

# The Story of His Glory

by Steve Hawthorne

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The Bible is basically a story about God. When we turn to the Bible as a self-help book, we end up bored or frustrated with what seems to be a rambling collection of stories. What if the Bible is more about God than it is about us? How thrilling 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.

We're used to the idea that the Bible is a true story. It's so true that the story is still unfolding to this minute. We are used to hearing that the Bible is a love story. But we tend to see only one side of the love: how God loves people. If the main point of the Bible is that God is to be loved with heart, soul, mind and strength, perhaps it would be wise to read the entire story from God's point of view. When we look at it all from God's viewpoint the grand love story finally makes sense: God is not just loving people. He is transforming them to become people who can fully love Him. God is drawing people as worshipers to offer freely to Him their love-inspired glory.

God can be loved only when He is known. That's why the story of the Bible is the story of God revealing Himself in order to draw to Himself obedient worship, or glory, from the nations. With God's passionate love at the core, the Bible is truly the story of His glory.

## BASIC CONCEPTS OF GLORY

To trace the story of God as the Bible presents it, we need a grasp of three related ideas which define the story at every juncture: glory, the name of God and worship.

### Glory

Don't be thrown off by the religious-sounding word "glory." Glory is the relational beauty that every person's heart yearns to behold and even to enter. The word "glory" in scripture refers to the essential worth, beauty and value of people, created things and, of course, the Creator Himself. The Hebrew word for glory is a word meaning weight, substance, and at the same time, brilliance or radiant beauty. To glorify someone is to recognize their intrinsic worth and beauty, and to speak of that feature in a public way. To glorify God is to praise or to speak of Him openly and truthfully. Glory is at the heart of true worship throughout the scriptures:

All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord; and they shall glorify Your name (Psalm 86:9).

We ... worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus... (Phil 3:3).

The idea of "glory" also describes honor that can be given or awarded. When someone is exalted or made great, they are, to some extent, in a biblical sense, glorified. God is so rich in glory that He bestows extravagant honors upon His human servants without compromising His own majesty in the slightest. Jesus exposed our habit of seeking "glory from one another," and yet failing to "seek the glory that is from the one and

only God” (John 5:44).

### **The Name of God**

Throughout the larger story, the biblical authors use the idea of the “name of God” as a key idea. To distinguish the functions of reference, revelation and reputation, it may help to sort out the usages with three easy-to-remember categories: *name-tag*, *window* and *fame name*.

*Name-tag names.*

First, there are the names themselves used to designate God in the Bible. God is never anonymous in His story. He uses many names for Himself. Because the function is *reference*, we can call these names, for our purposes, the “name-tag” names of God since a name-tag distinguishes and identifies someone. It is just as true to refer to the God of scripture as “Lord of hosts” as it is to refer to Him as “God Almighty,” or “Judge of all the earth” or “King of glory.” Each of these names is truly God’s name. \*1

*Window name.*

Second, God is pleased to disclose Himself accurately by any of the Biblical names. The function is *revelation*. For example, anyone who spends a few minutes pondering the biblical name “The Lord is my Shepherd” will have a better understanding of the nurturing kindness of God.

*Fame name.*

The third usage of the phrase “the name of God” is the most abundant in the Bible, even though it is little recognized. “God’s name” most often refers to the idea of His public renown. I call it God’s “fame name.” The function is God’s *reputation*. God’s name is His global namesake. It is the open memory, based on historical incidents, which establishes a reputation worthy of future trust. God’s name is the body of truth about Himself which He has displayed and declared in the long-unfolding story of the Bible. The Hebrew people were not only to treasure this story, but they were also to tell it. Unlike the way of many religions, God’s revelation was never to be a secret affair for a few people. Isaiah calls Israel to “Make known His deeds among the peoples,” so that the nations are steadily reminded that “His name is exalted” (Isaiah 12:4). As we shall see, much of the story of the Bible recounts what God has done to make His name great among the nations.

### **Worship**

Why does God want to be known with such precision? God wants to be more than globally famous -- He yearns to be truly worshipped.

*God Reveals Glory to Receive Glory.*

God’s glory flows in two directions. The first direction of His glory is toward the world. He shows His glory to people throughout the earth. He reveals who He is and what He has done in order to bring about the second direction of glory -- that people might give Him glory in loving worship. God *reveals* glory to all nations in order that He might *receive* glory from people through worship.

Psalm 96 shows these two directions of glory. God mandates a declaration of His glory to the nations in verses 2 and 3:

Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day.  
Tell of His glory among the nations,  
His wonderful deeds among all the peoples.

What an eloquent portrayal of the evangelization of the world. But the Psalmist goes on to tell the purpose for world evangelization by describing the second aspect of God's glory: an response of glory *from* the nations toward God in verses 7 to 9:

Give 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.\*2  
Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;  
Tremble before Him, all the earth."

The heart of mission flows in this amazing economy of glory: God *reveals* His glory to all nations in order to *receive* glory from all creation.

*A Purpose Beyond Salvation.*

People are indeed saved by the global declaration of God's salvation, but the ultimate value of their salvation is not to be seen in what they are saved *from*, it is what they are saved *for* that really matters. People are saved to serve God in worship. In this respect, we can say that world evangelization is for God. However accustomed we may be to seeing people as being of paramount importance, the Bible is clear: The rationale for mission is the colossal worthiness of God. Examine the logic of Psalm 96:2-4:

Proclaim good tidings of His salvation ... Tell of His glory... among all peoples. For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods.

*A Rationale Greater than Supremacy.*

The rationale for mission seems simple enough: Since God is supreme, every creature should bow down in subjection. But can this really be the logic at the center of the universe? Our hearts won't buy it. There is something more. The Scriptures are loud about the truth that God is love. God calls people to love him with all that they are. Where is God's love, and ours, in response?

A God who demands worship just because He's supreme doesn't seem like a very loving God. In fact, such a God might not seem like he is worthy to even be admired. God's penchant for praise might make him appear to be struggling with a low self-image problem. It's foolish to speak of God's jealousy for worship as if He were a petulant tribal deity threatened by rival gods. God is not threatened; rather He is immeasurably saddened by false worship. When people worship anyone or anything besides Him, they become like it. God has better intentions for people.

What is true worship anyway? Worship takes place when people recognize who God is and offer public acknowledgement and freely approach God, personally offering face-to-face gratitude and day-to-day allegiance. Worship is genuine relational interaction with God. That's why God always welcomes us to worship with a gift. He never needs the worship gifts. But the gift brings the giver. That is why the nations are urged to come bringing a gift, offering God tokens of their finest worth (Psalm 96:8 and many others). By their sacrifices and gifts, they offer themselves.

*Fully Bestowing His Love.*

Why is God so desirous of worship? Two reasons: He is delighted by the sincere love that comes to Him in true worship. But there is more: By wooing people into true worship, God is able to fully bestow His love upon them. You can see it in Psalm 96:6.

Splendor and majesty are before Him,  
Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.

“Splendor and majesty” do not refer to God’s self-experience. Rather, along with “strength and beauty” (the parallel passage says “joy” in 1 Chron 16:27), they are features of God’s presence that are to be the experience of people who approach Him in true worship. There can be nothing more splendid or majestic for humans than to be elevated and placed in the gorgeous, heart-stopping grandeur of God’s regal presence.

Worship is the way that people glorify God. When looked at from God’s point of view, we can see that worship is also God’s way of glorifying people --in all the best sense of bringing people into their highest honor. Worship fulfills God’s love. He loves people so vastly that He wills to exalt them to something better than greatness; He wants to bring them into an honored nearness to Him. Stretch your mind and your heart as far as you can, but you’ll never perceive the extent of what God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor 2:9).

Perhaps John got a glimpse of the “splendor and majesty” of those courts in Revelation 5:1-14. He heard all of heaven’s myriads raise their voices acclaiming the marvel that God Himself has purchased people from every tribe and tongue. Why has God bought such ignoble humans at the extravagant cost of the blood of His Son? Furthermore, why has he purchased some from every single ethnicity? Of what value are these ones? Their precious value is this: They will be His priests. Some from every people will gladly offer to God the distinctive honors and redeemed glories of their people. Each of the peoples has eternal worth because of Christ’s blood. Each of the peoples has an appointed place before Him. God has set His mighty heart to bring them there. It must come forth. The passion of this unrequited love of God for each of the peoples is the very soul of any true missionary enterprise.

The psalmist reflects God’s zeal for the people groups of earth. God beckons every one of the “families of the peoples,” people linked by blood and marriage with generational depth. Each of these extended families has a history and a destiny before God. In formal language they are each invited into His regal presence (Psalm 96:7-9). 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. 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).

## THE BIBLE AS GOD’S STORY

The Bible is the astounding drama of God’s love drawing the worship of the nations. 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 Abraham arrived in the land of promise, he did not excel as a brilliant missionary, however we might define that role. He’s certainly 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: His first act was to establish ongoing public worship of God. “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 and

in a public way.

*Blessed to Be a Blessing to Be a Blessing*

At one point Abraham rescued some of his powerful neighbors from an alliance of marauding nations (Gen 14). After the miraculous victory, Abraham refused to accept the windfall of reward from the king of Sodom. If he accepted the largess, he knew that from that point, he and his family would 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.\*3

With the nations watching, Abraham 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. Abraham offered to God the wealth of Sodom as well as that of other nations. He helped foreign nations present a tithe to God, a recognized formal act of worship (Gen 14:18-20). With Melchizedek as presiding priest, Abraham functioned, in a priest, by offering worship gifts on behalf of other nations.

Abraham was blessed in order to be a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:1-3). But the purpose goes beyond the blessing of nations. God Himself is blessed! Melchizedek openly recognized that Abraham was blessed by God. By God's power, Abraham had been a blessing to his neighbors by rescuing enslaved families and their goods. But the grand result was that God himself would be blessed in praise! Listen to Melchizedek: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High...And blessed be God Most High..." (Gen 14:18-20).

What do we learn from the entire series of events? Abraham made God's name known by his ongoing worship. God made His name great by dramatic redemptive power through His people. The outcome was a multi-national gathering of grateful honor in which God was explicitly worshiped in truth.

*Global Purpose Confirmed by Obedience in Worship.*

The crucial, proving moment of Abraham's life was a worship event (Gen 22). God told Abraham to bring His son Isaac to offer him in an act of worship. It was a test to prove what Abraham and his family would be. Would God find in Abraham an obedient, priestly passion for God (literally, "a fearer of God," Gen 22:12)? Would Abraham prove to be zealous to offer the worship God desired? If so, God would find him to have the kind of faith that God wanted multiplied among the nations. You know the story. At the very moment that Abraham obeyed in worship, God spoke from heaven with solemn oath, declaring forcefully His global purpose to bless the peoples of the earth through Abraham's family (22:18).

## **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. At first glance, the story of the Exodus doesn't look like a great missionary event. Thousands of Egyptians died. Grief covered 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 worship me! (Ex 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 plans for escape. 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.

### **God Brings Global Attention to His Name**

God was singling himself out from all the gods of earth. 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 to protect cattle from disease. The powerful religious elite was shamed. The deeply revered military was summarily annihilated. Why was God wrecking Egypt before the watching world?

God was executing judgments “against all the gods of Egypt” (Ex 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” (Exodus 9:15-16).

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 never 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...” (Ex 15:3, 7, 15).

Jethro had married into Moses’ family, but was still very much a Gentile. He 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” (Ex 18:11). Jethro was a leading priest of a foreign people well-qualified to evaluate religious matters (Ex 18:1).

As we read the story of Moses confronting Egypt today, it might appear that Egypt was just another harsh empire that abused slaves. In Moses’ day it was open knowledge that Egypt was a complex of religious, economic, and military powers inextricably enmeshed with spiritual powers. God unraveled the system to show it for what it was at the core: horrid, spiritual evil, dedicated to diverting worshipers from coming to him. God had blessed Egypt, but Egypt had made itself an enemy of God. God’s “judgments” of the plagues and the awesome Red Sea affair (Exodus 12:12) are not to be understood as mere punishment for bad deeds. God’s intervention put down oppressive evil in order to liberate people. Why were they freed? “Let my people go, *that they may worship me.*” God had orchestrated the Exodus events so that He revealed His glory by establishing His name in a global way. Then, with the world watching, He drew the people to Himself to establish a way of worship that all other nations could enter.

## **The Conquest**

The conquest of Canaan should 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 will draw every other people to revere and know him.

### *Just Recompense*

At first glance to modern readers, the conquest may seem like a genocidal land grab rather than an act of a good and loving God. But a close look at the pertinent passages of Scripture shows that God ordained the conquest of Canaan with a double purpose. First, God was bringing just recompense for the “wickedness” of the peoples of the land (Deut 9:5). Long before, God had told Abraham 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 one statement about the conquest recorded from a Canaanite came from a king who acknowledged the righteous execution of God’s justice: “As I have done, so God has repaid me.” (Judg 1:7)

### *Demolishing False Worship*

The second, and primary reason for the thorough ferocity of the Hebrew conquest was this: God was demolishing systems of false worship in order to preserve the singular devotion of his people and the holiness of his name. Almost every passage describing the rationale behind ousting the peoples living in the land offers this reason: Canaanite worship would swiftly turn the Hebrews “away from following me to serve other gods.” (Deut 4:15-24, 6:13-15, 7:1-8, et al.).

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” (Josh 23:7). 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 was pure worship. God’s objective was not that Israel would be the only people that worshiped Him. His point was to insure that He was the only God that they worshiped.

### *Idolatry Would Profane the Name*

Idolatry doesn’t seem to threaten most believers today. 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 look at 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 clearly 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 testimony 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 (Num 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 (Ex 32:1-14), that the nations were watching. 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 weak—all beginnings, but no finish (Numbers 14:15-16).

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...”<sup>6</sup> 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 14:17-21).

What was God saying? That he would continue to use the nation, but wait for another

generation. Even though he was taking a delay, he remained everlastingly resolute to bring forth his purpose on earth: to fill the earth with “the glory of the Lord.” To fulfill that purpose required an obedient, worshiping, witnessing people.

## **The Temple**

Perhaps the first clear mention of the temple was made on the plains of Moab prior to Joshua leading the people into the land. Moses issues God’s directives to destroy “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 ruined in order to “obliterate their name from that place.” God’s name was never to be equivocated with the name of 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, He wanted 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. Second, God desired a place of encounter, of relationship, of dwelling. From the earliest mention of a tabernacle God intimated His desire to enjoy an exalted nearness amidst His people, “that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8). To “dwell” is a relational affair. It is consummated worship. God coming near His people as they come near to Him. 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 Chr 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 (v. 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 the house was not just for Israel. Solomon makes special mention of “the peoples.” He knew that God’s purpose for the temple was to welcome all nations to worship.

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 Ki 8:41-43).

Solomon did not pray for a few of the individuals to come, but for 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 Ki 9:25), the Queen of Sheba “heard about the fame of Solomon *concerning the name of the Lord*” (10:1, my emphasis). She came to learn, she listened to Solomon’s wisdom (v. 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” (v. 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” (v. 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. His name was great. Israel was making it known so that the nations were coming to know God personally. What could have possibly slowed God’s unfolding plan to draw the nations to Himself? Only one thing. It was the issue 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 Ki 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 Ki 11:1-8). Can any believing reader of these verses not feel disappointment to the point of nausea? It’s hard not to speculate about what might have happened if worship had been pure and steady for at least another generation.

### **The Persistence of God**

God’s plan was simple: God would make His name great and then Israel could 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 becomes a prolonged up-and-down struggle with idolatry. Various episodes revive fidelity to God’s worship, but are followed by stunning new lows of profaning God’s name. The uppermost issue throughout the generations is

God's glory by Israel's worship. At times the people disregarded the worship of God so greatly that 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 some of the prophets show that even when worship patterns were followed, they were often performed superficially. The prophets exposed perfunctory worship, showing that it perversely lacked the justice and the kindness which was supposed to have thrived behind every offering and prayer to God (Isa 1:11-15, Amos 5:21-24, Mic 6:6-8). Although God delayed the great shaking of Israel and Judah, He finally separated the people from the land which was to showcase the blessing of God. They were exiled to distant lands. 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 His 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 over-riding concern was that the ruins of intended glory on the temple mountain in Jerusalem was a continuing 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 9:16-19).

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 because of 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.' (Ezek 36:22-23)

### **The Destiny of Israel: Glory From All Nations**

Daniel and Ezekiel weren't the only prophets who saw the ongoing story of Israel as focusing on God's name and glory. Other prophets and psalmists spoke of the history and the destiny of Israel in terms of the nations being drawn to God by name, and worshiping him with diverse, lavish glory.

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 (Ps 66:1-4).

All the kings of the earth will give thanks to You, O LORD, when they have heard the words of Your mouth. And they will sing of the ways of the LORD. For great is the glory of the LORD (Ps 138:4-5).

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Hab 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 (Zeph 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. When the people of God were finally brought back to the land, building the temple was to be top priority. Haggai made it clear that the temple was for God's glory, and for a greater glory than had ever come before. "And I will shake all the nations; and the desire of the nations will come; and I will fill this house with glory" (Haggai 1:8, 2:7 KJV). From the exile onward, Israel avoided idolatry. But the lesser national glory they desired never came. They were waiting for a messianic deliverer to free them from oppression. They almost missed the Messiah when He came because Jesus' vision of redemption was for God's Kingdom to be enacted among all peoples.

### **The Glory of God in Christ**

Christ is the crescendo of the story of God's glory. At the end of all things, He will have bought and brought people from every tribe and tongue to honor the Father. It's no surprise then, to see how His every move was part of pressing the story of God's glory toward the its culmination for all nations.

Jesus summed up his ministry in terms of bringing global 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!" 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 that Jesus taught: "on earth as it is in heaven." There is no question of the primacy of this prayer for all believers. The prayer has to be understood 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 public hour and most passionate moment, Jesus made an issue of the worship of the peoples. He cleansed the temple of the religious commercialism which formed a blockade prohibiting the nations from approaching God. He quoted Isa 56:7, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." The religious leaders listening to him immediately recalled the rest of the passage that Jesus was quoting from Isaiah 56:6-7. Jesus intended for them to hear it fully:

Also 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. *For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.*

Just before going to his death, he displayed his life purpose, and the purpose of his soon-coming death (John 12:24-32). He openly considered the option of asking the Father to rescue Him from death “What shall I say, Father, save Me from this hour?” But instead of asking to escape, he said, “But for this purpose I came to this hour.” What purpose was this? The purpose bursts forth from his heart in his next statement. It becomes the prayer of His death and His life: “Father! Glorify your name!” And then, to the bewildered amazement of those standing near him, God the Father Himself answered Jesus from heaven. “I have both glorified it (my name), and will glorify it again.” God’s answer from heaven still thunders, if you can hear it. It is God’s answer to anyone who yields their life to the Father for the greater glory of His name. Jesus said that the answer didn’t come for him, but for his followers who would come to similar moments of choosing to follow Him (12:30) accordance with God’s ancient purpose. How would Jesus’ death glorify God’s name? “If I be lifted up, I will draw all people to myself” (12:32).

### **Ministry of Surpassing Glory with Paul**

Paul saw his life as continuing the ancient purpose toward a huge global outpouring of obedient worship from all nations. His most precise statement of mission purpose was to “bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations *for his name’s sake*” (Rom 1:5, emphasis mine). Paul saw the entire world as divided into two categories: where Christ was “named” and where Christ was not yet named. Paul resolutely prioritized his efforts so as to labor where Christ was not named (Rom 15:20).<sup>\*8</sup>

We can see the double direction of God’s glory in Paul’s ministry. On the one hand He labored to glorify God by revealing Christ *to* the nations—getting Christ “named.” But his highest zeal, the very boast of his being, was in that which was to come back 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,<sup>\*9</sup> 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 to God” <sup>\*10</sup> (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. “With one voice” many diverse streams of believers, Jew and Gentile, weak and strong, will together “glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:6).

### **A Rehearsal for Eternal Glory**

At the end of history, we will marvel at how abundantly that God’s love has been fulfilled. His love will have triumphed by winning passionate devotion from all peoples. Jesus will have thoroughly fulfilled the promise He uttered to His Father, “I have made Your name known to them, and I will make it known; that the love wherewith You loved Me may be in them...” (John 17:26).

Beyond history, we will have found that all of the worshipful service of the many nations throughout the generations will have been a rehearsal for greater affairs of love and glory, still involving the beautified glory from every people.

Heaven will fill earth: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and he shall dwell among them, and they shall be his peoples,\*11 and God himself shall be among them” (Rev 21:3).

The peoples will endure everlastingly. The city which is heaven on earth will be adorned by kings of the peoples continually bringing the treasure and fruit of the peoples to God’s throne (Rev 21:22-26). We will serve Him, awed and honored by having his very name on our faces. And gazing into his face, we shall serve him as beloved priests (Rev 22:1-5).

### **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 You!” (Psalm 67:3-5). We hear even now 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!

### **HOW A VISION OF GOD’S GLORY WILL CHANGE OUR PRACTICE**

This emphasis on the glory of God is far more than a decorative flower on the Great Commission. More than ever we must work together with a shared passion that Christ be named and that Christ is praised in every people. A “doxological” (having to do with glory) vision of world evangelization offers practical wisdom essential for the finishing of the remaining task. Stepping into 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. 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. However, our love for people takes on balance and power when our overriding passion is for God to be honored by the kindness extended in His name; and even more, for God to be thanked personally by the people transformed by the power of the Gospel.

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 with a different metaphor. Instead of beleaguered sheep, He saw the people as carrying great value to God: “his harvest.” Who can comprehend God’s delight in the fullness of the fruit He receives from people’s lives? Jesus began to do just that. From that vision He implored the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers to bring God His harvest (Matt 9:35-38). Jesus knew that in God’s ways, volunteering is of little value. Anything of lasting power comes from an authentic “sending” of God. 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. In practice, however, 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. Instead of merely trying to help out the best we can in intermittent ways, we can live in the marvelous heritage of Abraham’s blessing as his sons and daughters. We are blessed by God in order to bless the nations. The nations are blessed so that God would be named and blessed (Gen 12:2-3, 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 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 the unity of churches or as a cover for stubborn attitudes of colonial domination by westerners. Recently, others have quietly abandoned the people group approach for other paradigms which seem more workable. 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, 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 must not be reduced to approaching peoples merely to “impact” them as “targets.” We must aim beyond the gospel encounter. We must aim to see obedient worship result for God which may be distinctive to that particular people.

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 message. Here lies a better rationale for indigenous church planting. 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 each people group, and at the same time, enhances the value of extending the gospel breakthrough to every place. 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. The most common response has been vague generalizations suggesting that we treat the issue as a “both/and” matter instead of an “either/or” question. We may be able to do better. 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.

Within the vision for God's glory lies the substance of true unity between churches. With a jealousy for unique glory to come to God from every people, we can easily set aside demands for uniformity of worship and conduct. We can 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 What about the name "Yahweh" or, as some translations render it, "Jehovah?" It is no doubt an important name. But we must be careful not to regard the living God as actually having a single, legal "real" name, as if He had a birth certificate on file somewhere. The Bible is consistent in urging us to know Him as He aspires to be globally known. The question of Exodus 3:13 was probably not a reference issue (Which god are you representing, Moses?). It was a reputation concern (What kind of track record has this God built for Himself that would move us to commit such a suicidal act of insurrection against Pharaoh? What is the basis of the trustworthiness of God?). It's possible to understand the tetragrammaton in a verbal sense of "I will cause to be what shall be," which is perfectly in keeping with a God who is both creator and promise keeper. The larger context brings emphasis on God's final answer to the people's question: "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations" (Exodus 3:15).

\*2 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 as an affair involving gifts from people to God which far surpass mere mental ascriptions.

\*3 Abraham recognized that by God's promise to bless him and his family, God was virtually constituting 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 Abraham (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.

\*4 Note as well that 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. See Exodus 3:12, 4:23, 5:1, 7:16, 8:27, 29, 10:9. See especially Exodus 10:25-26 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 (Ex 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 that God never dwells 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 would deign to turn his eyes toward a place of encounter and hold audience as He had promised (2 Chr 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 Chr 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 Paul uses the idea of a priest and activates it as a verb so that he effectively says that he is "priesting" the gospel. The image is that of a Hebrew priest whose primary task was to help the people present their worship gifts to God.

\*10 The idea is "toward the face of God" as if in a temple.

\*11 Some variant manuscripts with good attestation keep the word "peoples" plural in this passage.