

MOBILIZATION AND THE BIBLE

Max W. Chismon

Mobilization is not a Biblical word but it is a very powerful Biblical idea. God's people have been called to be on mission with God. Mobilization is all about ensuring that God's people, in each and every generation, join with Him on mission to the peoples and the people of the world. The importance of the ministry of mobilization is impossible to exaggerate.

In this article we will attempt to explore the significance of our calling to be on mission with God and how, in the awe-inspiring wisdom of God, He achieves the full realization of His end vision prepared before the foundation of the world.

What could be helpful, as we begin, is to consider the colloquial expression, common in so many cultures: "Killing two birds with one stone." This expression, of course, is used to express one's satisfaction in accomplishing two objectives with the one undertaking.

The one undertaking of God, that accomplishes His two primary objectives, is to engage His people with Himself in mission. The first accomplishment is the gathering into His Kingdom of people from every nation, tribe, people and language (Rev 7:9) and the second is the transformation of this redeemed people (Ro 8:29), in preparation for them to rule and reign with Christ in God's new world (Rev 22:5).

A Brief Overview of the Story of the Bible

Let's go back to the beginning and set the scene, so we can fully grasp the significance as to why mission is needed and what mission is seeking to achieve.

We often say that God made us in His likeness and image for fellowship. True, but incomplete! God made us primarily to labor together with Himself and to steward His most magnificent creation (Gen1:26). We were not to work FOR God as 'subcontractors,' but to work WITH God in a relationship of intimacy and interdependence. It was for this reason we were made in His likeness and image. Metaphors used to describe God's relationship with humankind are some of the most affectionate and intimate found in the human language: Husband and wife (Eph 5:22-32), Father and Son (Mt 6:9-10), Friend with Friend (Isa 41:8). But there are also 'purpose' metaphors, such as: master and servant (Mt 20:1), owner and stewards (Lk 20:16). All these metaphors help us to understand that we were created for God, to work with God, and in the closest and most intimate and rewarding relationship imaginable.

Down through the ages, Christians have often lamented the fact that God placed 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' in the garden of Eden. Had God not done so, all would have been well – so the thinking goes! We smile at such a suggestion and for good reason. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not the problem – in fact, it was a divine necessity. It provided Adam and Eve with the very thing they most needed to become 'one' with God - the freedom to do so, without coercion and compulsion. The intimacy, envisioned by God, demanded free moral choice!

Sadly, our representatives, Adam and Eve, chose to reject God's astonishing offer and instead, through disobedience, confirmed our future to spiritual darkness and became shut out of any hope of being part of God's future world (Gen 3:22-24).

God, however, did not turn His back on us. He put in place a program not only to provide redemption (to bring us to Adam's position before the fall) but to take us way beyond into

participation in God's future world. Having been made initially, 'a little lower than the angels' (Heb 2:7), we were always destined to be higher than the angels. We were, in fact, destined to be integrated into God's very own family and become joint-heirs with His Son in God's future world (Eph 1:4).

To accomplish all of this, we can say, is 'God's mission' (Col 1:20)!

The Story of God's Mission Flows Throughout the Whole Bible

The Bible is not a 'random collection of unrelated devotional stories' as many think it is. The Bible is authored by God (2 Ti 3:16) and comprises but one story, the story of God on mission. Think about this for a moment. If it wasn't for 'God's mission', there simply wouldn't be a Bible!

We need to take this thought of the Bible being a story about God on mission, and move it one step further. From Genesis chapter twelve onward, the Bible becomes a story about God on mission **with His people**. In chapter twelve, we see God calling one man, Abram (as he was then known) through whom He would form one nation, through whom He would bring His blessing (redemption) to all the nations of the world.

Genesis 12:2-3

"I will make you into a great nation

and I will bless you;.....

and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you."

Interestingly, the late Dr Ralph Winter, founder of the US Center for World Mission, considered the first eleven chapters of the Bible (Genesis 1-11) as the Introduction to the Bible Story. The 'Introduction', he said, lays the foundation and sets the scene for the entire story, which begin with chapter twelve, and then continues through to the very end of the Bible.

It is of critical importance that we understand that God's election of Israel was never meant to be misconstrued as elitism. The scripture in John 3:16 stating that 'God loved the world' was not a New Testament change of heart for God. God had always 'so loved the world' and the choosing of a people was always so God could express that love to all the peoples of the world. Election was **never** for the purpose of placing His love on a few, in order to deny His love to the many. In fact quite the opposite. Israel was taken **from** the nations, as a means to express God's love **to** the nations (Ps 67)!

The call upon this people to be on mission with God had a two-fold effect. Through them, the one true God was communicated to the nations of the world (2 Chron 9:23) and secondly, mission with God became the means by which God's people were purified and perfected (Ez 36:23). This is where our expression 'killing two birds with one stone' takes on Biblical significance. God accomplishes His two main objectives through the one undertaking!

It is also important to note that the chosen people of God were **always** identified as 'a people of faith in God' – not of natural descent (Ga 1:6, Heb 11). This faith was confirmed through their obedience to God's word and to His will. Many fell away from 'faith', became self-willed and disobedient, and instead placed their confidence in the fact that they were Abraham's physical descendants. John the Baptist was quick to challenge them on this mistaken assumption, saying that God could raise up physical children of Abraham from stones (Mt 3:9).

Why is this point so very important? Because of God's end vision, which is to have a people who have responded to His grace, thereby qualifying themselves to participate in God's future world. This we do through making free moral choices in favor of God and of His will, and rejecting independent, self-willed disobedience as Adam and Eve succumbed to in the garden of Eden!

The Continuation and Fulfillment of the Bible's Story through the New Testament

The story of 'God on mission with His people' continues seamlessly into and throughout the New Testament. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Peter 2:9

Note the two-fold call: to **be** the people of God, and to **declare** his praises (to be on mission with God).

God's plan of integrating His two objectives of: 1) redeeming a people from all the nations of the world and 2) preparing His redeemed people for His future world, continues through His one undertaking, of 'engaging His people with Him on mission'.

Jesus, however takes this all to a whole new level, unknown in the Old Testament, by bringing us into intimate communion with Himself. "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." (2 Corinthians 6:16). This is the closest we have ever gotten to God's relationship with Adam in the garden of Eden. What happens now is that God is taking us far beyond what Adam had! God has adopted us into His family (Ro 8:15), He has made us co-heirs with Christ (Eph 2:6), He has given us His Spirit to both empower us and to speak to us, and thus communicate to us His will and ensure our fruitfulness (Jn 16:13, Ac 1:8, Jn 15:1-11). We can now labor together with God in mission, in the intimacy pictured in marriage, family and friendship and obeying God as servants and stewards. As we engage with God on mission, every response to his voice, every step of faith, every act of obedience, every sacrifice and self-denial in favor of 'being on mission with God' is working towards our transformation—preparing us and qualifying us for participation in God's future world (Col 3:24) and hastening the glorious fulfillment of His end vision (Rev 21-22, 2Pe 3:12).

Revelation 21:7 "He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son."

"And they shall reign forever and ever" (Rev 22:5) .

The Experience of the Early Church and Where We Are Today

The early Church, which started with a mere one hundred and twenty believers (Ac 1:15), completely encircled the Mediterranean with communities of followers of Jesus in a relatively short period of time. They did this in the midst of no less than ten major persecutions that took the lives of thousands of dedicated believers.

The early Church prioritized what God had prioritized - their participation with God on mission to the peoples and the people of the world.

Through succeeding generations, God, through His redeemed people, has moved His mission forward to where we are today, on every inhabitable continent of the earth and in every country of

the world. There are no less than 700 million committed followers of Jesus in our world today in some 5 million local churches. The potential exists in this generation to reap the greatest harvest ever and, as a result, see the Church mature into the fullness of Christ as God so passionately intends it to (Eph 4:13). But this will happen if, and only if, all God's people are mobilized to engage with God on mission. This is without question a 'win win' situation – for God, for the world, and for us. People in the world get saved, the saved get the opportunity to prepare for God's future world, and God Himself is glorified and His end vision becomes ever so closer to realization.

We cannot exaggerate the importance of God's people being mobilized into mission with God. It embodies the wisdom of God and fulfills the purpose of God. Through this one endeavor, God fulfills the full complement of His agenda for this age, this special age, this age upon which "the fulfillment of the ages has come" (1 Co 10:11).