BOOKS I HAVE READ: A LIGHT TO THE NATIONS

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"God works out his redemptive purposes in this story by choosing a people to make known to all where history is leading. Jesus does not write a book to transmit the good news to succeeding generations. Instead, he chooses, prepares, and commissions a community to make the goal of universal history known." - An excellent biblical overview which is directly applied to the work of church planting.
Category: Observations

> *My primary concern in this book is to analyze the missional identity of the church by tracing its role in the biblical story. A plethora of books on missional ecclesiology has appeared in the last couple of decades. These books vary in quality, but even in the best there is little sustained biblical-theological and exegetical work. Moreover, to the degree that the authors make forays into Scripture, the Old Testament has been conspicuously neglected. I have written this book to fill this gap.*

Broadly speaking,Â A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical StoryÂ by Mike Goheen breaks into two sections. The first (and longest) is a recounting of the Biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation and the second is an outline of what a missional church might look like in modern Western culture. In and of themselves, there is nothing particularly new or unique about these sections. What makes this book stand out is the way in which the two themes are weaved together. The story of Scripture is presented as the defining narrative of the church. We form a part of the grand story of the Bible and our purpose is to glorify God by moving that story on.

> *God works out his redemptive purposes in this story by choosing a people to make known to all where history is leading. Jesus does not write a book to transmit the good news to succeeding generations. Instead, he chooses, prepares, and commissions a community to make the goal of universal history known. This gathering work is central to his kingdom mission, and it begins in the early days of his ministry. Following the central events of the salvation storyâ€"his death and resurrectionâ€"Jesus commissions this small community: â€œAs the Father has sent me, I am sending youâ€ (John 20:21). Here the nucleus of the community we now call â€œchurchâ€ is commissioned to make.*
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> *Godâ€™s chosen people do not exist for themselves. Rather, they exist for the sake of Godâ€™s glory and his mission, and for the sake of others toward whom Godâ€™s mission is directed. They are indeed â€œchosen by Godâ€ to play a prescribed role in Godâ€™s mission to restore the creation and to glorify himself. But this choosing is â€œfor the sake of the world.â€*

The background survey of the Bible narrative is thorough and well presented. The book would be worth buying for this alone, to be honest. It is full of interesting and thought provoking ideas, for example, I love this reflection on the *Great-Commission.Â*

> *With the crucifixion and resurrection accomplished, the work of the Messiah to gather and purify a people to carry out its calling to be a light to the nations is just about complete. All that remains is to give his people their new identity in a concluding commission and equip them with the promised power of the Holy Spirit. Then the eschatological gathering can begin.*

> *All the Gospels end with the risen Jesus commissioning his disciple community to take the good news to all nations (Matt. 28:16â€“20; Mark 16:9â€“20; Luke 24:44â€“49; cf. John 20:19â€“23; Acts 1:8). Unfortunately, these mandates have often been disconnected from both the overarching biblical story and the literary structures of the various books in which they are found.* ***Though Jesus was actually sending a community into the world, his words in the Great Commission often have been used as the rationale by which churches send individuals into cross-cultural settings. Though cross-cultural missions are part of the churchâ€™s mandate, that is not the focus of Jesusâ€™s final commission to his peopleâ€”not what these texts are about.Â*** *(Emphasis mine.)*

The final section of the book sets out a series of characteristics of a missional church, which are derived from the overarching biblical narrative.

- AÂ Church with Worship That Nurtures Our Missional Identity
- A Church Empowered by the Preaching of the Gospel
- A Church Devoted to Communal Prayer

> *Â Quite simply, the church that does not learn to pray fervently and corporately will never become a truly missional church.*

- A Church Striving to Live as a Contrast Community
- A Church That Understands Its Cultural Context
- A Church Trained for a Missionary Encounter in Its Callings in the World
- A Church Trained to Evangelism in an Organic Way
- A Church Deeply Involved in the Needs of Its Neighborhood and World
- A Church Committed to Missions
- A Church with Well-Trained Leaders
- A Church with Parents Trained to Take Up the Task of Nurturing Children in Faith
- A Church with Small Groups That Nurture for Mission in the World
- A Church That Seeks and Expresses the Unity of the Body of Christ

> *This list suggests what it might mean today to be a â€œcome and join usâ€ people, inviting others to unite with us as we embody and journey toward Godâ€™s shalom at the climax of history. It also points to what it might mean to be a â€œso thatâ€ people, blessed so that we might in turn be a blessing to the world. Yet even to take baby steps in this direction will mean rooting our lives more deeply in the cross and resurrection and crying out for the empowering work of the Spirit.*

Many of the ideas in this book get further development inÂ Introducing Christian Mission Today:

Scripture, History and IssuesÂ (my book of last year, by the same author). However, for those who are focussed on church planting in their own cultures, this gives an excellent biblical basis for their work. It's not a book to be missed.