jesus said in essence, "Seek to save yourself and you will lose your life." (Luke 9:24) Seeking self-salvation and self-limited promises is the most dangerous thing you could do! Yet our Constitution actually suggests that the pursuit of happiness is part of our national goal. While this may be true, it should not be. It is a disastrous goal.

So right here in Genesis, the Plan of Redemption of all the earth is announced and instituted. These early chapters of the Bible have a global perspective. God is not just interested in *only* us—his "chosen" ones. And we cannot fellowship with God if we assume we have His undivided attention. You know how small children sometimes want undivided attention, and they will push another sibling off because they want their mother's full attention. This is counter-productive behavior. We cannot love and fellowship with our Father in heaven or with this global family of Christians unless we can understand that God's love exceeds the existence of the Christian community and extends to *all* the peoples of the earth.

Now these first three verses of Genesis are so significant, that it is a tragedy that they are reduced to merely a "Covenant" or the "Abrahamic Covenant". What an absolute loss when this incredible Plan of Redemption is mentioned as a minor or marginal matter.

Let me give you a lurid example: I was at a huge city church in Des Moines, Iowa some years ago, and I was in the Pastor of Christian Education's office. There was sitting on his desk a brand new book, which consisted of nothing but cartoons. And there were cartoons, four per page, that ran clear through the Bible, from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation. So, I thought, "I'll look up the Plan of Redemption. I'll see how this summary of the whole Bible treats this Plan of the whole Bible, this Plan of Redemption, which gives the theme for every passage in the Bible."

So, I found where Abraham came into the picture, and sure enough, God is telling Abraham to go some place. And then the next picture shows him fighting a lion on his way to Egypt. Well, that is right in Genesis: he is on his way to Egypt. Now, it doesn't say anything in the text about lions, but little kids like lions, so put a lion in there. Keep the kids awake, keep them on the subject.

This is clearly *off* the subject! To mention that God asked Abraham to go to a different country, and then just rush on to a lion on the way to Egypt, is totally to destroy the meaning of the Bible. When we attempt to teach the Bible and actually destroy it, this is really evil. Yet you find that same paradigm in book after book in the Christian libraries all around the world, as they treat the book of Genesis. They ignore or downplay or just comment in passing on this Commission, which actually is repeated four more times: twice to Abraham in 18:18 and 18:22, once to Isaac in 26:4-5, and once to Israel (or Jacob) in 28:14-15.

The Commission in Both Testaments

Remember that the Bible, the Old Testament, is in two different languages. It was originally, presumably, in Hebrew and Chaldean. Who knows exactly what dialects there were behind the various authors who crossed the large period of time that it took to produce the Old Testament? But the oldest documents that we have that refer to the text of the Old Testament are not in Hebrew, but in Greek. Hundreds and hundreds of years before our most ancient Hebrew manuscripts, there are Greek manuscripts that are translations by Hebrews who were bilingual in Hebrew and Greek.

We do not consider the Greek translation of the Old Testament scriptures as the inspired text; but we do not have the original documents of the inspired text. So Greek is a helpful reference to the Bible, and is probably less studied than it should be. It is important to realize that the Septuagint, this Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, was the Bible of the early church. There are some scholars who even believe Jesus had access to the Septuagint, as that translation was called. It was the most influential translation of the Bible ever made. Our current Bibles follow the order of the Septuagint, not the order of any Hebrew Bible. So the impact of that Greek Bible is very important, and it probably was accessible to Jesus Christ and certainly was accessible throughout the communities of the early church.

In order to translate the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, early scribes had to engage in a kind of paraphrasing because of the differences in thought and language between Greek and Hebrew. Interestingly enough, the paraphrase from the original Hebrew into Greek of the passage in Genesis 28:15 reads very similar to the wording of Matthew 28:20. Following the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-19, and the Great Commission as stated in Genesis 28:14, you have the statement, "I will be with you even to the end." Now, of course in Genesis the text does not read "of the world," whereas in the Matthew 28 the text reads "of the world." But the great similarity of the actual wording in those two passages gives rise to the obvious thought that Jesus was consciously paraphrasing Genesis 28:14-15 when He gave the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20.

Now why would He do that? Why would He not go back to Genesis 12? He gave this commandment in this way because He was speaking to the children of Israel. So, He

basically repeats the Commission as it was originally given to Israel, which is recorded in Genesis 28:14-15.

Thus, as consideration is given to the two parts of Genesis and the role of the Great Commission in the whole of the Bible, exciting dimensions are opened up for reflection.