

What in the **world** is God doing?

A series of bible studies exploring what God's big
mission really is



BCMS

Crosslinks

GOD'S WORD TO GOD'S WORLD

What in the world is God doing?
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Getting clearer on mission: a bible study for small groups

Today many people are rather confused on the subject of mission. Its meaning often seems unclear and muddled. Does this matter? Well yes, because our view of mission will have a massive impact on what we understand to be our activity and priority in the world. Our view of mission will determine:

- How we understand the world
- What we think God is doing in the world
- Our understanding of the Church's priority today

But in order to answer the question “*what is mission?*” first we must ask “***what in the world is God doing?***”

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How to use this study guide

The aim of this guide is to explore what the Bible says about God's mission and to draw out implications for all who want to live and speak for Jesus today. It is designed to be used in a small group setting, to help each member of your church understand mission.

There are four study sessions and a leader should work through each beforehand and then use the questions and notes to guide the group through the study.

For further information on how Crosslinks can help you engage in gospel partnership, get in touch with the Church and Member Team at cmt@crosslinks.org or 020 8691 9111.

SESSION 1: WHAT IS GOD'S MISSION?

Discuss:

- What words or ideas come to mind when asked “What is mission”?
- Who does mission? (God? Jesus? The church? Mission Societies? Christian Unions?)
- Where does mission happen? (Overseas? In a different cultural context? At home? In colleges and universities?)
- What is mission concerned with? (Spiritual need? Physical need? Psychological need? Some combination of these?)
- Where does mission originate? (Is it “west to the rest” or “richer to poorer?”)

► Read Isaiah 66: 18 – 24

This is the climax to the book of Isaiah – it's quite a note to end on! In these few verses the history of the world is surveyed, from the 8th century BC to the end of time. God reveals his plan for all nations and how he is going to achieve it.

Explore:

- v 18 What is God going to do?

- v 18 What is the result of this?

It's rather striking to read that the reason God acts in the world is for his glory. He isn't acting primarily for our benefit – though we do benefit massively. God is acting for his glory, and it is for God's glory that anyone will stand in the New Creation on the last day!

The Apostle John recognised God's agenda for mission was to be found in Isaiah and declares his prophecy fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ – see John 12: 37 – 43. Earlier in his gospel, John tells us more about why God is acting in the world:

► **Read John 3: 16 – 17**

Explore:

- What has God done?
- According to this summary text, what is God's motive for mission?
- v 17 What has God not done? Why not?

To sum up so far:

- God's mission is to gather together a people from all nations, for his glory and because of his love. This is what God is doing in the world, that is his agenda.

Think it through: How has this challenged your understanding of “Who does mission?” and “What is mission?”

SESSION 2: HOW IS GOD'S MISSION GOING TO BE ACHIEVED?

► Read Isaiah 66: 18 – 24

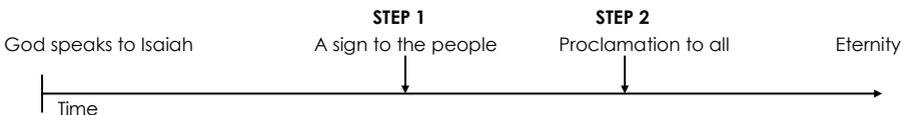
The closing passage of Isaiah, as well as telling us what God's plan for the world is, explains how God is going to achieve it. These verses tell us that God will carry out his mission in two steps.

Explore:

- v 19a What is step one of God's mission?
- v 19 What is step two of God's mission?
- v 19 Where are the "survivors" sent?

The first step of God's mission is to establish a sign among the people. The second step sees those who have seen the sign sent out to all nations, to proclaim God's glory to those who have not heard or seen.

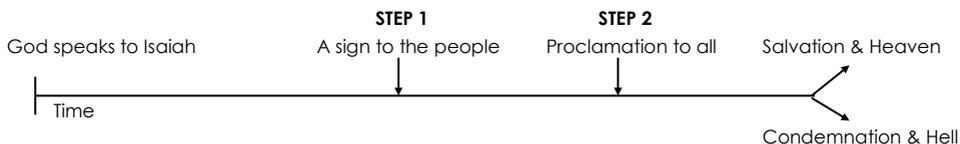
We can draw this as a timeline, starting with God speaking these words to Isaiah and ending with the start of eternity. The two steps of God's mission occur within this time period.



Discuss:

- What do v 22 – 24 tells us are the two alternatives for eternity?

We can add this to the timeline:



- Isaiah speaks elsewhere of these two steps. What do these verses tell us about the sign and who it is for?
 - 7: 10 – 14
 - 9: 6 – 7
 - 11: 1 – 5, 10 – 12
 - 49: 1 – 6
 - 53: 1 – 12

To sum up so far:

- God's mission is to gather together a people from all nations, for his glory and because of his love. This is what God is doing in the world, that is his agenda.
- God achieves this mission in two steps: 1) establishing a sign
2) sending messengers to all.

Think it through: How has this challenged your understanding of "What is mission?"

SESSION 3: WHEN WILL GOD'S MISSION BE FULFILLED?

We have seen that God is going to gather together a people from all nations, and he is going to do this by 1) establishing a sign 2) sending messengers to all. We have seen that God spoke to Isaiah many times about this sign and the gospel writers tell us when this prophecy was fulfilled.

► **Read Matthew 1: 20 – 23 and re-read Isaiah 7:14**

Explore:

- v 21 *Who is the sign?*

We can add this to our timeline:

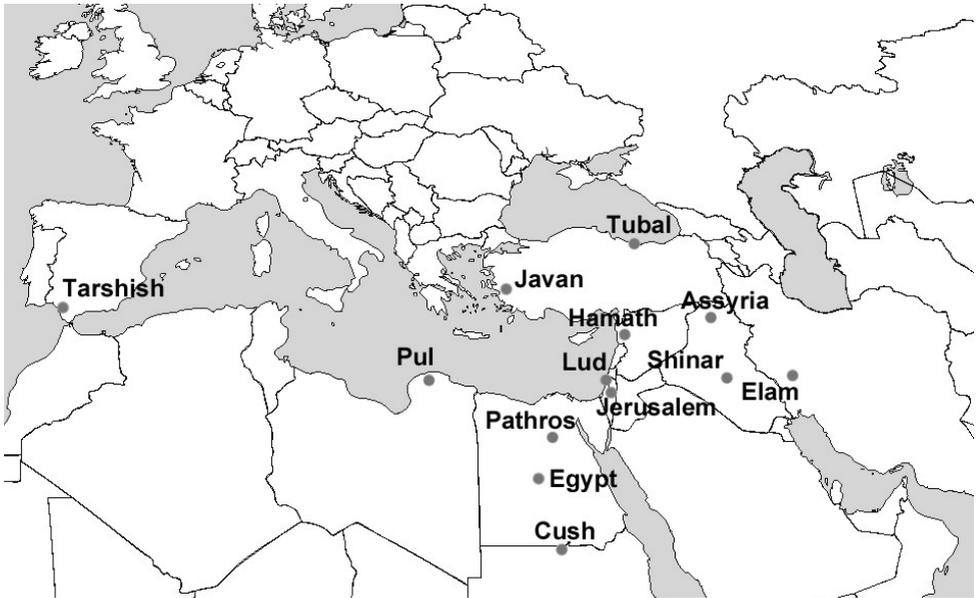


Step one of God's mission was achieved when his sign, the Lord Jesus, came to earth.

We saw in Isaiah 66: 19 that the second step of God's mission was the proclamation of God's glory and, in 11: 11-12, 49: 6 and 66: 19, that this will reach every nation. The countries mentioned in chapters 11 and 66 represent the entire known world at that time (see map overleaf).

Discuss:

- What do you think it could mean to "declare [God's] glory among the nations"?



Map showing possible locations of the places listed in Isaiah's prophecy

Jesus told the disciples what it meant to “declare [God's] glory” before he ascended into heaven:

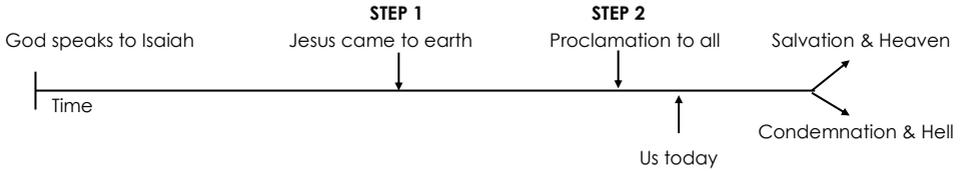
► **Read Luke 24: 44 – 47**

Explore:

- What is the message Jesus says will be proclaimed?
- To whom will this be proclaimed?

Step two of God's mission is therefore achieved as the disciples go out to all nations proclaiming repentance and the forgiveness of sins, through Jesus' life, death and resurrection (i.e. the gospel!). As we are

living after this, we can put ourselves on the timeline, between the time when the first disciples went out to proclaim to gospel and the beginning of eternity.



To sum up so far:

- God's mission is to gather together a people from all nations, for his glory and because of his love. This is what God is doing in the world, that is his agenda.
- God achieves this mission in two steps: 1) establishing a sign
2) sending messengers to all.
- God fulfilled step one of his mission when the Lord Jesus came to earth.
- God is fulfilling step two of his mission as Jesus' disciples proclaim the gospel to all nations.

Think it through: How has this challenged your understanding of "Where does mission happen?" and "What is mission concerned with?"

SESSION 4: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US TODAY?

We have discovered that God's mission is concerned with gathering a people together, for his glory and because of his love for the world, through the proclamation of the gospel.

When Isaiah's vision was first announced, it addressed a scattered nation. God's people, captured by a foreign power, were carried away into exile in a foreign country. Why was this? Not because God had failed his people, nor because he had forgotten his ancient promise, but because his people had rebelled against him and so were exiled from the land as part of God's judgement. Isaiah's vision is an amazing picture of God gathering his rebellious people back together and them giving God the glory he rightly deserves.

As people who live after the sign has been established, what can we learn from Isaiah's vision of God's mission?

► **Read Isaiah 66: 18 – 24**

Discuss:

- Whose mission is it? (i.e. Who is the initiator?)
- v 19 Who else is involved?
- v 19 What is the fruit of mission? (see also Revelation 7:9)
- Where does mission happen? (i.e. Where is the "mission field"?)

Think it through:

- Every Christian is called to be a part of this work of proclaiming the gospel – it's not just a task for a small group of people that might be called "missionaries".
- God is gathering together people from all nations. There is no special "mission field" – every inch of God's world is God's mission field. That applies to the town we live in, the place where we work and even to our own home and family.
- God gathers his people through the proclamation of the gospel message: God's word is his means for his mission (see Isaiah 55: 10 – 11). We are to stick to his method and his message – and God has said he is going to work through this. It is God's job to change hearts and ours is just to keep proclaiming Christ crucified and to pray for his Holy Spirit to convict of sin and convince of truth.

► **Read 2 Peter 3: 9**

Discuss:

- What reasons does Peter offer for a delay in Christ's return?

Peter is addressing his original audience ("[God] is patient towards you") but his reason (v9b) is a wider point that can be applied to all readers.

- Given this reason for the delay in Christ's return, what should the priority of Christians be now?
- If God's agenda is bringing about the salvation of unbelievers through the proclamation of the saving message of Jesus, what should our agenda be?

- How will this affect:
 - our prayers?
 - our time?
 - our money?

Postscript:

A common approach concerning mission today is summarised by the phrase attributed to Francis of Assisi: "Preach the gospel and if necessary use words". This attitude appears to prioritise Jesus' command to "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22: 39) but actually undermines the role of the church in God's mission by rejecting Jesus' command to "Go and make disciples" (Matthew 28: 19) and "proclaim the forgiveness of sin" (Luke 24: 47). To truly love our neighbours we must give them the opportunity to be saved and stand with us on the last day: to tell them the gospel is the greatest act of love we can perform.

Think it through: What role do you think social action has to play in mission?

To sum up:

- God's mission is to gather together a people from all nations, for his glory and because of his love. This is what God is doing in the world, that is his agenda.
- God achieves this mission in two steps: 1) establishing a sign
2) sending messengers to all.
- God fulfilled step one of his mission when the Lord Jesus came to earth.
- God is fulfilling step two of his mission as Jesus' disciples proclaim the gospel to all nations.
- God delays Christ's return so that unbelievers can hear the gospel and turn to Christ.
- As Jesus' disciples, the Church is to be involved in God's mission by proclaiming the gospel to all people.

