

May 01, 1993 by Steve Hawthorne

The Story of His Glory



The Bible is basically a story about God—the story of his glory. Might we be boring ourselves with the Bible, mistreating it as if it were merely a drawn-out sermon about how people got saved and behaved? What a thrill to discover that every element of scripture—the reports of events, the verses of distilled wisdom, the lyrical prophecies—converge in one central saga of one worthy person. The story, in essence, is God bringing glory to himself. At the core of all the epics and eras, God’s story flows with steady continuity. The story of God’s glory is still unfolding today toward its fulfillment.

Don’t be thrown off by the rather religious sounding word “glory.” There are two amazing dimensions to glory. The first is that God reveals who he is. The second is that God receives people who have become like him.

Declare his glory — that he may be given glory.

Consider these two dimensions of glory as found in Psalm 96. First, the revealing of his glory:

“Sing to the Lord, bless his name. Proclaim good tidings of his salvation from day to day. Tell of his glory among the nations, his wonderful deeds among all the peoples.”

God is not spreading vague rumors about himself. The record of what he has actually done is to be announced in every circle and setting of humanity.

Although the psalmist marvels that “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1-3), God has not left us guessing about God in the subtle light of creation. He has spoken to people in speech and in actions, and supremely in the person of Jesus. God intends that this knowledge be passed on faithfully in every human

language. When God speaks to the people in genuine, articulate language, telling them about what he has done or will do on earth, it's something special. It's special because God is saying more than what is obvious from the speechless light of created order. Some scholars call God's revealing of himself in words "special revelation."

The heart of special revelation is the name of God. God does not go anonymous. He names himself, divulging wondrous matters that can be described in human speech. But the name of God is not to be confused with the names of God. There are many biblical names of God. He is pleased to be addressed by any of them. Usually, when scripture uses the phrase "the name of God," it is often speaking of the entire record, or reputation about God, the body of truth that he has revealed of himself. We might call this aspect of God's name, his "fame name."¹

In every nation God wants to be named. This does not mean that he wants to be listed in the phone book under "G" for "God." He wants the truth about his history and his character made known amidst every people. Special revelation continues as people tell the story and divulge what God has spoken of himself. That's why Ps 96, along with other scriptures, calls believers to announce the record of God's dealings.²

But why is God so interested in getting himself proclaimed? Many believers have observed the eternal results of evangelism and have concluded that God's uppermost passion must be the salvation of people. Of course there is abundant biblical truth at this point. God "desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4). How astounding is God's love for the world! He cares for predicaments of people at the present hour as well as their eternal status. But the divine concern for people is not the whole story. Even more moves the heart of God.

As vast as God's love for the world, there is an even greater love: The Father loves the Son and gives everything into his hands as inheritance (John 3:35, Col. 1:12-13, Psalm 2:7-8). The Son loves the Father, revealing the Father and ultimately bringing all things to him again for his glory (John 14:31, Matt.

11:25-27, 1 Cor. 15:24-28, Phil. 2:9-11). The Spirit of God searches and reveals the heart of God and glorifies the Son (1 Cor. 2:10, John 16:13-15).

God desires the glory that he deserves. He seeks to be recognized by all, and to be lovingly served by many from every people. God is worthy of such glory, but what is astounding to comprehend, is that he actually takes joy in the glory that people can bring him. There is too much language about God being pleased with righteous worship to think otherwise.

Psalm 96 presents a simple rationale for such a resounding declaration of the gospel of salvation. "For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised" (verse 4). God is worthy of the praise he is destined to gain. The purpose for evangelizing the nations is not ultimately the benefit to people, neither is it the rightful ascendancy of God over false gods, though both these matters are mentioned. The reason for the world evangelization is the praise of God that comes from people who hear and acknowledge that God indeed reigns (verses 7-10). God will be worshiped by entire families who live out righteousness and bring it to him as a personal love gift. Such lavish worship is still but a small measure of the jubilation of all created order welcoming God's coming to fill the heavens and the earth with his righteousness (verses 11-13).

Why the global song of proclamation? The basic rationale of world evangelization is that God reveals his glory to all peoples so that he may receive glory from all creation.

Why does God have such a penchant for praise? Does God have a public relations problem? A fool might conclude that the Most High has some kind of low self-image driving him to crave the adulation of people. Of course, this is not the case. God is to be praised simply because of his magnificent worthiness and beauty. "Splendor and majesty are before him, strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Give³ to the Lord, O families of the peoples, give to the Lord glory and strength. Give to the Lord the glory of his name. Bring an offering, and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in holy attire" (96:6-9).

Every grouping of people with generational depth, the “families of the peoples,” are beckoned to come near the royal presence of God. They are not to come empty handed, but they are to extend to God a sampling of the unique glory and strength of their people as a submissive gift. The peoples are to voice praise gifts to God in their many languages, but no people is to offer speculative guesses about what constitutes rightful praise. Only the truth God has revealed about himself—“the glory of his name”—is the substance and true measure of worthy praise (verse 8).

While styles vary with the distinct flower of every culture, still each people group is to continually approach God according to the protocols of heaven’s courts, with a radiant inner holiness only God can give (the Hebrew phrase of verse 9 can be rendered “the splendor of holiness”).

The Bible as God’s Story

Let’s return to the idea that the Bible is an integrated story of God’s glory.

Remember the basic thesis: God reveals his glory to all peoples so that he may receive glory from all creation. This double dimension of glory can help make sense out of an apparent jumble of ancient stories.

Abraham

When Abram finally completed the long sojourn from his ancestral homeland to the land of promise, he did not excel as a brilliant missionary as we might define that role. He’s not on record as a great evangelist. He was actually thrown out of Egypt in disgrace (Gen. 12:10-20). Abraham’s neighbors frightened him into lying about his family. Abraham’s rationale for falsely presenting his wife does not reveal an evangelist’s confidence that lives might change: “ Surely there is no fear of God in this place.” (Gen. 20:11).

But for all his failings, he did the most missionary thing he could have done when he first arrived in the new land. The first thing Abraham did upon arrival was to establish ongoing public worship of God according to revealed truth. “He built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord” (Gen. 12:7-8). His

household may have been the only worshipers at that altar, but God was explicitly worshiped by name in some sort of continuing public way.

Early in his occupancy of the new land Abram rescued some of his powerful neighbors from a marauding alliance of other nations (Gen. 14). After the miraculous victory Abram refused to accept the windfall of reward from the king of Sodom. If he accepted the largess he knew that he and his family would from that point always be viewed as living under the patronage of that city. Instead he chose to keep himself positioned before the nations as one specifically blessed by God.

With the nations watching, Abram resolutely named God as the one who would reward and bless him. His bold words (Gen. 14:21-24) were substantiated by the gift of goods Abraham offered God. Abram offered to God the wealth of Sodom and other nations to God. He helped the nations give a tithe to God (in biblical usage, nothing like a church “tax” but rather a significant gift of worship, (Gen. 14:18-20). Even with Melchizedek present, who then ended up serving as the surprise priest for the nations by offering such a lavish worship gift on their behalf? Abraham!

It’s been said that Abram was blessed in order to be a blessing to the nations. This may be true, but in the words of Melchizedek, Abram was recognized as being blessed by God with the result that God himself be blessed in praise! “Blessed be Abram of God Most High ... And blessed be God Most High ...” (Gen. 14:18-20).

Abram recognized that God’s promise to bless him was nothing like winning a lottery for a free prize. God was forming a new family. The biblical concept of blessing was loaded with overtones of family honor and heritage. A biblical blessing was often a statement of power which bestowed a destiny. A family blessing often became the most valued feature of an inheritance.

Many present-day societies restrict the idea of inheritance to shuffling unspent assets after the death of an ancestor. Biblical inheritance was not considered to be the leftovers from one generation trickling down to be consumed by the next.

A blessing was known to be a special heritage for future generations of a family, multiplying with increased abundance. The most astounding feature of the blessing promised to Abram (Gen. 12:1-3) was that God was entrusting to him an endowment that was destined to impart something substantial to every single family on the planet, far beyond one extended family.

The Proof of Abram's Faithfulness

The crucial, proving moment of Abraham's life was a worship event (Gen. 22). God tested him to find what kind of servant he really had. Would Abraham receive God's promised gifts but fail to enjoy them in ongoing obedient intimacy with God, as a son would honor his father? The test was a simple one of worship. Would Abraham render to God what had been given to him? Would God find in Abraham an obedient, priestly passion for God (literally, "a fearer of God," Gen. 22:12)? Would Abraham prove to be a trustworthy son? If so, God could make of him a faith-father for the nations.

You know the story. At the moment of Abraham's obedient worship, God reiterated with solemn oath his global purpose to bless the peoples of the earth through this family (22:18). This defining faith of worship virtually constituted the new faith-family. This event sealed Israel's destiny as a people powerful to receive and release God's bounty for the world. If God has a worshiping people with their entire beings jealous for God, then God's intent to bless will ultimately not be dissipated in self-service.

The Exodus

God did more for his name than to gain early worship from Abraham. God went global in a big way at the Exodus. Since then he has never ceased to deal with every people on earth according to the truths he revealed at that time.

At first glance, the story of Exodus doesn't look like a great missionary event. Thousands of Egyptians dead. Grief in every Egyptian home. What was God doing?

The key passage is Exodus 9:13-16 in which Moses gives an ultimatum to Pharaoh, with a bold word about his purposes:

“Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, ‘Let my people go, that they may serve me. For this time I will send all my plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. For if by now I had put forth my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. But indeed, for this cause I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you my power, and in order to proclaim my name through all the earth’” (my italics).

Take note that Moses never said, “Let my people go!” That’s just half the sentence, without the purpose. Take care to hear the entire cry of salvation: “Let my people go, that they may serve (worship) me!” (Exodus 8:1, 20, 9:1, 13, 10:3).⁴

Pharaoh well understood the entire demand of Moses that the people be released to worship. Pharaoh probably thought that the appeal for a worship vacation was a ploy to disguise escape plans. Perhaps many of the Hebrews made the same mistake. How many of them may have thought that the plans to worship God in the wilderness were but a ruse to dupe the authorities? Is it any wonder then that many of them remained fixated on matters of comfort, diet, safety, and entertainment? They were slow to comprehend that in their escape, God had a purpose for himself in the sight of the nations. They had turned salvation inside-out: They seriously thought that their rescue was the predominate concern of God. Instead, God was orchestrating a powerful plan to draw the the attention of the nations to himself by their rescue and worship.

God’s purpose to be worshiped by the nations had to begin in pure simplicity with one people. God had rescued them to begin the worship festival on earth. Instead, for them, worship remained a perfunctory ritual along the way to their new homes and gardens. But God was resolute in making his worship the global issue.

God Brings Global Attention to His Name

God was singling himself out. He was making an “everlasting name” for himself at the Exodus (Isa. 63:11-14 and Neh. 9:9-10). He wanted everyone in Egypt and beyond to know that there was absolutely no god like the only living God. He

wanted the world to watch a mob of slaves marching in procession to worship him. God established his reputation as one greater and absolutely different (truly holy, not just holier) than every other deity ever dreamed up by man—an exquisite, almighty, resplendent God. The Exodus was to be a reference point for all subsequent revelation to the world of his character, his holiness, and his power. How did chaos in Egypt reveal the ever-living God?

Some scholars have noted that every one of the plagues of Egypt was either aimed against the false gods of Egypt or the oppressive power structures that were revered with fanatical zeal.⁵ Some Egyptian deities, such as the Nile River, or the great sun god, were embarrassed directly by plagues of blood and darkness. Other deities were indirectly shamed by exposing their complete inability to do what they were supposed to do. There were gods who were revered as being able to deal with infestations of insects or protect cattle from disease. The powerful religious elite was shamed and diseased out of honor and power. The deeply revered military was summarily annihilated. Why was God wrecking Egypt like this before the watching world?

God was executing judgments “against all the gods of Egypt” (Exodus 12:12). He was not aiming at destroying people, but devastating one of the most highly regarded collection of false gods in all the earth. If he wanted to destroy the people of Egypt he could have done it quickly. “For if by now I had put forth my hand and struck you ... , you would then have been cut off from the earth. But indeed, for this cause I have allowed you to remain ... to proclaim my name through all the earth.”

Did it work? Did the world take notice of God making his name great? The devastation recorded in the book of Exodus didn’t make headlines in Egyptian hieroglyphs, but we should understand that not many stories were chipped into stone which put Egypt in a bad light.

The waves of the Red Sea hadn’t quite calmed down before Moses led the people in singing, “The Lord is his name... Who is like you among the gods, O Lord? Who is like you, majestic in holiness?” Then they began to list some of the surrounding

nations, stating clearly that: “The peoples have heard, and they tremble...” (Exodus 15:3, 7, 15).

Jethro, married into Moses’ family, but a Gentile in every respect, had certainly heard about the God of the Hebrews for years from Moses. Perhaps many peoples and cities had heard something of this great God without trusting or worshiping him. But listen to Jethro after the plagues of Egypt. “Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people” (Exodus 18:11). Jethro was a leading priest of a foreign people with authority to evaluate such matters (Exodus 18:1).

God showed himself as the “warrior” of which Moses sang, who “in the greatness of your excellence, you do overthrow those who rise up against you” (Exodus 15:3, 7). The Egyptian empire opposed God by dealing “proudly with the (Hebrew) people,” and thus became his enemies.

For all of Pharaoh’s concern about keeping the Hebrews as slaves, forced servitude is not the prominent issue. God does not take him to task about being a mean taskmaster. As Moses confronted ancient Egypt, it appeared to be just another harsh empire. It turned out to be a complex of religious, economic, and military powers inextricably enmeshed with horrid spiritual evil. Instead God unraveled the system to show it for what it was at the core: dedicated to diverting or perverting worshipers coming to him. Egypt made itself an enemy of God. This was not a cosmic extortion scheme to force worship from a kidnapped tribe. Just the reverse. It was very much a rescue mission. God dismantled the structures which had trapped people, hindering them from knowing, serving, and loving him.

His “judgments” of the plagues and the awesome Red Sea affair are not to be understood as overdone spankings for bad deeds. God’s wrathful intervention ended up freeing people. Freed for what? “Let my people go, that they may worship me.”

[The Conquest](#)

The conquest of the land is to be seen in the same light of God winning to himself a single, holy people of worship. To that people, and by their witness, he would draw every other people to revere and know him. The conquest of the promised land was a land grant, on the basis of ancient promises to Abraham's family, in order to unfold the purposes of blessing the nations.

At first glance to modern readers, the conquest may seem more like a genocidal land grab than an imperial land grant. But a close look displays a double purpose of God. First, he was bringing just recompense for the "wickedness" of the peoples of the land (Deuteronomy 9:5). Long before God had told Abram that "the iniquity of the Amorite (was) not yet complete" (Gen. 15:16). God had allowed sin to run its full course.

We might wonder how the Canaanites felt about God's wrath. The only statement recorded from a Canaanite regarding the justice of the conquest came from a king who acknowledged the execution of God's justice: "As I have done, so God has repaid me." (Judges 1:7)

Second, God was demolishing systems of false worship to preserve the singular devotion of his people and the holiness of his name. Many passages describe the logic of ousting the resident pagan peoples living in the land because they would swiftly turn the Hebrews "away from following me to serve other gods." (Deuteronomy 4:15-24, 6:13-15, 7:1-8, among many others).

Joshua and Moses both voiced the same God-given rationale for the violence of the conquest: it was, at the core, an annihilation of false worship. God had mandated the destruction so that Israel would never "mention the name of their gods, or serve them, or bow down to them" (Joshua 23:6-16). While there are difficulties in fully understanding this part of the story of God's people, one thing is clear about the conquest: the point of the conquest is worship, that God would be purely worshiped by his people.

Idolatry doesn't seem to threaten most believers today. Perhaps we think that idols could only attract the attention of so-called primitive peoples. Surely we moderns are beyond any kind of idolatry. Or so it may seem.

The first four commands of the ten commandments can mystify or even bore us. Why was God so ferociously passionate about idolatry? Without grasping his global purposes for glory, it may seem that God is over-wrought about a nasty primitive habit.

But ponder idolatry from God's point of view. God had distinguished his name far above any other. Any kind of idolatry would, in effect, profane (that is, bring down as common) God's name, the very name God had just singled out and sounded forth to the world.

Look again at the conquest. The point of the invasion was not that Israel deserved someone else's homeland. God told Israel point blank that they weren't special or favored because of their intrinsic righteousness or their great nobility (Deut. 7:6-7). Israel was told repeatedly that God would destroy them just as swiftly if they turned away from his worship to other gods.

The record is clear that the Hebrew people were at several points precariously close to being destroyed. Why? Hadn't God specially loved and saved them? For all the special love God had promised the descendants of Abraham, God was resolute in working for his glory. God was not averse to taking a delay and dealing with another generation. The issue at every juncture was the worship of the people to God and their witness to his glory.

One instance makes this constant purpose of God clear: The rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea. Israel had followed God through a divinely opened way, and stood on the threshold of fulfilling God's purposes. Spies were sent to check out the land and the people. Ten of the spies spooked the entire people, touching off a hysterical rebellion for self-preservation (Numbers 13:17-14:10).

God was ready to vaporize the entire people and start over with Moses, making out of him another people "greater and mightier" than the Hebrews. The point is not that the people had done something so bad that God had become fatally angry. God simply required for his purposes a nation who would at least believe in him.

Moses actually argues with God, bringing up, as he had in a previous instance (Exodus 32:1-14), that the nations were watching; and that they had heard something of God's name which could be falsified by what God was about to do. "Now if you slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of your fame (literally "name") will say, 'Because the Lord could not bring this people (into the land).'" Moses challenges God, telling him that the nations will conclude that the Hebrew God is a wimp—all beginnings, but no finish.

Then Moses asks God to magnify himself according to how God himself had summarized his name: "The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression..."⁶ A long pause from heaven, and then God said that he had pardoned Israel according to the prayer of Moses. Then God raised his voice, I think, using some of the strongest expressions possible: "But indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord!" (Num. 14:11-21).

What was God saying? That he would continue to use the nation, but wait for another generation. But though he was taking a delay, he remained everlastingly resolute to bring forth his purpose on earth which required an obedient, worshiping, witnessing people: to fill the earth with "the glory of the Lord."

The Temple

Perhaps the first clear mention of the temple is found in Deuteronomy 12, in context of destroying "all the places where the nations serve their gods." Instead of remodeling any of the former places of worship, the shrines were to be completely wasted in order to "obliterate their name." God's name was never to be equivocated with any other deity. Instead, a new and special place would be built, "to establish his name there for his dwelling" (Deut. 12:2-14, especially verse 5).

Consider God's declaration of purpose for the temple: "to establish his name there for his dwelling." God wanted to do two things in this special place: first, to reveal himself by "his name." It would be a place of revelation as worshipers continually exalt his character and voice the stories and songs about his working.

But it would also be a place of encounter, of relationship, of dwelling. For God to “dwell” in a place does not mean that he has a mailing address, or that he wants to haunt a house with holiness. To “dwell” is a relational affair. God does not so much want to inhabit a building as he desires to dwell with his people.

Solomon knew that the temple was not God’s domicile. As he dedicated the fabulous structure he prayed: “But will God indeed dwell with mankind on the earth? Behold, heaven and highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house which I have built” (2 Chronicles 6:18).⁷

David had designed the temple as a place of approaching God with praise. Solomon installed the choirs and priestly musicians that his father had planned. These choirs were to continually “praise and glorify the Lord” using some of the Davidic songs, and no doubt using David’s dedicatory hymn found in 1 Chronicles 16:23-33 (another rendition of Psalm 96, discussed above), which explicitly beckons “all the families of the peoples” to worship God (verse 28).

According to Solomon’s dedication, the house of the Lord is to be a place where God would see, hear, and answer his people. But not just Israel. Solomon makes special mention of the peoples. He knew that God’s purpose for the temple was in keeping with his eternal purposes to reveal himself to all the earth.

Solomon knew the story up to that point. God had made himself vastly famous. People of other nations would seek to know the God of Israel personally. Listen to Solomon’s astounding prayer:

“Also concerning the foreigner who is not of your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for your name’s sake (for they will hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name, to fear you as do your people Israel...”(1 Kings 8:41-43).

Solomon did not pray for a few of the individuals to come, but many from every one of the peoples. Solomon prayed that the nations would meet God as they came to the house to pray and to worship. He did not ask that Gentiles know God

in their own Gentile way, but rather that they would know God just as Israel did. Solomon envisioned all peoples joining Israel in the same kind of humble, joyous worshipful walk with God that Israel enjoyed: “the fear of the Lord.”

The Nations Begin To Come

Did the report of God’s name go out to the world? Did foreigners ever come to the house of the Lord and learn of the fear of the Lord? Did God answer Solomon’s prayer? The best answer to these questions is “Yes” as well as “No.”

The record shows that soon after the temple was complete (1 Kings 9:25), the Queen of Sheba “heard about the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord ”(1 Kings 10:1, my emphasis). She came to learn, she listened to Solomon’s wisdom (10:8), and came away with understanding of the covenant-keeping God who “loved Israel forever.” As only a royal potentate might see, she realized that God himself had established the power of Solomon, and the hope that through God’s rulership, there might be “justice and righteousness” (1 Kings 10:9).

Was this an isolated instance? Apparently not. A few verses later it says that, “All the earth was seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart” (1 Kings 10:24). The world didn’t honor Solomon for being brainy or clever with court cases. The world recognized that God himself had put wisdom in this man’s heart. And what was the first lesson in wisdom that Solomon put forth to the world? “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10).” Solomon was introducing the world to the worship of God as well as the life of wisdom under God.

God’s purposes were apparently being fulfilled. What could have possibly slowed the unfolding plan of God to draw the nations to himself? Only one thing. And it was the one matter about which God most stringently warned his people: Idolatry.

And of all the possible horrors, probably the worst thing happened: Solomon himself led the way into grotesque idolatry. It was one of history’s most bitter ironies. Imagine the brilliant hopes with the riches and the desires of the nations turning to Israel. Solomon had consecrated the temple in a spectacle of

unimaginable glory. He had closed that event with a blessing of purpose on the building and nation: “so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no one else” (1 Kings 8:60).

And then just three chapters after this climactic opening of doors to the nations to know and fear the only God by name, Solomon’s heart was turned “away after other gods.” He actually constructed shrines within sight of the holy mountain of God (1 Kings 11:1-8). Can any believing reader of these verses not feel disappointment to the point of nausea? It’s not wise to speculate, but we can never know what might have been had worship been pure and steady for at least another generation.

[The Persistence of God](#)

The story continues with a grievous regret that the global purposes of God had been so foolishly hindered and his blessing forestalled. But from what follows, it appears that God did not change his plan. The plan was simple: Make God’s name great and then make his name known. He has always purposed to single out his name from all other gods, and then to welcome the nations to worship him personally in the light of that revealed name through the witness of the people of Israel.

The story from this point turns to a prolonged up-and-down struggle with idolatry, with various episodes of revived fidelity to God’s worship, followed by stunning new lows of profaning God’s name. The uppermost issue throughout the generations is God’s glory by Israel’s worship.

The disregard of the people for the worship of God became so advanced, that at times, generations would pass without the slightest attention to the simple regimens by which God had invited Israel to meet with him (the ordinances for worship in the books of Moses). The words of the prophets disclose that at times, godly worship forms were followed perfunctorily. But the prophets exposed that superficial worship as perversely lacking in the justice and the kindness that was supposed to have thrived behind every offering and prayer to God (Isa. 1:11-15, Micah 6:6-8, Amos 5:21-24).

God delayed the great shaking of Israel and Judah, but finally the people were separated from the land which was to showcase the blessing of God. And then the utmost tragedy: The house of God was burned and broken to rubble.

Near the end of the time of exile, Daniel cried out for God to enact his promise to restore the temple and people. Daniel was intensely aware of the entire saga, how God had brought his people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand (to) make a name for yourself, as it is this day” (Dan. 9:15). Daniel’s bottom line was that the people of God and the wreck of intended glory on the holy mountain of the temple was a reproach to God’s glory to “all those around us.” He prayed that God would restore the people and the city so that the glory of his name would be restored. Daniel did not base his request on the supposed greatness of Israel, but “For your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people are called by your name” (Dan. 9:15-19).

Ezekiel, a near contemporary to Daniel, breathed the same themes. God had restrained his wrath at several junctures from destroying Israel, but God’s restraint had been for the sake of his name (Ezek. 20:5-22). The dealings of God with Israel were not at all a sickly favoritism, but solely for his glory among the nations:

“Thus says the Lord God, ‘It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord,’ declares the Lord God, ‘when I prove myself holy among you in their sight’” (Ezek. 36:22-23).

[The Destiny of Israel: Glory From All Nations](#)

The prophets and psalmists spoke of the destiny of Israel in terms of the nations being drawn to God by name, and worshiping him with diverse, lavish glory.

“All nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord; and they shall glorify your name” (Psa. 86:9).

“Shout joyfully to God, all the earth. Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious. Say to God, ‘How awesome are your works!’ Because of the greatness of your power your enemies will give feigned obedience to you. All the earth will worship you. And will sing praises to you; they will sing praises to your name” (Psalm 65:1-4).

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14).

“For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord, to serve him shoulder to shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my worshipers, my dispersed ones will bring my offerings.” (Zephaniah 3:9-10)

“For from the rising of the sun, even to its setting, my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to my name, and a grain offering that is pure; for my name will be great among the nations.” (Mal. 1:11)

These are but a sampling of the scores of prophetic words which tethered Israel’s identity to the culmination of God’s purposes: the glory of God on earth drawing the worship of all peoples.

The Glory of God in Christ

Is the theme of the glory of God from the nations merely that, a theme? Or is it something relegated to “Old Testament” times that has been superseded by some “New Testament” truth?

Of course, the person to look to is Jesus. What was his life all about? What did he teach? What did he mandate?

Jesus summed up his ministry in terms of glory to his Father: “I glorified you on the earth, having accomplished the work which you have given me to do.” And what was the work? “I manifested your name to the men you gave me out of the world” (John 17:4,6).

The prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray can be easily misunderstood because of the antiquated English translation, “Hallowed be Thy name.” This

prayer is not a statement of praise. It is explicitly a request in the original language: “Father... sanctify your name!” Or to paraphrase: “Father lift up, single out, exalt, manifest, and reveal your name to the people of earth. Become famous for who you really are. Cause the people of earth to know and adore you!” The prayer can be prayed most thoroughly in the global dimension Jesus taught: “on earth as it is in heaven.” There is no question of the primacy of this prayer for all believers. There can be little doubt that Jesus is teaching the church to pray for the fulfillment of ancient purposes revealed in the law, the stories, the songs and the prophecies of Israel for the glory of God.

In one telling encounter with the non-Jewish Samaritan woman, Jesus declared God’s future for her and other Gentile nations: “An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be his worshipers” (John 4:23).

In his most dramatic challenge of the status quo, Jesus made the issue the worship of the peoples, echoing David’s desire for the nations to come to God in his courts. As he cleansed the temple of excessive commercialism, he quoted Isa. 56:7, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” He and the religious leaders listening knew immediately the rest of the passage that Jesus was quoting from Isaiah.: “The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, and to love the name of the Lord, ... even those I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar.”

At the hour of his greatest trouble of soul, just before going to his death, he pondered his life purpose, and the very purpose of the death he was about to die. Instead of asking to escape the pain, he cried out, “Father! Glorify your name!” To the bewildered amazement of those standing near him, God the Father himself spoke from heaven assuring them of the simple constancy of his purpose of glory. “I have both glorified it (my name), and will glorify it again.” How would his death glorify God’s name? “If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to myself.”

Jesus was prompted into this public decision by the approach of a group of Greeks (Gentiles, not Jews with Greek culture) who had come to the holy city to worship. They encountered Jesus at the crescendo of his ministry, his most public hour on earth, the grand worship procession we have come to call “Palm Sunday.” The Pharisees looked on and could only say, perhaps with some measure of prophetic force, “Look, the world has gone after him” (John 12:19, see John 11:49-52 for an example of an inadvertent prophecy). The Gentiles asked to see Jesus. Though Jesus did not refuse to see them, he instead saw afresh his purpose, to be lifted up higher, by death and by exaltation, so that all people could be drawn to him (John 12:12-32).

Ministry of Surpassing Glory with Paul

Paul labored to “bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations for his name’s sake” (Rom. 1:5, emphasis mine). It appeared that Paul saw the entire world as divided into two categories, where Christ was “named” and where Christ was not yet named. Paul plainly prioritized his efforts so as to labor where Christ was not named (Rom. 15:20).⁸

We can see the double direction of God’s glory in Paul’s ministry. He labored to glorify God by revealing Christ to the nations—getting Christ “named.” But his deepest zeal, the very boast of his being, is in something that comes back again to God from the nations.

“Because of the grace that was given to me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the nations, priesting the gospel, that my offering of the nations might become pleasing, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to⁹ God (Rom. 15:15-17).

Paul’s passionate ambition to “preach the gospel” was based on the far more fundamental commission (or in his language, a “grace that was given”) which he had received from God to “priest the gospel.” There’s no mistaking the imagery. Paul sees himself before God, serving the nations as if he were a priest, instructing and ushering them near to God, helping them bring the glory of their nation to God for his pleasure. Paul’s job was not to change the societies and

cultures. The Spirit of God was at work transforming and sanctifying the finest possible display of glory from the peoples.

Paul labored at great cost with a brilliant vision before him. It was something he knew was worth working and waiting for: “that with one voice” many different streams of believers, Jew and Gentile, weak and strong, would together “glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:6).

The Hope of Glory

Then Paul quotes four Old Testament passages in Rom. 15:9-12. Perhaps they might serve together as a rough outline of hope for the world:

First, in verse 9, the hope of Christ declared by name to the nations: “I will give praise to you among the nations, and I will sing to your name.” The word of God goes to the world as a song, giving clear testimony to the truth of his name.

Second, in verse 10, the hope of the nations joined with the people of God in jubilant worship: “Rejoice, O nations, with his people.” The peoples are welcomed to join the people of God, but not at a superficial point of uniformity. They remain the distinctive peoples they are, but profoundly at one with the singular point of joy: the God who is worshiped.

Third, in verse 11, the hope of culmination: “Praise the Lord all you nations, and let all the peoples praise him.” The hope goes far beyond a number of pagan individuals singing along with God’s people. The vision is sure: Every one of the peoples will come into the festival of worship.

Fourth, in verse 12, the hope of the kingdom: “There shall come the root of Jesse, and he who arises to rule over the nations; in him shall the nations hope.” Could the anticipated worship somehow instill a yearning to serve directly for the king? When the king of glory comes, will he not be the “desire of nations” (Haggai 2:7 in some translations). Will he not meet a rising hope from the faithful among every nation?

This is not intended to work as some blueprint of the last days, but simply to show that there is abundant biblical warrant to expect and labor for an expression of worship from all nations within history, before his coming.

A Rehearsal for Eternal Glory

But beyond history, we will have found all of our love for God abundantly rewarded. We will have found something greater, that all of the worshipful service of the many nations was a rehearsal for greater affairs of love and glory, still involving the beautified wonder from every people.

At the last God comes to his earth exulting in his ancient promise, now fulfilled: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and he shall dwell among them, and they shall be his peoples,¹⁰ and God himself shall be among them” (Revelation 21:3).

The peoples endure everlastingly. God desires that the kings of the peoples continually bring the treasure and fruit of their lives to his throne (Revelation 21:22-26). Forever, with such honor and glory of the nations in our hands, we will be awed by having his very name on our faces. And gazing into his face, we shall serve him as priests (Revelation 22:1-5).

Labor Boldly for His Greater Glory

What shall we do now? Whatever God may grace us to do to glorify Jesus before the world in such a way that movements of obedient worship emerge. To use Paul’s language in 2 Corinthians, may God give us a ministry of surpassing glory (3:10-11), and labor boldly toward a vast hope (3:12) because of the open access by the Spirit of God that men may now behold the very glory of God (3:17-18) in the face of Christ (4:6). Now is an hour for increased purity and encouragement of heart (4:1-3) to continue evangelization at great cost (4:7-14) in the face of satanic subversion that blinds people to “the gospel of the glory of Christ” (4:4). And what is the hope? That the sending, empowering grace¹¹ of God may multiply through the many who have believed to bring about a great “giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God” (4:15).

And though the story of his glory crescendos within history, with some from every people thankfully giving up to God what they are living out in their communities,¹² there is glory beyond. Lifetimes of labor for an earthly

extravaganza of glory for God are altogether worthwhile. By such labor we lay hold of “a weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (4:17)

What is an Evangelized World For?

Until now we have cried, “Let the earth hear his voice!” Let us never cease voicing his word to every creature. But soon comes the day when, by most reckonings, the earth will have heard. What then?

There is another cry, far more ancient. It is a shout for earth’s destiny. It is to be lifted today more than ever: “Let all the peoples praise him!” We hear even now a growing praise from the nations. Now let us focus our deepest affections and boldest plans on the splendor of every people loving God with the sanctified best of their society. What a magnificent hope!

Changes in Practice

This emphasis on the glory of God is far more than a decorative flower on the Great Commission. The hour in history and the unique nature of the remaining task call us to work increasingly out of a “doxological” (having to do with glory) frame of reference.

Living out of the story of his glory will help us in three practical ways:

1. Deepen Our Motive Base to a Love for God’s Glory

World evangelization is for God. Perhaps it is common to work out of a concern for the predicament of people: either to see them saved from hell, or to serve them to communal wholeness, or both. Such compassion is biblical and necessary, but love for people must increasingly emerge from a passion for God’s glory by the social and personal transformation that the gospel brings.

Jesus was moved with an abounding compassion, as he saw the multitudes as abandoned sheep, but he did not respond to the naked need. He deliberately recast his vision of the same lost crowds as something of even greater value. He saw them as something of value to God: “his harvest.” Who can comprehend the fullness of the fruit God gains from people’s lives? Jesus began to do just that, and from that vision implored the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers (Matthew

9:35-38). Jesus knew that in God's ways, a "sending" of God is requisite.

Compassion flows like rivers from one who is truly sent.

Mission efforts which draw their motivation from compassionate response to human predicament will go only so far. Such "response missiology" has proven inadequate again and again. Guilt-based appeals to care for billions of people continues to soften our hearts a little; but in practice, they weary and harden believers to a minimal token obedience. Costly and difficult work needs to be done. It cannot be fulfilled by the fleeting, momentary zeal generated by appeals for desperate, perishing souls. God's global purpose is an ancient affair, far more than an urgent need. Now more than ever believers need to be nurtured into a jealousy for God's glory, and welcomed into the heritage of Abraham: Blessed by God, to bless the nations, and all this so that God would be named and blessed (Gen. 12:2-3, and 14:19-20).

2. Define the Task as Increasing God's Glory.

Never has there been a day when Christians are taking so much care to deal with all of the world's peoples, and with good cause. Considering people groups and their cultures helps to devise impactful gospel communication to specific cultures. The people group approach appears to be useful for evaluating progress and apportioning out different assignments for effective collaboration.

Even so, the people group approach has been a contentious issue. For years some have decried the entire approach as disintegrating unity of the churches or a cover for stubborn attitudes of colonial domination by westerners. But recently, many others have quietly abandoned the people group approach for other paradigms which seem more workable. One instance has been increased attention on geographical models. Even as nation-states disintegrate overnight into the competing peoples that comprise them, country-by-country approaches to evangelization are still proving attractive. Other geographical approaches range from marking urban centers, to drawing windows of longitude and latitude, and to mapping spiritual forces arrayed against the gospel. Of course, the peoples of the earth are geographical, urbanized, nationalized entities. We

need to take note of these dimensions as important factors in fashioning useful approaches to any people. But our goal can not be reduced to approaching peoples to merely “impact” them as “targets.” Something must happen for God. I submit that it is not the people group approach which is important, but the people group result. What is the result of the gospel? Surely something more than every person having a chance to pass verdict on the gospel. God has promised to get obedient glory for himself from every tribe and tongue. He yearns for the unique outpouring of love, righteousness, wisdom, and worship that can come from every people.

Such a vantage point elevates the distinctive wonder of every people. Here lies a better rationale for indigenous church planting. Missionaries are not dispatching an obligation to preach, but are serving movements which bear fruit for God. And such fruit must always have a time-space reality. Geography matters all the more. Every city and place takes on greater significance as the venue of a unique display of God’s life.

3. Integrate Efforts For God’s Glory

The obviously false dichotomy of evangelism and social action can be set aside with a doxological approach. Arguments have swirled around which part of man is more important: Is it more important to save a soul or to heal a community? The question is equally repugnant to all. What if the same issues were resolutely examined and embraced for what comes to God?

Glory comes to God from gospel declaration or a kind deed done in his name. Greater glory resounds when whole communities see Christ’s hand transforming their lives.

Some have needlessly proposed a double mandate to fashion a point of balance. The so-called cultural mandate to fill the earth is balanced by the evangelistic mandate to evangelize the world. Is there not a singular purpose of God being served by all the peoples and in all places of the earth? The service of the nations must be a total life obedience of justice and righteousness. The worship offerings now to be brought to God through Christ are words as well as works.

In the vision for God's glory lies the substance of true unity between churches. With a jealousy for unique glory coming from every people, we can easily set aside notions of uniformity and delight in the variety of styles of righteousness, peace, and joy, while increasing in jealousy for the commonly confessed singular truth in the person of Christ.

Endnotes

1. I distinguish three aspects of the biblical phrase "the name of God." The "reference" or "name-tag" name amounts to actual wordings used to refer to God. There are scores of biblical "reference" names. These names are self-disclosures which reveal something about God. Thus the second aspect: the "revelatory" or "window" name of God. The third aspect is most important to understanding the story of God's glory. It is the "reputation" name, or what I call the "fame name." The "fame name" consists of awareness of God's actions in connection with true understanding of God's person by special revelation.
2. Psalm 105:1 connects, by Hebrew parallel structure of poetry, the act of calling on God's name with making "known his deeds among the peoples." Psalm 145 and Isa. 12 are among several other passages stressing the naming of God among the nations by the declaration of his deeds.
3. The Hebrew word often translated "ascribe" is a simple word meaning "give." I use the most literal translation "give" because "ascribe" could make it appear to be an entirely cognitive affair. The context describes this worship an affair involving gifts from people to God which far surpass mere mental ascriptions.
4. See as well the other variations of the appeal to release the Hebrews which reflect that the general Hebrew word translated serve is very much in the context of service of worship. Exodus 3:12, 4:23, 5:1, 7:16, 8:27, 29, 10:9. See especially Exodus 10:26 which makes it clear that to "serve" was to offer sacrificial gifts to God.
5. See Moses and the Gods of Egypt, by John Davis, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971)
6. God had given this extensive summary of his dealings as his name at Sinai (Exodus 33:19, 34:6-8). It is good news in a capsule about how God does things with people. It is a very significant statement, and was recognized by later generations of Israel as a summary of what was to be proclaimed among the nations. Psalm 86:9-15, 145:1-2, 8-12, 21. Jonah himself recognized this package of truth as something that he knew, that he had withheld from the Ninevites. Jonah 3:9-4:2)
7. Don't take Solomon's question about God dwelling with people on earth as a word of despair of God ever dwelling with people. His prayer is not intended as a definitive map of cosmos. It rather fits the self-effacing approach to the Most High. He follows with a profoundly humble appeal, in a most formal framework of courtly language, that the king of all the earth deign to turn his eyes toward a place of encounter and hold audience as he had promised (2 Chronicles 6:19-21). Compare 2 Chronicles 6:1-2 in which Solomon acknowledges the cloud of God's glory so filling the temple that no priest could endure the dreadful brilliance (2 Chronicles 5:13-14).
8. A close look at the context shows what Paul means by Christ being "named." It was not a matter of the message of Christ being preached once by a missionary, but rather a "foundation" being laid (Rom. 15:20). Paul has just been speaking of specific regions in which the gospel is "fulfilled" or brought to a substantial closure (Rom. 15:19). Translations such as "fully preached" or "fully proclaimed" stress the cognitive transfer of gospel information far too steeply, especially in light of the full menu of gospel activities just reviewed in 15:18-19. In light of how Paul uses the idea of "foundation" elsewhere (particularly 1 Corinthians 3:8-15), I conclude that "Christ is named" when there is a growing movement of obedience to Christ established which has proven potential to articulate and demonstrate the life of Christ to its entire community. This is what many would consider a church.
9. The idea is "toward the face of God" as if in a temple.
10. Some variant manuscripts with good attestation keep the word "peoples" plural in this passage.
11. As much as half of Paul's usage of the word "grace" has more to do with God's empowering influence to co-labor with him in the advance of his purposes than with the familiar issue of personal salvation. A few examples: Rom. 1:5, 15:15, 1 Cor. 15:10, Gal. 2:9, Eph. 3:2-8, 4:7, Phil. 1:7, 1:29, 1 Tim. 1:14, 2 Tim. 1:8-9. Most of the uses of the term "grace" in 2 Corinthians have to do with co-working with God by his power as in 6:1, 8:1-9, and 12:9-10.
12. Heb. 13:15-16 reflects the simple fullness of the worship God desires to see in every community: his name being articulated, and his just love being demonstrated.